

Spotlight

The impact of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander educators

July 2021



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This Spotlight focuses on how:

- ⚡ Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander educators bring valuable community and cultural knowledge to education settings, particularly in remote communities.
- ⚡ Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander educators provide continuity for student learning in schools that may face high teacher turnover (particularly in remote schools).
- ⚡ school leaders can ensure schools are culturally safe environments for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff
- ⚡ the staffing of remote schools requires policies that consider the skills and knowledge for education in that context.

This Spotlight was written in consultation with the Northern Territory Department of Education and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. AITSL acknowledges the valuable insight and contribution to this Spotlight.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples are advised that this publication may contain the names and images of deceased people.

Introduction

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander educators play a significant role in the communities in which they live and work due to their deep understanding of the local context, languages, histories and cultures. According to the 2016 census, there were 9,184 fully qualified and registered Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander teachers, making up a little over 2% of the teaching population (ACDE, 2018). The teaching workforce is supported by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander educators, who are particularly important in schools that have no Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander teachers, or who have a high proportion of Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander students.

Across Australia, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander educators are varyingly referred to depending on the context in which they work, and the state or territory they work in. For example, Assistant Teacher is used in current Northern Territory employment agreements for government schools to describe “a person of Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander descent who has been employed to assist in a teaching capacity in a school, a Community Education Centre or a Homeland Learning Centre, which is usually located within an Aboriginal community” (OCPE 2018, p. 5). This Spotlight largely draws on the Northern Territory context, where 40% of students are of Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander descent.

In Western Australia, the term Aboriginal and Islander Education Officer (AIEO) is used to describe staff who support Aboriginal students in the classroom and in Queensland these staff are referred to as Community Education Counselors (CEC). Koorie Engagement Support Officers (KESOs) are an important support for Aboriginal students in the Victorian state education system and in South Australia, Aboriginal community education officers (ACEOs) support individual Aboriginal students and their families within the school and preschool community. This Spotlight uses the term ‘Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander educators’ to refer to Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander staff who work alongside registered classroom teachers to team-teach students in schools with high numbers of Indigenous Australians.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander educators work in partnership with classroom teachers, combining knowledge and practice with specific community understanding. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander educators often work in schools^[1] within culturally rich communities. A high proportion of students may have one or more first languages that are different to the language of instruction. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander educators who speak community languages, as well as Standard Australian English, are employed to work with students and their classroom teachers, and are highly valued for their skills in the translation of both language and culture. In Australia, the work of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander educators is particularly important in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities.

Focus on the Northern Territory

The Northern Territory is home to 1% of the total Australian population and this population is dispersed over one-sixth of Australia's landmass (Worley et al. 2019). The Territory has by far the largest proportion of Indigenous children: 42% compared to 6% nationally. The next highest is Queensland with 12.1 per cent, followed by Western Australia with 11.7 per cent (ABS 2013).

Geographically, 42% of all children in the Northern Territory are enrolled in remote or very remote schools^[2], compared to 2% nationally. Close to half (47%) of Northern Territory government school students have a language background other than English (Maher 2013).

The Northern Territory Department of Education acknowledges the importance of students seeing themselves represented in the educator workforce. In 2019, there were 656 Aboriginal employees across the Department, including 142.3 full-time equivalent Assistant Teachers, which is a position designated for Aboriginal employees (Northern Territory Department of Education 2020).



📺 Australia needs a diverse workforce that has the knowledge and expertise to ensure the success of every child.

Why we need Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander educators

The Mparntwe Education Declaration sets this important goal:

Ensure that learning is built on and includes local, regional and national cultural knowledge and experience of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and work in partnership with local communities.

—Education Council 2019, p. 5

It is particularly important for rural and remote schools to recruit and retain qualified teachers with the right attributes to positively contribute to a collaborative partnership approach that will achieve quality student outcomes. Estimates suggest 66% of remote school principals find it difficult to fill staff vacancies, compared to 39% of principals at metropolitan secondary schools (Productivity Commission 2012). This is even more difficult for schools in remote Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities, where teachers frequently report feeling isolated while dealing with the 'always on' challenge of teaching and living in a bilingual and bicultural community (White et al. 2008). There is generally a higher turnover of teachers in these schools when compared to urban schools, thereby making Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander educators the stable presence for students in these learning environments.

