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## Teaching Indigenous Children: Listening to and Learning from Indigenous Teachers

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*Abstract: This article is based on the findings of a qualitative case study that examined the professional experiences and career pathways of fifty current and former Australian Indigenous teachers. Here, we draw on data obtained from semi-structured interviews with the teachers to highlight their knowledge in three key areas: 'Indigenous ways of knowing', 'Indigenous learners' lives beyond the classroom' and 'Building relationships with Indigenous students and communities'. We suggest that Indigenous teachers can potentially play important roles as teacher educators and as mentors to non-Indigenous teachers and preservice teachers. We argue that it is important for schooling systems and teacher education to create and formalise opportunities for non-Indigenous teachers and preservice teachers to listen to, and learn from their Indigenous colleagues.*

### Introduction

*If white people listened to the black people that work in education, we'd be way further ahead (interview with Tom).*

There is a significant body of literature and evidence to suggest that non-Indigenous teachers in Australia simply do not know enough about how to teach Indigenous children. Despite the best intentions and commitment from many teachers, most have inadequate understandings of appropriate pedagogies and the complexities of Indigenous cultures, knowledge and identities (Brayboy & Maughan, 2009; Malin & Maidment, 2003; Partington, 2003; Villegas, Neugebauer, & Venegas, 2008). The strategies that have been successful for non-Indigenous students are often ineffective for Indigenous students who are the most educationally disadvantaged group in the nation (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2007; Doyle & Hill, 2008; Hughes & Hughes, 2010; Klenowski & Gertz, 2009). Their educational outcomes are generally well below those of non-Indigenous students (Aird, Miller, van Megen & Buys, 2010; New South Wales Department of Education and Training, 2005; Nolan, Hill & Harris, 2010; Steering Committee for the Review of Government Service Provision, 2007) and their school participation rates are lower than those of their non-Indigenous peers. They leave school earlier and are less likely to complete secondary schooling (Doyle & Hill, 2008; Hughes & Hughes 2010). They are also underrepresented in universities and other tertiary education institutions, comprising in 2008, less than 1% of all enrolments at Australian Higher Education Institutions and 1.0% of commencements (DEEWR, 2008). Furthermore, 26% of those aged 25-64 have obtained a non-school

qualification and 5% have obtained a Bachelor degree and above. This compares unfavourably to the non-Indigenous population where 53% has a non-school qualification and 21% has a bachelor degree (ABS, 2008). They are also more likely than non-Indigenous students to be inappropriately placed in special education classes (De Plevitz, 2006) because their needs are misdiagnosed. For example, a review into Indigenous education in New South Wales (NSW) found that classes for young offenders, the learning disabled and those with behaviour disorders, comprised a disproportionate number of Indigenous students (Aboriginal Education Consultative Group, 2004). De Plevitz (2006) suggests that the high proportion of Indigenous students in Special Education classes can be attributed to culturally biased testing. According to Nelson-Barber & Trumbull (2007, p. 134), people 'create meaning from experience in culturally determined ways, individuals have predisposed notions of how to respond to questions, solve problems, and so forth. It follows that these predispositions influence the ways in which they respond to test items.' However, schooling systems generally perpetuate a view of learning that fails to take into account culturally diverse practices, values and beliefs.

An ongoing challenge for those working in education systems and teacher education is how to better prepare teachers to work productively with Indigenous students. One way to do this is to involve Indigenous teachers in teacher education at both the inservice and preservice levels. Although there is no single, unitary way of being Indigenous, teachers who have grown up and completed their schooling as 'Indigenous' learners have a wealth of experience and knowledge about the pedagogies that are likely to be successful for Indigenous students. They understand Indigenous worldviews and have first-hand experience of the challenges facing Indigenous students in White schooling systems. In this article we draw on a selection of data obtained from interviews with Indigenous teachers to highlight their knowledge about: 'Indigenous ways of knowing'; 'Indigenous learners' lives beyond the classroom' and 'Building relationships with Indigenous students and 'communities'. We suggest that Indigenous teachers can potentially play important roles as teacher educators and as mentors to non-Indigenous teachers and preservice teachers. We argue that it is important for schooling systems and teacher education to create and formalise opportunities for non-Indigenous teachers and preservice teachers to listen to, and learn from their Indigenous colleagues.

