Principles for Teacher Professional Development Research Report

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COMMISSIONED BY:
Executive Summary

Australians Together’s Professional Learning Workshops (PLW) aim to deepen teachers’ understanding of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, histories, cultures and current contexts and increase their confidence to embed Indigenous perspectives in curriculum. This report details the outcomes of a small pilot study involving two independent system schools in regional Victoria where the Australians Together two-day PLW was conducted.

The research methodology included interviews and focus group sessions with participants (nine teaching staff, five curriculum coordinators, mentors and school leaders, and one system level coordinator) approximately five months after they attended the PLW. It aimed to find answers to four research questions relating to:

1. Barriers to teaching the Australian Curriculum Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cross-curriculum priority
2. Outcomes of the PLW
3. New narratives emerging in the classroom, at leadership levels and the system level
4. Changes in education that focused on equity, justice, rights and reconciliation for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people

At the time of data gathering, participants were in various stages of implementing the learnings from the PLW - some had already taught relevant units of study, some were doing so in the current term, and some had future plans to.

Feedback from participants was positive and showed that the PLW was transformational. The interviews and focus group discussions showed evidence not only of teacher learning but also of them implementing positive actions in the classroom. The study found that one of the key barriers to teaching the Australian Curriculum Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cross-curriculum priority, a lack of awareness, was successfully overcome through the PLW. Participants had a strong desire to know more and to connect the content of the PLW with curriculum and planning. There was evidence of new narratives and new conversations forming, with participants reporting increased empathy for First Nations peoples. At this stage, however, this has not demonstrably translated into a greater focus on social justice or equity in education approaches at the schools.

Both schools identified a need for implementing a whole school approach and for an Aboriginal community engagement strategy. Revisiting the schools involved, and speaking to the PLW participants, will be important for Australians Together to see the long-term impact of the workshops.
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# Acronyms and abbreviations

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Acronym</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ACARA</td>
<td>Australian Curriculum Assessment and Reporting Authority</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AIATSIS</td>
<td>Australian Institute for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AITSL</td>
<td>Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BIITE</td>
<td>Batchelor Institute of Indigenous Tertiary Education</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GPILSEO</td>
<td>Goal, Pedagogy, Institutions, Leadership, Spread, Evidence, Ownership</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ICSEA</td>
<td>Index for Community Socio-Educational Advantage</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LOTE</td>
<td>Languages Other Than English</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PD</td>
<td>Professional Development</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TRB</td>
<td>Teachers Registration Board</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Introduction

Australians Together is a not for profit organisation that brings Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians together. It is working to create new narratives to ‘help non-Indigenous people learn the true story of our shared history, understand how it’s still having an impact today and imagine new ways to live together more respectfully’ (Australians Together, n.d.-a). A significant part of Australians Together’s work is to support teachers and schools to teach Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander perspectives with Professional Learning Workshops (PLW) and curriculum resources. This is about building the capacity of teachers so that they can more effectively and appropriately teach elements of the Australian Curriculum, particularly the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cross-curriculum priority. Australians Together has developed resources and a learning framework around a set of 5 Key Ideas (See Appendix 1, page 54).

Given the effort put into this educational work, Australians Together commissioned a team of researchers led by Batchelor Institute of Indigenous Tertiary Education (BIITE), to conduct a small research project in order to better understand how Australians Together’s work with teachers is perceived and applied.

The aim of this research is to understand how non-Indigenous teachers can develop knowledge, skills and confidence to include the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cross-curriculum priority from the Australian Curriculum in their pedagogy.

The research tests the propositions of Australians Together’s 5 Key Ideas. This is a small study involving nine teaching staff, plus five curriculum coordinators, mentors and school leaders as well as one system level coordinator, in two independent system schools in Victoria. In this report, we will refer to these as Shorteff College and Evangel Independent School. Both schools are part of the same independent school system and both are located in regional areas of Victoria. Both schools participated in a Professional Learning Workshop (PLW) conducted by staff from Australians Together in May 2018.

Batchelor Institute of Indigenous Tertiary Education is an organisation committed to supporting First Nations peoples through tertiary education and research. Under its ‘Both-ways’ philosophy, the Institute significantly provides a First Nations lens to a mainstream education system. Both-ways is a philosophy of education that ‘brings together Indigenous Australian traditions of knowledge and Western academic disciplinary positions and cultural contexts and embraces values of respect, tolerance and diversity’ (Ober & Bat, 2007, p. 69).

The project team for this work comprised John Guenther, Robyn Ober, Sam Osborne and Majon Williamson-Kefu. This report adopts terminology that is appropriate to the authors’ particular institutions and research contexts. Australians Together has developed a terminology guide for use in their own publications that can also be used as a tool for schools and communities. This can be found at https://australianstogether.org.au/resources/languageandterminologyguide/
Background and site descriptions

RESEARCH RATIONALE

Australians Together believes that ‘better outcomes for Indigenous Australians begins with a change in our perspective’ (Australians Together, n.d.-a).

*By listening to the voices of Indigenous Australians, we help non-Indigenous people learn the true story of our shared history, understand how it’s still having an impact today and imagine new ways to live together more respectfully.* (Australians Together, n.d.-a)

This plan for research follows on from Australians Together’s attempts to identify and create resources that align with the Australian Curriculum to support a new narrative in education based on 5 Key Ideas, expressed here as goals:

1. **The Wound** - empathise with the reason why many Indigenous people experience injustice and disadvantage;

2. **Our History** - acknowledge how our shared past continues to have an impact on our present context;

3. **Why Me?** - appreciate the interconnectedness of Australians and take personal responsibility for their attitudes and behaviours towards Indigenous people and culture;

4. **Our Cultures** - value and respect Indigenous people through an understanding of the importance of culture; and

5. **My Response** - actively respond in respectful and meaningful ways in both personal and professional lives  
   (Australians Together, n.d.-b)

One of the concerns for Australians Together, based on preliminary surveys in selected schools, was a lack of knowledge, awareness and confidence among teachers about how to incorporate First Nations perspectives into teaching and learning programs. The premise for this pilot research is that there are problems with education systems that continue the redistribution of injustice, racism and inequity in First Nations education.

These problems are connected to teaching and learning but they are also located within a broader social context, as well as being systemic factors. Australians Together’s development of curriculum resources and teacher professional learning programs is designed to resource teachers to understand and address these challenges.

STUDY SITES

As noted above, the sites for this pilot research project were two regional schools in Victoria. We have given them alternate names: Shortef College and Evangel Independent School. A short description of the sites is provided below. At the time of the study, both schools applied the Australian Curriculum to teaching, learning and assessment. Australians Together funded the delivery of the PLW and supported the school with teacher release time to enable the teachers to attend.
Background and site descriptions

**Shorteff College**
Academically, Shorteff College’s results are similar to ‘like’ schools across most year levels. Over the past decade, the school population has shifted from having a relatively low socio-economic status to one in which enrolments are skewed toward higher socio-economic advantaged students. Enrolments have grown rapidly since it began operating in 2009. Students tend to come from English speaking backgrounds as indicated by the low proportion of LOTE (Languages Other Than English) speakers.

Shorteff College’s values are built on a Christian ethos. The school’s website describes its values as supporting and promoting principles and practices of Australian democracy, the rule of law, equal rights, freedom of religion, freedom of speech, together with openness and tolerance.

Table 1. Summary information about Shorteff College sourced from MySchool for 2017

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>YEAR RANGE</th>
<th>ICSEA</th>
<th>INDIGENOUS STUDENTS</th>
<th>ENROLMENT</th>
<th>TEACHING STAFF</th>
<th>LOTE STUDENTS</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Prep-12</td>
<td>1083</td>
<td>2%</td>
<td>531</td>
<td>52</td>
<td>3%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Evangel Independent School**
Evangel School is located in an inner regional growth area. Its enrolments have quadrupled in 10 years and in the same period, the proportion of LOTE students has grown from 40 to 63 per cent. The school population has shifted from having a relatively low socio-economic status to one in which enrolments are now skewed toward higher socio-economic advantage.

The school aims to encourage students to gain a strong sense of self-worth and respect for others while fostering ‘God-given gifts and abilities’. The school has a strong Christian ethos claiming that Jesus Christ is the cornerstone of the school and the reason for its existence.

Table 2. Summary information about Evangel Independent School sourced from MySchool for 2017

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>YEAR RANGE</th>
<th>ICSEA</th>
<th>INDIGENOUS STUDENTS</th>
<th>ENROLMENT</th>
<th>TEACHING STAFF</th>
<th>LOTE STUDENTS</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Prep-12</td>
<td>1073</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>879</td>
<td>64</td>
<td>63%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

¹ ‘Like’ schools are determined by the ICSEA (Index for Community Socio-Educational Advantage), which provides a measure for fair comparisons between similar schools. ICSEA is set at an average of 1000. The higher the ICSEA value, the higher the level of educational advantage of students who go to the school. See Australian Curriculum Assessment and Reporting Authority 2013 for more information.
Background and site descriptions

PROFESSIONAL LEARNING WORKSHOP (PLW) CONTENT

The goals of the Australians Together PLW conducted with staff were to:

1) deepen understanding of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, histories, cultures and current contexts; and
2) increase confidence to embed Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander perspectives into curriculum.

This PLW specifically addressed the *Australian Curriculum* Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cross-curriculum priority and AITSL Standard 2.4 (see footnote on page 10).

The workshop was organised as follows:

**Day 1**
Learn about:

› History, geography, culture and policies since European contact in Australia
› The relationship between culture and identity
› The ongoing impact of colonisation

**Day 2**
Plan curriculum:

› Connect Indigenous perspectives to the *Australian Curriculum*
› Be supported to develop a unit of work that embeds Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander perspectives
› Investigate a range of authentic education resources

Further detail about the organisation of the PLW content is shown in Appendix 2, page 55.
Literature review

Our literature review focuses on educational issues that affect both First Nations students and teachers who are teaching curriculum content about First Nations peoples and cultures. The summary information shown above in Table 1 and Table 2 about the two schools in this research, might suggest that the first focus is largely irrelevant in contexts where First Nations students are not represented in school populations. However, particularly in schools like Shorteff, where numbers are low, the issue of how teachers respond to First Nations students and how they teach about First Nations peoples, histories and cultures, is particularly relevant. How should a teacher respond to the one First Nations student in her class? How should she represent the curriculum? How should she represent First Nations peoples?

Before we return to this question, let us consider briefly where educational policy has come from over the last decade.

Policy development since 2008

In this section, we very briefly consider how educational policy has developed since the landmark 2008 Melbourne Declaration on the Educational Goals for Young Australians (Ministerial Council on Education, 2008). Policy is important for several reasons. It shapes discourses, provides a basis for funding and influences practice. In a decade where ‘Closing the Gap’ has dominated the discourse, it is important to recognise how that has translated into educational policy implementation.

