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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 mindset believes things can be better, and rejects absolutely the notion that second or third rate is good enough for Aboriginal children (Sams, 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 in each state and supported by Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal teachers in twenty schools, sought to engage in a journey of learning about, and improving their understanding of, Aboriginal histories and cultures. The school studies provided evidence of empowering communities to work together to design authentic, culturally responsive pedagogies for all students. The project drew upon the NSW Department of Education’s Quality Teaching Model (QTM) to inform the discussion on quality teaching. The implementation of Quality Teaching supported the development of student-centred pedagogies that reflected constructive and innovative integration of local Aboriginal histories and cultures. These practices represented new approaches in each school as they utilized 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, 2002).

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 on improving teachers’ understanding of local Aboriginal cultural knowledge so that teachers could apply their new learned skills and understandings 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 project 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 assessments 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 some of the key location, context, and proportion of Aboriginal students. These settings ranged from a larger primary school in western Sydney to a small primary school in a rural community in northwest 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 500 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 plans were designed in a way that would provide an opportunity for each student to feel valued and supported. The action learning teams were made up of a member of the school’s executive team (principal or deputy principal), an Aboriginal teacher (often a parent from the school) and a representative member of the local Aboriginal community. These teams discussed the implementation of the program and the type of learning teams established in the school. In each setting, the different approaches were tailored to suit 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 in the school’s local Aboriginal community and encouraged parents to become involved in the school.

Other school studies illustrated that by adapting an action learning change model, together with the kind of support provided by the team, 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 some incremental progress and positive change, in the sense that schools and school educators were acknowledging and valuing local Aboriginal culture, history and knowledge.
THE JOURNEY CONTINUES

EMERGING THEMES

Currently in NSW government schools there are more than 49,000 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 49 schools with significant numbers of Indigenous students received funding under the Smarters 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 schools;
- 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 influence future pathways and strategies in Aboriginal education. The underlying philosophy here is based on a collective spirit of reconciliation and recognition of a shared history and a common future between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal Australians which seek to address the inequalities 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 testing 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 sustained 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 sector providing support for teachers and support staffs' professional learning about Aboriginal histories and cultures that further develop their knowledge of, and comfort with, local Aboriginal communities and the cultures they represent. The more professional learning outcomes for the staff involved in this study included:

- engaging in professional collaboration around a specific literacy and numeracy teaching/learning practice that the valued collaboration as a forum for professional conversations;
- engaging in a small 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 with 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 change among many of the participants in the project schools that indicated 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 Indigenous '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 time day by 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, cooperative 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 (ATSSL, 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 appeared that a facilitative approach was the most effective. This meant that the team leader, generally a principal or deputy principal, brought them together, encouraged discussion and fostered a period of reflection and repositioning 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 reflecting on teachers' responsibilities for progressing the project. In some cases, such as in Carineo school, an even more loosely centralized 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 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 commencement 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 part was able to play an important, valuable, supportive role, assisting the team to map the issues they wanted to address, and provide feedback on time. As the project developed, in some cases the relationship over the life of the project was modified and evolved as staff and/or academic members changed.

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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 speech therapists or literacy/numeracy experts.

Research (Bass & Avolio, 1990, Cavan 2005, Burridge, 2009) points to the role that good leadership has in driving positive reform 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.]

(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' (Blument, McCormack, 2001, p. 3). Transformational leaders inspire, motivate followers, and challenge and develop individuals’ potential to reach higher goals. Such high 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 putting a commitment to a set of values, statements of 'what ought to be' within the hearts of the culture of the school. It is how to 'embrace whole institutions and societies with a sense of purpose' (Mintz, 1997, quoted in Horne, 1999, p. 31).

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 formal assessments or individual test results. Research (Hewes 2002, Best 2010) 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 misconduct 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. Students also responded by taking on projects related to what they saw as important learning needs for their students and their local context. At Criewen 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 Taeu primary school felt that taking a hands-on approach to teaching and learning, by
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Introducing activities involving the use of concrete objects and references to Aboriginal cultural practices also helped make learning more authentic for students. For teachers at both Corun and Carnice 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

Corun and Carnice 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 as 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. 3).

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

There are several elements of personalized learning and development and implementation of PLPs have [had] contributed to improving 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).

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The NPLN program also reinforces the findings of this research project in stating the importance of quality teaching and learning; emphasizing 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 Technology (ICT) to address particular learning needs. These included an interactive white board, various digital technologies such as the use of Klamath and Mornit to enable animation and video production, and video conferencing in improve communication between groups and schools. The outcome resulted in greater student engagement and an improvement in their skills base, all of which are likely to prove beneficial to them in the future.