## **The Study**

The study on which this article reports brought together a team of Indigenous and non-Indigenous researchers to investigate the nature of former, current and beginning Indigenous educators' experiences in Australian schools. The study aimed to investigate the experiences and career pathways of Australian Indigenous teachers in order to better understand the factors that contribute to their under representation and the low retention rates in the teaching profession. The study had two main components; A) qualitative case studies of 50 current and former Indigenous teachers who had either remained teaching in classrooms, left teaching to take on administrative, teacher education or other roles in schools or systems, or who had left the field of education entirely; B) longitudinal case studies of 5 newly graduated Indigenous teachers commencing employment in 2004 and 2005.

The data for this paper were drawn from Part A of the study and were collected via in-depth semi-structured interviews ranging in length from 1.5 - to 2 hours conducted by individual members of the research team between 2004-2007. The 38 interview questions aimed to elicit chronological, experiential and evaluative accounts of the participants' experiences and were grouped into 5 broad categories; Personal Information and History;

Early Schooling Experiences; Teacher Education; Teaching Experiences; Indigenous Education. Some examples of specific questions are; Who or what was your greatest inspiration to become a teacher?; Tell us about your teacher education; Were there any tensions and overlaps between being a teacher and your responsibilities to community and family?

Two-thirds of our interviewees were current teachers, both male and female and ranging in age from 25 to 61. At the time of data collection they were at varying stages of their careers, that is, early-career (less than 5 years experience), mid-career (less than 15 years experience) and late-career. There was one deputy principal included in the sample. The teachers were located in primary and secondary school contexts across metropolitan, regional city, rural and remote areas of the Australian states of Victoria and NSW. The former teachers had also taught across a range of schools and locations for varying periods of time. At the time of data collection they were working in a number of occupations including teacher education, educational consultancy and development, as officers within government departments outside education or in the retail trade. Two interviewees had retired from teaching. The participants were volunteers from extended networks of Aboriginal teachers to which we and our Aboriginal co-researchers are connected.

All interviews were audio recorded, transcribed verbatim and returned to individual participants for checking and verification. The data were analysed collaboratively via processes of intercultural dialogue between members of the Indigenous and non-Indigenous research team. We interrogated and debated the data, drawing on our individual professional and personal experiences including a complex range of insider/outsider perspectives. Such collaborative cross-cultural dialogue supported the work of critical reflection on our own positioning and biases as researchers. The data analysis, informed by discourse and thematic analysis perspectives, examined the data for broad themes and recurring discursive patterns that could identify practices that shaped how the teachers positioned themselves and were positioned within discourses of schooling. We also attended to the silences, to what was not said and how discursive practices shape teachers' experiences in implied, but not explicit ways. Additionally, a focus group consisting of eight volunteer participants was convened in order to follow up issues that emerged as significant across a number of the individual interviews, and to validate the emerging themes of the analysis through a collective member-checking process.

In what follows, we discuss one of the main themes that emerged from the data; 'Indigenous Teachers' Knowledge'. We present the data under three subthemes: 'Understanding Indigenous Learners' Ways of Knowing'; 'Understanding Indigenous Learners Out-of-School Lives' and 'Understanding the Importance of Building Relationships Within and Beyond School'. We then discuss the potential of Indigenous teachers to be mentors and providers of inservice and preservice teacher education. We conclude by discussing some limitations of our findings.

### **Understanding Indigenous Learners' Ways of Knowing**

Lisa Delpit claims that in order to be an effective teacher it is necessary 'to really see, to really know the students we must teach' (Delpit, 1995, p. 183). 'Really knowing' students means knowing what knowledge they bring to the classroom and how their cultural practices, values and beliefs shape them as learners and, as producers of knowledge (Castagno, McKinley & Brayboy, 2008; Santoro, 2009). Many teachers however, struggle to really know Indigenous students. One reason for this is that 'Indigenous people have their own ways of looking at and relating to the world, the universe, and each other' (Barnhardt &

Kawagley, 2005, p. 10). While Indigenous knowledge can be seen to parallel Western epistemologies or types of knowledge, Indigenous ways of knowing can be seen to refer to pedagogy, methods of teaching and learning (Pember, 2008). Indigenous knowledge and Indigenous ways of knowing are about the connected concepts of *what* one knows and *how* one comes to know it. The work of Klenowski & Gertz in Australia highlights how ‘teachers need to distinguish the “funds of knowledge” that Indigenous students draw on and how teachers need to adopt culturally responsive pedagogy to open up the curriculum and assessment practice to allow for different ways of knowing and being’ (2009, p. 36).