As well as supporting their students in the key areas of learning, culture and community, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander educators are role models for post-school transition and pathways. The complex and interconnected components of their role relate to the essential elements of identity, well-being and belonging.

[Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander educators] authentically connect schools with local Indigenous communities to promote educational opportunity and respect for cultural ways of knowing, being and doing.

–Gruppetta et al. 2018, p. 3

In practice, the precise role of an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander educator will vary greatly depending on the needs and priorities of their school. Some roles may relate mainly to student learning support across learning areas, while others focus more on cultural teaching and learning. While the specifics of roles and responsibilities may vary, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander educators bring a cultural lens and significant social capital to education settings, which often includes teaching in local languages. Pastoral care, family support and community liaison are also crucial aspects of many roles, to facilitate genuine connection with communities and families. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander educators often also provide professional learning for non-Indigenous teachers, including formal induction processes or mentorship, or post-school follow-up with students enrolled in further education. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander educators work with teaching partners, such as classroom teachers, community members and school visitors, to provide culturally responsive educational experiences that enable students to engage with and access the curriculum, participate in learning and achieve positive learning outcomes.

Community members have been involved in classroom roles in schools in most Australian states and territories for over 40 years, however, there remains limited written research about their contribution to student learning. The voice of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander educators has also been missing in research until recently (Armour 2016). International studies of similar roles provide emerging evidence that they contribute to improvements in student achievement. This is particularly associated with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander educators working well alongside teachers in designing and providing contextualised learning support.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander educators speak community languages

Across Australia, there are over 250 different Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander languages, many of which have several dialects (AIATSIS n.d.). Data from the 2009 Australian Early Development Index indicates that three quarters of five-year-old children enrolled in their first year of full-time schooling in the Northern Territory have language backgrounds other than English (Silburn et al. 2011). A 2011/2012 Australian Government inquiry into language learning in Indigenous communities found that using Indigenous languages in the early years of education is linked to improved attendance and community engagement.

It is important for Aboriginal people to learn Aboriginal Languages for our identity; being proud of being Aboriginal people. Language is connected to Aboriginal spirit and our Country. The language and Country is our spirit

–Mary Noonan, Wogyala Community, 2013, [ACARA website](#)

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander educators are essential to the implementation of the Northern Territory's *Indigenous Languages and Culture Policy* (NTBOS 2017). This policy encourages students to communicate in Indigenous languages, and learn about associated knowledge systems and cultures.

In the Northern Territory specifically, Aboriginal Assistant Teachers' responsibilities include:

- Advising on cultural protocols for engaging with Elders and Traditional Owners and teaching language and culture
- Participating in 'planning together' sessions to assist with the development of the Indigenous Languages and Cultures (ILC) program scope and sequence, units of work and lesson plans
- Collaboratively teaching or leading delivery of ILC lessons
- Working in a teaching team to assess and maintain records of student progress and achievement
- Engaging in professional learning in accordance with their professional growth plan (Department of Education 2017, p. 12).

Aboriginal Languages and Literacy Programs

ACARA Framework for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Languages

The national framework adopted by ACARA is based on the Australian Indigenous Languages Framework developed for the Senior Secondary Assessment Board of South Australia in 1996.

🔗 <https://www.australiancurriculum.edu.au/f-10-curriculum/languages/framework-for-aboriginal-languages-and-torres-strait-islander-languages/what-is-the-framework>

Guidelines for the implementation of Indigenous Languages and Cultures Programs in schools 2017

The Northern Territory's Board of Studies (NTBoS) Indigenous Languages and Culture Policy (E2A5) was launched in October 2017.

