

INDIGENOUS EDUCATION AND TEACHER PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT: THE AUSTRALIAN PROFESSIONAL STANDARDS FOR TEACHERS IN AUSTRALIA¹

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Abstract

Australia, a postcolonial democracy, is a signatory to the Declaration of the Rights of Indigenous Peoples. As part of a broader reframing of Australia's policy provision with respect to the rights of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples, the role of education has become a key proving ground. It is the Australian Government's intention that all teachers will have, as a minimum, a proficient level of demonstrable professional expertise in both Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education and Australian Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies. The Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Action Plan 2010-2014 (MCEEDYA, Version 2, released 2011) specifies the National Collaborative and System Level Actions that have been agreed by all State and Territory Ministers of Education. Of particular relevance to this paper, the commitments made under Leadership, quality teaching and workforce development (MCEEDYA, 2011, pp. 22-25) are giving shape to the engagement of the Australian education system with respect to 'closing the gap' between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander and non-Indigenous Australian education outcomes.

Research undertaken throughout 2012 investigated teacher readiness to be able to account for their skills and knowledge in Australian Professional Standards for Teachers with particular emphasis on those standards focusing on the needs of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students, Focus Areas 1.4 and 2.4. A literature review was undertaken in three fields: the policy and practice context for teacher professional development and learning in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education; workforce development and system-wide, school reform, change management literature ; and, research that specifically focuses on teacher professional development and learning of relevance to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education.

Fieldwork was undertaken in each State and Territory capital with Indigenous Education Consultative Bodies, Traditional Owners, and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander representatives with special expertise, key government stakeholders, teachers' unions, teacher associations, teacher registration boards and professional development service providers, within the government, independent and Catholic systems and also independent providers to gather information at the Federal, State/Territory, and regional levels. An overview of the findings will be presented.

Key Words Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education; Australian Professional Standards for Teachers; teacher professional development.

¹ The full version of this paper is drawn from a national study available at: Ma Rhea, Z., Anderson, P.J., and Atkinson, B. 2012. Australian Professional Standards for Teachers Focus Areas 1.4 and 2.4: Improving Teaching in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education. Melbourne: AITSL. Available at: http://www.aitsl.edu.au/verve/_resources/MONASH_STUDY_FINAL_REPORT_09092012.pdf .

Introduction

Australia, a postcolonial democracy, is a signatory to the *Declaration of the Rights of Indigenous Peoples*. Professor James Anaya, the United Nations Special Rapporteur on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, visited Australia in August 2009. In his report, he noted that despite some recent advances, Australia's legal and policy landscape must be reformed. He recommended:

The Commonwealth and state governments should review all legislation, policies, and programs that affect Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders, in light of the Declaration.

The Government should pursue constitutional or other effective legal recognition and protection of the rights of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples in a manner that would provide long-term security for these rights. Human Rights Council, 2009

As part of a broader reframing of Australia's policy provision with respect to the rights of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, the role of education has become a key proving ground. It is the Australian Government's intention that all teachers will have, as a minimum, a graduate level of demonstrable professional expertise in both Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education and Australian Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies, and measures are being introduced in pre-service teacher education programs nationally to support this intention. This study concerns itself with the approximately 291,000 teachers currently employed in Australian primary and secondary schools, sixty-four per cent of whom are working in government schools and thirty-six per cent who are working in non-government schools (ABS, 2011b). Given the focus of this study is on teachers working in all sectors of the education system rather than on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students who are more highly concentrated in the government school sector, it is important to recognise that many teachers do not teach Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students and arguably as a profession have little or no appropriate qualification with regard to either the teaching and learning needs of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students or in the broader cognate area of Australian Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies.

This research is predicated on the view that there is an emerging consensus internationally regarding the rights of Indigenous peoples, and that this bundle of international rights mechanisms, to some of which Australia has become signatory, provides useful guidance with respect to orienting our discussion of the professional learning and development needs of Australian teachers, in order for them to be able to account for their professional expertise in the education of Australia's children under the Australian Professional Standards for Teachers (Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership [AITSL], 2011).

