More Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Teachers Initiative

Indigenous Engagement, Scholarship and Research
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Related Documents
  • McGregor Tan Research, 2012 MATSITI Project Indigenous Education Focus Groups Research
  • MATSITI Project Plan 2012–15 matsiti.edu.au/about/project-plan

This project is funded by the Australian Government Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations through the More Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Teachers Initiative.
1 Executive Summary

The More Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders Teachers Initiative (MATSITI) Project is a four-year national program to increase the number of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people entering and remaining in teaching positions in Australian schools.

In 2011-12, the MATSITI Project Team engaged the services of an external agency to conduct initial market research into factors and perceptions that contribute to the number of Aboriginal people entering and remaining in teaching positions in Australian schools, and to ascertain the best means to attract Aboriginal people into teaching.

The market research comprised nine one-hour facilitated focus groups to elicit perceptions and insights about becoming a teacher and working as a teacher in schools. The cohort-based groups included Aboriginal teachers, school students, teacher education undergraduates, Aboriginal education workers, parents and carers, and teaching and recruitment staff in teacher education and in education departments. All but a small number of participants were located in South Australia and for the most part in the metropolitan area of Adelaide.

The report from this market research forms part of a range of qualitative and quantitative research undertaken by the MATSITI Project Team. The report findings will inform a comprehensive 2012-15 communications and marketing strategy and help identify strategies that schools, universities and Indigenous communities can undertake to increase the number of Indigenous teachers.

1.1 Key findings

The common message from groups participating in the market research was to strongly endorse the objectives of the MATSITI project—the need for every effort to be made to attract and retain Aboriginal teachers and other staff in schools.

Participants expressed the view that there are many gaps and obstacles to achieving a successful career in teaching for Indigenous people. These gaps included the need for more male teachers to act as mentors for Aboriginal students during their schooling, and for continuing support for Aboriginal people during their university study and into their teaching careers in schools.

Many participants identified the significant impact of family and community members, individual teachers or other mentors on influencing a decision to consider a career in teaching.

Respondents expressed the need for resilience in overcoming a larger than usual number of personal, social and financial obstacles in their journey to obtain a degree and begin a career in the teaching profession.

Participants also called for greater flexibility in studying for their teaching degree due to a range of family and work responsibilities, and commented that their limited finances during their student years was a significant barrier. This barrier was particularly evident for the large number of mature age students who are likely to have their own family responsibilities.

This study highlights the isolation many Indigenous student, undergraduate or teacher in the classroom and recommended a range of initiatives to help overcome this isolation. The groups acknowledged the responsibilities and resilience of individuals, but said more could be done by schools and universities to improve study and professional support networks.

All Aboriginal students and school staff had experienced some level of misunderstanding or racism. Many Aboriginal teachers had experienced a perception from colleagues that their hard-won qualifications were less rigorous or of less value than the norm.
Several participants were frustrated with the widespread assumption that being Aboriginal meant they were an expert on everything associated with Aboriginal culture, and must deal with any issues or incidents involving Indigenous people in their school workplace.

There was a strong view expressed that school communities need to highlight the contributions that Aboriginal teachers make to the education system, and in particular, to assisting the learning and well-being of Indigenous students.

The overall message to be conveyed from this research is the need to build on the desire of Aboriginal people to play their part in supporting their communities, for them to ‘give something back’ or ‘make a difference’, and to act as role models for the next generation of Indigenous students and professionals.

1.2 Communications and marketing

In addition to gaining perceptions about teaching as a career, the study also aimed to ascertain the best means to attract Aboriginal people into teaching.

The facilitators of the focus groups, McGregor Tan Research, recommended the following elements to be included in a marketing strategy to attract new Aboriginal recruits to teaching:

1. MATSIITI should refine the current project video¹ featuring Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander teachers in the education sector to enthuse others into believing they too can achieve success and become role models and mentors for others.

2. Schools with a number of Aboriginal students should be encouraged to invite community leaders and high achievers in education to come into the school to talk to the students about these opportunities.

3. Parents and guardians of Aboriginal school students should be invited to attend special sessions with their children, where the opportunities for becoming a teacher can be outlined.

