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**Aboriginal Peoples' Perceptions and Beliefs about Quality Teaching.**

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**Abstract**

Quality teaching has increasingly been cited as a major factor in improving student outcomes at school. Certainly, the NSW Department of Education and Training (DET) has invested extensively in the notion of quality teaching. The implementation of the Quality Teaching Framework and organisation of numerous professional learning opportunities for teachers remains a major theme.

For Aboriginal<sup>1</sup> students whose educational disadvantage is generally higher than any other student group, quality teaching takes on greater importance as a potentially key strategy in bridging the achievement gap. Significantly, the Report of the Review of Aboriginal Education (AER) cited the work of teachers as the 'make or break' element in improving Aboriginal student outcomes (NSW DET & NSW AECG, 2004, p 189).

The NSW Aboriginal Education Consultative Group (AECG) has subsequently undertaken a research project to elucidate Aboriginal parents and community member's perceptions and beliefs about quality teaching. The project aimed to find out what aspects of quality teaching make a difference to Aboriginal student outcomes. Using a mixed methods approach of workshops, focus groups, surveys and interviews, parents and community members were asked to identify key issues around the notion of quality teaching. Additionally, members were asked to rank the NSW Institute of Teachers' Professional Teaching Standards and statements on quality teaching from the AER.

Preliminary findings have indicated that Aboriginal parents and community members believe that above all teachers need to understand, know and build trust relationships with their students. Crucial to this, is the individual teacher's knowledge and understanding of Aboriginal culture, particularly local community culture. Authentic engagement with student's families and the community is seen as essential to building this trust and learning about local culture. From their own school experiences, Aboriginal parents identified that it was a particular teacher; their personality rather than their knowledge of curricular and the way that they taught, that gave them a sense of belonging and feeling of worthiness to continue with their education.

This paper seeks to present the research project findings including implications for Professional Teaching Standards, teacher education training and current approaches to teacher professional learning.

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<sup>1</sup> Note: the terminology Aboriginal is used in recognition of original land ownership in NSW and is inclusive of Torres Strait Islander students (as per NSW AECG and DET policies).

## Introduction

Much of the current literature and research around quality teaching focuses on what teachers know or can do<sup>2</sup>, commonly referred to as knowledge of their subject area and the pedagogical practices used to implement and assess this. This research has been prominent in the recent development of professional teaching standards and accreditation systems. But from an Aboriginal perspective, is this enough or the right approach to ensure the best possible outcomes for Aboriginal students?

In the Report of the Review of Aboriginal Education (AER, 2004)<sup>3</sup> Aboriginal students, families, community members and many Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people working in schools singled out the work of teachers as the “... *make or break element* ...” (NSW DET & AECG, 2004, p. 189) for Aboriginal students and that teacher quality was perhaps the most significant element in the engagement of Aboriginal students and potential improvement in their learning outcomes.

The NSW Aboriginal Education Consultative Group project aims to explore the issue of quality teaching in greater depth through eliciting Aboriginal community members (specifically AECG members) views on the nature of quality teaching and teacher quality and to what extent this impacts on their children. Through an advocacy lens, a mixed methods approach of surveys, workshops and interviews will “... *give voice to diverse perspectives, to better advocate for participants* ...” (Creswell, 2009, p. 213) in an attempt to ‘hear’ the voices that are often excluded, marginalised, sidelined or just not heard at all.

## Quality Teaching

*“The most balanced, rigorous and user-friendly curriculum that can be devised still requires skilled and dedicated teachers to implement it.”* (Standing Committee on Employment, Workplace Relations and Education; Quality of School Education September, 2007, p. 1). Research has consistently reported quality teaching as a critical factor in the improvement of student outcomes.<sup>4</sup>

Indeed, this is not an Australian phenomena but an international concern as cited in the MCEETYA report to the Teacher Quality and Educational Leadership Taskforce<sup>5</sup> “*A major shared concern across the OECD membership is whether enough teachers have necessary knowledge and skills to meet the challenges of rapid social and economic change and an increasingly diverse student population*” (Skilbeck & Connell, 2004, p. 21). The OECD also notes the inherent difficulty in measuring relationships between student achievement and teacher quality while recognising the importance of quality teachers during times of profound societal change. Darling-Hammond (2001 in Skilbeck & Connell, 2004, p. 16) claims that teacher quality is one of the most important school factors “... *influencing student achievement ahead of class size, school size ... (and) ... a larger share of the variance in students’ achievement than any other single factor, including poverty, race and parent education*” ; conclusions based on reviews of studies of student achievement in the