Ma Rhea and Anderson (2011) have argued that standards-based education in Australia has established benchmark expectations for academic achievement nationally, allowing for the measurement of the efficiency and effectiveness of education services provision to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children. It has also, through its accountability frameworks such as the annual reports produced by the Productivity Commission (SCRGSP, 2011) exposed statistical differences in academic achievement between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander and non-Indigenous students in Australian schools. If Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students are not achieving the expected standard, then there are serious consequences for them in achieving their rights, and social and economic justice, for themselves and their families.

Together these big picture policy mechanisms, and the new Australian Curriculum, provide an ideal catalyst to engage and support teachers to develop their skills and knowledge of the needs and rights of Australia's Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people are now included in discussions when planning reform in the education system at the highest levels, which in turn filters down into the classroom. This has become a matter of course for all planning in Australia under the federal government's Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander consultation processes. But what seem to be lacking are real, tangible outcomes in terms of educational and economic improvements for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. Senior Indigenous government advisers such as Rigney (2011) are concerned that the gap is widening. High quality Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander education is recognised as a key determinant in improving the quality of life for Indigenous Australians. Despite considerable effort over that past 40 years, the gap in educational attainment between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander and non-

Indigenous Australians has remained seemingly intractable. VAEAI (2012, pp. 11-12) notes that since 1975, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples have been making strong representation to governments, pressing for improvements in pre-service teacher training and teacher professional development.

Many education initiatives across the system, large and small, have attempted to improve outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children. Australian government-funded programs such as *Dare to Lead*, *What Works*, *Stronger Smarter*, and *Teach Remote* have aimed to develop professional knowledge networks and curriculum materials which have begun the task of codifying successful approaches to, and barriers which exist to prevent the successful provision of, education in the Indigenous domain. State and Territory governments have implemented numerous programs to attempt to 'close the gaps' in educational achievement between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander and non-Indigenous students under their jurisdictions. These programs are selectively offered and accessed across the Australian education system.

This research considered national collaborative, systemic, and local level responses to teacher professional development and professional learning being mindful that many teachers in Australia are expressing concern about how they will be able to validate their expertise in the area of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander education and are asking for clear guidelines and expectations to bring them up to 'proficient' level.

Literature Review

The policy and practice context of this study has been examined in order to understand teacher professional development and professional learning in the Indigenous domain: the international Indigenous rights framework, its operationalisation into Australian government policy, and recent school reform initiatives. The findings of this study have shown that postcolonial democracies such as Australia are struggling to employ the sort of framework that would enable the education system and its principals and teachers to undertake teacher professional development in the Indigenous domain as outlined under the UN *Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples* and the International Labour Organisation's *Convention No. 169 on Indigenous and Tribal Peoples*.

The policy context for this research has been shaped by the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Action Plan 2010-2014 (MCEECDYA, Version 2, released 2011) which specifies the National Collaborative and System Level Actions that have been agreed by all State and Territory Ministers of Education. Of particular relevance to this study, the commitments made under *Leadership, quality teaching and workforce development* (MCEECDYA, 2011, pp. 22-25) are giving shape to the engagement of the Australian education system with respect to 'closing the gap' between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander and non-Indigenous Australian education outcomes.

In addition to the national work being done by the Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership (AITSL), as discussed below, Australia is also undertaking a process of national coordination of what is to be taught in Australian schools. Historically, curriculum has been developed at the State and Territory level. The Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority (ACARA) is now responsible for 'the development of a national curriculum, a national assessment program, and a national data collection and reporting program that supports 21st century learning for all Australian students' (ACARA, 2012a & b). The development of the new Australian Curriculum is guided by two key documents; the *Melbourne Declaration on Education Goals for Young Australians* and the *Shape of the Australian Curriculum*. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander issues are incorporated as a cross-curriculum priority. Its implementation in parallel with the implementation of the Australian Professional Standard for Principals (AITSL, 2011a) and the Australian Professional Standards for Teachers (AITSL, 2011b) heralds a significant reshaping of Australian education.