In order to develop pedagogies that they believe work with Indigenous students, the teachers in our study drew on their understanding about, and direct experiences of, the informal and experiential learning and teaching that occurs between children, parents and elders in Indigenous communities. For example, in the following excerpt of interview data, Deb, a former teacher who is now working as a senior administrator in the health sector, describes her teaching as characterized by a ‘hands-on’ approach to teaching.

*Deb: ... in reflection, my style of teaching was probably teaching the way Aboriginal people teach. Not the way conventional teaching and learning happens ... We would do lots of hands on ... and then the paper and pen stuff would come after concepts were well and truly understood. By not forcing them to pen and paper too early, it gave them that time to work it out for themselves.*

*Interviewer: Was that approach something that was covered in your teacher education course?*

*Deb: No. It was just something that I did. I pulled from my own experiences some of the things that I have learnt.*

(Officially, the term ‘Indigenous Australians’ refers to Aboriginal peoples from mainland Australia and the Torres Straits. Many Indigenous people do not use the term ‘Indigenous’ when identifying themselves and their communities and prefer to use ‘Aboriginal’. Throughout this article, ‘Aboriginal’ is used from this point on whenever we refer to the participants who prefer this practice, when we refer to their experiences or when we quote them)

Similarly, Cathy, a former teacher who has moved in and out of teaching over the last fifteen years to work as a teacher educator, an education consultant, and a tutor to Indigenous children claims that hands-on learning is important for students who learn in tactile ways, that is, ‘by touching and feeling and ... you know, exploration’. She goes on to describe non-Indigenous views of learning and teaching as compartmentalized, discrete and bounded, and in direct contrast to Indigenous ways of knowing which are de-compartmentalized and fluid.

*... western teaching and learning is very compartmentalized. It's very boxed and it has to fit. [...] We don't fit into a box. We're surrounding the box. We're part of the box. We're inside the box. We're all over the box. We're like the air, we're all around. ... White teachers don't see that.*

Although taking specific examples of learning and suggesting they are applicable to all Indigenous peoples in all contexts is potentially problematic because it constructs Indigenous people as a homogenous group, there is a significant body of literature that supports the notion that in general, Indigenous people learn in practical ways involving observation and doing. For example, Barnhardt and Kawagley suggest that education for Indigenous Alaskans occurs through ‘demonstration and observation accompanied by thoughtful stories in which the lessons were embedded’ (2005, p. 10). They go on to argue:

Although Western science and education tend to emphasize compartmentalized knowledge that is often decontextualized and taught in the detached setting of a classroom or laboratory, Indigenous people have traditionally acquired their knowledge through direct experience in the natural

world. For them, the particulars come to be understood in relation to the whole. (2005, p. 11)

While Nakata believes that it is important for teachers to understand how Indigenous students' ways of knowing are different from those of non-Indigenous students because such understandings 'make teachers more sensitive to their students and [...] reveal the complexity of the factors with which they are dealing' (2003, p. 9), he issues a note of caution. He believes that the cultural difference schema, particularly from the perspective of Indigenous students' differences from non-Indigenous students, that is used to explain the problems faced by Indigenous people in regard to education, 'stands to provide a convenient explanation of student failure that exonerates teacher practice' (Nakata, 2003, p. 9). In other words, in understanding the differences between Indigenous and non-Indigenous students, there is the risk that teachers will view such differences as barriers – and see the problem resting with the students, rather than inappropriate pedagogies. According to Young, '...there's a very fine line between having a problem to solve and becoming a problem' (2004, p. 110). Furthermore, there is the risk that the development of particular knowledge or skills in Indigenous students may be neglected if such knowledge is perceived by teachers to be culturally inappropriate, or is not prioritised as important. Nakata (2003) illustrates this point by giving the example of how teachers might prioritise the teaching of Indigenous children via oral and aural language because these are widely believed to be their preferred learning styles. However, in doing so, teachers may neglect the development of written literacy, and skills that are essential for the full participation of Indigenous people in Australian society.

In the interests of equity and social justice, it is important that teachers work towards the same fundamental educational outcomes for Indigenous students as non-Indigenous students. 'The task for the teacher, then, is to provide the conditions for children to learn appropriate behaviours for different contexts. If we do not, we will diminish the child's chances for success and opportunities in the modern world' (Nakata, 2003, p. 10).