To a large extent ‘success’ defined by education systems, depends on perceptions of the purpose of education. In 2013, we problematised this within the context of remote education in Australia (Guenther & Bat, 2013). If, as we argued then (see also Guenther et al., 2013), a good education leads to economic participation and wealth, capacity to think, individual agency and control, democratic participation and a sense of belonging, then those are the things that we should count as success. The 2008 Melbourne Declaration concurs with these aims, suggesting that successful learners: develop their capacity to learn; have essential skills in literacy and numeracy; are able to think deeply and logically; are creative and innovative; can make sense of the world; and are on a pathway to ‘continued success in further education, training or employment’ (p. 8). The Melbourne Declaration has resulted in a series of actions that are designed to achieve those (among other) ends. The development of an Australian Curriculum was one of the outcomes (ACARA, 2012b). The Australian Government’s Review of the Australian Curriculum (Donnelly & Wiltshire, 2014) and the Government’s initial response (Australian Government, 2014) adds little more than philosophical tinkering around the edges. Importantly, however, the introduction of the Australian Curriculum changes the way teachers teach (Mayer et al., 2017), or should if it is implemented effectively. Teachers will, therefore, need to engage in ongoing learning, which is likely to be non-linear and occur across multiple spaces in messy and recursive ways (Mayer et al., 2017, p. 129).

One of the other actions that followed was a Measurement Framework (ACARA, 2012a), which attempts to set out how educational outcomes should be measured according to the National Education Agreement (Standing Council on Federal Financial Relations, 2012).
Literature review

The Measurement Framework identified four indicator areas: participation; achievement in the National Assessment Program; attainment; and equity. The array of indicators for these outcome areas is largely based on test scores, attendance rates and apparent retention rates along with participation in training or employment. Interestingly, the Framework does not measure equitable education; it measures equity groups, supposedly as a proxy; it does not examine content covered, perspectives represented or accessibility of education. How these measures are meant to respond to First Nations peoples’ aspirations and hopes is not clear. The Measurement Framework takes no account of the First Nations schools’ workforce, no account of traditional languages or creoles or even Aboriginal English spoken by many First Nations students. The Measurement Framework does not take account of equitable distribution of funding to those in need either.

While we could add much more to the discussion about policy development, the point to take away here is that while gap closing is at the core of education policy rhetoric, the gaps almost always use non-Indigenous and metrocentric reference points as targets (for example see how this plays out in statistical analysis Guthridge et al., 2016). This points to an arguably racist, assimilationist and discriminatory policy regime.

A BRIEF ANALYSIS OF POLICY ARTEFACTS

To a large extent, the discourses of education are embedded either explicitly or tacitly in the content of policy artefacts. The language used is often reproduced in the narratives of teachers who use these artefacts and the absences are reproduced as well. For these reasons, it is important for our study to examine some of the dominant policy documents of the last 10 years to get a better understanding of how they treat issues that we know are important to First Nations people. For the purposes of this review, we have chosen seven documents for critical analysis:

3. The Australian Professional Standards for Teachers (Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership, 2016)
4. The Australian Curriculum (F-10) (ACARA, 2018)
5. The 2015 National Report on Schooling (ACARA, 2016b)
6. The Australian Education Act 2013

In the Australian Professional Standards for Teachers (AITSFL, 2014), Standard 1.4 requires teachers to be able to apply their understanding of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures, languages, histories and identities to enhance the education and teaching of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students, through collaborative relationships with the families of students and their communities. Even graduate level teachers are professionally required to have and demonstrate a sound understanding of the impact of culture, cultural identity and linguistic background (AITSFL, 2014, p. 9). Furthermore, Standard 2.4 outlines the need for teachers to understand and respect Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people to promote reconciliation between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians (AITSFL, 2014, p. 11). These standards, however, are framed around a muted pedagogical imperative that through ‘knowing’ the ‘other’, either through more effective teaching strategies or better cultural understandings, entrenched educational disadvantage can be ameliorated (Moreton-Robinson et al. 2012, p. 8).
We have approached these documents with a critical lens to examine what they have to say about aspects of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander education—in particular how they represent the problem that policy addresses (Bacchi & Goodwin, 2016). The ‘problem’, as we shall later see, with education for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people is often represented as a deficit that needs correcting.

While we acknowledge that the documents listed 1-7 above are not an explication of racism and inequity in schools, they are; however, important documents that reflect the policies, and therefore the culture and the related assumptions, and practices of schooling.

Table 3. Word counts of keywords in 7 policy documents

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Keywords or phrases</th>
<th>1 MD</th>
<th>2 CTG</th>
<th>3 APST</th>
<th>4 AC</th>
<th>5 NRS</th>
<th>6 AEA</th>
<th>7 MFSA</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>No. of pages</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>130</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>3520</td>
<td>117</td>
<td>124</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aboriginal</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>347</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>1019</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Indigenous</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>899</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>130</td>
<td>187</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Torres Strait</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>280</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>951</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>First Nations</td>
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<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Racism*</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Colonisation*</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
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<td>Disadvantage</td>
<td>9</td>
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<td>0</td>
<td>29</td>
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<td>0</td>
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<td>Diversity*</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>595</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
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<tr>
<td>Racial discrimination</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Respect*</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>393</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
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<td>Aboriginal or Indigenous culture</td>
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<td>4</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The above table is somewhat crude in its presentation, and the numbers are not significant in relative terms because of the different purposes of the documents and their different lengths. However, a few points are worth noting. The use of the term ‘Indigenous’ to describe Australia’s First Nations peoples is used exclusively in the Melbourne Declaration and the Measurement Framework. While there may be no racist intentions behind this usage, the homogenising nature of the term may be a product of ‘racialisation’, which provides a binarised basis for classifying people—one versus another (Vass, 2012) and which is commonly associated with constructing narratives of a disadvantaged and deficit ‘other’ (Guenther et al., 2013). Indeed, the scant descriptors of ‘Indigenous’ in the Melbourne Declaration and the Measurement Framework rely on ‘disadvantage’ as the main identifier, rendering the terms ‘Indigenous’ and ‘disadvantage’ synonymous, as does the National Report on Schooling (which mixes up ‘Indigenous’ and ‘Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander’). The Australian Education Act, which uses ‘Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander’ also relies on ‘disadvantage’ as a dominant descriptor. The 2018 Closing the Gap report also uses ‘disadvantage’, but the more dominant theme is one of ‘respect’, which also has a strong focus in the Australian Curriculum. Notably, the Australian Curriculum emphasises ‘diversity’, though this is not necessarily only in relation to First Nations peoples, instead assuming the unproblematic grouping of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, together with migrant populations.
What is more interesting is the absence of some terms used in association with First Nations peoples. For example, across more than 3500 pages of curriculum, the term ‘Stolen Generation’ appears only nine times; ‘incarceration’ and ‘trauma’ do not appear and ‘massacre’, ‘assimilation’, ‘dispossession’, ‘racial discrimination’ and ‘colonial settlement’ all appear three times or less. Racism as a term only appears five times in the Curriculum and only once in relation to First Nations peoples. Our analysis here concurs with a more comprehensive analysis of the whole Australian Curriculum by Parkinson and Jones (2018) who argue that the dominant discourses of the Curriculum can be most often categorised as ‘liberal multicultural’ where difference is celebrated but ‘where Indigenous peoples can at times be included in a ‘trivial’ manner’ (p. 81). Perhaps more disturbing in their assessment is the dominance of ‘neoliberal assimilationist’ discourses in the cross-curriculum priorities.

In terms of current educational policies, it is also essential to consider the practical limitations and barriers to effective implementation for teachers. These include, but are not limited to:

- graduate teacher knowledge and the limitations of initial teacher training;
- a lack of experience and expertise specifically in teaching Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander content and perspectives;
- the time restraints that teachers face, which limit their ability to research and design lesson plans around what is often unfamiliar content for them and to deliver teaching effectively in an overcrowded curriculum;
- the difficulty associated with finding and vetting appropriate and high quality resources;
- the challenge of negotiating the line around what can and should be shared; and
- understanding and addressing one’s own values and experiences and the way these impact teaching practices (Mackinlay & Barney, 2014a; Moreton-Robinson et al., 2012; Sambono, 2018).

ANTI-RACISM, RECOGNITION, RECONCILIATION AND EDUCATION

For far too many First Nations people, racism remains an everyday experience (Moreton-Robinson, 2006; Rigney, 1999; Sarra, 2011). Racism may or may not be recognised by teachers, but it is inherent in structures, sometimes invisibly. In the context of teaching and learning—whether there are First Nations students present or not—teachers’ awareness of the issues faced by First Nations people can have a profound impact on their students’ knowledge and how they apply that knowledge in the future. These issues are of particular importance to our teacher participants at Shorteff and Evangel schools.

Racism is not always clear cut or simple. Rose (2012, p. 72) highlights the ‘racism by cotton wool’ phenomenon, which is tied to intentions of political correctness. Unfortunately, the aim of avoiding political incorrectness can lead to silence and disengagement and, camouflaged by ‘respect’, this either excludes or excuses the afflicted professional (Neill, 2002, p. 238, cited in Rose, 2012, p 72). Langton (1994, p. 94) highlights that the ‘easiest and most natural form of racism in representation is the act of making the other invisible’. Australian educational systems have long histories of making First Nations peoples and content invisible and silent.
Literature review

The impact of institutionalised and cultural racism in Australia has been so pervasive that Australian education systems have failed to address fundamental issues to do with recognising the validity of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander histories and cultures in their rightful place in Australian society. (Craven, 2011, p. 4, cited in Price, 2012, p. 168)

Ignorance and racism have contributed to, and grown from, this silencing discourse:

Beginning with the term ‘aborigine’ [sic], Indigenous Australians were constructed as primitive natives and understood in terms of their distance from ‘civilised’ Europeans. Considered ‘archaic survivors from the dawn of man’s existence’, ‘full blood’ Indigenous Australians were assumed to be a ‘dying race’ – ‘the wandering savage… doomed to extinction…’. (Turner, 1904, cited in Carlson et al., 2014, p. 66)

These misperceptions, which were repeatedly and continuously perpetuated throughout Australia, ‘whitewashed’ (Vass, 2012) the diversity of First Nations peoples, experiences, perspectives and knowledges. As a part of this whitewashing, Australia institutionalised a ‘cult of forgetfulness or disremembering’ (Stanner, 2011, p. 307) and it continues today.

There has been a growing conversation about the role of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Histories and Cultures as a cross-curriculum priority in the Australian Curriculum, brought about in part by the Australian Government’s call for a review of Curriculum in 2014 (Donnelly & Wiltshire, 2014) and its response in 2015 (Pyne, 2015).

However, the more common focus in the literature remains on how and what to teach at a tertiary level (for example Mackinlay & Barney, 2014b). Australian Indigenous Studies as an area of academic study constitutes a field of inquiry related to the past, present and future of Indigenous people and societies’, (Nakata et al., 2014, pp. 8, emphasis added) and could contribute significantly to ‘critiquing the historical, social, economic and political narratives and structures that underpin inequitable relationships within Australia’, (Vass, 2012, p. 93) and counter racist ignorance.

Importantly, combating racism, promoting recognition and strengthening understanding could also improve the experience of First Nations peoples.