4. Consider the use of targeted Indigenous community media and advertising about teaching as a career, with an underlying message ‘You can make a difference through teaching’.

5. Investigate the use of social networking in reaching younger Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people who may be interested in teaching as a career.

The perceptions and recommendations of the market research study will inform a comprehensive communications and marketing strategy to be developed and implemented by the MATSIITI Project Team from late 2012 onwards.

¹ matsiti.edu.au/about#video
2 Background

The More Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders Teachers Initiative (MATSITI) Project is a national four-year program to increase the number of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people entering and remaining in teaching positions in Australian schools.

The primary rationale for the initiative is that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander teachers are significantly under-represented in schools, comprising approximately 1% of the teaching community, compared with Indigenous students, who comprise 5% of the total school student population.

Increasing the number of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander teachers is a key factor in fostering student engagement and improving educational outcomes for Indigenous students. It will also enable all students to develop an understanding of, and respect for, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander histories, cultures and languages.

The key outcomes for the MATSITI project include:

- Comprehensive research on background factors and various strategies and their effectiveness in increasing the number of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander teachers;
- A series of partnerships and co-investment agreements with school authorities, university schools of education and other agencies to achieve lasting school workforce reforms;
- A national community engagement and marketing strategy to promote teaching as a career option for secondary Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students and adults.

The initiative is led by senior Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander educators with administrative and research support provided by the University of South Australia.

The project is funded by the Australian Government Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations through the More Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Teachers Initiative.

Further background about MATSITI is available at matsiti.edu.au.

2.1 Research purpose

In 2011-12, the MATSITI Project Team engaged the services of market research agency McGregor Tan Research to conduct initial qualitative research into factors that contributed to the number of Aboriginal people entering and remaining in teaching positions in Australian schools.

In particular, the purpose of the research was to ascertain the best means to attract Aboriginal people into teaching, whether as a progression through high school and university, or by attracting older Aboriginal people with experience in other fields to gain the qualifications needed to become a teacher.

The qualitative research formed part of a suite of quantitative and qualitative research into Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people’s participation in teacher education and in the education workforce throughout the course of the MATSITI Project.

The market research was also designed to inform future communications and marketing strategies to encourage Indigenous people to consider a career in teaching, and to identify strategies that schools, universities and Indigenous communities can undertake to increase the number of Indigenous teachers.
Methodology

This research comprised nine one-hour facilitated focus groups with the following cohorts:

- Aboriginal secondary school students in Years 8-10
- Aboriginal secondary school students in Years 11-12
- Aboriginal undergraduate students currently studying teaching
- Aboriginal undergraduate students from remote communities
- Aboriginal people in non-teaching roles working in the school sector
- Parents/carers of Aboriginal secondary students
- Staff in undergraduate teacher education with Aboriginal students
- Staff in education departments with a teacher recruitment, induction or human resources role
- Aboriginal teachers working in schools

Focus group discussions with these groups canvassed a broad range of topics including:

- Career aspirations and study requirements to become a teacher
- Universities attracting and retaining people to teaching education programs
- Employers attracting and retaining qualified people for teaching positions in schools
- Factors contributing to or hindering pathways into teaching
- Incentives, support, scholarships and community factors that contribute to increased recruitment and retention of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander teachers

2.2 Research limitations

The report is intended as a starting point only—a summary of the perceptions expressed by the nine focus groups rather than a comprehensive analysis of the current state of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander teacher study and career experiences.

Focus groups were recruited in South Australia; inferences on findings beyond South Australia or with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in other locations need to be validated.

Only one of the groups comprised practising Aboriginal teachers. Unsurprisingly, this group had deep insight into the background factors, the study and career journey and resilience required to be a successful teacher. The perceptions of Indigenous teachers and their professional experiences in the school workforce will be further investigated during 2012-13.

The research comprises the perceptions of approximately 80 people and will contribute to a broader agenda of research and reforms in current education workforce policy and practice.
3 Research findings

3.1 Summary of findings

The need for more Aboriginal people working in schools

The consensus from all groups who took part in this study was that every effort should be made to attract and retain Aboriginal teachers, especially males (and other staff, to act as mentors for Aboriginal students at every level), and for there to be support for Aboriginal teachers through mentoring and other networks.