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<sup>2</sup> claims such as Ingvarson & Rowe (2007), Rowe (2003), and indeed most of the supporting research for the development of professional teaching standards and accreditation such as Ingvarson, Rowe, Elliott, Kleinheinz & McKenzie (2006), Hayes (2006), MCEETYA (2003), SIPA project 2004-7

<sup>3</sup> New South Wales Department of Education and Training & New South Wales Aboriginal Education Consultative Group Incorporated (2004) *The Report of the Review of Aboriginal Education Yanigurra Muya: Ganggurrinyrna Yaami guurulaw Yirringin.gurray - Freeing the Spirit: Dreaming an Equal Future* Darlinghurst, Sydney, NSW

<sup>4</sup> NSW DET & AECG ‘Report of the Review of Aboriginal Education (2004), MCEETYA *Australian Directions in Indigenous Education 2005-2008* (2006), “*Connecting Cultures.*” *Review of Victoria’s Indigenous Education Strategies: Supporting Indigenous Students through School* (January 2008), Mellor & Corrigan (2004) Rowe (2002, 2004a, 2006a, 2007), Ingvarson & Rowe (2007), Leigh & Ryan (2006), Hattie (2003), Alton-Lee (2005), Darling-Hammond (2001, 2002, 2005)

<sup>5</sup> from OECD (2004) *Attracting Developing and Retaining Effective Teachers. Synthesis Report. First Draft.*

United States. Further to this, research in New Zealand by Professor John Hattie<sup>6</sup> found that while the major source of variance in student achievement is ability and application (50%), it is closely followed by teacher quality (30%); “ .. *what teachers know, do and care about which is very powerful in the learning process* ” (Senate Standing Committee on Employment, Workplace Relations and Education (2007), p. 5).

In New South Wales, the ‘Quality Teaching in NSW’ Discussion Paper (2003) was released by the NSW Department of Education and Training (DET) resulting in substantive use of the pedagogical model, the Quality Teaching Framework (QTF). This model offers three dimensions; Intellectual Quality, Quality Learning Environment and Significance with each containing six specific interacting elements designed to achieve quality teaching. Extensive professional learning is a high priority in the implementation of the model to classroom practice, with an emphasis on assessment designed to reflect high quality student outcomes (NSW DET Professional Learning and Leadership Development Directorate, 2008, p. 4).

In an effort to assess the value of the QTF, the NSW DET and University of Newcastle conducted a longitudinal study (Systematic Implications of Pedagogy and Achievement in NSW public schools - SIPA) from 2004 to 2007, tracking three cohorts of students, totalling 2500 from 36 diverse primary and high schools. Three key findings identified from the SIPA study showed that:

- professional learning that focuses on pedagogy works, and that the quality of teaching is related to the degree to which teachers believe they are responsible for and can make a difference to learning;
- quality teaching leads to higher achievement particularly the quality of assessment task students receive, and
- quality teaching closes gaps for Aboriginal students and students from low-socio-economic backgrounds.

The SIPA study also reported on findings for Aboriginal students and students from low-socio-economic backgrounds which supported the overall study findings and emphasised the QTF dimension of ‘Significance’. This dimension connects student’s cultural backgrounds and uses techniques such as narrative to increase student connectedness to curricular. The study found that the lower the socio-economic status and Aboriginal proportion of the student population the lower the intellectual quality, teacher expectations and significance, ironically where it is needed most. It confirms the tendency to use a deficit model for describing and engaging with these students. This is consistent with an ongoing discourse of blaming students, their cultural/ethnic backgrounds, the school, and the system (Harrison 2007) for their lower achievement, disengagement and resistance to school. Semi-structured teacher interviews revealed a tendency to ‘defensive teaching’ (McNeill 2000 in Griffiths et al 2007, p. 9) where pedagogical choices are determined by the teacher’s need and/or desire to control the behaviours of students. Further, preconceived levels of student ability subsequently deepened student disengagement and lower achievement levels creating in effect, a self fulfilling prophecy.