Addressing access, success and retention problems for Indigenous students is a matter of highest priority. Indigenous Australians suffer high levels of social exclusion… [Education] providers must not only address their learning needs but also recognise and act on issues such as the culture of the institution, the cultural competence of staff – academic and professional – and the nature of the curriculum. (Bradley, 2008, p. 33)

Recognition is not just about acknowledging the truth; however, recognition is a complex and multi-faceted process. For example, while the recent changes in educational policy have the potential to begin to reverse the negative impacts of Australia’s educational legacy, it is essential to recognise the possible dangers Indigenous students may have to endure in this process (Bodkin-Andrews & Carlson, 2013). There should also be recognition that schools have a responsibility to ensure all students’ identities are affirmed and anti-racism policies should be nationalised and implemented in schools (Shay & Wickes, 2017, p. 119).
Power is often underestimated in education and more broadly, in society. Power determines what ‘truth’ is recognised and taught and therefore learned. Those with power will also define how recognition, as a process, is implemented and whether it contributes to the ongoing reconciliation process. Osborne argues that:

*The institutions of education administration and of government have greatest power, but without power-sensitive dialogue they tend to redistribute unequal power by cleaving to implicit ‘common sense’ assumptions and paying particular attention to the perceived needs of the system.* (Osborne, 2017, p. 260)

Education is a socialising process though it may not be benign, particularly where class and race cause friction. It can be assimilative. The classroom may be a site of manipulative coercion—even indoctrination (Bailey, 2010)—where the unruly are tamed, cultural deprivation is remedied and children are forced to conform (Oakes et al., 2013, p. 229). However, schooling may play a major role in helping young people to establish their opinions and understandings of the world around them, as well as themselves. Identities are formed and shaped through schooling (Erikson, 1968). On the other hand, Mezirow (2012) notes that: ‘Learning may be intentional, the result of deliberate inquiry; incidental, a by-product of another activity involving intentional learning; or mindlessly assimilative’ (p 75).

Given its influence on young people (if not whole societies), education can have a significant and essential role to play if Australia is to become a reconciled nation (Gunstone, 2016). In Australia —indeed any nation—the education system must acknowledge the flaws of its past, as well as the realities of the present. In Canada for example, the *Final Report of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission* commented that: ‘Education must remedy the gaps in historical knowledge that perpetuate ignorance and racism’ (Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada, 2015, p. 117). The *Melbourne Declaration* acknowledges this as a consequence of achieving the goal of producing active and informed citizens.

In order to achieve this type of change, as Aveling (2006) argues, teacher education must teach critical reflection, to enable teachers to understand their own ‘racialised, gendered and class-based positioning and become more effective anti-discrimination practitioners’ (p. 264). We return to this discussion in more detail later (see Transformative learning processes, page 20).
SOCIAL JUSTICE, HUMAN RIGHTS AND EDUCATION

Both of the schools in our study promote values of respect for others and to some extent, social justice. Shorteiff, for example, is ‘committed to being active in the school community and alive to the social needs and injustices of our society’. Evangel’s values statement includes ‘respect for others’.

In the context of education for, or about, First Nations peoples, what do these values mean? This section of the literature review will group together social justice and human rights, which are inextricably interrelated.

Social justice in education is generally focused on changing mindsets and systems, in this context, to recognise First Nations cultures and knowledges ‘as being of equal validity to non-Indigenous cultures and to secure Indigenous Australia in the frame of reference of mainstream Australia’ (Craven, 2012, p. 339). Human rights are about having ‘the freedom to choose and create a good life for yourself and family’ (Thomas, 2015, p. 204).

Human rights are everywhere humans exist – they are exercised, controlled, assured or negated in everyday life. The challenge is to ensure that our personal and collective behaviours affirm and do not destroy people’s enjoyment of these rights and freedoms. (Thomas, 2015, p. 205)

Even though Australia has written ‘a fair go for all’ into its national narratives (Craven, 2012, p. 336) and the policies are beginning to change ‘to represent the institutional accommodation of diversity more generally and embed the agendas of social justice and reconciliation with Indigenous Australia, more specifically’ (Nakata et al., 2012, p. 123), the lived experiences of First Nations peoples do not reflect this. Craven (2012, p. 377) suggests that learning more about First Nations peoples is about social justice for all Australians. Enabling people, specifically both teachers and students, to develop ‘sociological imagination’, a phrase coined by C. Wright Mills in 1959, would also assist in the process of reconstructing their inner eyes (Moreton-Robinson, 2015, p. 125): ‘Developing a sociological imagination means one should be able to think beyond the temple of one’s familiar to examine the social world in new and unfamiliar ways.’

Human rights are outlined in several international laws, and Dodson (1998) emphasises that we should all be aware of these rights and ensure the Australian Government is held to account. It is up to us, as individuals and a community, to ensure that all Australians can understand, experience and access these rights equitably. Education systems and their participants have an important role to play in this and strengthening education programs in relation to First Nations peoples should contribute to this process.
Narrative, Voice, Knowledge, Power and Education

Those occupying powerful social positions in Australia determine the national narratives taught in classrooms, which are normalised, internalised and reproduced, both consciously and unconsciously. In our study, we were interested to see how narratives had changed or what new narratives were emerging. These narratives shape the words, labels and language used to describe and define the world and the ‘other’ (those occupying less-powerful social positions), as well as reinforce perspectives that are represented, drawing the line between the visible central content and the invisible peripheral content. These narratives become ‘official’ knowledge (Zipin, 2009, p. 329); they become ‘truth’.

The way language may both reflect and (re-)produce unequal relations of power has a particular resonance for those interested in Indigenous Studies. How has language (such as the choice of terminology) been used historically to limit understandings of Indigenous histories, knowledges, experiences and social realities? How is language used today to name, categorise and marginalise Indigenous communities? It is important to remember that discourses are emergent products of human consciousness: they are ways of talking about and interpreting the world. (Carlson et al., 2014, p. 59)

With this in mind, let us consider the fact that Australia’s First Nations peoples embody the world’s oldest living cultures and the world’s oldest continuing intellectual traditions; and if this is the case, why have these traditions remained ‘essentially mute and invisible in the curriculum’? (Rose, 2012, pp. 67-68). First Nations peoples (and knowledges) have been suppressed and oppressed through colonisation, and yet when these relatively powerless groups seek equity, recognition and freedom of education, some non-Indigenous people feel threatened (Moreton-Robinson, 2011; Smith, 2012). This vulnerability is a reflection of the power structure of knowledge, truth and narratives, and its potential for change, (Nakata et al., 2012). This potential for change is seen by Nakata et al., (2012) not as some kind of decolonising treatment, but as an opportunity for complex critical analysis. They suggest that:

To think about the Indigenous position as one produced though colonial practices and to take on an expanded analytical stance that is open to decolonial and decolonising arguments does require students to be open to critical analysis of their own social locations and what these obscure from their view, what remains unarticulated in their language and what has been absent from their thoughts. (Nakata et al., 2012, p. 135)

The value of this approach is that it removes the need for binarised ‘them and us’ confrontations, which will probably reinforce the enculturated positions based on their own embedded epistemologies and ontologies.
Notwithstanding Nakata et al.’s (2012) optimistic perspective, those of us who operate within the structures of policy (e.g., schools and universities) must be mindful of the power of ‘discourse’ driving many of the artefacts of policy such as curriculum, professional standards and measurement frameworks. For our purposes, we concur with a definition provided by Bacchi and Goodwin (2016), who suggest:

*Following Foucault, discourses are understood as socially produced forms of knowledge that set limits upon what it is possible to think, write or speak about a ‘given social object or practice’ (McHoul and Grace 1993: 32). ‘Knowledge’ in this context is not truth; rather, it refers to what is ‘in the true’—what is accepted as truth—and is understood to be a cultural product. (Bacchi & Goodwin, 2016, p. 35)*

With this definition in mind, curriculum/standards/frameworks then do not contain the discourse, rather they are a product of the discourse. The omissions in the curriculum are therefore not necessarily a denial of truth as much as they point to what is (or not) ‘in the true’. The invisible nature of the discourse, driven by a set of beliefs or ‘paradigms’ reinforce the artefacts of education policy and reproduce the discourse with narratives that dismiss counter-narratives as irrational or nonsensical. Alternative narratives such as ‘Country enacted as curriculum’, which often come through First Nations voices, are just not considered (Harrison et al., 2019).

Language is not neutral; names convey more than just a title (Carlson et al., 2014, p. 68). Definitions in curriculum documents are not only not objective, they are also ‘infinitely elastic’ (Dodson, 1994, p. 7). Narratives—or stories—‘do not occur in a vacuum; they meander into our value systems and our institutions’ (Behrendt, 2016). Literature, specifically including curriculum, needs to be understood as a powerful political tool, which too often renders First Nations peoples voiceless (Dodson, 2008, p. xiii). All those involved in the education system should consider the historical significance and loaded nature of colonial labels and recognise that such names can have real effects on First Nations peoples (Carlson et al., 2014, p. 68).

Something to consider is that while the teaching profession is ‘as much a victim of the ‘silent apartheid’ as it is a catalyst’ (Rose, 2012, p. 75), the choices teachers and academics make, in relation to their classrooms, content and teaching approaches, are ‘not just educational but political’ (Nakata et al., 2012, p. 123).

It may be true that discourse gives ‘expression to relations of power’ (Nakata, 1998, p. 4), but the relations of power are changing and language, words, narratives and discourse can be reclaimed, reshaped and given new meaning (Carlson et al., 2014; Moreton-Robinson, 2015; Shay & Wickes, 2017). The challenge then becomes to do this in a way that provides a counter-narrative and ensures that First Nations voices and experiences are heard and validated and are centred within an understanding that issues of race and racism continue in Australia (Shay & Wickes 2017, pp. 108-9). By doing this, we create the opportunity to overcome the ‘epistemic violence’ (Spivak, 1988) that has been perpetuated by the education system. As a society, we must give ‘voice to the voiceless’ (Rigney, 2006, p. 44) and welcome First Nations voices as ‘a challenge and an invitation’ (Heiss & Minter, 2008, p. 8).
SCHOOL-COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIPS AND ENGAGEMENT WITH FIRST NATIONS COMMUNITIES

Enhancing First Nations education through reforming mainstream education is not a new endeavour. Bishop (2008) discussed this exact challenge in the New Zealand context, in relation to Maori education. Building on the work of Coburn (2003, cited in Bishop, 2008), Bishop recommends a reform model labelled GPLSEO (Goal, Pedagogy, Institutions, Leadership, Spread, Evidence, Ownership), in which school leadership (including the full range of leadership and coordination positions in schools) is a central element. In Australia too, scholars have commented on the important role of school leaders in creating a school environment in which issues concerning First Nations peoples are taught (Davies & Halsey, 2019; Sarra, 2011), issues of social justice and racism are dealt with (Aveling, 2007) and schools engage meaningfully with First Nations students and the communities they come from (Phillips & Luke, 2017). Even when engagement is pursued, many leaders may find themselves ‘caught in the middle’ between a hegemonic system and a community with a completely different set of values—and often the hegemony’s values are prioritised (Guenther & Osborne, 2018). The education systems must also show leadership in these areas by ensuring appropriate resourcing and support for teachers, explicitly including both funding and time for teachers to undertake professional learning (Williamson-Kefu, 2019). Furthermore, the systems should support teachers to build relationships and understanding with local communities (McKinley, 2017), which should be recognised as a part of the core work of teachers. Currently, this remains an area that needs strengthening both in teacher training and in practice (Mayer et al., 2017).