🔗 https://education.nt.gov.au/_data/assets/pdf_file/0004/471712/indigenous-languages-and-cultures-guidelines.pdf

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander educators are role models

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander educators have opportunities to enter the school workforce in a number of ways, for example directly from school or as community Elders. They may enter with a qualification or engage in accredited training throughout their career progression. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander educators demonstrate to young people, their families and communities the benefits of continued learning.

This issue was the focus of a study conducted in the Northern Territory, New South Wales and Victoria, investigating what Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander educators see as enablers and barriers to post-school education. The study found it was often difficult for community and family members, who had negative experiences during their own schooling, to go to the school and engage meaningfully with the school community. This could reinforce a disconnect across community, family and the school. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander educators reported the need to help community members negotiate education bureaucracy, particularly at a distance, and in some cases to offer post-school support to former students. To help combat this, past students were asked to talk to the school community about the courses they were undertaking or jobs they were working in (Gruppetta et al. 2018).

Award-winning Aboriginal educators

Jack Gumbala, an assistant teacher in the Work Readiness class at Ramingining School, won the Northern Territory Young Aboriginal Educator Award in 2020. He was recognised for using his strong connection to culture and his passion for music to develop engaging activities for his students while teaching them the importance of school attendance.

You can read more about Jack here:

🔗 <https://www.awardsaustralia.com/young-achiever-awards/nt/previous-winners/>

School assistant teacher Roger Wilyuka won the 2018 Northern Territory Young Achiever of the Year Award and the Young Aboriginal Educator Award. Roger was recognised for his positive attitude and strength of character, working as an assistant teacher in Titjikala School's Transition class, running the fathers and sons reading program and school holiday activities and sports program.

You can read more about Roger here:

🔗 <https://education.nt.gov.au/statistics-research-and-strategies/indigenous-education-strategy/indigenous-education-strategy-issue-18/titjikala-young-achiever-of-the-year>

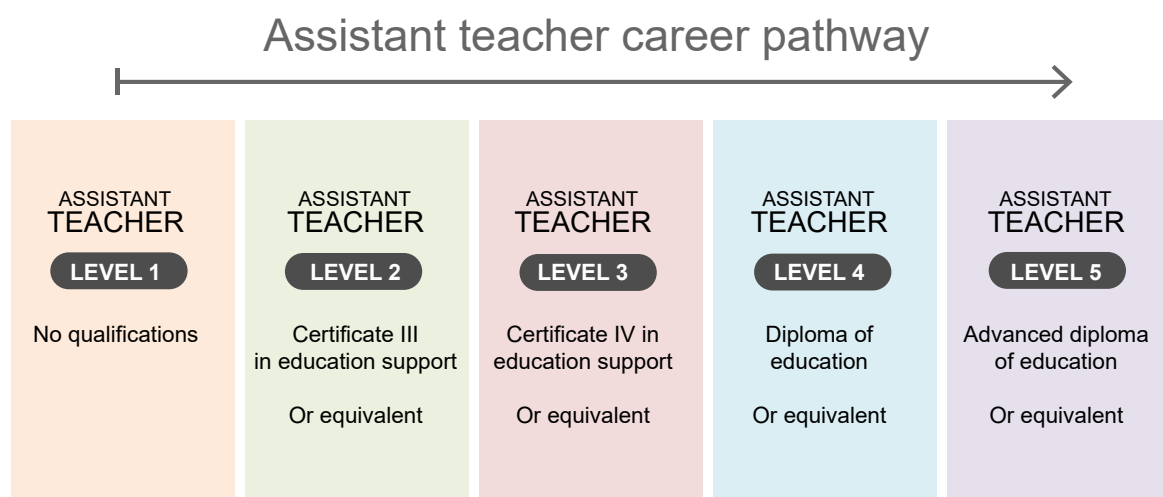
Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander educators belong to the education profession

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander educators work under different state and territory awards that do not require them to hold full teacher registration. Education in Australia is a shared federal and state responsibility with state and territory teacher regulatory authorities managing the requirements to be a teacher in their jurisdiction. While 5.7% of all students in Australia are from Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Island backgrounds, only 2% of registered teachers are (AITSL, 2019). This discrepancy, combined with the diversity and richness of Indigenous communities in Australia and the vast distances between communities, means Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander educators are vital to meet student and community needs.