In terms of Aboriginal students and other disadvantaged groups, teacher quality takes on a greater personal, cultural and social dimension as connecting with students alienated from the education system becomes a key focus. Increasingly, researchers<sup>7</sup> identify a holistic approach to education, building on the teacher - student relationship to include authentic relationships with families and communities. Critical to this is deep understanding of the cultural, historical and socio-political

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<sup>6</sup> John Hattie, *Teachers Make a Difference: What is the research evidence?*, Australian Council for Education Research Annual Conference on Building Teacher Quality, October 2003, pp1-2

<sup>7</sup> such as Eckermann (1994), Mellor & Corrigan (2004), Partington (1999), Malin (1990,2002), Russell (2000), Purdie,Tripcony, Boulton-Lewis, Fanshaw, & Gunstone (2000)

context from which these students come and the ability to weave this into contextual daily practice including high expectations.

## Professional Teaching Standards

The development of professional teaching standards has been in response to calls for greater accountability of the teaching profession and recognition of teacher quality and leadership.<sup>8</sup> After extensive consultation, a National Framework for Professional Standards for Teaching was released in 2003 which described a set of competencies to measure quality teaching in terms of skills, knowledge and understandings. Central to the development of a national framework on teaching standards was deciding how to capture the essence of teacher quality and then how to adequately interpret this into knowledge and skill sets. Hayes (2006) summarises the responses of various professional associations' to the framework including the implications for their particular subject methodology. These responses highlighted the difficulty in reducing teacher quality in each area to a finite and definitive set of characteristics and acknowledged that the complexity of practices such as cross-curricular approaches, inclusive learning methodologies, collaborative relationships and the advocacy role of some educational areas are difficult to reflect in competency-based teacher measurement.

Professional teaching standards have been received by an optimistic public that believes this will guarantee teacher accountability for the educational outcomes of their children. Teachers and educational researchers, on the other hand, tend to view professional teaching standards and accreditation systems with varying degrees of uneasiness. Connell (2009, p. 9) expresses concern over the intrinsically individualistic base of these standards when she says, "*They construct the good teacher as an entrepreneurial self, forging a path of personal advancement through the formless landscape of market society with its shadowy stakeholders and its endless challenges and opportunities. .. It embeds an individualised model of the teacher that is deeply problematic for a public education system.*" . A growing body of research recognises the importance of collaboration, 'communities of teachers', 'learning pods' and "*... professional learning networks (that) typically involve a sense of shared purpose, psychological support, voluntary participation and a facilitator....*" (Skilbeck & Connell, 2004, p. 17), which is at odds with the individualistic approach of current standards. Many also stress the importance of teachers having a more comprehensive input into the standards so as to have a sense of ownership over them<sup>9</sup>. Others fear that standards will have a 'normative' effect by creating a hierarchy in professional teaching practice by legitimising one style of teaching over another (Serafini 2002 in Skilbeck & Connell, 2004, p. 27).

At a state level, the NSW Institute of Teachers (NSWIT) has identified only two of forty six specific elements in its Graduate Teacher Standards that specifically address Aboriginal student needs. These are framed around the areas of literacy, numeracy and specific needs. While these issues are of concern in Aboriginal education, a deficit view is implied, and for teachers unfamiliar with Aboriginal students, this potentially conveys preconceived notions about Aboriginal students and their capabilities.

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<sup>8</sup> From the National Goals for Schooling in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century (The Adelaide Declaration), MCEETYA established the Teacher Quality and Educational Leadership Taskforce (TQELT).

<sup>9</sup> see Lovat 2003, Sachs 2003b in Skilbeck & Connell, 2004, p. 23

## Findings

A mixed methods approach was employed, involving quantitative data from surveys and qualitative data from workshops and interviews.

A survey (n=20) was used in the first stage of data collection to elucidate participants views on quality teaching through existing statements in official documents. This was done to provide a basis for respondents to work from and to increase awareness of the existence and nature of statements around quality teaching and professional teaching standards.

Two sets of statements were presented in the survey. The first set of statements are a list of teacher attributes identified in The Report of the Review of Aboriginal Education (NSW DET, AECG, p190) as those indicating quality teaching specifically for Aboriginal students. The second set of statements on the survey are from the NSW Institute of Teachers Professional Teaching Standards which identify seven elements that all teachers must demonstrate competence in to become an accredited teacher. These are a mainstream construction designed to encapsulate indicators of teacher quality in general terms as they apply to all students and were not known to most respondents.

The survey responses were to a large degree centred around teachers knowing and understanding Aboriginal students. There was a sense that it was the teacher and their interaction with and expectations of Aboriginal students that is of crucial importance.