Much of the literature on family and community engagement comes out of a perceived need to connect schools which have First Nations students with the communities they come from. The rationale for engagement in this context is often to ensure that parents are involved in their children’s education, which is believed to improve student engagement in learning, enhance wellbeing and improve social inclusion (Campbell et al., 2016; Lowe et al., 2019). In part parent engagement is about ‘helping parents invest in the cognitive and emotional development of their children toward academic attainment’ (Chenhall et al., 2011, p. 56). There are of course all sorts of other reasons why schools want to engage with the communities that their students come from including improving behaviour, increasing attendance and helping school decision making (Guenther et al., 2015; Mechielsen et al., 2014). For both Evangel and Shorteff schools, these reasons may apply as well, but they provide no impetus for engaging with the local Aboriginal communities because there are so few Aboriginal students.

We note from the literature that even when the above rationales and motivations are present, school-parent/community engagement is not easy for teachers or principals. The challenge for teachers often is that they are focused on pedagogy and curriculum in the classroom—and this is where their expertise lies—so the thought of engaging with First Nations peoples in the community is no doubt daunting. Further, teachers have some degree of authority and power in the classroom, partly because of their professional standing and partly because of the nature of their relationships with students. They have very little power and authority in First Nations community contexts.
Literature review

TRANSFORMATIVE LEARNING PROCESSES

At the centre of the Australians Together professional learning is an assumption that the Australians Together approach will produce change. This in turn reflects a philosophy of education that goes beyond essentialism (basic intellectual schools) or perennialism (teaching enduring values) or behaviourism (programmatic instruction) or child-centred learning (student-directed problem solving) towards a philosophy of social reconstructionism (where teachers raise consciousness about social problems) and socioculturalism (promoting a just multi-cultural democracy) (see Oakes et al., 2013, p. 65) and ‘critical multiculturalism’ where ‘educators and educational theorists reflect on their own positions within structures of power, privilege and oppression.’ (Suissa, 2018, p. 844).

Suissa also argues that the focus of critical multiculturalism should not be students but rather teachers, who, without an understanding of how structures of power operate, will likely inevitably reproduce the dominant power structures and their socio-economic inequalities. One can easily see implications in these philosophies for pedagogy, but equally important are the systemic constraints and enablers that might support or suppress transformative or liberatory approaches to education: curriculum, professional teaching standards and assessment frameworks.

The overt statements of the curriculum and professional teaching standards appear to support some kind of transformation: for example,

that the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Histories and Cultures cross-curriculum priority is designed for all students to engage in reconciliation, respect and recognition of the world’s oldest continuous living cultures. (ACARA, 2016a)

And in the professional standards, teachers should be able to demonstrate broad ‘knowledge and understanding of the impact of culture, cultural identity and linguistic background on the education of students from Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander backgrounds’ (1.4) and demonstrate ‘broad knowledge of, understanding of and respect for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander histories, cultures and languages’ (2.4), (Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership, 2016).

Notwithstanding the accuracy of content, the positioning of cross-curriculum priorities within a potentially oppositional ontological and epistemological framework is problematic such that ‘Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander knowledges, cultures and histories are liable to be deconstructed, reconstructed and metamorphosed in order to fit into the curriculum’ (Maxwell et al., 2018, p. 172). An associated risk is that teaching about culture results in a ‘construction of distance between ‘us and them’ which allows for or justifies unequal treatment’ (Waldorf, 2014, p. 77). Furthermore as Salter and Maxwell (2016, p. 309) point out: ‘The optional nature of the priorities leaves their inclusion at the discretion of teachers’. Regardless of this, if the discourse of curriculum is assimilationist (as noted by Parkinson and Jones, 2018, earlier) teaching the curriculum may result in a reproduction of perennial values. The point is that having cross-curriculum priorities is in itself no guarantee of inclusive, socially just or transformative teaching. Teachers themselves are the key to transformative learning.
Within this context, how then can teaching and teachers be truly transformative? Is it reasonable to suggest, as Pimentel (2017) describes, that the (im)possible multicultural teacher ‘that teaches’ pedagogical practices cannot be understood as existing outside the inequitable power relations that define the sociopolitical context of teaching’ (p.14). Davis et al. (2013) warn that: ‘unless we understand how we construct and shape knowledge, we risk reifying the status quo instead of promoting social justice’ (p. 2).

Lazar and Nicolino (2019) suggest that it is possible to be transformative, but that it requires more than knowing their students’ backgrounds. Rather it involves teachers knowing themselves: ‘By examining issues such as racial privilege, colourblindness and institutionalised racism, white teachers can move beyond the guilt and denial that is often associated with studying these issues, to seeing their responsibility for anti-racist actions within classrooms, schools and society’ (p.172). In order to advance social justice and promote human rights through education and therefore be transformative, it is essential for teachers to reflect on their personal beliefs and experiences (Aveling, 2006; Shay & Wickes, 2017, pp. 108-109), understand how these relate to social justice and then ‘match them up’ with their professional practice in the classroom.

Johnson-Bailey (2012) argues that transformative learning is possible, but with two preconditions: trust and open dialogue. ‘Because critical reflection drives the process of transformative learning, learners must be able to honestly discuss and appraise the position.’ (p. 270). One way forward, suggested by Deckers (2014) in the context of post-secondary is ‘to provide students with a language to speak to racism’ (p. 68).

The key question for us in this is to what extent and how has Australians Together transformed the thinking of teachers? In terms of the educational goals of the schools involved, we are keen to know how Australians Together has contributed to the values which argue for social justice and equity, particularly in relation to First Nations peoples.
Methodology

This study was designed as a qualitative research project built around a participatory community of inquiry. Philosophically we worked from foundations of a critically transformative paradigm (Mertens, 2009). The research team engaged with staff effectively as co-researchers such that the knowledge created during the research was shared and developed among the staff.

*Such staff development in the critical culture of schooling gives way to teachers who analyze and contemplate the power of each other’s ideas. Thus, the new critical culture of school takes on the form of a real learning community, where knowledge is produced firsthand rather than developed on the bases of other research conducted with different students in different contexts.* (Kincheloe et al., 2018, p. 241)

Teachers involved in the research had all participated in a PLW conducted by Australians Together in May 2018. The workshop was designed to connect directly to relevant units of work. At the time of data gathering, staff were in various stages of implementing the learnings from the workshop: some had already taught units of study, others were teaching relevant units in the current term and some would be teaching related content in the last term of 2018. In some cases, planning, reflection and student learning outcomes were shared amongst peer teachers as a process for monitoring and evaluating the impact of the teaching focus.

**RESEARCH QUESTIONS**

The research questions guiding the research are as follows:

1. What barriers/limitations/challenges do educators and school leaders face in applying the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cross-curriculum priority through teaching and learning?
2. What are the outcomes (for teachers, students and schools) of a professional learning program designed to support teachers with (1)?
3. What new narratives and discourses emerge as a result of these outcomes (in the classroom, at leadership levels and at the system level)?
4. What evidence is there of changes towards an education that focuses on equity, justice, rights and reconciliation for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples?

**DATA COLLECTION**

The data gathering strategy for this project was built around the following activities:

1. An information and consultation session with senior staff at both schools (July 2018);
2. Individual 30-minute interviews with curriculum coordinators, principals and other school leaders (late October 2018 on-site at the schools); and
3. 2 x intensive half-day focus group sessions with participating teachers (also late October 2018)
Methodology

The interviews and focus group discussions were audio-recorded. The purpose of these was to gain a response to the research questions listed above. Participants included:

- 9 Australians Together focus group participants;
- 5 school leaders (curriculum coordinators and principals); and
- 1 regional office staff member.

The focus group sessions were designed to engage teachers in a critically reflexive set of discursive activities, which 1) looked back on the initial Australians Together PLW; 2) reflected on changed teaching practice and personal development; 3) considered changed learning outcomes for students; 4) considered systemic issues that support or hinder their ability to teach the cross-curriculum priority; and 5) looked forward to what they would do differently the next time they teach the relevant units. Analysis of the interviews and focus group discussion used these five key ideas as an analytical tool for assessing the discourse.

Analysis

Audio recordings of each focus group session and individual interviews were transcribed and then added to a NVIVO (qualitative analysis software) project for analysis. Responses were 'coded' according to their fit with each of the research questions as barriers (RQ1), outcomes (RQ2), new narratives (RQ3) and evidence of changes in educational approaches (RQ4).

Ethics

Ethical clearance was sought and approved through the AIATSIS (Australian Institute for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies) Research Ethics Committee (HREC Reference Number: EO94-23072018).

Limitations

This study involved two schools that represent a limited sample size. Both schools are located in the same system and similar contexts and involved staff working in the middle-upper primary years. The project was designed to capture a sample of teacher experiences and applications of their learning through the Australians Together PLW and ongoing engagement with the resources available. It was not designed to be a project representative of a wider national or multi-systemic context.

While staff were largely engaged with the project in an ongoing way, data collection and the corresponding focus group session effectively represents a snapshot or point in time analysis. Data was not collected from a range of sources such as ongoing data collection processes, in-class observations, or collation of student, parent or school community feedback and so the data is limited in both scope and range. With less than six months between the PLW and the reflection and data collection process, longer-term issues or benefits of the program are still unfolding and are not captured in this process.
Findings

In this section, we present findings from the analysis of data obtained in the interviews and focus groups.

**WHAT MOTIVATED THE SCHOOLS TO BE INVOLVED?**

While not directly related to our research questions, we asked respondents how they heard about and became involved with Australians Together.

Australians Together staff approached the School System’s National Office Chief Executive about a collaboration and were referred to the School System’s Regional Office. Through close working relationships between the two schools and the Regional Office, the schools were encouraged to participate in the Australians Together PLW. The workshops were funded through Australians Together, who also provided teacher release time for staff to attend the two-day event.

There was a recognised need within the schools for the professional learning based on curriculum requirements, meeting professional teacher standards and a perception that teaching of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cross-curriculum priority could be improved. For example one school leader stated:

> My expectations were that the year four team, which was the one that I worked with specifically, would be able to produce a unit of work that would both, I guess tick Australian Curriculum requirement [and] we would also be able to run as a unit of enquiry in the PYP [Primary Years Program] style.

Another leader commented on the AITSL Standards:

> Interviewer: So they need to satisfy the AITSL Standards for full accreditation with the Victorian TRB [Teachers Registration Board]? Respondent: For full registration as a teacher, yep, so to go beyond that graduate level.

And another school leader focused in curriculum content:

> I felt the three/four team was going to be preparing a unit of work in the near future and it would be a really good opportunity to... improve the units we might’ve had in the past and to have a perspective that maybe might not have been there.

