

Increasing the number of Aboriginal teachers in the Northern Territory: Planning for the future

Dr Tracy Woodroffe, Charles Darwin University
2024 ACSES First Nations Fellow

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Acknowledgement of Country

The Australian Centre for Student Equity and Success acknowledges Indigenous peoples across Australia as the Traditional Owners of the lands on which the nation's campuses are situated. With a history spanning more than 60,000 years as the original educators, Indigenous peoples hold a unique place in our nation. We recognise the importance of their knowledge and culture, and reflect the principles of participation, equity, and cultural respect in our work. We pay our respects to Elders past, present, and future, and consider it an honour to learn from our Indigenous colleagues, partners, and friends.

Acknowledgements

Figure 1: The 2024 ACSES Fellows



Pictured (left to right): Dr Bret Stephenson, Dr Darren Garvey, Dr Tracy Woodroffe, Associate Professor Amani Bell, Ms Danielle Keenan, Professor Peter Anderson, and ACSES Research and Policy Program Director Professor Ian Li.

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Abbreviations

ABS	Australian Bureau of Statistics
ACER	Australian Council for Educational Research
ACSES	Australian Centre for Student Equity and Success
ATAR	Australian Tertiary Admissions Rank
CDU	Charles Darwin University
HEPPP	Higher Education Participation and Partnerships Program
IWST	Indigenous women's standpoint theory
MATSITI	More Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Teachers Initiative
NAPLAN	National Assessment Program – Literacy and Numeracy
NT	Northern Territory
RATE	Remote Aboriginal Teacher Education
RQ	Research question
SESA	Special education support assistant
TRB	Teacher Registration Board
VET	Vocational education and training
VETiS	Vocational education and training in schools

Clarification of terminology used throughout the report

Throughout this report, various terms are used to refer to the *First Peoples of Australia*. It is important to note that the focus of this research is specifically on *Aboriginal* people in the Northern Territory. In some instances, *Torres Strait Islander* people may be mentioned, such as when referencing data from sources such as the Australian Bureau of Statistics, which often aggregates data under the combined category of "*Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples*". In such cases, it is not always possible to isolate data specific to Aboriginal people. The term *Indigenous* also appears in this report for two reasons: (i) as a shorthand reference to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples when used in external sources or broader national contexts, and (ii) when referring to established theories, frameworks, or methodologies that commonly use the term.

The intention is not to cause confusion but to be as accurate as possible when speaking about the *First Peoples of Australia* in the various contexts within this report.

1. Executive summary

The Northern Territory (NT) faces a critical shortage of Aboriginal school teachers, despite having the highest proportion of Aboriginal students in Australia. Many of these students consistently perform below national educational benchmarks. Research indicates that increasing the number of Aboriginal teachers can positively affect student outcomes. This report presents findings from an Australian Centre for Student Equity and Success (ACSES) Fellowship study, *Increasing the Number of Aboriginal Teachers in the NT: Planning for the Future*, which explored how teaching is perceived as a career by Aboriginal senior secondary students and current Aboriginal teachers. The study also examined strategies to promote teaching as a viable and appealing profession, including the use of participants' own words and perspectives to inform culturally relevant promotional materials.

1.1 Key questions

Through our research, we aimed to answer the following research questions (RQs):

- RQ1: Do Aboriginal senior secondary students aspire to be teachers?
- RQ2: How can we encourage more Aboriginal senior secondary students to want to become teachers?
- RQ3: What do existing Aboriginal teachers and students think are positive reasons to become a teacher?
- RQ4: How do Aboriginal teachers think teaching should be promoted to other Aboriginal people?

1.2 Research design

This study employed a mixed methods approach, integrating both quantitative and qualitative data to establish baseline insights and capture the nuanced perspectives of individual participants. This complementary research design enabled a deeper understanding of the lived experiences of Aboriginal people within the broader research context. All participants identified as Aboriginal, ensuring the research was grounded in Aboriginal perspectives. Importantly, the study did not treat Aboriginal Australians as a homogenous group; instead, the analysis and findings highlighted the diversity of Aboriginal voices across the NT's five regions, four levels of remoteness, and three education sectors—public, Catholic, and independent—thereby amplifying perspectives often overlooked in mainstream discourse.

Aboriginal senior secondary students were invited to complete a brief online survey, which was designed to be accessible and minimally time-consuming, via Qualtrics. This fit within the ethical requirements of the NT Department of Education and Training for gaining approval to conduct research. The success of the project relied on gaining several approvals to conduct research: from the Charles Darwin University (CDU) Human Research Ethics Committee, the NT Department of Education and Training, the Catholic Education Office NT, and the independent Indigenous schools choosing to participate. It also relied on the decision of each principal to disseminate information to teachers and students, or not.

A total of 23 students participated. Fully qualified Aboriginal teachers were also invited to participate, with the option of completing an online survey or participating in an interview. Thirteen teachers contributed to the study—10 via the survey and three through interviews. Quantitative data and short answer responses were analysed using Qualtrics, and NVivo was employed for thematic analysis of open-ended responses, enabling a rich interpretation of participant narratives.

1.3 Findings

A central finding of this study is the lack of accessible and culturally relevant information about teaching as a career for Aboriginal people in the NT. Both senior secondary students and qualified Aboriginal teachers emphasised the need for more proactive communication. Students expressed concern that they were rarely engaged in conversations about their career aspirations, particularly regarding teaching. They requested face-to-face interactions to explore the possibility of becoming a teacher and noted a desire for encouragement, even when they had doubts about their own capabilities—particularly in relation to English proficiency. Despite these concerns, many students indicated they would consider teaching if they were explicitly told that it was a viable option. One-third of student respondents reported an interest in becoming a teacher.

Aboriginal teachers described teaching as a deeply rewarding profession and highlighted the importance of sharing personal experiences—preferably in person—to inspire others. They also noted that an individual's experience of schooling significantly influences their interest in teaching. Whereas some teachers were motivated by positive school experiences, others were driven by a desire to improve the system, challenge racism, and provide better educational experiences than they had received.

To promote teaching effectively among Aboriginal communities, it is essential to ensure that students have positive schooling experiences. This foundational step must be followed by the provision of clear, culturally appropriate information about teaching pathways. Communication should include practical details about teacher education, such as behaviour management training, support for passing the Literacy and Numeracy Test for Initial Teacher Education, and options for studying without leaving one's community.

Participants also identified the need for an Aboriginal teacher role model platform or association. Such a platform could support mentorship, provide professional development opportunities, and offer formal recognition for leadership contributions—potentially through teacher registration boards.

These findings are relevant to the NT Department of Education and Training for local recruitment strategies, and potentially to interstate education departments seeking to understand cultural nuances necessary in promoting teaching as a career. They also inform recruitment efforts at CDU, and potentially other teacher training institutions. NT schools, career advisors, and vocational education and training in schools (VETiS) educators should use these insights to better support and guide Aboriginal students towards teaching careers, ensuring that positive, empowering messages are consistently communicated. Importantly, to honour the diversity of Aboriginal communities, similar research should be conducted in other states and regions to generate locally relevant knowledge and strategies.

2. Recommendations

The findings of this report inform recommendations for the NT Department of Education and Training, schools, teachers, CDU, and the Teacher Registration Board (TRB) NT. They may also be relevant to interstate education departments and teacher education providers, particularly in relation to how teaching is promoted to Aboriginal people. However, because of the diversity of Aboriginal communities, applying specific perspectives or language as seen in this research to other regions—interstate or internationally—would require locally conducted studies.

For the NT Department of Education and Training, TRB, schools, and other interstate departments of education, I recommend that:

1. Teaching should be promoted more proactively as a career to Aboriginal senior secondary students, who should be given more information about how to become a teacher, including what you learn while studying teaching (such as behaviour management) and the benefits of becoming a teacher (including cultural benefits).
2. Students should be encouraged to reflect on the positive ways that they have been engaged at school and how becoming a teacher could ensure that the next generation of Aboriginal students also have a positive schooling experience.
3. Students should be told that teaching is a career option and that they can become teachers.
4. More Aboriginal teachers should act as role models and share their stories of how they succeeded in becoming teachers. This is invaluable and should be recognised as leadership.
5. The available pathways to teacher training, including the Australian Tertiary Admissions Rank (ATAR) and VETiS, should be presented to students.
6. Requirements, such as completing Year 12 and achieving language and numeracy proficiency, should be discussed.
7. Students should be involved in career education conversations to help them make informed decisions about how they can become teachers.

For CDU and other teacher training institutions, I recommend that:

1. Teaching as a career should be promoted more proactively to Aboriginal people and should include positive, real stories from Aboriginal teachers (as role models) about what it is like to study teaching and then be a teacher, face-to-face where possible.
2. The significance of positive impacts for Aboriginal (and non-Aboriginal) students should be highlighted, along with the amazing rewards of being a teacher.
3. It should be communicated to potential teachers that cultural knowledge combined with professional knowledge of teaching enables Aboriginal teachers to connect and engage students in a unique way that enhances learning.
4. Pathways and possibilities should be discussed and explained.
5. A targeted approach should be applied to encourage more young people to consider teaching as a career.
6. A system of mentors should be created to support people once they have begun their teacher training.
7. It should be communicated that although the work is hard, teaching can still pay for a comfortable lifestyle.