A workshop (n=30) was held at the NSW AECG State Conference on quality teaching including discussion around the Professional Teaching Standards and teacher qualities identified in the AER. This provided the dual purpose of increasing respondent's awareness of the detail in the Professional Teaching Standards and drawing out some comparisons with the quality teaching responses in the AER. Participants were then divided into small groups to apply an Aboriginal perspective to various sections of the Professional Teaching Standards.

Across the seven elements in the Professional Teaching Standards, common themes that emerged were:

- understanding and acknowledging Aboriginal students individual, socio-linguistic and cultural needs, and being able to build this into better teaching strategies,
- forming decent relationships with Aboriginal students, their families and the community and realising that this could make a big difference in the classroom,
- engaging in genuine consultation with families and communities including acknowledgement of their potential valuable contributions to curriculum in terms of cultural knowledge etc; and
- designing and implementing engaging, relevant curriculum with a view of having high expectations that Aboriginal students can achieve

Following analysis of data from the surveys and comments from the workshops, an interview schedule was designed in order to focus in on particular quality teaching attributes that were clearly identified by respondents. These questions allowed interviewees (n=8) the opportunity to explain in detail their perceptions and beliefs about quality teaching drawing on personal and professional experience as well as their knowledge and understanding of the education system. It is important to note that most interviewees are experienced, to varying degrees, with schools, teaching, the education system, and are mature-aged and parents.

All respondents attempted to provide balanced and multi-perspective responses. Most acknowledged that some answers were generalized which made them uncomfortable due to the potential for stereotyping but also recognized that this is difficult to avoid. They wanted it noted that above all, Aboriginal students are individuals and therefore should be thought of as such in the first instance, and that there is the full range of student abilities and personalities within an Aboriginal student group as in any other student group. Some respondents also noted that the same applied to teachers, and acknowledged that there are some hardworking non-Aboriginal teachers who make a difference for Aboriginal students.

By enlarge; the overall picture of quality teaching expressed by respondents is the importance of a holistic approach which includes educating the whole child within a community of people. It was noted that education had become increasingly individualistic and competitive, so that students whose cultures had different values, seemed to be inherently disadvantaged. Generally speaking, Aboriginal cultures and modes of operation, place the community and family above the individual and success is only helpful if it is to the benefit of all. Respondents made clear however, that they wanted their children to succeed, but that this sits inside a big picture of the future of their family, and their communities.

In each case, the interviewee identified the importance of the interest and care of a specific teacher at school that encouraged them to finish school and consider a future career path. This teacher, unlike others, believed that they were capable of succeeding and 'went the extra mile' to help them. Many found the school system baffling, often feeling like an outsider, and had family responsibilities from a young age that affected their attendance. They believe that it is particularly important for Aboriginal children to have a teacher who believes in them and makes school feel like a place of belonging rather than making them feel like inconvenient extra work, that makes the difference.

It was believed by respondents that Aboriginal students judge the teacher on the following characteristics:

- how they treat them,
- whether they care, are interested in them
- that they don't stereotype them,
- if they are fair when dealing with discipline issues,
- if they have a sense of humour; and
- if they can talk with them rather than to them.

As parents, they indicated that they tended to be more interested in the teacher being able to show their children how to study and succeed, but also acknowledged that personal and cultural safety was of crucial importance.

The respondents acknowledged that there are many factors outside the classroom that impinge on the quality of teaching in each classroom and that they are often beyond the teacher's control. These included:

- school atmosphere and culture,
- school leadership ,
- school's willingness to engage with the local community; and
- lack of ongoing teacher professional learning in Aboriginal histories, cultures and student needs.

Partington (1999, p. 1) supports this through a research project conducted in a school that observed interactions between a non-Aboriginal teacher and his students citing that the socio-political context

of the schools was a main factor in hindering teacher-student relationships. He concluded that “.. *an individual teacher, working in isolation from a cohesive school approach, is unable to resolve key issues which contribute to the better education of Aboriginal students.*”

With regards to developing criteria or standards for teachers to meet, most respondents acknowledged the potential of this but were sceptical of a process that attempts to institutionalize intangibles like caring and genuine interest in students into checklists for teachers and schools to ‘the tick the box.’ The teacher attributes discussed in the first question were identified by most respondents as embodying the key tenants of any system of accountability for teachers as follows:

- a. understanding of individual student needs, including high expectations,
- b. superior understanding of Aboriginal history, cultures and local communities and being able to apply this to the students they teach and the communities that the students come from,
- c. knowledge of their subject area and ability to engage students through relevant and appropriate pedagogies, and
- d. ability to develop good relationships with students, their families and communities; the ‘trust relationship’ being of paramount importance potentially creating a sense of belonging for students at school.