### **Understanding Indigenous Learners' Out-of-School Lives**

In addition to understanding Indigenous students' ways of knowing, teachers also need to understand students' out-of-school lives and the conditions that facilitate or impede their educational success. Our participants know well, either because of their own personal experiences or because they are members of close knit Aboriginal communities, how the economic and social disadvantage that characterises the lives of many Indigenous students can impact on their aspirations and performance at school. Dianne says:

*There are so many kids there [at the school] that remind me of me at that age. And you just feel for these kids because you know their home lives will be crap and they're just in this bad vicious cycle...There are kids coming to school who haven't had a decent sleep all night, they mightn't have had breakfast and they're hungry. They can't concentrate – they're thinking about other things. White teachers just have no idea! They have no idea what the kids' home lives are like.*

Clare makes a similar point when she illustrates the mismatch between what is the lived reality for many Indigenous students and expectations from school:

*White teachers expect that you have access to books, computers or your parents have an education and your main focus when you go home is your education. Whereas, you know, for a lot of Aboriginal communities, it's just a struggle to exist. [...] it's expected that you'll sit down and do your homework because,*

*you know, Mum has time or Dad has time. Like, both of my parents worked long hours and my Dad had two jobs so there wasn't much that you saw of him.*

The connections between poverty, social disadvantage and poor educational achievement are well established in the research literature in regards to marginalised groups, including Indigenous people (Beresford, 2003; Thomson, 2003). However, the comments above suggest that often non-Indigenous teachers do not fully engage with how poverty can negatively impact on Indigenous students' engagement with schooling.

### **Understanding the Importance of Building Relationships Within and Beyond School**

Much research suggests that sound home-school relationships are important to improving educational outcomes for all students (Hill & Taylor, 2004), but particularly for Indigenous students (Hunter & Schwab, 2003). However, schools can often appear intimidating and hostile places to Indigenous parents who have negative memories of their own schooling. They are therefore often reluctant to be involved in their children's school education. This is frequently taken by teachers to mean that Indigenous parents have few aspirations for their children and don't care about their children's education. However, it is the system that fails their children by not addressing their needs and by drawing on curricula and pedagogies that are in some instances, a re-inscription of colonising practices (Hickling-Hudson & Ahlquist, 2003).

Mark, a former teacher now working in community health in a small remote rural town with a high Indigenous population, believes some of the difficulties teachers experience in motivating Indigenous students and gaining the support of parents are due, in part, to poor home-school relationships. In order to mend fractured relationships and build and sustain strong school-home partnership, he believes it is important to establish informal social networks between parents and teachers outside school contexts where relationships of trust can be developed.

*Things will change if the school teachers are actively engaged with the parents in the community and it's visible, it's seen, it's recognized, the kids see it and the parents will say, well 'OK, there's nothing wrong with Mrs. Smith, she's nice, a nice lady, good teacher'. They'll come and have a yarn [a chat] and when you see them up the street at the grocery shop they'll say 'hello' to you. They won't only talk to you on the night of the parent interview and then when they see you in the street, look away or cross the street because they can see you coming. [They will say to their children] 'Hey, you're going to school, no mucking around here, get up there'.*

Mark goes on to say that the teachers in his town have minimum involvement in community activities such as sport and social clubs – they live in a different area of the town from the majority of Indigenous families and often leave the town on weekends and school holidays. This lack of personal investment in the community can be due, in part, to many teachers' aspirations to return to the city or to larger regional centres as soon as they can obtain transfers.

In general, schools that have high populations of students from low socio-economic status and/or diverse ethnic groups, are challenging schools to work in and staff turnover is often high (Cochran-Smith, 2004; Osborne, 2003; Sharplin, O'Neill, & Chapman, 2011). As Grant, one of our informants who teaches in a remote rural school with ninety percent Indigenous population says, 'We get a massive turnover. [...] We've had teachers last one day, we've had teachers last one week, we've had some drive into town hit the roundabout, turn around and leave again'. High teacher turnover in schools with significant Indigenous

student populations works against teachers developing long-term relationships with students and their families. If teachers were better prepared to work with Indigenous students and their families, their levels of job satisfaction may be higher and they may be prepared to remain in schools with high Indigenous student populations. White and Reid claim that ‘‘staffing churn’’ results in a perceived lack of commitment by schools to the communities they serve, often resulting in a distancing of school staff from the community’ (2008, p.3).