3. Introduction

This section introduces the researcher, outlines the purpose of the report, and explains its overall structure.

3.1 Researcher positioning

As a Warumungu Luritja woman born in Darwin, I bring a unique and culturally grounded perspective to this research. My professional journey spans over two decades in education, beginning with the NT Department of Education and Training and continuing since 2014 as a lecturer at CDU. This experience has been further enriched by the completion of my PhD in October 2019 and the ongoing development of a robust academic and research profile, accessible via the CDU Researcher Profile.

My cultural identity and lived experience as an Aboriginal woman are central to my teaching and research practice. Aboriginal ways of knowing, being, and doing are not only philosophical foundations but also practical frameworks that shape my pedagogy. These principles enable me to engage with students through both Western and Aboriginal lenses, fostering inclusive and responsive educational environments.

Grounded in cultural integrity and driven by practical application, my research seeks to support educators in meaningfully engaging with Aboriginal students and content. This includes publishing nationally focused articles that offer actionable strategies for navigating cultural complexities in the classroom—an area where many Australian teachers report feeling underprepared and constrained by concerns about political correctness (Ure et al., 2018).

Ultimately, my work is committed to creating meaningful industry impact that benefits Aboriginal communities. I advocate for a transformative approach to education—one that challenges systemic bias and promotes cultural understanding and is anchored in both academic expertise and the lived realities of being an Aboriginal Australian woman.

3.2 Report contents

This report describes the 2024 ACSES First Nations Fellowship research study conducted by Dr Tracy Woodroffe, which is entitled *Increasing the Number of Aboriginal Teachers in the NT: Planning for the Future*, and includes its findings and recommendations. The research was undertaken between February 2024 and February 2025. Ms Khushi Chauhan was the research associate.

The Fellowship study took a two-part approach to investigate teaching as a career of choice for Aboriginal people in the NT. It aimed to first understand the aspirations of Aboriginal senior secondary students with regard to becoming teachers and to then use the recommendations of current Aboriginal teachers and Aboriginal senior secondary students to improve the promotion of teaching to other Aboriginal people. Different to many other research studies in the area of Aboriginal teachers—that, for instance, focus on enrolment

into and completion of teacher training, and the embedding of perspectives into course content—this research and report focus primarily on teaching as a career for Aboriginal people. It investigates how to create effective marketing and promotion for teaching to convince more Aboriginal people to become teachers, with the intention of positively affecting enrolments and completions.

3.2.1 A starting point

The study began with an investigation of current NT strategies through a coordinated collaboration with stakeholders in the form of a symposium. This meeting provided an opportunity for stakeholders to share current programs and practices, while also hearing about the research questions (RQs) and intent. The event was online, and was well attended with interesting conversations and the respectful sharing of information. It marked the beginning of data collection and set the tone for the project moving forward.

3.2.2 Research questions and intent

- RQ1: Do Aboriginal senior secondary students aspire to be teachers?
- RQ2: How can we encourage more Aboriginal senior secondary students to want to become teachers?
- RQ3: What do existing Aboriginal teachers and students think are positive reasons to become a teacher?
- RQ4: How do Aboriginal teachers think teaching should be promoted to other Aboriginal people?

The new knowledge found as a result of answering these research questions allowed for recommendations to be formulated about how education departments, higher education institutions, teacher education providers, schools, and registration boards in the NT could empower Aboriginal people to become teachers and enhance educational outcomes for Aboriginal students—thereby challenging the prevailing deficit discourse about Aboriginal engagement in education.

3.2.3 Stakeholder collaboration and industry impact

The collaboration between CDU and the NT Department of Education and Training presented a valuable opportunity to influence educational practice and policy within the NT. The NT government's investment in the Remote Aboriginal Teacher Education (RATE) program reflects a strong commitment to increasing the number of Aboriginal teachers in remote communities. This Fellowship project complemented such initiatives by contributing new, locally relevant knowledge that supports stakeholders across the NT.

A distinctive feature of the Fellowship was the targeted marketing focus, exploring how to promote teaching as a meaningful career path for Aboriginal people. The project's findings offer practical insights for enhancing Aboriginal engagement with teacher education. These insights can inform more effective recruitment strategies and strengthen culturally responsive pathways into the profession.

The TRB NT has a role in supporting the findings by endorsing leadership and mentoring opportunities led by Aboriginal educators. The research generated evidence with direct

implications for program design and implementation, leading to recommendations that could inform CDU and NT Department of Education and Training practices and policies. This collaborative effort increases the NT's capacity to improve Aboriginal participation in education and build a more inclusive and effective teaching workforce.

By understanding the specific needs and opportunities within the NT, this project could contribute to a more coordinated and effective approach to Indigenous engagement in education. Ongoing dissemination through local media and academic channels could ensure that the findings reach relevant audiences across the NT. It is also likely that media engagement and publications could reach a national and international audience.

Teacher education and the effective engagement of Aboriginal students in education is a national issue, as highlighted in the *Review of Higher Education Access and Outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander People: Final Report* (Behrendt et al., 2012). Improving teacher education to potentially increase the number of Aboriginal teachers is key across Australia. Because of the broad interest in the issue, there is potential for outcomes to be explored nationally. This would require research to be repeated in each state or region to reflect local perspectives and needs.

3.3 Report structure

The report is organised as follows:

- Section 1: Executive summary
- Section 2: Recommendations
- Section 3: Introduction
- Section 4: Background and literature review
- Section 5: Research design and methods
- Section 6: Findings
- Section 7: Discussion
- Section 8: Conclusions
- References

4. Background and literature review

4.1 Introduction

Since colonisation, education for Aboriginal people in Australia has been characterised by exclusion, segregation, low expectations, and cultural difference because of the dominance of a Western knowledge system. As a result, Aboriginal people have been in a constant battle to shake off the burden of a deficit view (Hogarth, 2016; Pascoe, 2011; Price, 2015; Rose, 2015). Deficit views continue today and are less than helpful. The content of initial teacher education courses should position Aboriginal people as strong in culture and as experts in language and cultural knowledge – a positioning that should also be linked directly to the Australian Professional Standards for Teachers (Murphy & Railton, 2013; Woodroffe, 2019, 2020). Acknowledgement of this expertise would be best recognised with professional status and remuneration. Recognition could include formalised leadership with defined Aboriginal educational leadership pathways.

There are currently very few Aboriginal teachers in Australia. In the 2016 census statistics, a little over 2% of fully qualified and registered teachers in Australia were Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander (Australian Council of Deans of Education, 2018). By 2020, that figure was reported to have decreased to 1.3% (Australian Council for Educational Research [ACER], 2025). That very few Aboriginal adults appear to consider teaching as a career choice may reflect the fact that many Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples have challenges to achieving academic success. This appears as a cultural disparity, best seen in the annual standardised assessment of Aboriginal students in compulsory education (see the National Assessment Program – Literacy and Numeracy [NAPLAN]). This gap in achievement is reflected in numerous Closing the Gap targets (Closing the Gap, n.d.). In 2023, reported NAPLAN results stated that the NT performed the worst in Australia with reference to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students performing lower than their non-Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peers. As of 30 June 2021, the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander population of Australia was estimated at 3.8% of the total population, with the NT having the highest percentage of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people per population at 30.8% (Australian Bureau of Statistics [ABS], 2021).

The following sections examine the existing literature in the field that addresses the two main associated research concepts: (i) why we need to increase the number of Aboriginal teachers and (ii) the way that teaching is promoted as a career to Aboriginal people. The literature accessed is prioritised by local and national relevance. Adhering to the characteristics of a literature review, existing literature was analysed and synthesised to evaluate and confirm how fellowship findings present new knowledge in the field.

4.2 Increasing the number of Aboriginal teachers

Although increasing the number of Aboriginal teachers is the final goal of the Fellowship study, it is not the main focus of the literature review. The underrepresentation of Aboriginal teachers is not a contested issue. It is a fact reported and easily understood in the ABS statistics reported. The aspect of increasing the number of Aboriginal teachers that needs to be unpacked further is the cultural reason why “Aboriginal” teachers are important.

4.2.1 Why do we need more Aboriginal teachers?

The representation of Australian Aboriginal teachers in the education system is crucial for fostering cultural understanding, promoting diversity, and improving educational outcomes for Aboriginal students. This section of the literature review explores the reasons for increasing the number of Aboriginal teachers, drawing on academic sources and government strategies. It highlights the importance of Aboriginal perspectives in education and the role of Aboriginal teachers in bridging cultural gaps.