## **Analysis**

Not surprisingly, the results of this project reinforce many of the findings and recommendations in key reports that inform and drive government policies and agendas<sup>10</sup>. It also supports much of the current research on the issue of quality teaching in terms of its positive impact on student outcomes.

However, this project’s findings deviate from much of the mainstream research in crucial ways. Aboriginal people in this project emphasise that teacher quality is about the person and their ability and willingness to develop a trust relationship with students, one that is more profound than that for other students. This leads to Aboriginal children feeling that the school is a place of belonging which is likely to be more conducive to authentic learning. The importance of the teacher having superior knowledge and understanding of the cultural, historical and socio-political issues that impact on Aboriginal lives, both generally and locally is reinforced as being critical to the teacher’s ability to develop meaningful relationships with students and their families.

The two critical elements arising from the standards are first and foremost that that teachers know and understand Aboriginal students and how they learn. Converting this to improved learning outcomes requires the teacher having depth of knowledge of their subject area so they are able to rework curriculum to make it culturally appropriate to Aboriginal students’ experiences and learning needs, without losing the intellectual quality of the content. Relevant and engaging curriculum is seen as an important vehicle to connect the teacher student relationship to improved learning outcomes.

Consequently, if this occurs, it will have a positive effect on Aboriginal student self esteem, and more significantly, on their self efficacy in the academic sense potentially leading them to believe that they can be successful at school. This belief in themselves, supported by the teacher’s high

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<sup>10</sup> MCEETYA *Australian Directions in Indigenous Education 2005-2008* (2006), *Standing Committee on Employment, Workplace Relations and Education Quality of School Education* (2007), *NSW Parliament Legislative Council Standing Committee on Social Issues Overcoming Indigenous Disadvantage* (November 2008), *Connecting Cultures Review of Victoria’s Education Strategies* (January 2008), *NSW DET & AECG The Report of the Review of Aboriginal Education* (2004), *NSW DET Aboriginal Education and Training Strategy* (2006-8)

expectations of them, is perhaps more likely to improve Aboriginal student outcomes than any other externally driven strategies or programs.

While many respondents identified accountability through some form of teaching standards to ensure quality teaching, improvements to Aboriginal student outcomes will only occur if those standards strongly identify issues around teaching Aboriginal students.

The current NSW accreditation system, the NSW Institute of Teachers (NSWIT) Professional Teaching Standards, are not inclusive of Aboriginal viewpoints, pedagogies and priorities. That Aboriginal students are only mentioned in relation to literacy, numeracy and specific needs without articulating what those needs might be, is potentially more damaging in terms of reinforcing or reconstituting stereotypes about Aboriginal students and their families. The priorities identified by Aboriginal community members on what constitutes teacher quality are not reflected or indicated in any real way and therefore it can be assumed that they will not contribute to improvements in the teaching of Aboriginal students. Further Connell (2009, p. 6) acknowledges that the *“The teacher competency model thus has a context: it is connected with the growth of a market-oriented political and cultural order.”*; an order that does not necessarily reflect Aboriginal worldviews or realities.

As Professional Teaching Standards now provide ‘de-facto’ guidance to teacher education courses through the accreditation system, another gap emerges around genuine and authentic teacher training that will significantly influence approaches to the teaching of Aboriginal students, subject content or perspectives. While Aboriginal Education is one of eight mandatory areas within the NSWIT accreditation system that must be addressed by teacher education courses, it presents like a random list of ideas more applicable for use as a checklist rather than any real basis upon which to design courses. NSWIT has indicated that further research needs to be carried out in this area and teacher education courses have recently been involved in mapping Aboriginal content to Units of Study and introducing mandatory Aboriginal Education (generalised term) Units of Study for Preservice teachers. Whether this will in effect enhance teacher quality in Aboriginal education is yet to be seen.