Beyond these pragmatic and systemic requirements, many respondents talked about their interest in the topics covered. For some, this was based on personal experiences they wanted to follow up. For example, one teacher, who engaged in a university unit on First Nations issues that left him wanting to learn more, commented:

> I wanted to have a better experience, so you know, this program has been amazing.

Another school leader commented on the advocacy of a staff member:

> So, the push has come from a couple of staff members who have been our conscience and they’ve said well we’re not really doing much, are we?
Another respondent saw a connection between his school and the affiliated church’s involvement with Aboriginal missions in the past:

…our church has had a close association with Indigenous people and again, it’s an important association.

**WHAT ARE THE BARRIERS TO TEACHING THE ABORIGINAL AND TORRES STRAIT ISLANDER CROSS-CURRICULUM PRIORITY?**

We asked respondents what they thought of their ability (or their staff’s ability) to teach the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cross-curriculum priority before the PLW. This question was designed to tease out from respondents some of the challenges experienced by teachers.

Four key themes emerged from the analysis of responses. In order of priority, they expressed 1) a lack of awareness about the issues; 2) a lack of engagement with local Aboriginal people; 3) a consequential avoidance of the issues; and 4) fear or guilt about not teaching about these issues appropriately. We address each point in turn below.

**Lack of awareness**

One of the key points raised by focus group participants was their general lack of knowledge or awareness of local Aboriginal histories, cultures, languages, contact with colonisers, impacts of colonisation, issues of identity, Traditional Owners, or any number of other issues.

This, you know, this has been great because I think on the course that we did, I kind of stood back and went oh, this is new to me, you know.

Some talked about awkward moments in their experiences. For example, one staff member described how she learnt about the difference between ‘Welcome to Country’ and ‘Acknowledgement of Country’.

With the Welcome to Country, I suppose I had the personal experience of organising the Sorry Day assembly so I got a very swift lesson in the difference between Welcome to Country and Acknowledging Country and the protocol… Who’s allowed to do this, who’s not allowed to do this? So that was a little bit of an eye-opener because I was, my intentions were very genuine, however, they were perhaps not received as being so genuine.

The lack of awareness was highlighted for some within the PLW activities. For example, the following participant felt challenged when asked to ‘teach’ history to a fellow staff member:

I think just learning more about the history because we started the day, day one where we all had part of the history to teach each other and I think that was a big point for me because my knowledge was very limited, you know.
Findings

Others talked about their superficial knowledge as demonstrated in this exchange during a focus group.

*Respondent 1*: I probably had a very surface ability to tick the boxes.
*Respondent 2*: I was going to say yeah, just enough to tick the boxes.
*Interviewer*: So surface and shallow?
*Respondent 1*: I never really felt as though I did it justice.

Another respondent described her approach to teaching as tokenistic.

*I think also in my approach to teaching it, you know, token efforts like we say, the dot paintings, you know.*

Some respondents commented particularly about their lack of knowledge about local Aboriginal history.

*We certainly do have a history of having a couple of orphanages but I don’t know how many Indigenous students would’ve been there; I don’t know enough about that.*

**Lack of engagement with First Nations peoples**

The lack of engagement with First Nations peoples generally stood out as a barrier for many in the focus groups. Others had experienced First Nations culture elsewhere, for example in Central Australia or Far North Queensland, but found it difficult to engage with local Aboriginal people in their current community context. For example, one interviewee described a strong awareness of remote communities but no awareness of local communities:

*No, I haven’t thought about the local [Aboriginal community]. I know the [school’s affiliated church] has a relationship with [a community] over in Alice Springs and we have one of our year three teachers actually grew up there in [an Aboriginal community], yeah, so it’s something that I’d certainly like to know more about… I don’t have any contacts right now with the local Aboriginal community but certainly, I’d be open to it if I knew them.*

Another respondent talked about visiting the local Aboriginal cultural centre as ‘ticking a box’—in other words, the engagement was not meaningful.

*in Shorteff we don’t have a lot of exposure to Indigenous people other than places like [the local Aboriginal cultural centre] or I think there’s the [Aboriginal Corporation] Community Centre out in North Shorteff and you know, we went on excursions to [Aboriginal cultural centre] and I guess that’s just another box to tick…*

Some found it challenging finding out who the right people to talk to were:

*I had an occasion where I had to speak with the [local Aboriginal Corporation] and I was trying to get somebody to come out to the school but they needed to get permission from somebody from the [local Aboriginal Corporation], had to actually give them written permission to do that so… the politics were in play, which is very hard for a person outside of those organisations because I’m not quite sure who is in control of those politics.*
Findings

The lack of awareness of local Aboriginal people remained for some after the PLW.

*We haven’t made any real connections with those [Aboriginal community] groups at this point in time but that’s something that we can explore further down the track.*

**Avoidance**

Some respondents suggested that they chose to avoid the issues associated with colonisation. For example, in teaching about the arrival of the First Fleet one respondent described her discomfort and the temptation not to take the issue of what followed on, any further:

*… there was a big gap where it got a little bit touchy there and it was like dropped all together like we’ll just stop at the boat, we won’t go any further than that. They sailed the boats here and we’ll just stop at that.*

Another reason for avoidance was described as the lack of relevance to the teacher because there are no First Nations children in the classroom. However, as explained in this response from an interview respondent, this can be problematic for teachers wanting to demonstrate their proficiency:

*It’s part of the AITSL Standards but as part of their full registration for [the Teacher Registration Board]. The teachers need to explain explicitly how they’re currently meeting those standards and it’s traditionally been a couple of those ones where they... go oh, I don’t have any Indigenous kids in my class so that’s not relevant to me and yeah.*

For some, avoidance was an enculturated experience where one ‘didn’t say anything at all’.

*My experience in primary school was very whitewashed; there wasn’t any multi-cultural anything at all. It wasn’t really brought up, it wasn’t discussed... I think I grew up in an age where everyone was very careful not to say the wrong thing, so they just didn’t say anything at all.*

For others, it was an admission of ignorance that produced the avoidance response:

*We watched the movie Australia and there was something else that we watched, and that’s when I started thinking Australia, the Prime Minister said sorry and I was thinking sorry for what? I had no clue about what was it all about? So, I couldn’t, and I would usually try to avoid that because I don’t have a good knowledge or understanding so I would avoid that topic or subject in the class for many years.*
Findings

Fear or guilt
Associated with avoidance is the ‘fear of getting it wrong’ as expressed by this interviewee:

*There’s a lot of political stuff that makes you think you don’t want to get it wrong, don’t want to say the wrong thing…*

This idea translated into more practical concerns about making public ‘mistakes’ as this respondent describes in relation to an assembly she organised where she was required to acknowledge Country.

*I think we have to also be mindful of not making people feel like they’re too frightened to acknowledge [Country] in fear of doing the wrong thing…*

The guilt is also reflected in respondents’ reflexive comments about their own teaching practice:

*I’d never had a soulful experience to teach it with all my heart.*

The discomfort associated with the awareness that was raised through the Australians Together PLW led to another level of guilt, as this respondent discussed being ‘on the wrong side of history’:

*There’s a lot of pain and there’s a lot of history and you don’t like to be considered on the wrong side of history. ... it’s whitewashed because in the end, that was the Europeans. They took over, they had all this stuff but when you have to consider the fact that actually, that’s your history, then you’re on the wrong side of it as it were. That’s really uncomfortable and there’s a lot of pain and grief from not only acknowledging that but acknowledging the other people, the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander perspective that we weren’t right in this, it wasn’t okay.*

In summary, the barriers to teaching the cross-curriculum priority were not just about cognitive ignorance. Rather they were deeply personal and affected by personal experience, social norms and a fear of ‘getting it wrong’. The data suggests that feelings of guilt were magnified as a result of participation in the Australians Together PLW. Participants were encouraged to think about the issues raised in a constructive way in which the challenges were seen as a shared story. Consequently, this led to a more reflexive response that allowed teachers to respond more appropriately and productively.
Findings

What were the outcomes from the professional learning workshop (PLW)?

The PLW participants reported many outcomes. Most of the outcomes reported relate to personal impact. Impact on students was seldom discussed and impact on the school or the system it was part of, was not discussed at all. Three key themes dominated responses to our questions about impact and outcomes: 1) an emotional response; 2) strong learning and increased awareness; and 3) reflexive responses. Results in terms of classroom practice are discussed in the next section separately.

Emotional response

There were many reports from respondents about the enthusiasm and excitement that people felt after participating in the workshop.

I think after the first day, we got in the car and we drove home and we were like ‘this is incredible’. This is what’s needed, this is what we need, this is what everyone needs.

Another commented on the experience as one of the best PLW (‘PDs’) she had attended:

It was a wonderful opportunity. In fact, I think… I came back and said it was probably one of the best PDs that I had attended in so much as being able to come back and actually do something to make a difference.

One respondent talked about being more ‘comfortable’ after the workshop:

It has certainly given me a little bit more of a confidence and a comfortable feeling in being able to deliver this part of the curriculum and through the program.

Another school leader, who was not able to attend all the time, made this observation:

I wasn’t there full time. I do remember teachers leaving being very emotionally exhausted, so [staff member] left one of the meetings and she had to lead a meeting for the junior school and she just said my heart is full and troubled and my head is swimming with stuff.

The staff member provided her own reflection:

...just the information that was shared with us was quite full on and emotional and eye-opening and you know, made you sad, made you mad and I think yeah, my eyes were definitely opened.

The mix of emotional response described in the quotes above point to strong affective outcomes for participants. In many ways, the PLW provoked and inspired participants. They also point to a high level of engagement in the workshop process.
Findings

**Strong learning and increased awareness**
Beyond the emotional response, it was also evident from the data that the workshop resulted in increased knowledge and awareness. The awareness was not just about First Nations people but also sparked a process of reflexive self-awareness. For example, one respondent reflected on how it might be for the nine identified Aboriginal students at Shorteff.

> They’re almost like lone islands… struggling with identity… Who can they relate to in their cohort, in their friendship groups? They’re going through similar things, they have the similar culture, have that understanding. If there are only nine people, that’s going to be a struggle.

For others, the workshop and accompanying resources created what one respondent called a ‘real sense of understanding’ with authenticity.

> The resources… were wonderful, like all the… interviews along the way, they were interviewing Indigenous people that had been… taken from their land to just give people a real sense of understanding… It was very authentic, very authentic.

Another PLW participant described the awareness as ‘lightbulb’ moments; how the realities of discrimination and exclusion were so recent and so powerful.

> So, we had that limited knowledge of the impact of colonisation… it was only through having to explore the topic— I think ours was of discrimination and exclusion—just how the history of events and how it actually wasn’t that long ago that Indigenous people were actually counted and, just the voting and, that’s really not that long ago in terms of history so some lightbulb moments… I feel a little bit more equipped to actually deliver it correctly.

The growth in awareness was not about facts so much as it was about being able to ‘think’ about how and why circumstances for First Nations peoples are the way they are today.

> I sort of felt I knew a little bit about Indigenous people but just to have that greater depth and to really have time to think about it, not just a quick think but, to really think about how those things that happened compounded in generations and now when we look at Indigenous people today and the many issues that many of them have, just why?