Aboriginal teachers provide culturally relevant pedagogy and serve as role models for Aboriginal students. According to the *National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Strategy* (Education Council, 2015), increasing the number of Aboriginal teachers is essential for improving educational outcomes and closing the gap in academic achievement between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal students. Aboriginal teachers bring unique perspectives and experiences that are shaped by both their cultural and professional knowledge, and that enrich the learning environment and promote cultural understanding. The *Alice Springs (Mparntwe) Education Declaration* (Education Council, 2019), which replaced the 2015 document, did not specifically mention Aboriginal teachers except to say that there is a

community need to engage Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander learners, their families and communities in all aspects of education, increase Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples’ participation in the education workforce at all levels. (Education Council, 2019, p. 10)

Indigenous educational leadership is culturally based (Hohepa, 2013), with Indigenous educators acting in culturally specific ways because of a sense of cultural obligation to Indigenous students and the Indigenous community. These leadership actions of Indigenous educators are aligned with Indigenous knowledge but not necessarily defined by Australian Professional Standards for Teachers criteria (Woodroffe, 2019). Malin (1994) foregrounded this concept in her study investigating cultural differences in teaching, including parent expectations of the teacher. Malin (1994) noted a marked difference in parent satisfaction of the teacher’s demeanour and management of the students, with Aboriginal parents critiquing the non-Aboriginal teacher for being unnecessarily authoritarian and condescending. Non-Aboriginal parents were, in turn, underwhelmed by the management style of the Aboriginal teacher. From the data presented, it could be stated that there are cultural differences in pedagogical approaches to teaching and classroom management. In practical terms, it could also be suggested that Indigenous approaches to teacher education would be different because of these cultural differences in beliefs about pedagogy.

4.2.2 The Australian context

The Australian government has implemented various strategies and policies to increase the number of Aboriginal teachers. The *National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Strategy* outlines actions to support Aboriginal students' educational attainment and professional development (Education Council, 2015). The Closing the Gap initiative also emphasises the importance of education in improving health and socio-economic outcomes for Aboriginal communities (Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, 2023; Closing the Gap, n.d.). These policies aim to create a supportive environment for Aboriginal teachers and address barriers to their recruitment and retention.

Existing research highlights the significance of Aboriginal teachers in promoting culturally responsive education (Woodroffe, 2020). Hart et al. (2017) argue that Aboriginal teachers are essential for providing culturally relevant pedagogy and improving Aboriginal students' engagement and achievement. Biddle and Cameron (2012) emphasise the role of Aboriginal teachers in fostering positive identity development and self-esteem among Aboriginal students. These studies reinforce the need for increasing the representation of Aboriginal teachers in the education system. Trimmer et al. (2018) delve into the small numbers of Aboriginal teachers, considering both experience during study and reasons for discontinuation of study.

The More Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Teachers Initiative (MATSI) was a government-funded project that built on the premise that the “successful engagement of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in the teaching profession is an essential contributor to great educational success for children and young people and their families and communities” (Johnson et al., 2016, p. vi). The initiative and funding concluded in 2016 with not all targets met, despite the recommendation to extend it. There has not been a similar national initiative targeting an increase of Aboriginal teachers since MATSI, despite the evaluation report recommending: “5. A national strategy of promoting teaching as a career to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples be developed, launched and monitored” (Johnson et al., 2016, p. viii).

In 2020, there was some development regarding senior secondary students. The *Looking to the Future: Report of the Review of Senior Secondary Pathways into Work, Further Education and Training* presents information about building more flexible pathways from school into tertiary education (Department of Education, Skills and Employment, 2020). Making use of career planning for Aboriginal students and discussing teacher education could assist a more targeted approach.

The continued teacher shortage in Australia was acknowledged with the launch of the Be That Teacher campaign on 1 November 2023. The federal government worked with the states and territories to encourage more people to become teachers, increasing awareness of the value of teaching along with teacher status. The main purpose of the campaign was to highlight teaching as a rewarding career to encourage more people to become teachers (Australian Government, 2025).

4.2.3 The Northern Territory context

The limited number of Aboriginal teachers in Australia is a critical issue in the NT, where we have the highest percentage of Aboriginal students (ABS, 2021). Many Aboriginal students in the NT are reported to achieve below the expected standards (Australian Education Union, 2024; Cassidy, 2023). Increasing the number of Aboriginal teachers could improve engagement with education and increase academic success for these students (Johnson et al., 2016; Riddle, 2015; Woodroffe, 2020).

One example of an NT program designed—and then, more recently, redesigned—to increase Aboriginal teacher numbers is the RATE program. This program has a focus on increasing the number of Aboriginal teachers in the NT, improving education support, and providing resources to Aboriginal students according to the assumption that this will lead to improved educational outcomes. I was invited by the NT Department of Education and Training to write a literature review in preparation for the revised version of RATE. The program was then written by Dr John Guenther. Dr Guenther and I were later engaged to conduct an evaluation of the pilot program. This was completed in April 2022.

Evaluation of the initial program resulted in comment about the importance of Indigenous voice and perspective in education. Reaburn et al. (2015) recommended that the Batchelor Institute's Indigenous focus and Both Ways ideology needed to be embraced again to be successful:

There is a need to reengage with the interface of the two radically different social and cultural systems in geographically diverse and often difficult remote environments, paying attention to the consistent Aboriginal voice of the Northern Territory by pushing the boundaries of the political and mainstream education regulatory systems and finding the balance. (Reaburn et al., 2015, p. 43)

Reinforcing this sentiment, Christie (1988) warned that

the principal stumbling block to effectiveness in Aboriginal formal education is the refusal or inability of whites to listen, think about or act upon the demands Aboriginal people are making for their formal education. (p. 4)

The revised version of the RATE program provides the promise of teacher education that is respectful and inclusive of Indigenous knowledge, and created for the benefit of Aboriginal people with consideration of cultural differences in teaching practice (Uibo, 2020).

4.2.4 Challenges and existing recommendations

Despite the recognised importance of Aboriginal teachers, there are several challenges and barriers to their recruitment and retention (Trimmer et al., 2018). These include systemic racism, a lack of support and mentorship, and cultural disconnection within the education system (Hart et al., 2017). Addressing these barriers requires targeted strategies and policies that promote a supportive and inclusive environment for Aboriginal teachers.

The analysis of existing literature reveals several key reasons for increasing the number of Aboriginal teachers. To increase the number of Aboriginal teachers, several recommendations have been made in the literature. These can be summarised as: (i) implement targeted recruitment and retention strategies that address the unique challenges

faced by Aboriginal teachers, (ii) provide culturally responsive professional development and mentorship programs, (iii) foster partnerships between educational institutions and Aboriginal communities to promote cultural understanding and support, and (iv) ensure that policies and practices within the education system are inclusive and supportive of Aboriginal teachers.

4.2.5 Analysis

The literature consistently identifies the underrepresentation of Aboriginal teachers as a critical issue in Australian education. Aboriginal teachers are not only educators but often carry the colonial load—also known as the cultural load—of helping to bridge the gap between Western schooling systems and Aboriginal ways of knowing. The *National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Strategy* (Education Council, 2015) and subsequent policy documents highlight that increasing the number of Aboriginal teachers is essential for improving educational outcomes for Aboriginal students and closing the achievement gap.

Programs such as MATSITI and RATE have demonstrated that targeted initiatives can support Aboriginal teacher recruitment and retention. However, the ending of MATSITI despite unmet targets (Johnson et al., 2016) and the need for redesign in RATE highlight systemic challenges. Funding is a significant factor, as are the lack of culturally safe environments and limited emphasis on Aboriginal educators in national campaigns like Be That Teacher.

The NT context amplifies these concerns. With the highest proportion of Aboriginal students in Australia, the NT faces a pressing need for Aboriginal teachers. These teachers are needed especially to provide culturally relevant pedagogy and serve as role models. Reported as having some of the lowest academic outcomes for Aboriginal students, there is an urgency in the NT to address this gap.

4.2.6 Synthesis

Synthesis across the literature and policy frameworks reveals a shared understanding that Aboriginal teachers are central to educational equity and cultural inclusion. In schools they contribute to:

- improved student engagement and achievement (Hart et al., 2017)
- positive identity development and self-esteem (Biddle & Cameron, 2012)
- culturally responsive teaching practices that benefit all students and serve as examples to non-Aboriginal peers (Hart et al., 2017; Woodroffe, 2019).

Although government strategies such as Closing the Gap and the *National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Strategy* provide a policy foundation, implementation has been inconsistent. The MATSITI evaluation (Johnson et al., 2016) and the RATE program's evolution (Uibo, 2020) indicate that success depends on sustained funding, community involvement, and culturally grounded program development.

The literature also points to the importance of place-based approaches, and the avoidance of over-generalisation. Thus, what works in the NT may differ from strategies effective in

other regions. This establishes the need for flexible, locally informed initiatives that reflect the diversity of Aboriginal peoples.

4.2.7 Evaluation

Evaluating the current landscape reveals both progress and persistent gaps. Although there is strong rhetorical and policy support for increasing Aboriginal teacher numbers on the surface, practical outcomes appear to have lagged. The discontinuation of MATSITI, despite its positive impact and clear recommendations for continuation, signals a broader issue: a lack of sustained political and/or financial commitment.

The RATE program's redesign offers a promising model, particularly in its emphasis on Indigenous knowledge systems and culturally respectful pedagogy. In developing the pilot program, the NT Department of Education and Training incorporated Aboriginal input from the beginning. However, its success will depend on long-term support, rigorous evaluation, and scalability.