The Northern Territory is currently reviewing its career pathway for assistant teachers, from entry level requiring no qualifications through certificate and diploma levels of the Australian Qualifications Framework, up to Level 5 which requires an Advanced Diploma or equivalent.

The graphic in *Figure 1* provides an overview of the Northern Territory assistant teacher career pathway.

Figure 1. Assistant Teacher Career Pathway (Adapted from: DoE 2018)



A 2013 review of Indigenous education in the Northern Territory recommended that assistant teachers should have employment and performance management arrangements consistent with those of other staff to ensure their roles and responsibilities are understood and supported by all school staff, particularly classroom teachers (Wilson 2014). The Northern Territory Government responded to recommendations in 2016 by refining the *Assistant Teacher Professional Standards* and developing Professional Growth Plans and Induction resources for Assistant Teachers.

Assistant Teacher Professional Standards

The main purpose of the *NT Assistant Teacher Professional Standards* is to raise the status and professionalism of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander educators and to position their role within the community alongside other professionals, such as teachers, principals and health professionals. The *Standards* are described at each of the five levels of the Northern Territory Assistant Teacher Career Pathway (Figure 1). The three domains in the *Assistant Teacher Professional Standards* reflect those of the *Australian Professional Standards for Teachers* (AITSL, 2011), namely Professional Knowledge, Professional Practice and Professional Engagement.

You can learn more about the *Standards* here:

🔗 <https://www.transformingtraining.com.au> [pdf]



📺 Teaching teams can work together to develop approaches that are cultural responsive and pedagogically strong.

Working together

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander educators traditionally work in schools with unique, site-specific qualities, that are very different to urban schools. They quite often work with a teacher whose experience is limited to mainstream schools, with minimal understanding of the school's unique context, and who are new to the cultural context of the community. Building a productive way of working as a team is critical to the success of the partnership between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander educators and their teacher colleagues.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander educators also work with other professionals, parents, carers and outside agencies as well as with students. Collaborative qualities and skills are an important and distinctive part of their role. Given the challenges in educational continuity in remote communities, due largely to high rates of teacher turnover, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander educators represent a fundamental point of engagement (Cooper 2008).

Becoming an effective teaching team takes time. These teams are most effective when educators plan together and employ a team-teaching approach. The following list of characteristics is helpful to guide effective team-teaching practices.

Becoming an effective team

You will know you are being effective when each member of the team is able to:

- learn together, plan together, teach and assess together
- share teaching, administrative and other tasks in appropriate ways
- function as both teacher learner and learner teacher
- help each other in ways that ensure long-term growth not just short-term goals
- take responsibility for the learning of the children in their care
- have high expectations for themselves and their teaching partner/s
- teach together in ways that promote the independence of each team member

☑ (Remote Teacher Guide 2019, p. 23).

Cultural responsiveness is everyone's responsibility

In Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities, the teaching team must be grounded in an approach that is culturally responsive and pedagogically strong. This helps to ensure that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander educators are empowered to link culturally relevant knowledge with contemporary curriculum and pedagogical knowledge. Team-teaching practices shared by classroom teachers and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander educators help to ensure that classroom teachers are able to gain understandings of Indigenous ways of being, knowing and doing and to incorporate these into their teaching practice, thereby strengthening their practice.

Teachers coming into Aboriginal or the Torres Strait communities may require capacity building in how to live and work with their Indigenous colleagues and communities. This is a reciprocal process through which colleagues learn from each other and develop their team teaching practice. The willingness and disposition of teachers in a remote school to learn about the culture and language of the local community and develop productive working relationships underpins their capacity to both live and teach in a remote context (NT Government 2019). The provision of appropriate preparatory information, contextualised inductions and ongoing professional learning opportunities can all contribute to the quality, preparedness and resilience of teachers, especially in remote schools (Railton 2017).