The quotes above describe several aspects of the learning process which occurred during the PLW. The learning was built on an affective foundation that caused increased self-awareness, but this, in turn, led to increased capacity to teach and helped participants not only understand what has happened to First Nations peoples but how and why.
Reflexive response

The reflexive responses that emerged from the workshop are in part about positioning self differently as a result of the new knowledge and in part about repositioning professional practice. In terms of personal impact one focus group respondent commented on how the material connected with her feelings—perhaps like understanding what it would be like to walk in someone else's shoes:

"For me, it was like wow, it made me realise why things like Sorry Day, why it really was a big deal because it really highlighted to me the situations how I would feel."

The personal impact is also expressed in this workshop participant's reaction to the content:

"I was very emotional and I went … back home and I shared the whole story with my daughters and we all got very emotional about it and that actually helped me understand a lot, and what I did was the very next day after the session, I just poured it out on my kids in the class so lest I forget, you know?"

One of the exercises in the PLW was about planning for a unit of teaching and learning. The level of collective responsibility for the quality of the units is expressed in the following quote with references to 'we need', 'we can', 'we've always felt like that'. This indicates some of the powerful repositioning that resulted at a professional level through the PLW.

"I think when we would sit down and we'd get ready for these units, we would look at that and we'd all kind of be like ‘this isn't great’, this isn't a very good unit, you know, how can we improve it, you know, make it more engaging for the students and create more awareness and acknowledgment? I think we've always felt like that… we need to scrap it, we need to start again. This is, like it's not doing enough."

The teachers' newfound ability to ask questions and encourage their students to ask questions was also evident.

"I think, [students] being able to ask those questions that maybe [we] were sitting on in the session. Is it the wrong thing to ask? We were encouraged to ask them anyway and there were some answers that weren't able to be given because they weren't sure or whatever, but I think it's the same with the students. They sit there and they're not sure and they hear things... They've got opinions... from their parents that they bring to the classroom..."

The participants' experiences with their own questions, in some cases, cause them to reflect on how it might be for students. In some ways, this reflects a shift in pedagogical approach that sees the teacher as having to know and relay information to one that knows how to ask questions and explore answers to them.
Findings

This is reflected in feedback from focus group respondents who were reflecting on a unit they had just taught on the First Fleet and colonisation:

- It may be a chance to reflect on their own thinking and why they think that way and has their thinking changed since...
- Posing hard questions, hard thoughts that they have to then take back and self-reflect on and say well maybe I've thought wrong, you know, I've been told the wrong thing from the start.

As the quotes above demonstrate the emotional response translates into a reflexive response. Participants described experiences that could be labelled as epiphanic moments and needed to share those revelations with their family, colleagues and students.

**WHAT ACTIONS DID PARTICIPANTS TAKE IN RESPONSE TO THE PROFESSIONAL LEARNING WORKSHOP (PLW)?**

Given that part of the PLW was about preparing units of work, we were interested to hear from our respondents, what actions they took in the classrooms.

There were four key themes that emerged from the data in relation to this: 1) engagement with curriculum and planning; 2) practical classroom applications; 3) pedagogical responses; and 4) sharing learnings with other staff.

**Engagement with curriculum and planning**

One benefit of the PLW was that it fed directly into curriculum planning.

- [The workshop was] thoroughly enjoyable for all of us and has since been enjoyable for Shorteff because... we did a presentation as part of a curriculum day recently and it just led to so many things like, you know, editing our scope and sequence for our integrated studies and having a real P-6 approach and I believe now that they're going to go beyond and go 7-9.

The PLW also provided the impetus for a review of the whole primary years’ curriculum.

- It provided that springboard for us to actually have the conversation. Okay, let's spill out all these units, have a look what they're doing in prep, have a look where they're ending up in grade six.

Another participant from Evangel stated:

- Not only were we able to do that really deep level thinking of just the planning. We also learnt a lot about some extra things to add to our planning repertoire as well so that part of it was really well presented, the process was great.
Another participant commented on how it changed the way they approached the content of a unit. Note how this teacher from Evangel also connected the emotion and affective response (discussed earlier) with planning and classroom practice.

They explained why teachers and students should... share this information with others and then we made a connection with our cultures, the current cultures, how that history was brought into the modern society, how we can implement that and towards the end, [and] we were given the opportunity to put all that knowledge into our unit planner so we could see from the emotions, triggering emotions, to actually putting into our classroom practice through unit planner.

So, the benefit of the PLW was that it not only contributed to content, but it also connected that content with curriculum and pedagogy.

Practical classroom applications
The interview data provides numerous examples of ways that teachers responded to their learning in the classroom.

One strategy that emerged was to shift the focus from delivering content to making the content engaging and relevant:

I just think I’m really excited in a way that we can deliver it to help the kids connect. I think that wasn’t there, it was ‘this is what we’re teaching you’ and that was it but now, ‘this is your history, this is about you and this is why this happened and what can we do about it?’

The use of the AIATSIS language map as a teaching tool was also enthusiastically embraced:

They just love the language map, they do. They just love it.

Another respondent affirmed:

So, we’ve all got those maps in our classrooms, all the 3-6 classrooms have got those maps now.

Another activity incorporated into classroom practice was reflection on the five stones:

So, each learning outcome has learning intentions, success criteria then a brief about what the lesson, or some guidelines for what the lesson can contain and the five stones reflection is an amazing activity.

Another commented on enriched learning for students:

I felt like it was going to definitely enrich the year four Aboriginal studies unit, where before it had been focused on a lot of important things like dance and art and that sort of thing but not getting into the meat of it I guess, of the history and how your history shapes people. It can’t not shape people and the way they think.
Findings

One teacher commented on a USB drive that participants were given, which included a range of resources they could apply:

\[\text{This USB is the best thing. It’s got so many rich resources and stories and clips. It’s so comprehensive, it’s like it’s one of the best teaching tools I’ve ever seen so that was fantastic.}\]

What is clear, is that the PLW activities, tools and resources were directly transferrable to the participants’ classrooms.

**Pedagogical responses**

Related to the application of workshop activities in the classroom was a corresponding change in the pedagogical approach used by teachers. Helping students connect with the content was a key benefit for some teachers:

\[\text{I just think I’m really excited in a way that we can deliver it to help the kids connect.}\]

We noted earlier that the reflexive response of PLW facilitators was reflected in the way that questions were used to elicit responses from workshop participants as a way of breaking down opinions and in turn opening up alternative possibilities in the minds of the participants. Participant teachers then used this strategy to encourage their students to ask questions.

\[\text{…[You] break [those opinions] down completely but you’ve got to have those [points of view], if you’re confident enough to share and teach that then they’re able to ask those questions and maybe change opinions.}\]

The level of critical thinking applied to pedagogy was evident too. Noting that Evangel School has a strong migrant cohort, one teacher commented:

\[\text{Half of my class are migrants, including me, so when we had to sit for our citizenship test, Australian citizenship test, there was absolutely nothing about Indigenous history; absolutely nothing. We had a good discussion in the class that that must be included…}\]

The consequence of these altered approaches appears to be stronger student engagement:

\[\text{I was teaching a lesson about terra nullius and that really hit home for a lot of the kids of you know, the Europeans at the time and the way they came in here and, how would you feel if someone came and actually started camping in your backyard and setup, how would you be feeling? I think maybe it opened up more ways to talk about things. The kids are certainly very… very engaged.}\]
Findings

Sharing learnings with other staff

There were several comments in the interviews about how staff shared their learnings with colleagues.

> We came back and delivered it to the rest of the staff… The staff were really engaged, they were really interested, they were so interested to learn how we could all do it so much better.

Learnings were applied to other contexts. For example, one senior staff member commented on how she had used learnings to have ‘different conversations’ with staff as they approach the AITSL Standards:

> So, I think I have different conversations with the teachers about that now, about what that means for them and show them what’s on there, so I think I feel a bit more equipped…

For some staff who did not attend the PLW, the participants have become the ‘go to’ people on issues related to teaching the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cross-curriculum priority.

> I know that other teachers that have sort of, where it’s come up in their curriculum, I’ve said to them look, you’ve really got to talk to the year four teachers because they’ve really gone into this in a deep way and they might be able to help you out with this…

The knowledge gained by PLW participants has been shared with other staff in other ways too. For example, an initial presentation from the workshop has led to staff-led professional learning on integrating First Nations perspectives.

> The staff were so enthusiastic about what the team shared in that staff meeting that they said we need to spend more time on this and looking at our curriculum. We had two pupil free days and… we spent a whole day in the primary school on indigenous perspectives and did a number of different perspectives on that…[Participants] were able to run it, so that has also led now to a review of our integrated studies, scope and sequence.

In summary, the actions taken by staff in response to the PLW have led to significant changes in relation to planning and curriculum, accompanied by the application of tools and resources in classroom practice. There is evidence of some changes in pedagogical approaches, which have led to strong engagement among students. Further, learnings have been shared and applied to broader contexts beyond the year three and four context of the workshop.
Findings

WHAT EVIDENCE IS THERE OF ‘NEW NARRATIVES’?

The evidence of ‘new narratives’ was more limited than the evidence of outcomes and changes to classroom practice. However, two strong themes emerged from the data. The first relates to a more empathic and reflective response and the second relates to opening up a conversation or having language to talk about First Nations peoples and cultures.

Empathy and reflective responses

Reflective and empathetic comments from respondents were strongly evident in most of the interviews and focus groups we conducted. The topic of acknowledging Country and why we do it, came up repeatedly. Staff were very sensitive to the need for this and had a good appreciation of why it is important.

Even explaining to the students that, like you were saying, you acknowledge because you’re a visitor here, explaining that they acknowledge from one language area to the next that they are visitors helps them to understand that we really are visitors…

In terms of teaching and learning, the participants were also keen to translate the value of respect into their classrooms:

[A goal of our planning was to] demonstrate respect by sharing understanding of why colonisation significantly impacts the relationship between country, place and peoples.

There were signs from teachers that this was having the desired impact, for example:

I think if you were to ask [students], what do you know about Indigenous Australia, before the workshop they would've said boomerangs, dot paintings, [Local cultural centre], things like that but I think now, I think they’re developing that empathy and they’re saying they were forced out of their homes and their country due to people invading and things like that.

Another teacher at Evangel School, with its strong cohort of migrants, made a connection to the shared understanding of history with the lived experiences of many migrant families:

And particularly for some of our [migrant] students, that’s what makes it relevant. They’ve had some of that in their own upbringing so being able to make that connection and I think that’s a link to that sort of empathy and emotion that these things did actually happen… they’re sort of trying to put themselves in their shoes and think about okay, these things actually did happen, you know, how would that make you feel?
Findings

Staff also had this experience of ‘putting themselves in the shoes of others’ as they reflected on the information they received.

In particular, I think it was the Stolen Generation kind of information that I learned but I think I really sort of put myself in those shoes and sort of thought if it was me, linked it back to me.

In another response, a respondent spoke of taking ‘responsibility’

This is important to know and care about the past events in Australia because Australians have a responsibility to knowing their past. The past continues to affect the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders. There’s that recognition that it’s still going.