Most of our interviewees believe that for many Indigenous students, schools appear regimented and relationships with staff are too formal. For example, Raelene, a current primary teacher, says:

*We’re more relaxed with the kids. I’ll get out with the kids, will kick a football around with them and I’ll walk around the yard at lunch time. I’ll do all that sort of stuff, you know. I’ll sit under the tree with them, I’ll walk the whole oval. I’ll talk to the kids, try and remember what I said to them last week and see if they’ve fixed up the problem they had last week, you know.*

*White teachers don’t do that sort of thing*

She goes on to say that such relationships can be sometimes regarded by her non-Indigenous colleagues as too informal and ‘familiar’ and inappropriate for teacher-student relationships. However, the notion of what is considered ‘respectful’ and ‘appropriate’ is a matter of culture, values and beliefs. The relationships between adults and children in Indigenous communities are different from those in non-Indigenous communities. Furthermore, from an early age, Indigenous children are generally encouraged to make their own decisions and to take greater responsibility for themselves and for younger siblings than is the case for non-Indigenous children (Nelson & Allison, 2000; Saggars & Sims, 2005). This can lead to strong autonomy and independence; characteristics that can be interpreted by non-Indigenous teachers as disrespectful and disobedient. Such behaviours, according to Partington, can ‘lead mainstream teachers to impose more controlling behaviours on them than non-Indigenous students’ (2003, p. 41).

Our interviewees were eager to point out however that despite what seems to be a less formal approach to relationships with students, their expectations of Aboriginal students were high and that the nature of their informal relationships did not mean they compromised standards. Allison claims:

*I stand firm on what I say. I back what I say and I’m very fair with all children but with the Aboriginal student, you know I’m hard on them. No excuses.*

### **Indigenous Teachers as Mentors, Teacher Educators and Producers of Pedagogical Knowledge**

The knowledge base of non-Indigenous teachers needs to be expanded if they are to address the learning needs of Indigenous students. As Partington claims: ‘The efforts of governments and their agencies to bring about change in education will not succeed by focusing on the students. It is essential that teachers change first’ (2003, p. 46). However, the knowledge that teachers acquire must be informed by the wisdom of those most closely connected to Indigenous communities because the existing knowledge that most teachers and preservice teachers have about Indigenous learners has been produced by non-Indigenous people. It is racialised and constructed through, and by, discourses of Whiteness. According to Moreton-Robinson, ‘Whiteness establishes the limits of what can be known about the other through itself, disappearing beyond or behind the limits of this knowledge it creates in the other’s name’ (2004, p. 75). Colman-Dimon, drawing on the work of Spivak suggests that



for this reason it is important to ‘listen to the plural voices of those “Othered” as constructors and representatives of wisdom and authentic knowledge’ (2000, p. 37) rather than trying to *know* them through discourses of Whiteness. Far too often ‘Aborigines have often been represented as objects — as the “known”. Rarely are they represented as subjects, as “knowers”’ (Moreton-Robinson, 2004, p. 75).

While this research has highlighted the knowledge of our Indigenous teacher participants in regard to Indigenous ways of knowing, Indigenous learners’ out-of-school lives and the importance of relationships within and beyond school, it has also highlighted that they feel their expertise is not sufficiently valued and that they are not well enough recognised for their contribution to the education of Indigenous students. Many of our interviewees reported that they were regarded by some colleagues and parents as less able than their non-Indigenous peers and that their qualifications were not regarded as entirely ‘legitimate’. Tom, whose quote appeared at the beginning of this article, is a former teacher now working as an advisor for a state education department. He highlights how he was constantly asked by both colleagues and students’ parents about the nature of his teaching qualifications — questions he says his non-Indigenous colleagues were never asked. Deb, now working as a senior officer in a government health organisation, tells us, ‘We knew that we had to be better than good to be accepted’. We have written elsewhere about how Indigenous teachers are often marginalised within schools, rarely hold senior positions, experience institutional and individual racism, are susceptible to burnout and are at risk of resigning prematurely (Authors 2006a; Authors, 2006b).