These policy intentions designed to improve educational outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students have been codified into the development, by AITSL in collaboration with key stakeholders in State and Territory jurisdictions, of the Australian Professional Standards for Teachers as:

- Focus Area 1.4: Strategies for teaching Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students
- Focus Area 2.4: Understand and respect Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people to promote reconciliation between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians

Focus Area 1.4: Strategies for teaching Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students

The first Standard that refers to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander matters is Focus Area 1.4. The expectation of this Focus Area is described according to the four identified levels of teacher professional knowledge, namely Graduate, Proficient, Highly Accomplished, and Lead, and is concerned with strategies for teaching Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students. The descriptors for each level are (AITSL, 2011b, p.9):

➤ *At Graduate Level that a teacher can:*

- 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.

➤ *At Proficient Level that a teacher can:*

- 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.

➤ *At Highly Accomplished Level that a teacher can:*

- Provide advice and support colleagues in the implementation of effective teaching strategies for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students using knowledge of and support from community representatives.

➤ *At Lead Level that a teacher can:*

- 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 parents/ carers.

There are two predominant foci in the literature about professional development programs designed to give teachers the skills to teach Indigenous students. While there are few studies, there are some principles that can be synthesised from the approaches used and topics covered that serve as a guide for future research and program development.

The most common approach was to design a professional development program that would provide *practical strategies for teaching Indigenous students*. The topics include developing culturally inclusive curriculum (Canada, Hawai'i, and USA); improving student behaviour (Aotearoa New Zealand and USA); language and literacy (Aotearoa New Zealand and Australia); and using new resources (Australia and India). Within the topic focus, there was opportunity for participants to learn something about Indigenous lifeways. The second approach was to focus the program on *ways to enhance the student-teacher relationship* (Aotearoa New Zealand and USA).

Focus Area 2.4: Understand and respect Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people to promote reconciliation between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander and non-Indigenous Australians

Focus Area 2.4 is also described according to four levels and focuses on teacher skills and knowledge associated with understanding and respecting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people to promote reconciliation between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander and non-Indigenous Australians. This is arguably a more complicated Focus Area to measure and address because it is predicated in the personal understanding of, and respect for, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander societies held by each teacher and how this translates into their professional practice in promoting reconciliation. It states (AITSL, 2011b, p. 11) that:

➤ *At Graduate Level that a teacher can:*

- Demonstrate broad knowledge of, understanding of and respect for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander histories, cultures and languages.

➤ *At Proficient Level that a teacher can:*

- Provide opportunities for students to develop understanding of and respect for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander histories, cultures and languages.

➤ *At Highly Accomplished Level that a teacher can:*

- Support colleagues with providing opportunities for students to develop understanding of and respect for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander histories, cultures and Languages.

➤ *At Lead Level that a teacher can:*

- 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.

As with studies related to Focus Area 1.4, there are similarities of approach across the studies examined that relate to Focus Area 2.4 that might provide guidance in the development of teacher professional development programs. These approaches are understanding history (Australia, Canada and the USA); learning intercultural or cross-cultural skills involving the development of, or changing of, teachers' personal attitudes, expectations and understandings of the 'other' culture (Greece and USA); and creating inclusive, intercultural classrooms or schools Aotearoa New Zealand).

Of note, and recognising the paucity of research undertaken in the development of teacher cross-cultural understanding in the Indigenous domain, cultural immersion was a common pedagogical approach for programs that specifically focussed on non-Indigenous teachers learning about an Indigenous culture and for those that dealt with more general intercultural education.

Summary of Review of Literature

The review of the literature both international and national and the associated policy environment in Australia indicates that there is an extensive policy framework that works to guide the development of the provision of education services to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians but that there is no evidence that these developments are guided by a rights, socioeconomic framework even though Australia is a signatory to the *Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples*. In consideration of the workforce development literature, there has been no research conducted about specifically about workforce development as applied to the Australian education system with respect to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander education but the broader body of research about workforce development serves as an important body of knowledge to shape successful policy and implementation leadership of this work of teacher professional development.

