



**Quality Educators Produce Quality Outcomes –
Some thoughts on what this means in the context of
teaching Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students
in Australia’s public education system**

**A report and discussion paper on the outcomes of the AEU’s Annual
Indigenous Education Seminar held in Hobart, January, 2004**

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Background

Over the past three years, the Australian Education Union (AEU) has revitalised its campaigning in relation to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander education. One of the major features of the renewed Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander education campaign has been a focus on ensuring that all teachers in the government system¹ receive access to a comprehensive program of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander studies, both in their pre-service teacher education program, and as an ongoing in-service program to support their teaching practice. The AEU is currently campaigning for State and Territory Governments to illustrate their commitment in this area by mandating Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander studies as a condition of employment for teachers.

As a component of this campaign, the AEU is committed to ensuring that its members are able to engage in the debate through a variety of mechanisms, including professional forums and discussion groups. The first of these was initiated at the AEU's annual Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Seminar, which was held in Hobart on the 15th January, 2004. It is intended that each of the Union's Branches and Associated Bodies² will run similar forums, based around a similar theme in the future. This discussion paper gives a brief outline on the 'quality teaching' debate and outlines the themes and elements discussed by seminar participants. It is intended that this paper provide a basis for further discussions amongst the members of the AEU, facilitated through Branches and Associated Bodies.

The Debate on "Quality" at a Glance

The notion of a 'quality' educator is somewhat controversial and topical. Many educators fear that discussion in this area may lead to an imposed, punitive approach to the development and implementation of the concept of 'quality' as it applies to the teaching process. Nevertheless, the debate on teacher quality is now well established, and teachers must engage in it.

The MCEETYA taskforce on Teacher Quality and Educational Leadership was established in July 2001 by the Federal, State and Territory Ministers for Education with three terms of reference specific to the issue of teacher quality and standards. They are:

- Teacher preparation and development aimed at improving the quality of teaching and learning;
- Establishing a fully integrated professional development regime to support quality teaching; and
- Professional standards for teachers and principals, both for entry to the profession and to meet the ongoing needs of students over time.³

In 2003, this taskforce endorsed a National Framework for Teaching Standards⁴ which is stated to be developmental in its approach⁵ and will influence the development of standards for teachers.⁶

¹ Including Early Childhood, School and TAFE teachers

² See AEU Annual Federal Conference decision,

³ GET WEB REFERENCE

⁴ See http://www.curriculum.edu.au/mctyapdf/national_framework.pdf

⁵ Alegounaris, T (2003) *Progress Report: MCEETYA Taskforce on Teacher Quality and Educational Leadership in Report of a National Forum on Teacher Standards, Quality and Professionalism*, Canberra, 26th May 2003, Australian College of Educators and Department of Science, Education and Training, Canberra.

⁶ Martin, R (2004) *Educational Leadership and Teaching for the Twenty First Century* Australian Education Union Annual Federal Conference Papers – Hobart 2004 – Australian Education Union, Southbank, Melbourne.

In 2003-04, the Department of Science, Education and Training (DEST), undertook a review of Teaching and Teacher Education⁷. The focus of this review concentrated primarily on science, technology and mathematics, but broadly commented on issues pertinent to Australia's teaching profession. The AEU Federal Office's submission⁸ to the review criticised its narrow focus, outlining that issues such as teacher shortages (including recruitment and retention), Indigenous education, intensifying workloads, morale, remuneration and the conflicting public demands on teachers were a "national problem which require(d) a national solution".

The review recommended the establishment of a National Institute for Quality Teaching and School Leadership (NIQTSL), which was subsequently established and launched by the Federal Minister for Education, Science and Training in June 2004. One of the terms of reference of the new NIQTSL is to "support the implementation of the National Framework for Professional Standards for Teaching agreed by MCEETYA in 2003 and facilitate the development and implementation of nationally agreed teaching and leadership standards."⁹ It is pertinent to note that there has been little mention of the place of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education in the lead up to and establishment of the National Institute for Quality Teaching and School Leadership.

The AEU has long been an advocate for the establishment of national standards¹⁰ for teachers and has been an active participant in the debate on "Teacher Standards, Quality and Professionalism"¹¹, including engaging in work currently occurring around the establishment of the National Institute for Quality Teaching and School/Educational Leadership. At a State and Territory level, the AEU's Branches and Associated Bodies have been active advocates for, and participants in, the establishment of teacher registration authorities.

Although many of the AEU's members have outlined a range of understandable reservations about the directions of the current debate and the implications for the implementation of a range of externally imposed directions, there is also a belief that the failure of the AEU to adopt an engaging approach could lead to a range of worse case scenarios. As Martin¹² states:

There is an understandable temptation for the AEU and its members, and teachers generally to turn their back on the debate, or to respond in a defensive and derogatory manner. Many of the propositions are easily rejected and their credibility questioned...

