More Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Teachers Initiative National Conference

Story and images supplied by Kerryn Taylor

The University of South Australia brought together the biggest gathering of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander teachers and educational leaders in Australia’s history for the inaugural More Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Teachers Initiative “Teachers are Deadly” conference.

Conference convenor, UniSA’s Dean of Indigenous Scholarship, Engagement and Research Professor Peter Buckskin says the inaugural conference was designed to plan effective Indigenous teacher workforce strategies within the school sector.

“This conference examined strategies to stem the attrition of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander teachers and increase their numbers in the teaching profession,” Prof Buckskin says.

“With Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander teachers making up around five per cent of the school population, it is now more important than ever to increase the numbers of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander teachers beyond the current one per cent of the teaching workforce.”

The inaugural Teachers are Deadly national conference was attended by 200 delegates from all states and territories, representing over 80 First Nations education departments in the Northern Territory, New South Wales and South Australia provided additional funding for groups of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander teachers in their state system to attend.

Indigenous keynote speakers included:

- Professor Ronai Throne, UNESCO Chai of Teacher Education - Reclaiming a place for teachers and the education of Indigenous people in Oceania
- Dr Chris Sarr, Executive Director, Brogden Smarts Institute - How will you be remembered as a teacher?
- Ms Leanne Caine, Principal, Mania View School, New Zealand - Tu Kotahi Tātou. Standing together to make a difference
- Ms Judith Ketel, Executive Principal, Tagai State College (Torres Strait) - Navigating a course for successful school leadership
- Mr Corey Warrior, Teacher, Craigmore High School, Adelaide - Teaching: a deadly profession
- Professor Paul Chandler, Dean, Faculty of Education, University of Wollongong - Nurturing, enabling and sustaining our people into the profession of teaching.

A further 20 workshops were held on a wide range of topics and actions, including:

- A survival guide to your first 5 years in the classroom (or a principal)
- New teacher standards - teaching Aboriginal students and teaching about Indigenous culture to all students
- Teaching with our own people in Indigenous communities
- Models for mentoring and professional development
- Current state of play in retention and in teacher education
- Teaching in an inter-connected global world
- Indigenous teacher workforce data and system planning
- Establishing a national professional network of Indigenous teachers and leaders

Feedback from conference delegates:

- Meeting so many ‘DEADLY’ and ‘ON FIRE’ Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander teachers
- Realising there are a lot more Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander people so passionate about education & improving outcomes for our children.
- The first conference of its kind - celebrating us
- The fire in the tummy has been rekindled
- Having been in the education game for 32 years it’s good to see a major shift from the emotive - deficit model to being pro-active.
- It’s also refreshing to see lots of younger teachers with can-do attitudes.
- Networking and sharing has inspired me to aim higher and not settle for less to become the change I want to see.
- This conference has shown me that some states are much more ahead than others.
- The opportunity to be a part of the learning, communicating & action planning to move forward has been a privilege.

This conference has made me think of how I would like to teach my students.

Where to next?

Conference delegates contributed to an action planning process to influence change in schools, universities and our own communities.

Dozens of strategies were identified. A key output was a desire to create a strong national education voice and network through an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Academy.

"An Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Academy would provide the leadership required to create strong Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander voices in the education sector that can respond proactively to the development and implementation of national policies and programs.

"The Academy would also provide peer support and mentoring for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander teachers and educators, and work with the teaching profession as a career option in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities."

Prof Buckskin says.

"Indigenous and Torres Strait Islander teachers are role models for their students and assist their teaching colleagues to be more culturally competent in the teaching of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students in their classrooms."

For more information on the MATSIU Teachers are Deadly conference and project, go to www.matsitu.edu.au/ or contact the MATSIU Project Team on 08 8320 9026.

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