In essence, these narratives reflect the reflexive responses discussed earlier (see page 31). This new narrative is one of acknowledgement and respect and while we cannot say what the long-term impact is, there is an evident change in the mindset of teachers who have been exposed to the PLW. And they are attempting to bring that changed thinking into their classrooms to affect their students.

Starting an open conversation

The open conversation described by participants is not so much a new narrative, but it is an invitation to explore, understand and question previously held assumptions. For some, the conversation was about creating a language to talk respectfully about First Nations peoples. There was a shift in thinking from ‘them and us’ to ‘our’ as a foundation for taking responsibility and ownership of colonisation.

Language, the language, yep.
Using the language. It’s us, it’s not they.
It’s our story, not their story.
It’s ours. Getting that and teaching the students that language early on, you’re setting the example and have the students speaking like that as well. It just creates that feeling for them that it’s to do with us; it’s everyone.

The Australians Together framework provided a handle for the conversations. In the following focus group extract, the questions posed reflected a shift from providing answers to being able to critically explore challenges and solutions more deeply:

And I really like the framework that they gave us when, was it from the wound?
Wound, history, our cultures and response. You know, so you can see, you can say well this has gone wrong, why has it gone wrong? How can we fix this? You know, in the end, you’ve come to the end of the unit or you’re nearing the end and you say, okay kids, what can we do? You know, what can you do to make a difference?
Findings

The new conversation was also reflected in challenging the status quo, towards a more ethical, just response. As participants went back to their roles they were armed with tools that enabled them to see the need for more ethical approaches, as represented by this comment:

No one was confident enough to stand up and say this is not right, this is not the way we should be teaching because no one had had that training yet but once we had had that training, there was the three of us plus [other participant]. We stood up and said this isn’t the way it should be taught; we need to be looking at this again.

A school leader recognised the difference in staff conversations around planning:

I think that the teachers who have been involved certainly are having different conversations around their planning.

Commenting on the system level response, the same respondent offered a more restrained comment:

[At the] Systems level, there it’s starting to happen, maybe not specifically about the 5 Key Ideas but certainly around the importance of equipping our teachers with better language, more confidence and the ability to I guess do a better job.

All these comments point to changes in the way the schools and teachers are thinking about teaching the cross-curriculum priority and embedding First Nations perspectives into curriculum and pedagogy. The PLW has provided a framework or a model from which participants can draw.
Discussion

RESPONSE TO THE RESEARCH QUESTIONS

What barriers/limitations/challenges do educators and school leaders face in applying the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cross-curriculum priority through teaching and learning?

There is no doubt that the Australians Together PLW was effective in shifting teachers’ thinking and approaches to working with First Nations students, histories and cultures. This shift is an important achievement because a teacher’s mindset can pose a significant barrier to the effective delivery of learning and teaching around Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australia (Craven, 2012, p. 339). The data strongly reflects this shift which was initiated through a well organised and resourced education activity specifically working to engage the emotions and compassion of teachers. The data also shows that the PLW had a high impact in translating to action through peer collaboration in reviewing and rewriting existing curriculum and resources, sharing the learning with peers and repositioning students to engage more actively and reflexively with the content through an inquiry-based pedagogical model.

In terms of the barriers discussed earlier in this report (see page 25), the Australians Together PLW assists teachers to start to address some of these challenges by:

› providing additional knowledge to subsidise the often inadequate graduate teacher knowledge relating to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander content and perspectives, as well as providing a forum for teachers to discuss their lack of experience and expertise in the area;

› allocating specific time to enable teachers to research and re-design lesson plans around Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander content and perspectives, with the guidance of the workshop facilitator, which enables adequate resources vetting for quality.

Based on interview data, there are a couple of key points of tension that teachers encounter in seeking to apply and embed the professional learning they have engaged with. These include: 1) taking an active(ist) approach to whole school reform without full engagement and/or endorsement from all levels of school leadership; 2) limited strategies, experience and school-based expertise to connect core elements of AITSL Standards 1.4 and 2.4 to authentic engagement with the local Aboriginal community; and 3) access to ongoing engagement with First Nations educators and voices to guide a growing understanding and maturity in relevant field knowledge, content and perspectives. While the issue of grappling with concepts such as whiteness, racism and privilege did not come out of the data, reflection and critical engagement with these issues is considered essential by many scholars in this field (for example Larkin, 2014; Moreton-Robinson et al., 2012; Rose, 2012; Shay & Wickes, 2017).
Whole school transformation

While school leadership was supportive of the work at both schools and middle management was personally engaged at both sites, the broader project of whole school community (including church) transformation towards justice and reconciliation had not been engaged with by senior school leadership. In this sense, the ripple effect that a number of teachers mentioned in seeing a positive impact of action and transformation in classrooms is bordered by the circle of influence that the classroom teachers have. Senior school leaders endorsed and were pleased with the work but had not made this work a whole school priority or considered potential future actions to connect classroom practice to community-based engagement and action. The decision not to act could be indicative of broader institutional racism (Larkin, 2014) dismissing the potential importance and impact of this type of educational change, despite the requirements outlined in the Australian Curriculum. That is not to say that a widening of the work and impact across school and community lines will not or cannot happen, but a ‘boundary fence’ is in place to date at both locations.

School leadership plays a pivotal role in any whole school transformation (Bishop, 2008) and specifically in enhancing learning and teaching about issues important to, and engagement with, First Nations peoples (Davies & Halsey, 2019; Phillips & Luke, 2017; Sarra, 2011). It is essential therefore that school leaders, senior staff and coordinators, together with the decision-makers in Australia’s education systems, take an active role in ensuring their schools and systems overcome the legacy of institutional racism and normalised whiteness that has been ingrained in Australia’s education systems for the last two centuries. Instead of aiming for ‘political correctness’ or ‘colourblind respect’, leadership teams should be committing to active engagement and normalised understanding of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australia and mutually beneficial relationships with local communities and First Nations peoples more broadly.

Ongoing community engagement

Nakata’s (2007) description of the ‘cultural interface’ as a ‘complex and contested space’ reminds us that addressing issues relating to historical and continuing injustices, complex contemporary struggles and issues relating to First Nations peoples need guidance, continual learning and reflexive processes. These types of support are also essential for enabling local schools and students to establish a deeper understanding and genuine community engagement, as well as various forms of (pro)action. As per the Australians Together values, this is best done through the lens of relationships with First Nations peoples, local communities and the organisations that represent First Nations people.

Both schools lack dedicated staff to foster these relationships and engagement with Aboriginal organisations, Elders and community members is limited, if in existence at all. This is an area that can grow and be developed with goodwill and intent. The way forward, however, needs a broader and deeper ongoing focus. This focus would position the role of education and local schools towards future-oriented work on reconciliation and justice – moving from an empathetic stance towards a deeper, more mature approach that can account for complex issues relating to local interactions with colonialism and unresolved injustices.
Discussion

The Australian Professional Teaching Standards now require that even graduate level teachers be able to apply their understanding of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australia, to the development of relationships with the families of students and their communities (Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership, 2016 Standard 1.4). Despite this, the essential work of consulting with community and the associated relationship building is often viewed as ‘an extracurricular activity’ (Maxwell, 2012, p. 121). It is, therefore, a necessary system and leadership level change to ensure teacher and school cultures normalise community consultation and that teachers are provided with adequate and appropriate resources and assistance to develop the necessary skill set to build and maintain genuine relationships (Shay, 2017).

Ongoing access to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander voices

Further to the above discussion on community engagement, it was unclear from the interview data as to how teachers would access ongoing professional development opportunities to build their knowledge and confidence, in particular, with access to First Nations perspectives to inform their work. As Bodkin-Andrews et al. (2017, p. 21) argue, ‘all people seeking to understand “Indigenous Australia” [must] recognise, respect and incorporate perspectives emerging from not only Indigenous scholars but Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities themselves’. We will now reconsider the barriers to community consultation noted above, including teacher attitudes, time, staff and money (Maxwell, 2012). While teacher attitudes may have shifted through exposure to the Australians Together Professional Learning Workshop, time, staff and money remain unaddressed in terms of support for community engagement. Educational leaders and systems should be recognising their role in this process, specifically in providing greater support to facilitate the effective implementation of enhanced learning and teaching about First Nations peoples, histories and cultures in classrooms (Maxwell, 2014).

What are the outcomes (for teachers, students and schools) of a professional learning program designed to support teachers with the issues and barriers described above?

As discussed above, the data reflects a shift in teacher mindsets about First Nations histories and cultures, as well as significant action in the classroom including peer collaboration, review and remaking curriculum, pedagogical reform and an increased focus on more-inclusive representations of First Nations peoples in the retelling of the story of ‘us’ as Australians.

The strong emotional responses expressed in the interviews are likely to counter the popular tendency to disengage out of fear of political incorrectness (Rose, 2012), or the practice of disremembering that the education system has perpetuated for too long (Kinnane, 2015). While this is a significant and positive outcome, Moreton-Robinson and her colleagues (2012) warn that much of the professional development delivered to teachers succeeds in making teachers feel better or more comfortable or confident, instead of equipping them to teach the content and perspectives more effectively. By actively engaging the teachers in the planning process, the PLW facilitators ensured the workshop was not producing purely emotional outcomes, but practical ones as well, as some of the teacher participants were implementing changes in their teaching from the very next day after the workshop.
The PLW, therefore, has given clarity to staff planning and curriculum development across the school and enabled teachers to more effectively engage with the AITSL Standards 1.4 and 2.4.

As discussed above, school leadership plays a critical role in facilitating and supporting genuine and sustainable change in schools. While this is yet to be achieved in Shorteff College and Evangel Independent School, the PLW has prompted a number of conversations throughout the leadership teams around the role of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander content and perspectives in the curriculum. Ideally, moving forward, these conversations would expand to the whole of school context, as well as to the system more broadly.

What new narratives and discourses emerge as a result of these outcomes (in the classroom, at leadership levels and at the system level)?

Teacher narratives moved significantly from expressions of apprehension and relative disengagement to being deeply engaged and motivated in the work. Teacher mindsets, specifically the internalisation of the dominant discourse, can pose a significant threat to the potential for effective delivery of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Histories and Cultures cross-curriculum priority (Acton et al., 2017). Recognising that most teachers were victims of an education system that maintained the ‘silent apartheid’ before they became teachers, who now perpetuate the silencing of First Nations perspectives (Rose, 2012), changing the narrative is an essential aspect of broader educational change. The PLW enabled teacher participants to start to develop an alternative and more self-reflective narrative of ‘our’ collective history. This is an important outcome in terms of enabling the normalisation of an enhanced learning and teaching of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander content and perspectives through their curriculum. Importantly, this type of normalisation could not be achieved without ongoing engagement with First Nations peoples or communities, which would require the support of leadership teams and the system. Local school leadership teams were actively engaged in the PLW and change process and expressed enthusiasm about the changing narrative. There was also strong support from middle-level leadership through to expressions of support but some distance from the project at the senior level of both schools. School leadership teams have a responsibility to ensure all students’ identities are affirmed and anti-racism policies should be implemented in all schools (Shay & Wickes, 2017), and these changes require new narratives to be taught in classrooms. This is critically important to achieving sustainable change.