The national Be That Teacher campaign did not prioritise Aboriginal representation, which may limit its effectiveness in inspiring Aboriginal youth to pursue teaching. There has not been a national initiative with an Aboriginal focus since MATSITI. This highlights the need for inclusive and representative promotional strategies that reflect the aspirations and identities of Aboriginal communities.

In conclusion, the literature makes a compelling case for increasing the number of Aboriginal teachers. Such an increase is not only a matter of equity but a strategic imperative given that improved Aboriginal educational outcomes could depend on it. To achieve this goal, a coordinated, well-funded, and culturally informed approach that values Aboriginal voices at all levels of the education system is required.

4.3 Promotion of teaching as a career to Aboriginal people

This section of the literature review examines three significant examples of programs with the common goal of increasing Aboriginal teacher numbers. Key information has been analysed about each program's promotion strategies and their effectiveness or success.

4.3.1 Promoting RATE

The RATE program clearly illustrates the effectiveness of the role model approach to promote teaching to Aboriginal people in remote areas of the NT. This approach is a highly visual and word of mouth-based process. When the previous version of the program was at its strongest, from the 1970s to the 1990s, there was a confident group of Aboriginal educators who strengthened their local communities and actively encouraged younger generations of Aboriginal people to follow the same pathway. Reaburn et al. (2015) reflected on the past iteration of RATE, highlighting the Indigenous focus that distinguished the program and noting that it was the change to a more Westernised approach that contributed to a lack of engagement and the program's ultimate cessation.

There are obvious cultural considerations that need to be incorporated into promoting teaching as a career to Aboriginal people.

4.3.2 Promoting MATSITI

The *Evaluation of the More Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Teachers Initiative Project: Final Report* (Johnson et al., 2016) states that, under the initiative, there “were 12 projects funded with a focus on the promotion of teaching as a career to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples” (p. iii). Out of these 12, only two were developed into Tier 1 projects. The other 10 projects relied on a combined budget of approximately \$374,375. It is also noted that “the major jurisdictions of the New South Wales Department of Education and the Queensland Department of Education and Training were able to develop successful strategies utilising their access to significant resources” (p. iii).

In the report, it is acknowledged that not all MATSITI project partners achieved a successful level of promotion. Promotion of teaching as a career to Aboriginal people requires concerted effort and innovation, accompanied by large-scale campaigns and funding. The authors imply that successful promotion is required to increase the number of Aboriginal teachers.

4.3.3 Promoting Be That Teacher

The current Be That Teacher federal campaign encourages teachers to contribute 150-word narratives about how they have made a positive impact on students and to include photographs to create a comprehensive celebration of teaching. On the campaign website, the teacher gallery can be accessed at <https://www.bethatteacher.gov.au/teacher-gallery>.

It is important to acknowledge that you cannot determine a person’s Aboriginality by their appearance. However, at a glance, and despite the many faces on the teacher gallery webpage, Aboriginal students may not feel themselves represented among the images of successful teachers.

Separate First Nations pages have been developed to showcase First Nations teachers. There are three First Nations teacher videos and three editorials, which include the stories of two additional teachers and revisits one of the video participants. When the website was reviewed in early 2025, there was a “pathways to teaching” poster and social media tiles adding the story of one more teacher. All resources were compiled as a kit. The Be That Teacher national campaign kit showed only six First Nations teachers in total.

There was a link on the campaign website’s First Nations webpage called “inspiring teacher stories”. Not one of the eight stories presented had a teacher who introduced themselves as First Nations. It would be easy to assume that none of the inspiring stories teachers were First Nations people.

4.3.4 Successful promotion

Successful promotion is about making a product irresistible and convincing a target audience to behave in a particular way. It can be argued that successful promotion requires the identification of what has been called the “bliss point” (Moskowitz et al., 1980). This concept was developed in behavioural economics and food science by American market researcher

and psychophysicist Howard Moskowitz, who found that there exists an exact concentration of certain ingredients that maximises taste satisfaction for consumers (Rao et al., 2018). This understanding can be extended to consider actionable attributes nominated by consumers and then for a comparison between *existing* and *ideal* products (Moskowitz et al., 1980). Moskowitz et al.'s (1980) proposed research method for finding the bliss point of food products can be translated to consider the creation of effective promotional materials to encourage Aboriginal people to become teachers. Such translation suggests that a range of promotional materials can be developed with various ingredients and then rated by participants.

This 12-month Fellowship research asked participants to nominate the variables required to successfully create promotional materials that would best encourage Aboriginal people to become teachers. Responses described existing and ideal attributes, albeit without actually using that terminology. Draft resources were created, but a longer process would be required to test the created outputs and determine their level of impact—the degree to which they reach or fail to reach the bliss point to increase the number of Aboriginal teachers in the NT.

It should also be considered that because the Fellowship research collected responses from Aboriginal people in the NT, variations in bliss points might exist for different demographics. The identification of diverse bliss points is pivotal to align promotion content with consumer expectations and enhance desired marketing outcomes.

4.3.5 Analysis

The RATE, MATSITI, and Be That Teacher initiatives each offer distinct insights into how teaching has been promoted to Aboriginal people, particularly in the NT. The RATE program, especially in its earlier iterations (1970s–1990s), exemplified a culturally focused, community-driven model of promotion. The model worked because it leveraged the visibility and influence of Aboriginal educators within their communities. There was a self-sustaining cycle of inspiration and recruitment. Reaburn et al. (2015) critically noted that the program's decline coincided with its cultural relevance and effectiveness being diluted by more Westernised frameworks.

In contrast, the MATSITI initiative, as evaluated by Johnson et al. (2016), reveals a more structured, policy-driven approach. Resource allocation and jurisdictional capacity significantly influenced outcomes. This is evidenced by the fact that despite the funding of 12 projects, only two reached Tier 1 status. The report underscores that successful promotion requires not only funding but also strategic innovation and jurisdictional commitment.

The Be That Teacher campaign, although national in scope, falls short in visibly representing Aboriginal teachers. The limited number of First Nations stories and images may inadvertently reinforce a lack of the representation critical for Aboriginal students seeking role models. The campaign's reliance on visual storytelling without more cultural representation may undermine its inclusivity and impact.

4.3.6 Synthesis

The importance of culturally resonant promotion strategies is the common thread cutting across all three initiatives. Compared with MATSITI's mixed outcomes, the Aboriginal leadership and visibility within local contexts seen in RATE highlight the need for both

structural support and cultural alignment. The Be That Teacher campaign, although well-intentioned, illustrates the risks of underrepresentation.

Synthesising these findings suggests that effective promotion of teaching to Aboriginal people must integrate cultural authenticity, strategic investment, and community engagement. Examples of these would be ensuring that (i) Aboriginal educators are visible and celebrated in ways that align with community values, (ii) funding is equitably distributed and tailored to local needs, and (iii) programs are co-designed with Aboriginal communities to ensure relevance and ownership.

The concept of the bliss point (Moskowitz et al., 1980; Rao et al., 2018) offers an innovative framework for understanding how promotional materials can be optimised and made fit for purpose. Understandings about maximising taste satisfaction can be adapted to ensuring promotional effectiveness through using the right mix of cultural, visual, and narrative elements. The proposed approach of eliciting community-defined variables and testing draft materials aligns with a bliss point model and offers a promising methodology for future campaigns.

4.3.7 Evaluation

Evaluating the effectiveness of the RATE, MATSITI, and Be That Teacher initiatives reveals both strengths and limitations. Whereas RATE's early success demonstrates the power of Aboriginal-led promotion, its decline underscores the fragility of culturally grounded programs when subjected to systemic shifts. MATSITI's partial success suggests that structural support is necessary for the benefit of Aboriginal people, but is not sufficient without sustained engagement. Be That Teacher's limited representation suggests a missed opportunity to authentically connect with Aboriginal audiences.

The application of the bliss point concept is, therefore, particularly valuable because it shifts the focus from generic promotion to evidence-based, audience-specific design. Although this definitely confirms the need for the inclusion of Aboriginal voices and perspectives, this research also acknowledges the need for broader testing across diverse Aboriginal demographics, recognising that what resonates in the NT may not translate elsewhere.

Ultimately, successful promotion of teaching as a career to Aboriginal people requires a multi-layered strategy: one that is culturally grounded, community-informed, and empirically tested. The effective marketing and promotion of teaching must move beyond tokenistic inclusion to genuine representation and co-creation. This is the new knowledge established by this Fellowship research. The literature and program evaluations reviewed here provide a strong foundation for such an approach. The review also highlights the ongoing need for innovation, investment, and Aboriginal leadership in shaping the future of teacher recruitment.

4.4 Study outputs

The promotional outputs produced from the Fellowship research include:

- presentations (PowerPoint slides and video recordings)
- invited international conference panel presentation, Equity Practitioners in Higher Education Association, New Zealand
- conference presentation, 5th National Indigenous Education Summit, Perth
- professional development workshop presentation for the CDU First Nations Teacher Education Hub
- role model video (mock-up)
- posters and postcards
- social media tiles and posts
- several media interviews and resulting publications
- project website
- four articles, including an ACSES *Equity Insights 2025* article
- one book, *Conversation starter: Do you want to be a teacher?*
- invited presentation to the Australian Federal Government Department of Education
- Teacher Magazine podcast (ACER)
- Education Matters column
- invited panel member on The Point (NITV/SBS).