⁷ Dow, Professor Kwong Lee (2003) *Australia's Teachers: Australia's Future – Advancing Innovation, Science, Technology and Mathematics – Main Report*, Australian Government, Department of Science, Education and Training, Canberra.

⁸ Australian Education Union (2003) *Submission to the Review of Teaching and Teacher Education*, Australian Education Union Federal Office, Melbourne. p. 1.

⁹ DEST (2004) *Media Release - Strengthening the Teaching Profession: Launch of the National Institute for Quality Teaching and School Leadership* from <http://www.dest.gov.au/minimas/live/nelson/2004/06/n721030604.asp> (accessed 11.10.04 9.34am)

¹⁰ AEU (1997) *Submission to The Senate Inquiry into the Status of Teachers - May 1997* Australian Education Union Federal Office, Southbank, Melbourne

¹¹ Commonwealth of Australia (2003) *Report of a National Forum on Teacher Standards, Quality and Professionalism, Canberra, 26th May 2003*, Australian College of Educators and Department of Science, Education and Training, Canberra.

¹² *ibid*

However, such a reaction presents a very real danger that it will simply ensure that the debate continues without the AEU playing a decisive role in it. Left on their own, many of the current forces seem quite capable of building a momentum which, if nothing else, will become a major irritant to teachers. There are several organisations keen to assume the mantle of “voice of the profession” and engage in the debate.

External to the work done on the establishment of the NIQTSL and the MCEETYA Taskforce on Teacher Quality and Educational Leadership is the work done by the previous MCEETYA Taskforce on Indigenous Education¹³, which resulted in the publication of “Draft Standards for Accomplished teachers of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students”¹⁴ in 2001.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education – the AEU context

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education at the Federal level of AEU is governed under the direction of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Committee (ATSIEC) and the TAFE ATSIEC. When planning for the 2004 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Seminar, significant debate occurred around whether it would be advantageous to run a seminar based around the theme ‘quality educators produce quality outcomes’. The committees accepted that the topic was somewhat controversial, but nevertheless decided to proceed, as it was considered essential for a number of reasons.

Firstly, the debate occurring around the topic has largely excluded issues to do with educating Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students, secondly, the members of the committee believed it was important and significant to engage the whole Union, not just its Indigenous members, in a discussion about ‘quality’ in relation Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander education and thirdly, the committees believe in the importance of the profession, through the professional voice of the AEU, driving change and challenging current paradigms and wanted to acknowledge that much of the existing Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander education campaign work of the AEU, including the teacher education campaign was a part of this.

Additionally, 87.5%¹⁵ of all Indigenous students attend Government schools. Various statistics show that, whilst improvements have been made over the past ten years, the educational outcomes for these students are well below the same indicators for non-Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students in every category, including literacy and numeracy, school attendance and retention rates. It is therefore vital that the debate on teacher quality as it relates to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander education, engages and mobilises teachers working in the Government schooling sector.

Collation of themes from seminar

In this context outlined above, approximately 100 participants at the AEU’s annual Indigenous Education Seminar held in Hobart in January, 2004, came together to workshop a

¹³ The taskforce on Indigenous Education was disbanded and replaced by the taskforce on Indigenous Education, Employment, Training and Youth in 2003

¹⁴ MCEETYA (2001) *Education of Teachers of Indigenous Students in Early Childhood Services and Schools* from <http://www.mceetya.edu.au/pdf/educationofteachersinecs.pdf> (accessed 11.10.04 10.06am)

¹⁵ DEST (2003) *National Report to Parliament on Indigenous Education and Training*, Department of Education, Science and Training, Canberra, p 20

range of questions and challenges, under the topic – “Quality Educators Produce Quality Outcomes.” The following section of the paper provides an overview of the discussions of the workshop groups at the seminar.

Question 1

What are the characteristics of a “Quality” educator of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students?

The discussion around this workshop question included the listing of many characteristics that participants deemed valuable for individual educators. There were many contributions which also encapsulated the role of a ‘quality system’, as it was thought that the development of individual characteristics occurred in the context of the educational system they worked within. “Just because someone is an excellent teacher in one environment does not mean they will be in the next,” said one participant. The importance of supportive school leadership was thought to be integral to the fostering of skills.