Numerous participants spoke about the impact an individual teacher or other mentors (including family members) had on them. Time and time again, it was the encouragement and persuasion of others that had provided the impetus to individuals to consider teaching as a career goal.

However, there were some caveats, such as the parent who stressed his children were at school to learn, not to develop their Aboriginality, arguing this was a family responsibility.

The need for ongoing support at every stage

The focus group facilitators were impressed by the struggles many of these individuals had in pursuing their dreams. Whether dealing with the competing priorities in their lives (such as family commitments, work and finances) or addressing bureaucracy to obtain a degree, many Aboriginal teachers had overcome various obstacles (personal, social and financial) to get where they are today.

This report also highlighted the challenges experienced by the all-too-common experience of being the sole Aboriginal student in a school classroom, at university or being the only Aboriginal teacher in the school. Many respondents indicated that this amplified the need for ongoing personal and professional support at every stage of their study and career journeys.

Several participants (current undergraduate Aboriginal students), stated there is a need for additional flexibility and financial support if universities want to attract more Aboriginal students. For the mature-aged cohort, these factors are extremely pertinent, given their added family responsibilities.

The need for better understanding

While the onus is on Aboriginal teachers to build resilience and seek out their own professional support networks, a number of participants stated that more could be done by the universities and schools to better support their thinly scattered workforce and students.

The validity of degrees obtained by Aboriginal teachers by others was also raised. A number of participants were disturbed to hear that teaching colleagues hold an assumption that Aboriginal teachers do not have ‘real’ teacher qualifications, or that the degrees are issued to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people are without rigour.

Participants gave advice that Aboriginal teachers must stand their ground against all forms of prejudice. However, they also recommended that authorities implement some kind of educational campaign that highlights the positive contribution to the overall education system (especially for Aboriginal students).

A number of participants were frustrated with the widespread assumption from colleagues that because they were Aboriginal, they were expected to be an expert on everything associated with Aboriginal culture. Additionally, several commentators inferred that their role as a teacher was to teach and not deal with issues beyond their classroom affecting any Aboriginal student or family within the community. This was particularly evident for early career teachers, who do not need other distractions from developing their teaching skills.
Attracting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people into teaching

The core purpose of this research was to ascertain how best to attract Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people into teaching. Of equal importance was determining how to retain these students and teachers in study and teaching.

The study confirmed other data that there are many pathways into teaching, and that the majority of Aboriginal teachers enter university as mature age students rather than commencing their education studies directly after completion of Year 12.

A key message from all groups was the need to build on the widespread desire of Aboriginal people to play their part in supporting their communities, for them to give back in some way, and to act as role models for the next generation.

While addressing practical and material needs was seen to be important (especially giving assistance to mature students trying to balance their work, family commitments and study), the primary motivation in becoming teachers was to make a difference.

For all participant groups, word of mouth and recommendation or encouragement from others was an important motivating factor when considering teaching as a profession.

With the exception of two focus groups, this analysis largely reflects the views of urban participants in the study. We believe there is a need for additional research with remote communities to ascertain what they believe they need in terms of educating their children, and how this can be achieved through increased recruitment of Aboriginal teachers and other staff.

### 3.2 Marketing recommendations

Aiming from this research and from other studies McGregor Tan Research have conducted, the market research facilitators recommend the following should form the basis of a marketing strategy to attract new Aboriginal recruits to teaching:

1. MATSIIT should refine the current promotional video featuring Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander teachers to enthuse others into believing they too can achieve success and become role models and mentors for others. Such a video (which could be adapted for showing on Imparja TV) should direct viewers to a website or a toll-free phone line providing further information and advice about how to become a teacher or Aboriginal education worker.
2. Schools with a number of Aboriginal students should be encouraged to invite community leaders and high achievers in education to come into the school to talk to the students about these opportunities.
3. Parents and guardians of Aboriginal school students should be invited to attend special sessions with their children, where the opportunities for becoming a teacher can be outlined. Much should be made of trying to emulate what older brothers and sisters may have achieved by staying on to Year 12 and progressing to university. These achievers should be involved in a program to encourage their siblings to do the same.
4. In terms of advertising about teaching as a career, the focus groups suggested using mass media for the campaign, especially in remote communities which rely on Imparja TV and CAMAA Radio for their information. Billboards and posters were also suggested. The message they advocated was ‘You can make a difference through teaching’.
5. Social networking, e.g., developing a presence on Facebook, was seen as playing a potentially powerful role in reaching younger people who may be interested in teaching as a career.
4 Appendix

4.1 Focus group observations

In this section a range of individual comments have been selected to provide a direct reflection of the views of participants.

Background factors

The initial task of this research was to identify background factors and strategies to increase the number of Aboriginal teachers in our schools.

The need for Aboriginal teachers and AEWs

A number of participants spoke positively concerning the importance of having Aboriginal teachers and AEWs in their schools. Positive role models, such as teachers, empower students to succeed and importantly having Aboriginal teachers can contribute much to this. Several participants told us how much they had appreciated having an Aboriginal teacher or other mentor at school or university, or other teachers who understood their culture.

Some of them (Aboriginal teachers/mentors) link to you better and have a better understanding. They understand our family situations. Most Aboriginal people are family-orientated and they’d understand. (High school student)

It depends on what teachers you like. There are some teachers at this school that really make teaching look appealing. But you get some teachers who look like they just hate it. (High school student)

It was really inspiring to sit there and listen to them and see how they presented. (Aboriginal student studying teaching)

Some participants voiced their reservations about there being possibly too much emphasis on the need for an Aboriginal teacher or special policies aimed at making provision for Aboriginal students.

I’d hate to see my kids having to stay at school because of policies in place. I’d rather they stayed on out of a sense of passion to be there. (Parent of secondary Indigenous students)

The experience of my kids at school has not been great. A lot of schools compartmentalise Aboriginal kids in a way they don’t do with others. If it’s a boy, he gets put in that box, and this is the pathway he can take. I went to my son’s Year 10 pathway session and they gave him the choice of three things—steel fitting, mechanics and plumbing, saying that was what Aboriginal boys mainly pick. My son said he didn’t want to do any of them. (Parent of secondary Indigenous students)

There were other concerns voiced by staff involved in teacher education and other sectors.

My opinion is there should be a significant number of Indigenous people involved because they should be teaching the culture. I mean, we can’t teach that. (Staff member in teacher education)

We all know that the learning outcomes for Aboriginal students is not the greatest and I think that those kids having role models, whether it’s a teacher or whatever, that they can aspire to, would certainly give some motivation for them to seek jobs or further their education. (Recruitment staff in schools)
These staff also had firm views about the needs of Aboriginal students in remote communities.

For remote Aboriginal people, I think overwhelmingly they want to teach in their own community. They want to stay in their own community because they have the connection to their country and community. (Staff member in teacher education)

They have their own cultural differences that clash with the nine-to-five regime that we tend to run things on, and that’s one of the reasons we are continuing to have these problems. I saw a lot of things happening during my four years up there, and in the last 20 years there haven’t been a lot of changes. (Non-Indigenous teacher formerly in a remote school)

They come to Adelaide and hopefully they have a mentor that they can closely connect with and trust—then they have a better chance. (Staff member in teacher education)

**Determining career aspirations**

The participants offered their views about how individuals might be influenced in starting to determine their future career direction.