Advice for staff working with assistant teachers

“Developing strong relationships with an assistant teacher will take time, effort and energy. It is important that you develop shared understandings around teaching and learning as this relationship is a powerful model for the students you both teach. Use inclusive language when referring to the teaching team and assistant teachers. Instead of ‘my’ class or students, use ‘our’. Instead of ‘my’ assistant teacher, use collegial language or the person’s name.”

🔗 [Remote Teacher Guide](#) 2019, p. 22.

Many factors contribute to the development of a culturally responsive teaching workforce. One of these is developing cultural competency within initial teacher courses. For teachers who find themselves working in a remote setting early in their career, opportunities for truly engaging with, and understanding the important role Aboriginal cultures and languages play in education are invaluable. For this reason, some initial teacher education providers encourage preservice teachers to complete a professional experience placement in a remote Indigenous community, thus increasing their understanding of Indigenous ways of knowing, being, and doing, and experience of working with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander educators (ACIL Allen 2018).

Indigenous cultural competency in the Australian teacher workforce

AITSL is undertaking a project to understand and support cultural competency among educators. The project is focused on the processes teachers and school leaders can embark on to understand, develop, and effectively enact their cultural competency. It also aims to provide teachers and school leaders with guidance on the use of relevant resources and tools to help them improve or enhance their pedagogical practice in culturally responsive ways.

You can find out more here:

🔗 <https://www.aitsl.edu.au/teach/intercultural-development/building-a-culturally-responsive-australian-teaching-workforce>

Leaders are responsible for effective induction and ongoing professional learning for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander educators and classroom teachers

School leaders play a crucial role in ensuring the status of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander educators as a core part of the school's team of education professionals. The influence of the Principal goes well beyond employing Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander educators. It means sharing power and trusting the decisions that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander educators make about the children and community they know well. It requires an attitude that sees culture as foundational to balancing the priorities of the community as well as those of the education system.

Within an education department or system, governance support and leadership at the highest level is crucial to ensure the sustainability of this important and fragile ecosystem. For instance, system leaders should expect turnover and avoid over-reliance on individual staff members at all levels (Worley et al. 2019). Education systems can help Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander educators build a sense of collegiality and access support by finding ways for them to come together to support one another in formal and informal networks, including through induction processes. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander educators' induction could also include content on curriculum and pedagogy, which would further enhance their capabilities for the benefit of all students.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander educators are an integral part of the school workforce and working effectively with these staff members determines what difference they can make to student learning. This begins with induction. Research conducted with 82 remote Aboriginal Education Workers in Western Australia revealed that most received induction (73%) and training to assist them in their role (69%). The top two focuses of training were education support (small group and individual work) (62%) and behaviour management (57%). The researchers noted that only four respondents indicated that they had received training in the use of information and communication technologies for teaching (Jackson-Barrett et al. 2016). Relevant professional learning can form an important part of a holistic approach to professional development for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander educators as well as other teaching staff.

All teachers working with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander educators require appropriate capabilities to maximise the effectiveness of the team-teaching approach. The following list of 'ten truths' from the Diversity Council Australia & Jumbunna can inform and guide school leaders in ensuring the school is a culturally safe environment for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander employees.

The Diversity Council Australia & Jumbunna has developed:

10 Truths to centre Indigenous Australians' voices to create workplace inclusion

1. Commit to unearthing and acting on workplace truths – however uncomfortable this may be

2. Ensure any Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander-related work is Indigenous-led and informed
3. Develop organisational principles to make it clear how Indigenous community engagement and employment should work in practice
4. Focus on workplace readiness (cultural safety) rather than worker readiness
5. Recognise identity strain and educate non-Indigenous staff about how to interact with their Indigenous colleagues in ways that reduce this
6. Recognise and remunerate cultural load as part of an employee's workload
7. Consult with Indigenous staff on how to minimise cultural load while maintaining organisational activity
8. Focus on sustainable careers and career development, rather than just short-term appointments
9. Take action to address workplace racism
10. Look to high-impact initiatives – those that research shows are linked to better wellbeing and retention for Indigenous staff

📄 [GARI YALA SPEAK THE TRUTH \[PDF\]](#)

The *NT Assistant Teacher Professional Standards* discussed above can provide school leaders with a tool to ensure the skills and knowledge of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander educators in their school are recognised and developed. Meeting these standards depends on school leaders being able to provide a climate that supports collaboration. Teachers and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander educators require support and opportunities to reflect on their own practice in order to identify professional learning needs.