The growing body of teacher professional development and professional learning research provides insight into what is known in a general sense about how teachers like to advance their professional knowledge and skills base. There is some empirical evidence predominantly drawn from other former British colonial nations, and a few from Australian studies, about the effectiveness of teacher professional development programs designed for improving teaching of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students in mainstream education systems, over and above those needs that are understood more broadly within the profession but nothing on how teachers might be supported to champion reconciliation based on their improved understanding of Indigenous cultures.

Main Findings

Strengths and Limitations of Current Provisions

National Collaborative Level

There is a comprehensive policy environment that is shaping thinking about teacher professional development for Focus Areas 1.4 and 2.4. Of relevance to Focus Area 1.4, these are the National Partnership Schools and Focus Schools. For 2.4, there is the Parental and Community Engagement (PaCE) program. There are also a number of programs that are relevant to both Focus Areas. These are *Dare to Lead*, *What Works*, *Stronger Smarter*, and *Teach Remote*. All of these programs provide opportunity for teacher professional development. Participants reported that the strength of these programs is that they offer teachers an opportunity for professional development through training days, conferences, and individual support, and also an extensive body of materials and resources to use in their teaching. Every teacher in this study has used materials from *Dare to Lead* and *What Works*. This was also true for many of the participants from other stakeholder groups. Many have also attended conferences, workshops, and training opportunities arranged or auspiced

under these programs.

The analysis of the data suggests that the strength of the national collaborative effort is that it is providing opportunity for all State and Territory jurisdictions to work under a common policy umbrella. The policy environment is emergent and is being shaped by policy conversations about school reform, the public funding of education in Australia, improvements in productivity, and the role of the Australian government vis-à-vis the States and Territories. As such, teacher professional development programs are increasingly understood as a key aspect of workforce development, designed to deliver Australian government and COAG policy imperatives in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander education.

Without doubt, if there were not national political and bureaucratic commitment to closing the gap in education attainment between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander and non-Indigenous Australians, there would not be the reform and accountability measures that have been introduced. The empirical evidence demonstrates the need to address the gap in educational achievement and provides impetus for the inclusion of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander education experts the development of the new Australian curriculum. This research clearly reveals the need for focussed teacher professional development in the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander domain now highlighted through the implementation of the APST Focus Areas 1.4 and 2.4, and within this nationally co-ordinated focus there is the capacity within policy frameworks to structurally encourage and support teachers to undertake this work.

Common limitations were reported as:

- **NCL1:** Lack, in most organisations' policies, of a guiding vision statement that recognises Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander rights and social justice imperatives that shape this work
- **NCL2:** No evidence of structured policy or resourcing commitment across Australia with respect to teacher professional development in the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander domain as being a workforce development issue

Systemic Level

In the traditional governance arrangements between the Australian Government and the States and Territories, each jurisdiction is responsible for its own provision and funding of most education services. These systems have until recently operated independently under federated arrangements. While all States and Territories in the Australian mainstream education system have some form of policy framework guiding their Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander education efforts, the provision of education to Australia's Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander citizens has been less straightforward as previously observed (Langton & Ma Rhea, 2009). After the 1967 Referendum, the Australian Government began offering financial incentives to the States to pay additional attention to their Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students, over and above their usual activities. Over time, as was also explained by one of the participants, this came to be interpreted that if anything special was to be done in the extra provision of education services for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students that it was a federal responsibility. Thereby, many Australian Government education initiatives have been brought into the work of education as special arrangements, or 'bolt-ons', to the State or Territory system. An outcome of this arrangement has been that the fortunes of the provision of appropriate education to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students has been dependent on a complex mix of politics, the skill of the federal government to influence the States, and the willingness of variously engaged State and Territory Departments of Education to address Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander education challenges.