Quality Educators of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students have:

- *Cultural and cross-cultural understandings*, including an awareness of own culture and how this impacts on the teacher’s ability to work in a cross-cultural setting, an awareness of racism and the how this impacts on the development of personal attitudes, such as the harbouring of low expectations. They also have an understanding and acceptance of Indigenous culture at both a global and local level, including the ability to work within a local context, embrace local languages and to support local cultural values and knowledges.
- *High level communication skills* such as the ability to negotiate with parents and other community stakeholders. They have excellent listening, speaking skills and a sense of humour.
- *The ability to work in and within a community* which encapsulates the not only the physical aspect of locality, but also the social capacity to interact and engage with community members. Bringing the community experience in to the educational context and assisting students to develop a strong sense of their Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander identity was seen as imperative.
- *The ability to work as a member of a team and a broader collegial network* was seen as integral, including the ability to provide support for beginning teachers, and establish networks across the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander educational and broader communities. They have the ability to work collaboratively with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Workers and other ‘constants’ in the school.
- *A high level of professionalism and integrity* including a high level of industry knowledge and application of the tools of the ‘craft’ of teaching such as developing curricula and improved pedagogical practice. They establish high expectations for themselves and their students. They access professional development opportunities and use these as an opportunity to develop skills.

- *A high level of self and professional awareness* including the ability to reflect on, evaluate and improve one's performance.

Question 2

What support do educators need to develop the types of skills, qualities and characteristics required to be competent in working with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students?

Some workshop participants discussed the varying types of support that educators are already offered in education systems across the country, along with supports that should be available. The snapshot of State and Territory activities is not comprehensive, and concentrated primarily on pre-service and in-service training programs.

- In *South Australia*, there is an in-service course in teaching Aboriginal students which runs over a full term but it is outside of school hours and voluntary, which was seen to be not adequately valued by the employer. There is also 0.2 release time for teachers working in remote communities.
- In the *Northern Territory*, the Department is working with Batchelor Institute of Indigenous Education and Charles Darwin University to make ESL and hearing loss units compulsory in pre service training. The Department is also encouraging trainee teachers to do 10 weeks practicum in remote communities.
- In *Queensland*, there is a compulsory unit of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies at James Cook University. There was also a Graduate Diploma of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies course for teachers considering going to work in remote schools. But these were abolished. The Queensland Teachers' Union is fighting to get them back.
- In *Western Australia*, the Remote Teaching Service schools are a part of the merit selection process, where teachers must apply for appointment.

Discussions also occurred around the types of non-accredited support that should be offered. They included:

- Opportunities to spend time in an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community as a component of pre-service training.
- An induction program which allows educators time to meet and experience a community.
- Provision of relief teachers so that there is time and space for people to formally reflect on, evaluate and improve their practice.
- The establishment of formal mentoring relationships or collegial networks where people can find information and support if needed.
- Professional Development that is designed in response to educators needs.

- The development of internships to enable an extended experience for beginning teachers in structured and supported way.
- The building of status through job security and proper remuneration, particularly for AIEWs whose salaries are in some instances based on CDEP, but also for contract teachers.
- AIEWs also require access to quality training and professional development funded by department. They need proper relief backups to enable them to take up training opportunities outside the school.
- There is a need to make sure people are paid for all the work they do instead of a built in expectation of unpaid overtime.
- Indigenous Education Studies should be compulsory for all pre-service teachers.

Question 3

Who determines (or who should determine) these characteristics of ‘quality’ and what type of processes (if any) should be in place to measure and monitor these?

Discussion on this question was based around roles of specific groups and agencies and their interrelationships. There was concern around the punitive aspects of monitoring individuals, and it was thought monitoring should focus on a quality process – resources, team, curriculum, community engagement – and not on individual teachers, as teachers can only aim for the best outcomes for individual students. It was suggested that strong relationships and alliances need to be built between the community, employer and Union in the development, establishment and monitoring of such a process. As the school community is broad – teachers, admin staff, students, parents and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities – the process must be multi faceted and include feedback from all stakeholders. All participants must be empowered to effectively contribute to and participate in the process.

There is a need to build a range of indicators for individual educators to develop their own quality skills. These measures should be holistic in order to determine success of processes. It was thought that measuring standard educational outcomes was necessary to prove success but there was also a need to also measure outcomes outside the norm. Whatever the process, there needs to be safe mechanisms established for feedback and reflections, as in some instances personality conflicts could present a problem in the implementation of an evaluation process. It was also suggested that parental conservatism in relation to innovative curriculum and pedagogies could present a barrier to improvement. There is a need to recognise the needs of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students located in “mainstream” schools where they are not in a majority, and the impacts of working in a racist context, both within the school and the broader community.