Both schools in this study are located in the same system where the PLW and subsequent research project was encouraged via the Chief Executive and supported by a regional manager. There were strong statements of a commitment to broadening the project in the future at a systemic level. As discussed earlier, those with power often reproduce, consciously or unconsciously, the power imbalance that maintains the dominant narrative (Carlson et al., 2014). When those with power choose to change the narrative however, it is possible to reclaim language and discourse and give it new meaning (Moreton-Robinson, 2015); (Shay & Wickes, 2017). The challenge is to do this in a way that overcomes the historical epistemic violence, as opposed to recreating it (Rigney, 2001), by valuing, validating and centring Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander voices and experiences (Shay & Wickes, 2017).
What evidence is there of changes towards an education that focuses on equity, justice, rights and reconciliation for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples?

As discussed above, the strength of this work is reflected in a renewed approach in the classroom. Questions of equity, justice, rights and reconciliation for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples are ‘on the radar’ based on data from teacher interviews, and therefore moving towards being ‘in the true’ but are still discussed in the sense of being a little out of reach. Classroom activities tended to focus on building empathy and understanding towards First Nations peoples and the historical conditions that frame inequity, but there was little discussion about how this has developed towards notions of justice and reconciliation or understanding the interplay between race, whiteness and privilege. Learning more around Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australia is about developing a “sociological imagination” (Mills, 2000, p. 7)—a fruitful form of self-consciousness-- and reconstructing our national inner eyes (Craven, 2012; Moreton-Robinson, 2015). These are the kinds of themes that will be more ably developed in partnership with local Elders, community members and organisations.

There was some discussion at both schools about what role the church might have in assisting this work towards justice and reconciliation through building relationships and community. Another example of further work was the beginning of discussions about what the school could do to encourage increased Aboriginal enrolment in the school, ensuring that the experience was positive and successful for Aboriginal students. Both schools are not one of the main schools Aboriginal students in the region generally enrol in and this could be a further avenue for action.

WHAT IS NOT REPRESENTED IN THE DATA?

The data reflects discursive discussions held amongst small groups of teachers involved in the Australians Together project. This was not a comprehensive analysis of curriculum reform or student outcomes but was designed to capture teacher reflections and attitudes on the impact of the PLW and resources on their work as practitioners.

While noting this and reflecting back on the literature, we see some obvious omissions in the narratives of teachers. While they were open to new conversations and were clearly inspired to engage with the curriculum and improve their pedagogy, their reflexive response did not consider issues of racism and social justice, or how they saw themselves as agents of change in this regard. The transformation which occurred was partial insofar as it helped teachers better understand themselves (Lazar & Nicolino, 2019) but it could be that they were more like the ‘(im)possible multicultural teachers’ that Pimentel (2017) describes—perhaps unaware of the systemic power relations that place them in a continuing frame of limited knowledge.

While the research team held discussions and worked with local Aboriginal organisations, the data does not include contributions from Aboriginal people, particularly those from the local Aboriginal communities. Although this is not ideal in terms of representing Aboriginal voices within this particular project, Australians Together is committed to working with the ‘97%’ of Australians who are non-Indigenous to encourage a process of critical self-reflection and positive action towards a more-just Australia. Many schools (such as those involved in this study) have low or no Indigenous enrolments and are yet to establish relationships that centre Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander voices and community groups in the school community.
Discussion

These schools are typical of many school communities that are well placed to benefit from reaching out and engaging with Australians Together as a first step to strengthening their Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander education approach and building authentic relationships with local communities.

LIMITATIONS AND POTENTIAL FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

A broader discussion of the limitations pertaining to this study is found above. Participants described the process of attending the PLW, enacting the learning and regrouping for a focus group and evaluation session to be affirming and supportive. This approach could be expanded across a wider range of schools, contexts and systems.

The learning emerging from this research can act as a springboard for further professional learning for teachers. We would envisage an action learning project that draws on these initial teacher experiences to suggest potential actions to address some of the obvious next steps, for example towards greater engagement with the local Aboriginal communities and to connect student learning experiences to more explicit social justice, reconciliation, recognition and even an anti-racist agenda.

Noting the lack of Aboriginal voice in the data, we could also envisage a complementary research process that engaged more intentionally with a broader array of Aboriginal people, not just from the locales of both schools, but from First Nations stakeholders with an interest in improving the way that the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cross-curriculum priority is taught and learned.

We recognise that not all jurisdictions apply the Australian Curriculum or its cross-curriculum priorities. Our focus in this report has however been on the Australian Curriculum because both schools involved in the study were using it. We acknowledge that there may well be a different set of issues related to the application of state-based curriculum frameworks, but it is beyond the scope of this study to explore these.

Another angle that is largely missing from this piece of research is the system perspective. While we interviewed one person who had a role in the regional office, this single view does not purport to represent the system as a whole. Given that the initial impetus for the schools’ involvement was a suggestion from the national office, it may be worthwhile exploring how systemic responses might work to advance the Australians Together cause.
Conclusions

In this report, we have detailed the outcomes of a small pilot study involving two schools where an Australians Together PLW was conducted. Noting the limitations with the study and its small sample size, we wanted to know what stakeholders at the schools and at the system level thought were the barriers to applying the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cross-curriculum priority. We also were interested to hear about the outcomes of the PLW and whether any new narratives were emerging as a result. We also investigated whether there was any evidence of changes in education that focused on equity, justice, rights and reconciliation.

The Australians Together approach of conducting workshops, providing resources and encouraging teachers to take action towards justice, reconciliation and improved relationships through education was roundly celebrated as being positive and transformational across all who participated in the process in two schools involved in this study. The movement from learning to implementing positive actions in the classroom is demonstrably significant. One of the key barriers, a lack of awareness, was successfully overcome through the PLW and there was a strong affective response that translated into a desire to know more and to connect with curriculum and planning. There was evidence of new narratives and new conversations forming with participants reporting increased empathy for First Nations peoples. At this stage, however, the conversations and actions have not demonstrably translated into a greater focus on social justice or equity in education approaches at the schools.

There is more to be done in the examples of the experiences of these two schools though, with a whole school approach and an Aboriginal community engagement strategy presenting as clear objectives for the future. The teachers are committed to continuing their journey of learning and transforming their teaching of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander histories and cultures. This provides a solid platform on which the schools and Australians Together can build on, into the future.
References


References


References


References


Maxwell, J. (2014). Exploring the intentions behind the inclusion of the cross-curriculum priority ‘Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander histories and cultures’ in the Australian Curriculum. University of Southern Queensland.
References


References


References


References


Australians Together Learning Framework

**GOAL:**

- Teachers and students will:
  - My Response: 
  - Our Cultures: 
  - Why Me?: 
  - Our History: 
  - The Wound:

**5 KEY IDEAS TO INFORM TEACHERS AND STUDENTS ABOUT ABORIGINAL AND TORRES STRAIT ISLANDER PERSPECTIVES**

- Empathize with the reason why many Indigenous Australians experience injustice and disadvantage;
  - Understand that acts of injustice lead to pain and disadvantage;
  - Will keep asking: Why are many Indigenous Australians experiencing disadvantage and injustice?

- Acknowledge how our shared past continues to have an impact on our present context;
  - Understand that history continues to have an impact in the present;
  - Will keep asking: How does our history continue to affect us today?

- Appreciate the interconnectedness of Australians and take personal responsibility for attitudes and behaviours towards Indigenous people and culture;
  - Understand that actions derive from worldview and attitudes;
  - Will keep asking: What does this have to do with me?

- Value and respect Indigenous people through an understanding of the importance of culture;
  - Will keep asking: Why are culture and identity important?

- Actively respond in respectful and meaningful ways in both personal and professional lives;
  - Will keep asking: How can I respond respectfully and meaningfully?

**ESSENTIAL QUESTION**

- Understand that knowledge of personal identity and culture will build empathy with others and provide a foundation for understanding others’ experiences and perspectives;
  - Will keep asking: What is the relationship between my personal identity and culture and others’?

- Understand that respectful relationships and connections reduce Indigenous injustice and disadvantage;
  - Will keep asking: How can connections and relationships reduce injustice and disadvantage?
## Appendix 2: Professional Learning Workshop Plan

### Pre-Engagement and Curriculum Workshop Plan

**When:** Wednesday 30th and 31st May, 2018  
**Where:** Evangel Independent School

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>TIME</th>
<th>ACTIVITY</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>DAY 1</strong></td>
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| 9.00 – 10.30am| **Session 1:**  
› Welcome  
› Where are we going? Essential question, goal and understanding  
› AT Survey  
› Illustration of Practice: Donvale CC, VIC Year 9  
› **Key Idea 4: Our Cultures**  
› T 5KI Learning Framework  
**Session 2:**  
› **Key Idea 1: The Wound** – Reflection and Responses |
| 10.30 – 10.45am| **MORNING TEA BREAK**                                                    |
| 10.45 – 12.30pm| **Session 3:**  
› **Key Idea 2: Our History Workshop**  
Group planning and presenting – 10 big ideas from Video, Powerpoint and Resource Book |
| 12.30 – 1.15pm | **LUNCH BREAK**                                                          |
| 1.15pm        | **Key Idea 2: Our History continued**                                    |
| 2.30 – 2.45pm | **AFTERNOON TEA BREAK**                                                  |
| 2.45 – 4.00pm | **Session 4:**  
› **Key Idea 3: Why Me?**  
› **Intro Key Idea 5: My Response** – My Response Curriculum  
Preparing for Day 2 Curriculum – ACARA codes |
## Appendix 2:
### Professional Learning Workshop Plan

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>TIME</th>
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<tr>
<td>9.00 – 10.30am</td>
<td><strong>Session 5:</strong>&lt;br&gt;› Review – what do we know?&lt;br&gt;<strong>Session 6:</strong>&lt;br&gt;› Key Idea 5: My Response in Curriculum&lt;br&gt;   Illustration of Practice Southern Vales CC: Yr 12, Marrara CC Yrs 5/6&lt;br&gt;› Backward Design – Begin with the end in mind&lt;br&gt;› Stage 1 Goals&lt;br&gt;› Stage 2 Assessment Evidence&lt;br&gt;› Stage 3 Learning Plans</td>
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<tr>
<td>10.30 – 10.45am</td>
<td><strong>MORNING TEA BREAK</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>10.45 – 12.30pm</td>
<td><strong>Session 7:</strong>&lt;br&gt;› Group Curriculum Planning</td>
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<tr>
<td>12.30 – 1.15pm</td>
<td><strong>LUNCH BREAK</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>1.15pm</td>
<td>› Group Curriculum Planning continued</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.30 – 2.45pm</td>
<td><strong>AFTERNOON TEA BREAK - working</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>2.45 – 4.00pm</td>
<td>› Curriculum Gallery Walk&lt;br&gt;<strong>Session 8:</strong>&lt;br&gt;› AT post-survey&lt;br&gt;› AT resources&lt;br&gt;› Q&amp;A</td>
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<tr>
<td>3.30pm</td>
<td><strong>Conclude</strong></td>
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