Aboriginal people are community-minded and think of their families and extended families first. I think that would probably be the greatest inspiration for most of us about wanting to create change, ... and wanting to make it appear like a safe setting for Aboriginal kids to be in and learn and excel in. (Aboriginal education worker)

Our culture are all born teachers and that’s passed on through generations ... You’ve got more than opportunity to engage with our kids and our families on a positive level than if we were say a police officer. (Aboriginal education worker)

It’s the same as any young person wanting to be a teacher. They are influenced by peers, parents, friends, and inspired by teachers or have a desire to contribute to their community. (Staff member in teacher education)

By all accounts, they’re pretty keen to be in teaching, but for many of them, especially the younger ones, there is some apprehension about teaching even to Grade 3 or 4, because they don’t feel they have the literacy and numeracy skills to perform satisfactorily. (Staff member in teacher education)

Their intention is not to get a piece of paper, it’s not for the qualification, they are there to do the learning and get the skills and knowledge to take back into the community. (Staff member in teacher education)

**Attracting student-teacher recruits to university**

The following comments reflect the participants’ thinking about how the universities should make adequate provision for the Aboriginal students they attract, especially those studying education.

I think it’s really important to get the university on side with the programs they offer. For many of us, literacy and writing wasn’t the greatest and so that’s where we fail a lot. Plus be more aware of our commitments and family obligations because that’s one of the major reasons why a lot of the students fall out because they’ve got to leave and do something at home. (Aboriginal undergraduate studying teaching)

I did two years and then (my child) came along and I found it impossible to juggle having a child, working full time and studying. I cut down to part time and deferred for a couple of years. I’m finding it hard to keep it up because I have to do my practical and take a month to two off work which is impossible. There is no way I can do that. I’ve already asked the bosses and they said ‘no we can’t pay you to go to uni and not work for a month’ and all that sort of thing. I can’t quit my job and go and work and do a prac in one month and then look for another job. It’s just impossible when you’ve got a mortgage and family. So, I need some help I guess, but those are the barriers I have to finishing my degree. (Aboriginal male education worker)
I was a lone Aboriginal person doing psychology. You may come from a very supportive family but you’re the one who’s got to get yourself up every day and be confronted by the fact that you may be a minority. Once again, you’re coming from high school where we were a minority and I certainly got a lot of praise for finishing Year 12 and going on to university. But I was still an isolated person regardless of living in Adelaide most of my life. (Aboriginal person employed in education/training sector)

It can be very alienating at university. You don’t see any signs of your culture. You go to a tutorial group, and people are talking about your culture as if you’re not there, and they get it all wrong. You have to have a strong personality and a strong sense of justice. (Aboriginal teacher in school)

Whilst stating individual students had to be able to stand up for themselves, there was strong emphasis on the need for Aboriginal students to be given some moral and practical support, especially the chance to network.

We had a unit for the Aboriginal students. I wouldn’t have survived if I didn’t have that unit to go to and talk to others. You have to have a good support network for your wellbeing. No matter how professional you are, you will still be fighting prejudice. (Aboriginal teacher in school)

The few mainstream Aboriginal students that I have worked with would say that their most successful time at uni had been when they’ve had a close relationship with a lecturer or a support person that they’ve been able to go to. (Staff member in teacher education)

Recruiting Aboriginal teachers into schools

The participants offered their views about why Aboriginal people were attracted to teaching as a career, and they also identified some of the factors contributing to or hindering their pathways into teaching.

I don’t think an Aboriginal person would decide to become a teacher for the money or school holidays. It’s about becoming a positive role model and you have that opportunity to teach the kids just the way you thought you wanted to be taught when you were a kid. (Aboriginal undergraduate studying teaching)

If my daughter was motivated by this, I’d be concerned about her expectations. My impression is teachers are under a lot of pressure because of the demands on them. She currently has a part-time job in teaching young children to swim, and apparently she is very good at that. I’d want to be sure her expectations were realistic, that she knows what would be expected of her. (Parent of secondary Aboriginal students)

Obviously you have to love the job, in order to do it, but as a parent if one of my children says they want to become a teacher, I look on it as a permanent, secure job as a teacher, one of the best public service jobs you could hope to have. It also means I’m off from school when my children are, which fits in nicely with parental pressures. (Aboriginal teacher in school)

The Aboriginal teachers themselves had mixed views about the remuneration of teaching as a career:

If it was money that was motivating you, you would go to health where the pay is a lot better. (Indigenous teacher in school)

In Canberra, which is a public service town, you have to be at a senior executive level to earn what I earn as a teacher. (Aboriginal teacher in school)

For me it was to better my own life, to raise my financial status as an unemployed female. Now, it’s mainly because I want to make a difference and help close the gap. (Aboriginal teacher in school)

We were told the situation was markedly different in remote communities.