The two articles published in the course of the study (June and October 2024) presented themes as they emerged in the analysis process. These articles are provided in this report to show the progression of thinking and the presentation of concepts during the Fellowship as new knowledge was generated and presented publicly.

4.4.1 The Conversation

The following article was published in *The Conversation* on 8 July 2024. It has been read 4,238 times as of 13 February 2025 by people in Australia, the United States, France, India, and other countries. The article was also shared 355 times on Facebook.

This article is republished from *The Conversation* under a Creative Commons license. Read the original article at <https://theconversation.com/tell-students-they-can-do-it-how-aboriginal-people-can-inspire-each-other-to-become-teachers-233565>.

Listed below are the sources used throughout the article to cite evidence:

- The Australian Government's National Teacher Workforce Action Plan website (<https://www.education.gov.au/national-teacher-workforce-action-plan>)
- The Evaluation of the More Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Teachers Initiative Project Final Report March 2016 pdf (<https://www.edutech.com.au/matsiti/wp-content/uploads/2020/06/MATSITI-2016-Project-Evaluation-Final-Report.pdf>)
- The AITSL Spotlight webpage on The impact of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander educators (<https://www.aitsl.edu.au/research/spotlights/the-impact-of-aboriginal-and-torres-strait-islander-educators>)
- The Conversation article by Dr Virginia Beal, 'Thank you for making me feel smart': will a new campaign to raise the status of teaching work? Published November 10,

2023 (<https://theconversation.com/thank-you-for-making-me-feel-smart-will-a-new-campaign-to-raise-the-status-of-teaching-work-217362>)

- Increasing the number of teachers in the NT project website (<https://firstnationssuccess.cdu.edu.au/projects/increasing-the-number-of-aboriginal-teachers-in-the-nt>)
- ABS statistics about Schools, 2024, Table 42b showing the Proportion of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander student enrolments by state and territory, 2024 (<https://www.abs.gov.au/statistics/people/education/schools/latest-release#aboriginal-and-torres-strait-islander-students>)
- AITSL Australian Teacher Workforce data in-focus webpage on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Teachers (<https://www.aitsl.edu.au/atwd/in-focus/aboriginal-and-torres-strait-islander-teachers>)
- Northern Territory Government, Department of Education and Training's Careers in Education, Aboriginal Educator Workforce Initiatives webpage (<https://education.nt.gov.au/careers-in-education/aboriginal-educator-workforce-initiatives>)

‘Tell students they can do it’: how Aboriginal people can inspire each other to become teachers

Authors: Tracy Woodroffe, 2024 ACSES First Nations Fellow, Senior Lecturer in Indigenous Knowledges, Charles Darwin University & Khushi Chauhan, Research Associate, PhD Candidate, Charles Darwin University

Published 8 July 2024

Australia has a nationwide teacher shortage. But there is a particular shortage of Aboriginal teachers. This is very worrying because we know Aboriginal teachers are desperately needed to boost learning and school outcomes for Aboriginal students.

Not only do they bring vital cultural knowledge to schools, it also means Aboriginal students are represented by those who educate them. Aboriginal teachers can use Indigenous knowledge in the classroom and build effective student-teacher relationships which are vital for learning.

To boost the overall teaching workforce in late 2023, the federal government launched a campaign to ‘Be That Teacher’. But we need more specific measures, designed to resonate with Aboriginal students and communities.

In a new, ongoing project, we are talking to Aboriginal high school students and teachers to understand how we can encourage more Aboriginal people to become teachers in the Northern Territory.

What are the current figures?

As of 2023, 39.3% of school students in the NT were Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander, this is the highest proportion of any state or territory. Nationally, Aboriginal students account for 6.5% of all school students.

As of 2020, there were 260 registered Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander teachers in the NT. This includes the public, private and Catholic system and represents only 4.6% of the teaching workforce.

As of June 2024, there were just 163 Aboriginal teachers, senior teachers and principals in the public system, according to the NT Department of Education and Training.

While there are existing initiatives to encourage Aboriginal people to become teachers, such as the Remote Aboriginal Teacher Education program, clearly more can be done to increase teacher numbers.

Our project

In an ongoing project, in collaboration with the NT Department of Education and Training, we are talking to students and teachers to ask:

“how can Aboriginal people encourage and inspire each other to become teachers?”

So far, we have surveyed 23 Aboriginal students and ten Aboriginal teachers across government, independent and Catholic schools. Students are in the final years of schooling and at least 16-years-old.

Do you want to be a teacher?

When asked if students would like to be a teacher when they left school, most students we surveyed responded negatively.

As one student said, “school environments are mentally damaging”. They added the best way to encourage young people to teach would be to “put them in a school that actually accepts them”.

Some of the main reasons students gave for not being interested in teaching were having other career plans, not being interested in school and their teachers’ attitudes to the profession.

Some said their teachers “don’t look enthusiastic about their job” and “always complain about it”. While it was not specified if their teachers are Aboriginal or non-Aboriginal, we know statistically, the vast majority of teachers in the NT are non-Aboriginal.

More information

Students are also telling us they want more information about what it is like to be teacher and the practicalities of the profession. As one student said, they want to be shown “how to be a teacher”.

Another respondent told us:

“Sit and talk to them and ask if they are interested in becoming a teacher by explaining the benefits of helping young people.”

Role models can help

A strong theme to emerge so far is the importance of role models. Students said their teachers could help them consider becoming a teacher by the way they do their jobs. This was particularly so if they portrayed the profession as one focussed on student success and passion.

One student told us students could be attracted to the profession if they were told about how teachers helped “the next generation [to] follow in elders’ footsteps”.

Students also said they needed encouragement. As one respondent told us, they are worried about being treated badly by students.

“Tell [students] that they can do it and do not need to be afraid.”

Teachers’ own experiences matter

Aboriginal teachers also emphasised the importance of role models and personal experience. They told us their experience at school, whether as a student or later working in supporting roles, was a key reason behind deciding to teach. As one teacher said:

“I loved school. I was really lucky enough that I had a school and teachers that were engaging and really lovely people.”

But another was also inspired by negative experiences growing up:

“I wanted to be a better teacher than the ones I’d had.”

They stressed how passion was integral to their work and helping students to learn. They also talked of the importance of culture – something that could be emphasised with potential new recruits. As one teacher told us:

“[I am] putting my own perspective on things. Embedding Indigenous content and a different pedagogical [teaching] approach.”

Another teacher told us their work also had a simple purpose: “to combat racism”.

What now?

Our research is showing the need for more accessible information for Aboriginal students on how they get into a teaching career. According to students and teachers alike there is also a need for role models to encourage Aboriginal students to take up teaching.

We will keep surveying students and teachers this year and translate our findings into materials and information for universities and schools by the end of 2024.

This article talks primarily about Aboriginal people. Some of the data sources we accessed describe “Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander” statistics, which is why different terms have been used.

4.4.2 Needed Now in Learning and Teaching

The article was an invited publication first published in Needed Now in Learning and Teaching on 21 October 2024. It can be accessed at

<https://needednowlt.substack.com/p/spot-the-aboriginal-teacher-increasing>.

Listed below are the sources used throughout the article to cite evidence.

- ACDE Analysis of 2016 Census statistics of Aboriginal Torres Strait Islander teachers and students webpage (<https://www.acde.edu.au/acde-analysis-of-2016-census-statistics-of-aboriginal-torres-strait-islander-teachers-and-students/>)
- ABS statistics about Schools, Data on government and non-government students, staff and schools 2024 (<https://www.abs.gov.au/statistics/people/education/schools/latest-release>)
- The Evaluation of the More Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Teachers Initiative Project Final Report March 2016 pdf (<https://www.edutech.com.au/matsiti/wp-content/uploads/2020/06/MATSITI-2016-Project-Evaluation-Final-Report.pdf>)
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- More Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Teachers Initiative Final Report, 2016 (<https://edutech.com.au/matsiti/wp-content/uploads/2020/06/MATSITI-2016-Final-Report-1.0.pdf>)
- ACSES website, Congratulations! 2024 First Nations Fellows Announced webpage, December 2023 (<https://www.acses.edu.au/congratulations-2024-first-nations-fellows-announced/>)
- The Conversation article by Dr Tracy Woodroffe and Ms Khushi Chauhan titled 'Tell students they can do it': how Aboriginal people can inspire each other to become teachers, July 2024 (<https://theconversation.com/tell-students-they-can-do-it-how-aboriginal-people-can-inspire-each-other-to-become-teachers-233565>)
- The CDU First Nations Success website, Higher Education experience for First Nations students at CDU webpage (<https://firstnationssuccess.cdu.edu.au/projects/higher-education-experience-for-first-nations-students-at-cdu/>)
- The CDU First Nations Success website, Increasing the Numbers of Aboriginal Teachers in the NT webpage (<https://firstnationssuccess.cdu.edu.au/projects/increasing-the-number-of-aboriginal-teachers-in-the-nt/>)
- Dr Tracy Woodroffe LinkedIn profile (<https://www.linkedin.com/in/dr-tracy-woodroffe-6a6915299>)
- Dr Tracy Woodroffe CDU professional profile (<https://researchers.cdu.edu.au/en/persons/tracy-ann-woodroffe>)

Spot the Aboriginal teacher: Increasing the numbers and planning for the future!