Some suggested ideas to inform such a process include:

- The establishment of an Indigenous action group to monitor & measure at local level, or similarly a Board of Management within schools that reviews teachers each year, which would be a panel consisting of teachers, students, parents, community stakeholders and elders;

- Selection of staff; monitoring of results; measurements of individual and school “performance”;
- The development of clear protocols and for community engagement and clear understanding of rights and roles of all parties; and
- The development of an individual professional learning plan which identifies strengths/weaknesses of pedagogy and practice on a yearly basis.

Question 4

What support should be offered to educators who do not have these skills, qualities and characteristics?

Discussions around this topic included the role of varying agencies in supporting individuals and implementing processes. Workshop feedback made little mention of punitive processes for underperforming educators, concentrating instead on the need to develop sensitive procedures to address underperformance. It was felt that leadership played an important role in supporting individuals who are underperforming through the development of a school ethos of continual improvement.

Ensuring that ‘front-end’ strategies such as appropriate recruitment, selection and induction programs were in place were considered as imperative. These should be followed by strategies such as formal mentoring and access to further professional development. Preventative measures such as the development and introduction of strategies to support the retention of quality educators were also considered to be crucial. For educators working in remote communities, it was suggested they may need several weeks to get past initial culture shock and to learn whether they are likely to succeed working in such a context.

The Union should provide support for performance management processes and be actively engaged in them.

Strategies discussed include:

- Induction for all staff, including principals
- Mentoring
- Time to meet and experience community
- Professional Development designed in response to educators needs
- Ensuring appropriate pre-service education
- Harnessing of systemic support (from outside of the school).

Question 5

What are (or should be) the roles of the Union, Departments, Universities and other organisations such as Teacher Registration Boards in defining ‘quality’, implementing strategies and supporting the development of these skills in educators working in the public education system?

A range of inter-related roles were discussed and are listed below.

Role of the AEU (Federal Office and Branches and Associated Bodies)

- Lobby Government for resources from appropriate funding bodies
- Raising awareness of quality teaching
- Ensuring adequate remuneration and award conditions
- Provision of monitoring programs and training for Union reps
- Using certified agreements and bargaining to set goals and expectations
- Lobby and campaign for improved training & other policy changes
- Build activism within the union
- Union Training – survival skills
- Educating union members
- Involvement in discussion & teacher registration
- Actively concerned with raising standards & outcomes within framework of industrial rights
- Lobbying MCEETYA Taskforce on Quality Teaching for inclusion of Indigenous perspectives.

Departments

- Funding for P.D and networking
- Funding for regionalised resources
- Provision of a contact person/contact people
- Promote good practice
- Commitment to implement National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Policy – Mandatory Indigenous perspectives through out curriculum
- Ensure every teacher is given the opportunity to develop skills and knowledge.
- Make relevant studies and necessary prerequisite to employment as a teacher – build into registration and promotion criteria
- Fund their policies
- Staffing (and relief) levels for teachers and AIEWs that enables people to go off site for PD and training
- Walk the talk
- Take responsibility –don't pass off to schools
- Induction
- Support diverse training experiences through provision of accommodation

Universities & TAFE

- Accessible training for AIEWs
- Develop programs & ensure Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander people are employed to develop and deliver these programs.
- Develop and implement compulsory units
- Educate academics
- Ensure diverse experiences are covered in all subject offerings

Teacher Registration Boards

- Inclusive of union movement & education sectors

Conclusion

The intent of this paper is to provide a platform for discussions within the AEU through its Branches and Associated Bodies. Issues around the topic of 'quality teaching' are contentious and are best resolved when they are introduced through intensive debate in order to foster ownership by the profession, rather than imposed by 'the system'. However, many of the suggestions outlined above are not new, nor are they contentious from a policy perspective. They are though in need of reinvigoration if educational outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students are to be improved. Research suggests¹⁶ that the knowledge and performance of teachers is critical to the educational performance of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students and that in some systems, a culture where low expectations of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students pervades, and has resulted in the production of low outcomes¹⁷.

It is disappointing that the national debate on 'teacher quality' has been silent in relation to Indigenous education, given the policy commitments of governments at all levels to prioritise and improve outcomes for this cohort of students. The AEU must work to ensure that the needs of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students are at the forefront of this debate in the future. It is hoped that the 2004 seminar and this paper can provide some impetus for this to occur.

¹⁶ MCEETYA (2001) *Education of Teachers of Indigenous Students in Early Childhood Services and Schools* from <http://www.mceetya.edu.au/pdf/educationofteachersinecs.pdf> (accessed 15.10.04 - 7.45am)

¹⁷ Education Queensland (2004) *Indigenous education: A Ministerial Council for Educational Renewal Report to the Minister for Education and the Minister for the Arts* from <http://education.qld.gov.au/publication/production/reports/pdfs/indigenousreport.pdf> (accessed 15.10.04 7.42am);