

## Indigenous Pre-Service Teacher Education: Developing, Facilitating, and Maintaining Opportunities for Retention and Graduation

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**Abstract :** Within Australian tertiary institutions, the subject of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander education has been a major concern for many years. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander teachers are significantly under-represented in Australian schools and universities. High attrition rates in teacher education and in the teaching industry have contributed to a minimal growth rate in the numbers of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander teachers in previous years. There was an increase of 500 Indigenous teachers between 2001 and 2008 but these numbers still only account for one percent of teaching staff in government schools who identified as Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians (Ministerial Council for Education, Early Childhood Development and Youth Affairs 2010). Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander teachers are paramount in fostering student engagement and improving educational outcomes for Indigenous students. Increasing the numbers of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander teachers is also a key factor in enabling all students to develop understanding of and respect for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander histories, cultures, and language. An ambitious reform agenda to improve the recruitment and retention of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander teachers will be effective only through national collaborative action and co-investment by schools and school authorities, university schools of education, professional associations, and Indigenous leaders and community networks. Whilst the University of Southern Queensland currently attracts Indigenous students to its teacher education programs (61 students in 2013 with an average of 48 enrollments each year since 2010) there is significant attrition during pre-service training. The annual rate of exiting before graduation remains high at 22% in 2012 and was 39% for the previous two years. These participation and retention rates are consistent with other universities across Australia. Whilst aspirations for a growing number of Indigenous people to be trained as teachers is present, there is a significant loss of students during their pre-service training and within the first five years of employment as a teacher. These trends also reflect the situation where Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander teachers are significantly under-represented, making up less than 1% of teachers in schools across Australia. Through a project conducted as part the nationally funded More Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Teachers Initiative (MATSI) we aim to gain an insight into the reasons that impact Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander student's decisions to exit their program. Through the conduct of focus groups and interviews with two graduating cohorts of self-identified Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students, rich data has been gathered to gain an understanding of the barriers and enhancers to the completion of pre-service qualification and transition to teaching. Having a greater understanding of these reasons then allows the development of collaborative processes and procedures to increase retention and completion rates of new Indigenous teachers. Analysis of factors impacting on exit decisions and transitions has provided evidence to support change of practice, redesign and enhancement of relevant courses and development of policy/procedures to address identified issues.

**Keywords :** graduation, indigenous, pre-service teacher education, retention

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