Schooling and teacher education systems need to find ways of valuing and legitimizing Indigenous teachers’ knowledge and insights about Indigenous learners and Indigenous education. One avenue through which this might occur is through professional learning opportunities in which non-Indigenous teachers and preservice teachers are mentored by Indigenous teachers. In recent years, the need for, and effectiveness of formal mentoring in general has been well investigated and is commonplace as a form of professional learning, reflection and engagement, especially in regards to easing new graduates and preservice teachers into the profession. The mentoring of non-Indigenous teachers by their Indigenous colleagues has the potential to provide pedagogical support as well as advice about Indigenous cultures and ways of knowing and the importance of establishing and maintaining home-school relationships. Such professional development may be of particular importance to teachers, both experienced and inexperienced, who work in hard-to-staff schools, such as remote schools with high Indigenous populations, where there is significant staff turnover. Furthermore, mentoring can have significant advantages for mentors. It can result in collaborative relationships in which mentors feel valued, have opportunities to share their expertise and are exposed to different perspectives brought to the relationships by mentees. ‘As mentors begin to think about concepts and topics from their mentees’ points of view, they examine their own philosophies and often articulate their teaching methods and styles in new ways’ (Gilles & Wilson, 2004, p. 91).

However, establishing Indigenous teachers as mentors is not unproblematic. Far too often, Indigenous teachers carry the burden of being responsible for all aspects of Indigenous education. They are subject to high expectations from both school and wider communities to be ‘all things to all people’, that is; to act as a ‘bridge’ between Indigenous and non-Indigenous communities; to be role models for Indigenous students and to take responsibility for the implementation of Indigenous education policies and initiatives at the school level (Authors, 2006b). If they are to be also responsible for mentoring their non-Indigenous colleagues, it is important that such work does not become simply one more responsibility. If it is not formalized and given adequate recognition, there is the risk that ad hoc staffroom and corridor conversations with colleagues about practice will add to Indigenous teachers’ workloads, but will carry little recognition. They need to be offered time allowances for

mentoring, and, as recognition of the importance of their knowledge, increased remuneration in the form of higher duties allowance needs to be considered. As Young asks, 'When does asking people to provide the solutions to their own problems become too onerous and an unmanageable imposition? "Dumping" without also providing adequate resources to address the circumstances is merely exacerbating the problem' (2004, p. 110).

We are also aware that opportunities for non-Indigenous teachers to engage in formal mentor relationships with non-Indigenous teachers are limited. Indigenous teachers are grossly underrepresented in the Australian teaching profession. Data from a survey of Australian teachers in 2007 (McKenzie et al., 2008) found that only 0.7 percent of all teachers are Indigenous. However, those Indigenous teachers who *are* working in schools are likely to be in contexts where there are significant populations of Indigenous students. Therefore, while their knowledge and insights may only be passed on directly to a relatively small number of teachers, they may have significant impact on teaching practices and teachers' knowledge base.

Additionally, Indigenous teachers have significant contributions to make to the university based component of preservice teacher education. However, universities, like schools, have few Indigenous staff members. This means that, in general, course materials for teacher education subjects are designed with little input from Indigenous practitioners. Similarly, few Australian preservice teachers have opportunities within their degree courses, to be taught by Indigenous teacher educators. It is clear that there needs to be increased efforts by universities to recruit Indigenous teachers into Education Faculties and Schools of Education and such efforts must also be accompanied by appropriate support networks and career pathways. At the very least, consideration must be given to the secondment of Indigenous teachers from schools and/or community education contexts into teacher education.

### **Concluding Remarks**

While we have claimed in this paper the need to listen to, and learn from Indigenous teachers, we do not want to suggest that this is the only solution to an education system that is clearly not working for Indigenous young people. There can be no single solution to any complex issue. Indigenous peoples are not a culturally homogenous group – their cultures are multiple and complex and depending on where they teach, where they grew up and whether they are within, or beyond their traditional country. Individual Indigenous teachers do not and cannot know everything there is to know about Indigenous learners and Indigenous cultures. As Scott, one of our interviewees who is currently working as a teacher in a secondary school says, 'Being Aboriginal doesn't mean you automatically know everything about being Aboriginal'. Similarly, we do not want to suggest that all non-Indigenous teachers know little about Indigenous learners — some teachers can, and do teach Indigenous students well. However, it is time that all education professionals, whether teachers, policy makers or teacher educators listened to, and learned from Indigenous teachers. Maybe then, some common understandings and assumptions about what is 'normal' for Indigenous and non-Indigenous learners, can be disrupted.

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