Author: Dr Tracy Woodroffe, Warumungu Luritja woman, Northern Institute, Charles Darwin University; 2024 ACSES First Nations Fellow; Senior Lecturer and Researcher in the Northern Institute at Charles Darwin University

Published 21 October 2024

There are currently very few Aboriginal teachers in Australia. In the 2016 census statistics, a little over 2% of fully qualified and registered teachers in Australia were Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander.

The low number of Aboriginal school teachers is a critical issue in the Northern Territory (NT) because, according to 2022 ABS numbers, the NT had the highest percentage of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students at 39.4%. Disturbingly, many Aboriginal students are reported to achieve below expected standards. The NT's NAPLAN performance has been described as the worst in Australia, with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students performing lower than their non-Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peers. There is an obvious cultural disparity aspect to academic achievement in our Australian education system.

Evidence from the evaluation of the More Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Teachers Initiative (MATSI) suggests that increasing the number of Aboriginal teachers would improve educational success for Aboriginal students. More Aboriginal teachers are needed. There are some existing programs such as Remote Aboriginal Teacher Education (RATE), which has had success in providing additional training for assistant teachers in the NT, and the Federal Government's current "Be That Teacher" campaign. But, since the conclusion of the MATSI program in 2016, there has not been a similar national funded initiative specifically targeting an increase of Aboriginal teachers. A different approach is required to achieve a greater impact on increasing Aboriginal teacher numbers.

My 2024 ACSES First Nations Fellowship has provided the opportunity to investigate

1. how to promote teaching as a career of choice to Aboriginal people, and
2. how to create the promotional material embedded with Aboriginal senior secondary student and teacher perspectives to better target an Aboriginal audience and inspire more Aboriginal people to become teachers.

Research was conducted with the approval of the NT Department of Education and Training, which also supported the production of promotional resources. Government public schools were targeted but there was also representation from Catholic and Independent schools.

The results have been both clear and puzzling at the same time. It was clear from both students and teachers that more information about potential careers and pathways was needed, but that this should happen face-to-face with Aboriginal teacher role models talking about what it was like for them to study teaching and what they have experienced as teachers working in schools.

Several dilemmas now present themselves.

How can there be an availability of Aboriginal teacher role models to promote teaching face-to-face when there are so few Aboriginal teachers in the first place? And how will the career

advisors in schools know that Aboriginal students would like for someone to have a conversation with them and ask them if they are interested in teaching?

Interestingly, the information that senior secondary students seem to need is about the intricacies of learning to be a teacher. The main reason for not wanting to be a teacher, reported by Aboriginal senior secondary students, was that they did not want to put up with negative student behaviour. Therefore, career advice and information need to incorporate what pre-service teachers learn and practice, such as behaviour management. The fact that this point rated so highly makes you wonder about student's own experience of schooling and how negative student behaviour could be such a deterrent and impact future life choices. In responses provided by Aboriginal teachers, it was evident that their positive experience of schooling was very important in making the decision to be a teacher.

The Fellowship project is in the final stages. Promotional materials are being created, including video clips of Aboriginal teachers talking about their experience of being a teacher. A careers booklet in the form of a "conversation starter" is being produced. Reporting and a journal publication will include recommendations for stakeholders. How to share these resources and who to share them with will be considered for the greatest impact.

The translation of the findings has been supported by the Northern Institute HEPPP Advisory Group. More information is also available on the project First Nations Success website.

Future research could evaluate the long-term impact of the promotional resources created.

4.5 Conclusions

It is surprising that one of the main messages conveyed by participants during this research was that more information is needed for Aboriginal people. This means that current efforts have not managed to reach an Aboriginal audience as (or if) intended. Although there may have been moments of enthusiasm and momentum in the promotion of teaching to Aboriginal people, further consideration of the cultural promotion of teaching is a vital aspect of knowledge that needs to be applied to future promotion and recruitment strategies. It may be that the information circulated is perceived by Aboriginal people as not meant for them. Improvements will require Aboriginal ownership of what is happening, along with active leadership and decision-making, in conjunction with a nuanced approach to delivering career information about teaching.

5. Research design and methods

5.1 Introduction

This project adopted a mixed methods approach. The combination of methods was complementary. Quantitative data were collected from teachers within the NT Department of Education and Training, and from teacher education students within CDU. Demographics were collected to learn something about who the participants were and where they were from. Short answer and multiple choice survey questions were used. Qualitative data were collected through open-ended survey questions and interviews.

The Fellowship was confined to a 12-month period, and the research design was chosen to ensure that the aims and objectives could be met while having the greatest impact possible within this relatively short timeframe.

A more detailed table is provided in the methodology section of this report, but, in summary, this study included five distinct phases:

1. A **pre-data collection phase** was conducted from January–February 2024. This was when ethics and NT Department of Education and Training approvals were sought and obtained.
2. A **collection of baseline data** was undertaken from February–March 2024. While this baseline data collection began, the media strategy was also planned and activated.
3. March 2024 marked the start of the student perception **survey data collection**, with teacher perceptions surveys **and interviews** begun in May 2024.
4. **Data analysis** was well underway by June 2024.
5. The production of **outputs and reporting** continued from June 2024 to February 2025.

5.2 Indigenous methodology

This research is for the benefit of Aboriginal people. It was an Aboriginal-led project investigating the inclusion and consideration of Aboriginal people within a Westernised system that frames failure as the fault of a cultural group rather than the system (Bodkin-Andrews & Carlson, 2014; Moreton-Robinson, 2000). This has created deficit thinking about Aboriginal engagement with education but also requires that research needs to be explained from an Aboriginal perspective or standpoint.

The role of the research Fellow in this study included both describing and understanding the problem and the solution from an Aboriginal perspective to identify potential areas of improvement in the education system for Aboriginal Australians. As with any Aboriginal-led research, the challenge was with translation—not in a second language sense, but in the sense of the translation of information through lenses: an Aboriginal lens and a non-Aboriginal lens.

The methodology utilised was grounded in Indigenous women's standpoint theory (IWST) as defined by Moreton-Robinson (2000) and used and redefined for use by Woodroffe (2019). This approach was employed to centre the perspectives and value the voices of participating Aboriginal people.

Indigenous women's standpoint theory as methodology (Moreton-Robinson, 2000) enables me to take advantage of the Northern Territory context to work with and highlight the experiences, knowledge and opinions of Indigenous educators.

Indigenous women's standpoint theory was used to offset the dominant positioning of the westernised Australian education system, and to highlight this established on the evidence presented ... The focus of the research was to use an Indigenous strength-based position to explore the potential of improving education by including Indigenous knowledge ... (Woodroffe, 2019, p. 16)

The findings and creation of outputs were strengthened by using participants' words and perspectives and by analysing and interpreting these through an Aboriginal lens. This IWST approach was enhanced by the presentation feedback methodology (see Woodroffe, 2021). This facilitated the incorporation of presentation-based peer-review throughout the 12-month process. More detail is provided in [Section 5.7, Phase 4 – Data analysis](#).

5.3 Participants

The NT Department of Education and Training gave approval for the conduct of this research, as did Catholic Education NT. In total, 101 schools were contacted, including 91 government public schools, six Catholic schools, and four independent Indigenous schools. All of the schools contacted were described as having secondary education provision.

Although purposeful sampling was used to recruit participants who were "knowledgeable and experienced with the phenomenon of interest" (Palinkas et al., 2015, p. 4), this was affected by availability and willingness to participate. The project sample size was, therefore, relatively small ($n = 36$), but included both student ($n = 23$) and teacher ($n = 13$) responses. Participation was lower than hoped for, although this was not unexpected given past research experience using responses from NT schools. The homogenous nature of the participant groups recruited—in that they were Aboriginal people either attending school in the NT or teaching in the NT—increased the internal validity and reliability of the findings. One main point of difference among the participants was location, particularly with reference to remote as opposed to urban schooling experiences. Three teachers reported that their home communities were interstate.

Research was conducted following the design shown in Table 1, which also shows which stages of the research addressed the research questions.