The problem is anyone on a decent salary has to support so many people. A teacher’s salary is way in excess of the average income of the majority of people...
Living in remote communities. A number of people have actually stopped working as teachers and had a reduction in salary because of the fact that the person with the large salary has to sustain more and more people. (Staff member in teacher education)

Creating a better understanding in universities and schools

One of the critical aspects of this research was the emphasis placed by so many participants on the need for universities and schools to create a safer and better environment for Aboriginal students (including those at school) and teachers, which includes overcoming widespread prejudices and misconceptions.

They left no doubt that whilst some of the prejudices they encountered appeared to be relatively minor, there was still a level of racial prejudice that needed to be addressed.

From my experience in going to school and university, it was about nearly becoming a white person. There wasn’t a lot about Aboriginal people when I grew up in schools. (Aboriginal person employed in education/training sector)

There needs to be some myth busting about what universities can offer people, because maybe the rest of the Aboriginal communities think of universities as places that actually shed Aboriginal people of their Aboriginality. What do Aboriginal people become if they go through their system? It’s about how being educated isn’t a bad thing and it can be a good thing for Aboriginal people to excel. (Aboriginal person employed in education/training sector)

We are over-run by western ethics or propaganda systems that I don’t necessarily applaud. I think it would be fantastic if you can get people out there to say hey there are people that live in Australia that think differently and they can teach us important things. (Staff member in teacher education)

One of the participants described the actual experience of her brother who had become a teacher.

He’d go into the staff room, and teachers would say to him ‘What are you doing? Get out of here while you can’. He could feel the negative energy in the schools, and he said he did not spend much time in the staff room. (Aboriginal undergraduate studying teaching)

Some expressed frustration about the assumptions made about the expected role of an Aboriginal member of staff.

It’s assumed if you’re an Aboriginal teacher or an Aboriginal person in the workforce that you’re the ‘go to guy’ that knows everything about Aboriginality or the culture which is just not true. (Aboriginal undergraduate studying teaching)

My concern is always being seen as the Aboriginal person who can answer all their questions or queries. But often, they’re from a different mob and I didn’t even know their cultural background. (Aboriginal education worker)

You have to be prepared to be the Aboriginal expert on everything. Even though you have no idea about the culture of other Indigenous groups than your own, it’s assumed you will know. (Aboriginal teacher in school)

Several were upset that other teachers seemed to believe—or they certainly implied—that the standards of entry had been lowered in some way for Aboriginal people to become recognised as qualified teachers.

I think another myth and perception that needs to be broken down when it comes to Aboriginal people becoming teachers and then working in schools is that the non-Indigenous people think it was just given to us. (Aboriginal person employed in education/training sector)

People don’t recognise that we had to work to get where we are, that we had to study too, but oh they assume it was probably just given to us. Or you didn’t have to do as much. (Aboriginal person employed in education/training sector)
One participant highlighted the effect of such attitudes, which undermined the confidence of Aboriginal people aspiring to be teachers.

It depends very much on the individuals concerned. I was wondering what the impact would be on a young Aboriginal teacher to find himself or herself teaching classes which were not just Aboriginal students but the whole range of the school population. It could put a lot of pressure on the teacher. (Parent of secondary Aboriginal students)

An experienced Aboriginal teacher described how individuals needed to prepare themselves to handle such situations.

My first piece of advice is to stand your ground if you are not happy with anything or if you disagree. I was the only Indigenous person in the room, and I challenged on the few issues they got wrong. I wasn’t very popular but I stood my ground. (Aboriginal teacher in school)

Providing practical support

As a consequence of all these background factors, the participants spoke of the various ways in which universities, schools and employers needed to introduce practical measures of support for those who undertake to become teachers. This would include providing incentives, financial support such as scholarships and other programs to increase the recruitment and retention of Aboriginal people as teachers.

We were told this process needed to start with secondary school students, but that it applied especially in the universities offering teacher education. This was one of the main topics in our discussion with those responsible for recruiting staff in the schools.