Schools also experienced with a number of new learning activities. Magenta Secondary School provided opportunities for students to become part of the school's cultural commission for the school journal and allowed them to showcase their work both at the school and in the wider community. At Carnice 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 organized 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 Kiwani 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 visual 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 Forming (SWF) 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.
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, others were very transformative (Matthew, 2009; Bass & Arico, 1999). 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; Biloela & Smallis, 2003). Such goals were achieved through strengthening the connections between schools and local Aboriginal communities (including both Aboriginal parents and local Aboriginal community agencies).

Understanding the Promises on Local Aboriginal Communities

A notable feature of each of the local Aboriginal communities connected to a school in this study was the variety of their relationships with their schools and their capacity to be engaged in making connections with school staff and students to share their local cultural knowledge. In many cases members of the local community were relatively disadvantaged in terms of their own educational attainment, 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.

Adapting to the needs of the schools was a key issue for the school staff. Rather than trying to fix the schools so that they could act as a “model” for what their local Aboriginal community was, rather it is important to find ways for the schools to be more positively engaged with their community. It means that despite disadvantages, as the 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 what 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 groups? Identify what cultural protocols needed to be followed? While efforts were made to assist schools in this process, there was a need for a number of schools to better understand how relationships could be developed and strengthened over time.

The study showed that schools did improve their engagement with the local Aboriginal community. Currently this is involving connecting with local Elders and community representatives, including some local community agencies. In a number of schools involving Camina, Dinjarra and Mariri, 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 in 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 focused on learning – in some cases even developing examples of joint learning and reciprocal exchange of knowledge, such as occurred at Cool 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 (Bunyip, 2009, p. 249).

Another common point to the importance of teacher attitudes to cultural knowledge and the capacity to relate to Aboriginal people:

It’s getting the staff proficient enough to work and mix with Aboriginal people for a start... You’ve got to get people comfortable working in groups with Aboriginal people (Bunyip, 2009, p. 249).

One other aspect of good practice was teachers’ ability to apply culturally appropriate methods of working with Aboriginal pupils. These practices included following basic principles of keeping Aboriginal people involved and informed of school activities, making Aboriginal people welcomed in organising informal school meetings, and 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; Hillie, 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 Aboriginal 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 (MECCY, 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 Indigenous culture and society and Indigenous students and having 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 school 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 number of Indigenous students.

THE JOURNEY CONTINUES

Professional Knowledge

Standard 1 – Know students and how they learn

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

| Topic | Context | Proficient | Advanced
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Teaching and learning understanding</td>
<td>Understanding of students and how they learn</td>
<td>Use research evidence to develop learning trajectories</td>
<td>Use research evidence to develop learning trajectories, particularly for Aboriginal students</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cultural awareness</td>
<td>Understanding of cultural diversity and its impact on learning</td>
<td>Understand cultural diversity and its impact on learning</td>
<td>Understand cultural diversity and its impact on learning, particularly for Aboriginal students</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Family engagement</td>
<td>Understanding of family engagement in children's learning</td>
<td>Work effectively with families to support learning</td>
<td>Work effectively with families to support learning, particularly for Aboriginal students</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Language and literacy development</td>
<td>Understanding of language and literacy development in children</td>
<td>Use research evidence to support language and literacy development</td>
<td>Use research evidence to support language and literacy development, particularly for Aboriginal students</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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

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

| Topic | Context | Proficient | Advanced
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Aboriginal history and culture</td>
<td>Understanding of Aboriginal history and culture</td>
<td>Use research evidence to support understanding of Aboriginal history and culture</td>
<td>Use research evidence to support understanding of Aboriginal history and culture, particularly for Aboriginal students</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Understanding the importance of Aboriginal knowledge</td>
<td>Understanding the importance of Aboriginal knowledge in school curricula</td>
<td>Collaborate with Aboriginal communities to develop curriculum</td>
<td>Collaborate with Aboriginal communities to develop curriculum, particularly for Aboriginal students</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assessment and evaluation</td>
<td>Understanding the importance of Aboriginal knowledge in assessment and evaluation</td>
<td>Use research evidence to support assessment and evaluation</td>
<td>Use research evidence to support assessment and evaluation, particularly for Aboriginal students</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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 note that developing supportive and mutually cooperative relationships between the school and the local Aboriginal community is a central feature of good practice. It is about acknowledging and recognizing 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.

CONCLUSION

In this chapter, we have summarized 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 meaningful projects that involved teachers in collaboration with academic experts and members of their local Aboriginal communities delivered innovative teaching.
programmes 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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