Table 1: Research design and research questions

Research stage	Research approach	Research questions addressed
1	Pre-data collection – ethics and approvals	Preparation to address the questions effectively
2	Collection of baseline data	RQ1, RQ2, RQ3
3	Data collection – surveys and interviews	RQ1, RQ2, RQ3, RQ4
4	Analysis	RQ1, RQ2, RQ3, RQ4
5	Outputs and reporting	RQ1, RQ2, RQ3, RQ4

5.4 Phase 1 – Pre-data collection

This phase focused on the preparation for research and involved obtaining permissions. This process incorporated the gaining of approval from the CDU Human Research Ethics Committee (H24010), along with approvals to conduct research from both the NT Department of Education and Training and Catholic Education NT. This permissions phase determined the research design to a high degree. Without approval from the NT Department of Education and Training, the research would not have been possible. There were numerous requirements in the department's research guidelines and procedures (NT Government, 2023a) that needed to be observed. These are listed below:

The decision to participate in research is at the principal's discretion and will be based on alignment with the schools' improvement agenda, priorities and capacity. Furthermore, participation of schools, staff and students remains voluntary. (NT Government, 2023a, p. 7)

Ethics approval is required for all research applications that are aiming to explore issues of particular significance to Aboriginal people or involve a significant number of Aboriginal people or involve participants from vulnerable groups and involve more than low degree of risk of harm, discomfort or inconvenience. (NT Government, 2023a, p. 7)

3.1.8. Incentives. The department does not support incentives that influence participation and responses from research participants; however, provision of support to facilitate the research will be considered. For example, if the participant is required to use an app on a device to be able to participate in the research, the provision of credit for the period of the research would be deemed appropriate. Providing a participant with credit or a device after this period would be considered inappropriate. (NT Government, 2023a, p. 11)

Key assessment criteria were also front of mind when designing the research. These criteria—which can be found in the Key Assessment Criteria table listed on page 14 of the research guidelines document—are used by the department to determine whether approval to conduct research is granted. Key criterion two is “Burden on school, participant and department”. The requirements for research design that underpin this criterion and determine whether subsequent approval is given are:

- minimum effort commitment required from participants, either ongoing or one-off
- minimum disruption to teaching/learning/business, either ongoing or one-off
- minimum administrative burden on school and/or corporate staff, either ongoing or one-off.

Gaining approvals early and preparing to begin the research activities as soon as possible were vital steps for ensuring the effective use of the time available. This phase also involved having conversations with the media manager, the associate researcher, and the Northern Institute Higher Education Participation and Partnerships Program (HEPPP) Advisory Group, each of whom agreed to advise on this project.

A schedule of activities was designed, aiming for the greatest impact in the short amount of time given. Throughout the process, it was important to consider stakeholder collaboration, communication of progress, and engagement with the wider professional community of researchers and educators through social media, presentations, and publications.

Table 2 presents the research schedule and shows times of concentrated media focus as shaded in blue.

Table 2: Schedule of activities

Activity/ Milestone	Time period	Location	Aims	Deliverables	People
Ethics application and NT Department of Education and Training application to conduct research	Jan–Feb 2024	CDU unless stated otherwise	Required		CIs
Review of literature and current data on Aboriginal engagement at CDU in teacher education	Feb 2024		Baseline data	Literature review	CIs
Media coordinator and plan in place for project timeline	Feb 2024		Media plan active	Engagement with social media and media outlets	Media coordinator
Review of data on existing Aboriginal teachers in the NT by region	Mar 2024		Baseline data	Aboriginal teacher data	CIs, NT Department of Education and Training
Aboriginal senior secondary student perception surveys – creation and dissemination	Mar–Apr 2024	Online	Data collection of student perceptions about teaching	Student data	CIs, School teachers and students

Audit of programs already in place to attempt to increase Aboriginal teacher numbers, including identification of potential for improvement	Apr 2024		Baseline data, planning for improvement and innovation	Aboriginal teacher program data, Identification of potential for improvements	CIs
Aboriginal teacher interviews	May 2024		Data collection of teacher perceptions about teaching	Teacher data	CIs, School teachers
Online symposium of stakeholders presenting their knowledge and expertise about increasing the numbers of Aboriginal teachers in the NT	Late May 2024	Online	Collaboration, publish information about the project	Stakeholder collaboration, engagement with media outlets	CIs, Media coordinator, Stakeholders
Data analysis – surveys and interviews	Jun 2024		Findings to inform resource creation	Analysis of data	CIs
<i>The Conversation</i> pitch and article	Late Jun 2024		Publish information about the project	Engagement with media outlets	CIs, Media coordinator
Interim report	Jun–Jul 2024		Reporting progress	Milestone 1	
Creation of promotional resources	Aug–Sep 2024		Addressing the issues	Resource development	
Presentation of the findings, including resources developed	Oct 2024		Addressing the issues, impacting change	Resource presentation and plan for evaluation, suggested recommendations	Stakeholders
CDU media story about the project and findings	Oct 2024		Publish information about the project	Engagement with media outlets	
Q1 publication, including practice	Nov–Dec 2024		Publish information	Quality peer-reviewed publication	

and policy recommendations			about the project		
Final report	Jan–Feb 2025		Reporting	Milestone 2	
Project completion and acquittals	Mar 2025		Acquittal of funding	Milestone 3	

5.4.1 Addressing Ethics Section 13, First Nations Research

The National Health and Medical Research Council ethics requirements for conducting research with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and communities were approved and met. These requirements entail the foregrounding and consideration of six core values: spirit and integrity, cultural continuity, equity, reciprocity, respect, and responsibility. The information under the headings below outlines some of the detail provided in the ethics application.

Spirit and integrity

The research acknowledges that Indigenous cultural knowledge is significant to engagement with education, and the integrity required in conducting ethical research such as obtaining parent consent. The research team is committed to demonstrating the values of cultural continuity, equity, reciprocity, respect, and responsibility through adherence to the guidelines.

Cultural continuity

The culture and perspectives of Indigenous people in the NT will inform the research outputs and will be interpreted through an Indigenous researcher lens. The main outputs of the research are intended to benefit Indigenous people.

Equity

The research is funded with an Equity Fellowship. The project is designed to potentially increase equity in education for Aboriginal people. Data collected will be Aboriginal voice and perspective analysed with an Indigenous methodology so that the interpretation supports the creation of resources for Aboriginal people. The principal researcher is Aboriginal and will be the National Centre for Student Equity in Higher Education (now ACSES) First Nations Fellow for the 12-month duration of the project.

We recognise the significant contribution made by Aboriginal educators and community members to education and wellbeing in the NT. This project aims to support and strengthen Aboriginal voice in response to establishing improved successful First Nations Higher Education engagement. The project places high value on the opinions of project participants and the contribution they make to building resilience and capacity in their communities. Our work in considering perspectives is designed to improve the integrity of the research process and ensure that miscommunications are minimised.

Reciprocity

The research encompasses equitable and respectful engagement with and inclusion of Indigenous peoples, their values, and cultures. Indigenous voices will determine and inform the research outputs.

Respect

The researchers acknowledge the right of Indigenous peoples to have an equitable educational experience informed by cultural values important to them. Respect includes following respectful processes such as informed consent.

Responsibility

Researchers are accountable for minimising and managing risk for the welfare of participants. Established processes such as in the Participant Information document ensure researcher accountability.

In addition to the ethics documentation, the research Fellow was provided with a letter of support from the Northern Land Council. To further ensure ethical practice, the project was advised by the Northern Institute HEPPP Advisory Group, whose membership comprises four highly respected researchers experienced in conducting research with Aboriginal people.

5.5 Phase 2 – Baseline data collection

Phase 2, the collection of baseline data, was intended to demonstrate trends among the two main stakeholders, specifically in (i) Indigenous engagement with teacher education courses at CDU and (ii) in the number of Aboriginal teachers employed by the NT Department of Education and Training. Both terms, “Indigenous” and “Aboriginal”, have been used here to reflect the distinctions used in the initial data collection. It is assumed that the Indigenous CDU data are inclusive of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.

The NT Department of Education and Training has a responsibility to promote teaching as a career. Given that CDU promotes teacher education, once someone has begun their CDU course to become a teacher, CDU has a responsibility to provide a learning environment and support conducive to successful completion.

In this phase, a symposium was held to bring together stakeholders to share information about the strategies used to increase the numbers of Aboriginal teachers in the NT, as well as about the Fellowship project. The session was a public Northern Institute People Policy Place presentation, and information was collected as baseline data about current practice.

5.6 Phase 3 – Surveys and interviews

Figure 2: Student survey media



5.6.1 Student surveys

In total, 23 Aboriginal senior secondary students 16 years old and above from across the NT participated in the surveys.

The NT Department of Education and Training wanted to know how the data collection was going to occur to ensure the least amount of disruption to the students' learning time and least burden on the teachers' workload. The student surveys were conducted online using Qualtrics. The questions were kept short, and the language used was both age-appropriate and considered that the participants might not speak English as their first language. Because the students were all 16 years old and above, they were able to make their own decisions about participation without needing to wait for parent permission.

The Aboriginal senior secondary student survey questions were as follows:

Q1. Please choose which of the indicators below best describe you. You can select more than one (e.g. remote school, Katherine region).

- ☐ Rural school
- ☐ Remote school
- ☐ Very remote school
- ☐ Darwin region
- ☐ East Arnhem region
- ☐ Katherine region
- ☐ Barkly region
- ☐ Alice Springs region
- ☐ Catholic school
- ☐ Independent school

Q2. Do you attend school in your home community? (Yes or No)

Q2 (a). If you do not attend school in your home community, what region is your home community?

- ☐ Darwin region
- ☐ East Arnhem region
- ☐ Katherine region
- ☐ Barkly region
- ☐ Alice Springs region

Q3. Would you like to be a teacher when you leave school? (Yes or No)

Q4. Why or why not?