Increasingly, COAG has coordinated the provision of government services nationally and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander education has been a key area of focus under the 'Closing the Gap' strategy. The participants in this study all described the impact of these changing arrangements from their perspective. Of note, many identified that there is a governance issue between the intent of federal funding and how it is ultimately used. Overall, research participants' views reflect that some States have a longer history of establishment and policies to do with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander education reflecting older arrangements. While all jurisdictions receive monies for National Partnerships, Focus Schools, PaCE and other Australian Government programs designed to improve Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander education, there appear to be different levels of integration of these programs at the systemic level. In addition to these arrangements, the Catholic Schools systems

and the independent schools also have access to these programs but the observation regarding the integration of these programs is the same.

Analysis of discussions about the integration of Australian Government programs at the systems level suggests that historical differences in approach are coming to the fore under attempts to standardise the Australian Curriculum (ACARA), the Australian Professional Standard for Principals (AITSL), and Australian Professional Standards for Teachers (AITSL). Some States consider their approach to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander education to be set to a higher standard of expectations than what is being developed as the standard nationally. This confidence is, to some degree, questionable when the academic results for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students under NAPLAN continue to provide evidence that there is a significant gap in achievement between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander and non-Indigenous students across the country, despite some improvements for particular cohorts (for example, metropolitan primary school students). It was also noted that department of education provided programs in the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander domain is commonly assessed on the basis of perceived system-level need rather than end-user perception and this can tend to bias evidence about the effectiveness of such programs.

At the systemic level, the strengths identified through analysis of the data were that where there are clear policies, guidelines, and resources available to guide teachers, the education systems are confident that they will be able to support their teachers in accounting for the aspirations contained in Focus Areas 1.4 and 2.4.

A key finding at the systemic level is that the framework of the Reconciliation Action Plan (RAP) is becoming embedded in schools and bureaucracies and there was evidence from both Queensland and ACT that having a State Government RAP gives positive support to teachers in undertaking professional development to improve their pedagogical skills, their broader understanding of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures, and their commitment to reconciliation. In many ways, ACT and Tasmania share similar experiences with respect to ongoing tensions about Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander identity that impact at the systemic level. However, unlike ACT, the Tasmanian Department of Education and their schools do not have a RAP as their overarching commitment to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. In the absence of this sort of overarching mechanism, there was little to report about teacher professional development initiatives within the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander domain. Instead of a sustained approach to the professional development of teachers, it appears that focus has been given to developing resources for teachers to use. There were myriad examples provided in the various jurisdictions of resources available at the systemic level to support teachers to develop their professional skills in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander education.

Cascading down from the national collaborative level, incorporating analysis at the systemic level, common limitations were reported:

- **SL1:** Lack of systemic level planning for teacher professional development in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander education as part of workforce development
- **SL2:** There is scant evaluation of formal professional development provisions

There were a number of limitations identified at the systemic level. First, there is scant cross-sectoral professional development undertaken by teachers. Those in the public sector tend to go to department planned events and conferences and to their local teachers' unions for workshops and conferences. Those in the Catholic and Independent sectors have their systems of professional development that have Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander-specific and more generic programs that include Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander perspectives on the topic. Across the system nationally, there has been a reported drop off in teachers attending professional development generally and often there are now no specific opportunities available that focus on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander issues. Where there is specific professional development offered, it appears that there is a strong focus on cultural awareness and cultural competency workshops (Focus Area 2.4) rather than on programs that would support Focus Area 1.4. What was reported as happening more commonly is that PD is being conducted about, for example, the learning needs of disadvantaged learners and mums with kids, or topics such as substance abuse, bullying, child protection that claims to include specific attention to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. It was difficult to ascertain the quality of PD in general because of the lack of evidence-based evaluation that has been conducted about such programs. A number of participants in this study raised concerns that there is no quality control occurring and that

this development in the way that teacher PD is being provided has marginalised the input of knowledgeable Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

A common concern raised by Indigenous Education experts was about who would judge the demonstration and competence of teachers for meeting the Focus Areas. There is an issue about how the knowledge of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples is included into approaches that would enable teachers to demonstrate Focus Area 2.4, about who owns such knowledge, wanting to avoid handing over the knowledge of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and their broader communities to be packaged and used by non-Indigenous people without accountability back to the original knowledge holders. This has happened in the past and is a fear of many Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander participants in this study. It was felt that holders of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander knowledge must be provided with routes towards accreditation as trainers and providers of professional development for the APST Focus Areas 1.4 and 2.4.