Resource List

Working together

Indigenous cultural competency in the Australian teaching workforce

This AITSL project focuses on how teachers and school leaders can critically understand, develop and enact their cultural competency. The discussion paper provides details of the current context in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander education in Australia, and challenges or barriers in developing a culturally competent teaching workforce.

📄 <https://www.aitsl.edu.au/indigenous-cultural-competency>

Skilling up: improving educational opportunities for Aboriginal education workers through technology-based pedagogy

This project report reviews the roles of Aboriginal Education Workers using a lens of technology. The project created an ePortfolio specification that could be used for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander educators, and a 2-week professional learning

module to engage teachers with effective strategies when working alongside Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander educators.

🔗 https://ltr.edu.au/resources/ID13_2921_Jackson-Barrett_Report_2016.pdf

Maximising the impact of classroom support staff

This Evidence for Learning guidance report outlines seven practical evidence-based recommendations to maximise the effectiveness of classroom support staff (although note that this advice is not specific to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander educators).

🔗 <https://www.evidenceforlearning.org.au/assets/NT/Guidance-Report-Maximising-the-impact-of-classroom-support-staff.pdf>

Develop leadership using both standards

This AITSL case study follows an Advanced Skills teacher in Tasmania as she works with teachers and teaching assistants across the school, developing their expertise in working with students that have additional needs.

🔗 <https://www.aitsl.edu.au/lead-develop/develop-yourself-as-a-leader/learn-from-practising-leaders/develop-leadership-using-both-standards-loretta>



📹 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander educators are role models, and bring valuable community and cultural knowledge and social capital to education settings.

Teachers for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities

The *Review of Indigenous Education in the Northern Territory* showed that Indigenous teachers and principals are under-represented in the workforce and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander educators are unevenly utilised and employed (Wilson 2014). The solutions to these workforce and educational issues are not simple and to ensure a quality workforce for all Australian students within their community requires a strong forging of policies, programs, resourcing, education and support.

Recruitment of potential teachers, particularly of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander descent, who may be prepared to go on to work in remote schools, may require new or alternative selection processes that try to predict who is likely to be suited to the role. Practical strategies include ensuring training programs accommodate the community and family pressures experienced by some students, which may affect their progress. Together with school leadership, some remote communities also take on the joint responsibility of identifying educators that may be suitable for their school, helping to ensure community agreement and support.

A Tasmanian study focused on ways to support Aboriginal Education Workers (AEWs) to become teachers. The researchers recommended that AEWs be provided with additional information on teaching courses and pathways, as well as personal development and paid study leave. Scholarships and recognition of prior learning could also help AEWs to overcome some of the barriers that prevent them from undertaking further education (Andersen, Gower & O'Dowd 2015).

The *Review of Indigenous Education in the Northern Territory* found that experienced Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander educators need support to gain further training or qualifications, whether VET or higher education (for example a teaching degree), given the distance necessary to travel from remote communities and, oftentimes, the time away from home required (Wilson 2014). Examples of programs aiming to alleviate these barriers, was the Aboriginal 'Growing Our Own' model of teacher education, a joint Charles Darwin University and NT Catholic Education program and the currently running NT Department of Education Remote Aboriginal Teacher Education (RATE) program.

Supporting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander educators to become teachers

Mainstream provision of Initial Teacher Education courses may not meet the needs of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander educators aspiring to become teachers. Several factors have been associated with successful programs for Remote Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander adult learners, including:

- Cultural knowledge
- Learning on country
- Student motivation
- Personal empowerment with a transformative effect
- Flexible and adaptable trainers

- Training coordination and support
- Community and family support
- Peer relationships with other students
- Individual confidence and identity
- Strong foundational skills
- Local community ownership
- Funding security.