The lack of ongoing teacher professional learning and support in a structured, explicit and meaningful way contributes to an ‘ad hoc’ approach to Aboriginal education despite the mandatory NSW Aboriginal Education Policy<sup>11</sup>. The recent signing of NSW Department of Education and Training Aboriginal Education and Training Strategy 2009-2012 which includes staff training in cultural competency may address this issue but it will take a significant commitment in terms of human and financial resources to comprehensively change and improve the way teachers and schools approach Aboriginal Education.

Finally, perhaps the key barrier to improved outcomes for Aboriginal students is the fact that Indigenous Education issues and research “ .. has been to an extent isolated from the broader research discourses over teacher quality, ongoing professional development, class sizes and social and emotional readiness for school.” (Mellor & Corrigan, 2004, p. 46). This concern is articulated in the Australian Directions in Indigenous Education 2005-2008 (p. 16) in discourse around Indigenous education being ‘bolted on’ rather than ‘built in’ so that it becomes the domain of specialists and committed individuals rather than that of the system as a whole. Connell (2009, p. 12) expresses concern over these very issues and concludes that *“The educational task is now not to insert Aboriginal children more insistently into an unchallenged Eurocentric system. It is to change the institutions of education to make them relevant to Aboriginal children.”*

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<sup>11</sup> NSW Department of Education Aboriginal Education Policy (1996 ) revised and launched in 2008 became mandatory in 1987 following the introduction of the original policy in 1982.

## Conclusions

It is clear that Professional Learning of teachers in Aboriginal education has not been successful on a broad scale and that a more concerted, systematic approach backed by genuine commitment from governments is essential. Specific areas to focus on should be:

- superior knowledge and understanding of Aboriginal history, cultures and local communities and being able to apply this to the students they teach and the communities that the students come from
- knowledge and skills to develop genuine and authentic relationships with students, their families and communities
- knowledge and skills to explicitly teach Aboriginal students how and when to code-switch linguistically, socially and culturally, so they can move between both worlds and develop their confidence to operate successfully in the wider world.

In their current form, the NSW Institute of Teachers Professional Teaching Standards offer very little guidance for teachers in terms of Aboriginal students and Aboriginal Education. While these standards are inherently general because of the diverse nature of the student population, given the current poor outcomes for Aboriginal students and acknowledgement by governments of the severity of this situation, these standards need to be revised to include more explicit statements around the education of Aboriginal students.

There are two areas to consider in terms of teacher training. Firstly, the NSW Institute of Teachers mandatory Aboriginal Education requirements for teacher education courses needs to be revised and monitored to ensure the needs of Aboriginal students, culturally appropriate curriculum and pedagogy is adequately reflected. This then needs to be coherently linked to the Professional Teaching Standards and supported by appropriate research and in partnership with key stakeholders lead by the NSW AECG.

The second area is direct involvement with the universities to support their articulation of the mandatory requirements and the Professional Teaching Standards. Again this needs to be negotiated carefully to ensure genuine, authentic and productive partnerships based on a vision of improved Aboriginal student outcomes.

Despite the vast number of reports and research, there is still need for research that can identify the essence of Aboriginal student needs and convert these into tangible outcomes. Certainly, the articulation of Aboriginal voices in research is an area that has received little attention. Significantly, the communication of diverse Aboriginal voices to ensure appropriate reflection of these voices in localised action is essential.

On a final note “... *Aboriginal students continue to be the most educationally disadvantaged student group in Australia.*” (NSW DET & AECG, AER, 2004, p. 11), despite the many education initiatives implemented by the Commonwealth and NSW Governments over the past 20 years<sup>12</sup>. Many Aboriginal students are consistently at the lower end of the achievement scale, the effects of which are compounded by higher absenteeism and suspension rates, so there is an urgent imperative to address this issue and more focussed and constructive research with visible practical applications

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<sup>12</sup> MCEETYA *Australian Directions in Indigenous Education 2005-2008* (2006), *Steering Committee for the Review of Government Service Provision Overcoming Indigenous Disadvantage, Key Indicators* (2007), *Standing Committee on Employment, Workplace Relations and Education Quality of School Education* (2007), *NSW Parliament Legislative Council Standing Committee on Social Issues Overcoming Indigenous Disadvantage* (November 2008), *Connecting Cultures Review of Victoria's Education Strategies* (January 2008) etc

is of crucial importance. This project, at the very least, attempts to provide much needed Aboriginal viewpoints which are crucial if there is to be any authenticity, cultural integration of knowledge and understandings, and integrity in the development of professional teaching standards and professional learning for pre-service and service teachers.

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