Local Level

The local level consultations provided the richest information about what is working and not working in the provision of professional development programs for teachers about Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander education and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultural awareness. The positive aspects at the local level are the Indigenous Education Consultative Bodies (IECB) Network, the RAPs, *Dare to Lead* and *What Works*.

The IECB Network performs an often unrecognised role of being the glue that holds it all together, holding important knowledge at the local level of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community experience of the education system, of what teachers are telling them that they need, and are in a position in some States and Territories, and within the Australian government, to provide high level systemic and national collaborative advice. They are also ideally placed to work in partnership with universities and other teacher professional development providers to lead and teach into new programs that are aligned to the National Professional Standards for Teachers.

RAPs are proving very helpful to teachers in encouraging them to be interested in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander matters. Significant effort is made at the local level by Aboriginal people to engage with schools and teachers. There is no data available to provide evidence of the effectiveness of this work but anecdotally, across the country, it is Aboriginal people who are keeping the lines of communication open with schools and government bureaucracies about the education of their children.

This analysis also found that the Australian government programs *Dare to Lead* and *What Works* are still seen as an important first port of call for teachers looking for information.

The limitations are consistent with the issues identified previously. Cascading from the national collaborative and systemic levels, the common issues raised at the local level about teacher PD in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander education and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultural awareness were that:

- **LL1:** The approach to formal teacher professional development is patchy, ad hoc and lacking in cohesiveness
- **LL2:** There has been a noticeable drop-off in demand for formal PD over the past 12 months for topics associated with an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander pedagogy focus but not in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultural awareness and cultural competency programs, and
- **LL3:** Teachers have fear and resistance about these particular Focus Areas.

Discussion of Findings

Embedding the Rights Framework

This study has found that there needs to be a clear statement of intent from Australian ministers, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander experts and government officials that this work is guided by the UN *Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples*. Otherwise, every level and individual teacher in this complex education system will decide what the guiding principles are. Some will be motivated by the stick and some will wait for the carrot. There needs to be a clear commitment to provide both time and resources to create the necessary critical mass for change in improving the educational outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students and supporting the Australian

society to move towards reconciliation between its Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander and non-Indigenous citizens.

At the local level, the rights agenda can be embedded by using two mutually reinforcing approaches that would support teacher: first, that schools sign up to be RAP schools and develop their RAP plans; and second, that schools proactively contract with their local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities, and the wider Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community of Australia, funding them to develop and provide teachers with opportunity to undertake a cultural awareness immersion program, developed by the local community and recognised as counting towards teacher professional development and professional learning hours with respect to these Focus Areas.

Focus Area 1.4

Teachers are asking for a mix of professional development that guides them in a core set of knowledge and skills that will enable them to demonstrate what they know and do (formal professional development) and less formal professional learning opportunities that they find useful with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and with their peers in their professional associations.

Teachers and their professional representative bodies and unions all report concern about how they will validate their achievement of Focus Areas 1.4 and 2.4. There was a common view that specific skills and knowledge need to be clearly identified and then framed within system and school policies that support and recognise their development. The analysis of data suggests that there also to be an appropriate course of study developed in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander education as a method, such as at university Graduate Certificate equivalent that will enable teachers to demonstrate their formal knowledge to Proficient level in Focus Area 1.4. Reflecting what is also known from the literature, there was consensus that professional development in this Focus Area would need to:

- Be focussed
- Be practical
- Acknowledge what the teacher already knows
- Provide opportunity for understanding of the international Indigenous rights framework
- Offer clear interpretations of the links between international undertakings, national policies, systemic policies, local policies, and practice for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander education in schools
- Provide a means for existing teachers who have not done so, to demonstrate knowledge and skills development, at both the Graduate and Proficient levels, and
- Provide advanced options for already experienced teachers to enable them to demonstrate skills appropriate to the new Highly Accomplished or Lead Teacher levels.