The issue is how can those kids be supported? How can we support them to achieve where they want to go? I don’t really know the answer to that. (Recruitment staff in schools)

Increasing the number of Aboriginal teachers is a positive strategy to help Aboriginal kids. (Recruitment staff in schools)

I don’t suggest this is across the board, but intensive support is required from a financial perspective, from a professional perspective, from a collegiate perspective and probably from a cultural and social one as well. (Recruitment staff in schools)

Many have felt we over-promised and under-delivered. So in terms of what we are looking to in the future, we need to be really clear what we can provide and be really clear what we can’t provide. (Recruitment staff in schools)

4.2 Comments on marketing teaching

The focus groups provided several insights into how these participants saw the underlying marketing message to Aboriginal people (both young and mature) to consider teaching as a career. Having shown them a video at the start of the discussions, many believed using such role models would be effective.

If I can do it, you can do it. (Remote area undergraduate studying teaching)

I think the kind of people on that video are genuine role models, and that our kids do look at them and wonder if they can do the same. (Aboriginal education worker)

For young Aboriginal kids in school, say in Year 8, seeing Aboriginal students who are in Year 9, are struggling in Year 10, but have survived to stay on for Years 11 and 12 to find a sense of direction—they are the real role models for the rest of the students. (Parent of secondary Aboriginal students)

Not unexpectedly, word of mouth based on the experience and advice of others was most likely to have the most lasting impact on any individual.

There’s nothing more rewarding than to see an Indigenous child learning what you are teaching them. One girl had issues about getting to school, and on the last day of
term none of her brothers came to school, but she managed to get there. It was so rewarding, but I had to work so hard to build a relationship with the Indigenous children. (Aboriginal teacher in school)

4.3 Individual focus group responses

Aboriginal students in Year 11-12 (metropolitan secondary school)
- Some had ideas about their future—mostly helping other people in public services
- Family members are most likely to be their main influencers
- Current teachers are likely to influence their decisions, although not always in a positive direction
- An Aboriginal mentor/AEW is valuable to build one-on-one relationships

Aboriginal students in Years 8-10 (remote area students attending a city secondary school with boarding facilities)
- Too soon for most to be considering plans for their future
- Family members are most likely to be their main influencers
- They value having Aboriginal teachers/AEWS—they find them easier to relate to
- They valued the city-based cohort program which enhances their status in their home community

Aboriginal undergraduates studying teaching (city campus)
- Greatly influenced by family members in their decision to become teachers
- They are attracted to teaching by the prospect of helping their community and a desire to make a difference rather than material benefits, such as income and holidays
- Value of Aboriginal teachers/lecturers, especially male role models—they can be inspiring and they need to develop positive relationships with Aboriginal students
- Nearly all experienced difficulties because of conflicting priorities, including family, work and study
- Persevering and determined to succeed—more flexibility in the approach to the study process, such as Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL), would increase chances of success
- Misunderstandings and racism are common experiences for all participants
- Inspiring examples of staff support (especially mentors) and principals

Aboriginal undergraduates studying teaching (remote area)
- Inspired by others to make great efforts to succeed as a teacher
- Motivation partly for self-improvement, but mainly to help their community
- Valued having AEWs in schools (none had Aboriginal teachers) but the AEWs were often used for all kinds of chores not related to the classroom—concerns about retention
- Challenges with English proficiency (as a second language—study needs to be explicit and/or taught in own language)
- Improvements could be made to the remote area teaching program they are enrolled in; this was not fully explored due to time constraints
Aboriginal people working in the education sector

- Great value in having Aboriginal teachers and education workers, as we understand our own people—some recalled those who inspired them
- Strong motivation to change attitudes towards Aboriginal teachers, who are in a strong position to empower and inspire others—teachers are in daily contact with students and can do it
- Job security is a key benefit of teaching—more so than pay or holidays, in fact a higher salary can be a burden in some circumstances due to obligations to extended family
- Aboriginal students’ abilities and aspirations are often stereotyped in schools, such as in manual work or sport
- There is some community concern that Aboriginality will be diminished during university study
- Concern about being the ‘sole Aboriginal’ at every level of education, and misunderstandings on the scope of their role—e.g., they are available to deal with any Aboriginal issue or incident in their school
- Mature students have particular challenges juggling work/family/study roles
- University provision of special study areas with services such as tutors and mentors for Aboriginal students is perceived to have a high value for Aboriginal students
- There is a need for considerable support (including financial) and encouragement