Established in 2009, the *Growing Our Own* project was a partnership between Charles Darwin University (CDU) and Catholic Education NT that aimed to deliver effective programs that address regional Indigenous needs. It operated in five regional areas in the NT. As part of the project, tertiary providers delivered courses to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander educators in their home communities and schools, supported by qualified non-Indigenous classroom teachers employed at the school (Maher 2013, p. 847). Between 2009 and 2016, 54 students participated in the project and 21 graduated. Of those, 90% are working as teachers (van Gelderen, 2017).

The development of grow your own programs gives communities access to local educators that have an in-depth understanding of the local languages, context and cultures. The medical profession faces the same ongoing challenge, and has its own 'growing our own' doctor initiative - a partnership between Flinders University, Charles Darwin University and the NT Government (Worley et al. 2019).

Challenges with the *Growing Our Own* program included:

- it took time for non-Indigenous lecturers to establish strong relationships with communities, schools, and students
- English literacy levels of some students proved a challenge and additional tuition was provided
- students all had significant demands on their time from within the communities within which they lived.

In 2019-20, over 200 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander educators were enrolled in training across the Northern Territory, most with the Batchelor Institute, a specialist in Aboriginal post-secondary education (Table 1).

Table 1: Assistant teachers enrolled in accredited training in the Northern Territory (2019-20)

Northern Territory assistant teachers enrolled in accredited training	Participants
Certificate III in Education Support	32
Certificate IV in Education Support	31

Northern Territory assistant teachers enrolled in accredited training	Participants
Diploma of Education Support	10
Advanced Diploma of Education	8
Other accredited training	133
TOTAL	214

Source: Department of Education Annual Report 2019-20, p. 22

Northern Territory: Remote Aboriginal Teacher Education (RATE) pilot program

A RATE pilot program commenced in 2021 which enables aspiring teachers in Northern Territory communities to study while living and working on Country. The program has started in a small number of sites and includes:

- ongoing engagement with local communities,
- negotiated agreements with education settings and ongoing systemic support, and
- aspiring teachers engaging in study pathways that are based on career aspirations and preferred ways of learning.

For more information visit:

🔗 <https://education.nt.gov.au/careers-in-education/remote-aboriginal-teacher-education-rate-pilot-program>

Queensland: Remote Area Teacher Education Program (RATEP)

The RATEP program provides pathways for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people to become qualified teachers, teacher aides and early childhood educators. It is a joint initiative between TAFE Queensland, James Cook University and the Queensland Department of Education, in liaison with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities and operates in sites across QLD.

For more information visit:

🔗 <https://tafeqld.edu.au/information-for/aboriginal-and-torres-strait-islanders/RATEP.html>

Conclusion

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander educators bring valuable community and cultural knowledge and social capital to education settings. Schools that create environments which enable effective collaboration between classroom teachers and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander educators can maximise impacts on positive student learning.

This role is to contribute contextual understanding and culturally appropriate support to assist Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students' learning. Thus, not only is the role a necessity in addressing Aboriginal students' learning in a Western-dominated world, it is also significant for these students' success.

–Armour 2016

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander educators can play a crucial role in students' education outcomes if the right conditions are in place. They help to link student learning with local languages, cultures and communities and are also role models for post-school transition and pathways. Team-teaching practices help to bring unique capabilities to the classroom and help develop Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander educators' and classroom teachers' skills and capabilities. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander educators can also play an important role in growing the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander teacher workforce.

Of prime importance is that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander educators are recognised as belonging to the education profession, as well as for their special role as a connector to culture, Country and community.

Footnotes

1. The term 'school' is used throughout this *Spotlight* to encompass a diverse range of education settings including early childhood education and care services, community and homeland learning centres as well as learning on country programs
2. Remoteness is derived from the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) Australian Statistical Geography Standard (ASGS) Remoteness Structure whereby Australia is divided into 5 classes of remoteness on the basis of a measure of relative access to services (ABS n.d.).

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