Focus Area 2.4

Again, the absence of an agreed body of knowledge to rely on was a common theme. Teachers are asking for reliable information about Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and are seeking it out individually in many cases. Given the large number of teachers that will be seeking this knowledge, and the demand that the development of RAPs and developing and leading cultural awareness immersion programs places on local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities, the analysis of data suggests that there also needs to be an appropriate course of study developed in Australian Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander studies, at university Graduate Certificate equivalent, that will enable teachers to also demonstrate their formal knowledge to Proficient level in Focus Area 2.4. Reflecting what is also known the literature, there was consensus that professional development in this Focus Area would need to:

- Be explicitly anti-racist
- Provide opportunity for understanding of the international Indigenous rights framework
- Offer clear interpretations of the links between international undertakings, national policies, systemic policies, local policies, and practice for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander education in schools
- Include opportunity for understanding the history between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander and non-Indigenous Australians
- Include intercultural or cross-cultural skills development involving the development of, or changing of, teachers' personal attitudes, expectations and understandings of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures

- Include strategies to create inclusive / intercultural classrooms or schools, and
- Link issues relating to the preservation and maintenance of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander identity and lifeways, including languages and traditional practices to contemporary Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander aspirations and practices.

Conclusion: Teachers getting ready in a postcolonial democracy

Analysis of the findings suggests that postcolonial democracies such as Australia are struggling to employ new frameworks in which to undertake teacher professional development in the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander domain. Current provisions for teacher professional development lack a guiding commitment to a rights and strengths perspective; problematically, there is scant rigorous evaluation of teacher professional development provisions; and, teachers have fear and resistance about teacher standards that highlight Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander matters.

Getting teachers ready for 2014 when the Australian Professional Standards for Teachers are to begin is a formidable undertaking. There were many questions from participants about why these Focus Areas were included, why they were important, how their implementation would be managed, and what consequences there would be for non-compliance. Many Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander colleagues asked who would be responsible for establishing and ensuring a minimum standard with respect to these Focus Areas, knowing the levels of concern that have been expressed about how teachers might meet them.

What is clear is that if the Australian education sector does not make the paradigmatic shift towards a rights-based approach to the education of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples that the colonial, deficit model of education as it has historically been imposed will continue to fail to support teachers to develop their skills and knowledge in this domain. The exciting challenge ahead is for teachers to create successful teaching and learning environments for all their students, thereby ultimately enhancing the vibrancy and sustainability of Australia as a postcolonial democracy into the 21st century and supporting the education aspirations of Australia's Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander citizens.

Acknowledgements

I would like first to acknowledge the leadership and guidance of Professor Henry Atkinson who has worked tirelessly with young and not so young teachers to understand the aspirations and rights of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and to help them to improve the standard of education to his people. I also acknowledge my research colleagues Peter. J. Anderson, Bernadette Atkinson and Jeane Freer without whose guidance and support this research would not have been possible.

I would also like to acknowledge, and thank, the research participants who took time from their busy lives to speak with us and help us to understand their thinking on matters relating to this study, and for their critical feedback on various drafts of the final report for the Australia Institute for Teaching and School Leadership.

Thanks also to the members of the organising committee and participants at the AITSL Forum (Brisbane 2012) who gave feedback on the draft consultation paper and for their willingness to engage in the process of thinking about teacher professional development for Focus Areas 1.4 and 2.4 of the Australian Professional Standards for Teachers.

I would also like to acknowledge the critical input given by Dr Graeme Hall, AITSL, and Aoife Cooke, our research assistant for their commitment to this work.

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