Parents of Indigenous secondary students

- Strong support for the employment of Aboriginal teachers and education workers in schools to better support Aboriginal student learning, with some debate about how much schools should reinforce Aboriginality (or should this be seen as a parental responsibility)
- Their children have a fair idea of their future aspirations and plans, particularly girls
- This group were more guarded about the prospect of their children becoming teachers—they are aware of the general pressures on teachers plus the added pressures and limited valuing of Aboriginal teachers
- In favour of promoting Aboriginal role models and not just sports people. Year 11 and 12 students are seen as role models for younger students
- Critical of schools stereotyping their kids, especially boys being designated as destined for the trades and/or sport
- There is a need for parents to be more involved in school policy and career advice

Staff in tertiary education with Indigenous students

- Raised questions about rigour and inherent value of Aboriginal teachers in remote areas, requiring good teachers—just being Aboriginal not good enough in itself
- AEWs and teaching students are drawn into many community roles, often beyond the scope of their role
- Studying for teaching the only realistic professional option for many students
- Influenced by family, peers, friends, teachers—role models are important, who are best drawn from community leaders they know and respect
- Key motivation is to help children with their learning, their families and contribute to the community by operating within the community
- Salary and benefits can have other consequences due to demands and expectations from extended family
• Apprehension that they cannot become successful teachers because of literacy or numeracy problems
• Problem of retaining teachers and Aboriginal education as difficult as attracting them—there is a need for a tutor or mentor and peer support
• Aboriginal teachers face some racism which impacts on retention—there is a need to educate others to accept that Aboriginal culture makes a contribution to the school

Staff in schools responsible for recruitment
• Need to recognise major cultural differences and expectations between different community contexts
• Support for remote community students when studying in Adelaide—it is hard for them to fit in—the Witija program is a good start
• Community leaders they respect are powerful role models to encourage teaching—making a difference is the best motivation to pursue teaching as a career
• Aboriginal education and community staff in schools are significant advocates for Aboriginal students to consider careers such as teaching
• Scholarships for pre-service students and other programs play a vital role—home group teachers
• There is a perception that education department recruitment sections have ‘over promised and under-delivered’ to Aboriginal teaching graduates
• Concern about retention—large attrition rate to other fields—support programs are needed—Indigenous Tutorial Assistance Scheme (ITAS) tutors and experienced mentors—Aboriginal Teachers Reference Group important for advocacy and support
• The number of schools offering Aboriginal studies is very small—an Aboriginal teacher can provide a rich cultural learning experience for non-Indigenous students

Indigenous teachers working in schools
• As a group, strongly motivated to teach—main motive is self-advancement but also to achieve positive change
• There is a natural bent for teaching and love of the job, but many frustrations and a need for a ‘push’ and encouragement from time to time
• Questions about quoted statistics on Aboriginal teachers—many qualified teachers are working in other fields and many students and teachers are reluctant to identify as Aboriginal
• A range of opinions about working conditions—important to explain that teaching not a 9–3 job, job security is valuable, pay is satisfactory (but not great). Pay and holidays are not the main drawcard to teach
• Many challenges threaten retention—institutional racism and some prejudice in the staffroom—dismissed as not being ‘real’ teachers—treating Aboriginal teachers as supposed experts on all things Aboriginal
• Critical of schools which treat Aboriginal students differently from non-Indigenous but fail to recognise differences between Indigenous cultures
• Universities can be alienating—Aboriginal culture overlooked although some provide support and study areas for Indigenous students to network
• There is need for a national Indigenous teacher association for advocacy and support
• Teaching has many rewarding experiences—seeing their students blossom and helping pre-service students and colleagues as their mentor