Q5. Why do you think that teaching would be a good job for an Aboriginal person? (You can pick more than one answer.)

- ☐ Caring for Aboriginal students
- ☐ Sharing Aboriginal knowledge
- ☐ Can explain Aboriginal ways of thinking and learning to non-Aboriginal students and teachers
- ☐ Helps to build confidence in our ability as Aboriginal people to be successful in education like a role model
- ☐ Helping our community
- ☐ Other. Please briefly explain.

Q5 (a). Why do you think that teaching would be a good job for an Aboriginal person?

– Other. Please briefly explain.

Q6. What do you think would be the good things about being a teacher? (You can pick more than one answer.)

- ☐ Teaching students how to learn and be successful
- ☐ Being a professional and serving the community
- ☐ Having a good income to be financially secure
- ☐ Teaching things that you are passionate about
- ☐ Other. Please briefly explain.

Q6 (a). What do you think would be the good things about being a teacher?

– Other. Please briefly explain.

Q7. What might not be so good about being a teacher?

Q8. Do you think that there should be more Aboriginal teachers?

Q9. What do you think is the best way to encourage young Aboriginal people to become teachers?

Figure 3: Teacher survey media



5.6.2 Teacher surveys and interviews

Ten teachers chose to complete surveys. Three more teachers chose to be interviewed instead, meaning 13 teachers participated overall.

Teachers were offered a choice of completing a short online survey or being interviewed in person. The majority of teacher participants completed the survey, while three opted for an interview. Both groups were asked the same questions, but it was assumed that the interviewees would be more conversational, volunteer longer answers, and provide more detail.

The Aboriginal teacher survey and interview questions were as follows:

Q1. How long have you been a teacher?

Q2. Please select the choices below that best describe your school. You can select more than one (e.g. remote school, Katherine region).

- ☐ Rural school
- ☐ Remote school
- ☐ Very remote school
- ☐ Darwin region
- ☐ East Arnhem region
- ☐ Katherine region
- ☐ Barkly region
- ☐ Alice Springs region
- ☐ Catholic school
- ☐ Independent school

Q3. Do you teach in your home community? (Yes or No)

Q3 (a). If no, where is your home community?

- ☐ Darwin region
- ☐ East Arnhem region
- ☐ Katherine region
- ☐ Barkly region
- ☐ Alice Springs region

Q4. Did you decide to be a teacher while you were still a student in school? (Yes or No)

Q5. What made you decide to be a teacher?

Q6. Why do you think that teaching is a good career for an Aboriginal person? (You can pick more than one answer.)

- ☐ Caring for Aboriginal students
- ☐ Sharing Aboriginal knowledge
- ☐ Can explain Aboriginal ways of thinking and learning to non-Aboriginal students and teachers
- ☐ Helps to build confidence in our ability as Aboriginal people to be successful in education like a role model
- ☐ Helping our community
- ☐ Other. Please briefly explain.

Q6 (a). Why do you think that teaching is a good career for an Aboriginal person?

– Other. Please briefly explain.

Q7. What do you enjoy most about being a teacher?

Q8. What is not so good about being a teacher?

Q9. How would you promote teaching as a career of choice to other Aboriginal people?

Q10. What could universities and other teacher education providers do to make more Aboriginal people want to become teachers?

5.7 Phase 4 – Data analysis

Demographic, short answer, and multiple-choice responses were analysed using Qualtrics. A thematic analysis of the open-ended responses was completed using NVivo. To create examples of promotional materials and publications, it was important to maintain the exact wording used by the participants to convey the Aboriginal perspective required.

The use of IWST in the analysis meant that the researcher considered what the participant responses said about the education system and used the knowledge to shape the findings into strength-based strategies, both for the benefit of Aboriginal people and to improve our Australian education system. In this process of analysis, IWST was utilised “as method to determine through an Indigenous lens what the responses are saying about the education system” (Woodroffe, 2019, p. 38).

In Figure 4, I have taken Moreton-Robinson’s (2000) definition of IWST and redefined it in accordance with how I have understood and applied it effectively in past projects. The practical application for analysis is described “as method”. Although the information below mentions a past project, I have applied it in the same way for the Fellowship study.

It was important to introduce myself appropriately as Aboriginal to the participants. While immersed in the data during analysis, I also paid careful attention to the words, language, and perspectives being conveyed. I recognised the need to not only understand the minority Aboriginal positioning, and the differing cultural priorities, but empathise with the messages

being given in the responses. In addition to this, it was important that I used strength-based positioning, enabled by my own Aboriginality, to analyse and reinterpret— to follow Moreton-Robinson's (2013) lead to turn my gaze back onto the Westernised education system and oppose the deficit story of Aboriginal engagement with education.

Figure 4: Operationalising IWST (Woodroffe, 2019, p. 108)

Indigenous women's standpoint theory	
That Indigenous women's positions in society and life experiences, provide them with an ability to understand the world from a unique point of view and positioning. As Indigenous women, it is important to speak our truth and express our reality, which is different to the point of view and reality of others.	
As methodology	As method (an analysis tool)
An Indigenous woman as researcher.	To connect (through relationality) with Indigenous educators participating in the research study when conducting interviews, but also to use strength-based positioning when analysing and interpreting the data.
Expressing our reality means to understand the negative positioning by others and then to choose our own position of strength.	
Foremost are concerns about family and culture.	For example, in the case of this research study – <i>considering what the participant responses are conveying about the Australian education system (as opposed to continuing the story of deficit aimed at Indigenous people.</i>
"...Indigenous axiology, ontology and epistemology are [sic]...integral components" (Moreton-Robinson, 2013 [sic], p. 337). Informed by the connection to country and living things.	

This IWST methodology, along with the application of a presentation feedback approach, meant that whenever the research was posted, presented, or delivered in a workshop or professional development, the audience feedback informed further thinking about the findings and the next steps in the research. This was especially pertinent in this research project when the audience member giving the feedback was Aboriginal.

Presenting research in a format based on Indigenous emphasis on narrative and orality enables the Indigenous researcher to communicate their work effectively, making use of the skills and strengths of these types of communication to interpret feedback.
(Woodroffe, 2021, p. 81)

5.8 Phase 5 – Production of outputs and reporting

The production of the outputs and reporting of the findings occurred throughout the research process, beginning with the emerging themes.

Phase 5 was principally about understanding participant responses as descriptors of existing and ideal sentiments about teaching as a career. Assuming favourable reception of the research by the target audience, this distinction allows for the practical application of the research to facilitate its greatest impact. This final phase is the most important part of the

research because it requires accurate interpretation of the findings to create resources with a promotional bliss point that Aboriginal Territorians can relate to and connect with. If done correctly, the outputs should convince Aboriginal people to become teachers.

6. Findings

6.1 Introduction

This section presents the Fellowship findings. As previously noted, a complementary mixed methods approach to data collection and thematic analysis of open-ended questions was adopted to answer the research questions posed in [Section 1.1](#).

6.2 Phase 2 – Analysis

6.2.1 CDU data

CDU data were included because CDU is the main teacher education provider in the NT. Relevant CDU teacher education data were obtained from the CDU Performance Hub.

Table 3 provides a breakdown of Indigenous students' undergraduate enrolments by education courses, comparing 2022 enrolment numbers to those from 2021 and 2017. The majority of enrolments were in the Bachelor of Education Primary, but the numbers in Bachelor of Education Primary appear to have decreased over that period. There have been increases in the Undergraduate Certificate for Remote Educators since the re-establishment of the RATE program in 2020 and implementation of the trial program in 2021.

Table 3: Indigenous students' undergraduate enrolments by education courses, comparing 2017, 2021, and 2022

Course Group	YTD 2022	2021	2017
B ED PRIMARY	39 (32%)	40 (34%)	56 (59%)
B ED SECONDARY	22 (18%)	15 (13%)	15 (16%)
UG CERT REMOTE EDUCATORS	20 (16%)	22 (19%)	
B ED EARLY CHILDHOOD TEACHING	19 (15%)	29 (25%)	18 (19%)
DIP EDUCATIONAL STUDIES	16 (13%)	7 (6%)	
UG CERT TEACHER EDUCATION	5 (4%)	2 (2%)	
B ED (GRAD ENTRY)	1 (1%)	2 (2%)	6 (6%)
B EDUCATIONAL STUDIES	1 (1%)		

Enrolments are important and signal the beginning of the journey to become a teacher. Table 4 presents the number of NT (home location) First Nations undergraduate enrolments in the Bachelor of Education (Early Childhood, Primary, and Secondary) at CDU from 2019 to 2024. Data are taken from CDU's Key Annual Statistics. The number of NT First Nations people enrolled in the teaching degree courses declined over this period. This does not look encouraging for increasing the number of Aboriginal teachers in the NT, but it could also mean that people are engaged in other study on their way into a degree program.

Table 4: NT First Nations undergraduate enrolments in the Bachelor of Education (Early Childhood Teaching, Primary, and Secondary) at CDU, 2019–2024

	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024 YTD*
Course enrolments	67	60	57	54	48	46
EFTSL	38.4	34.0	36.9	29.5	23.6	22.4

* Please note that the 2024 YTD labelling was in place when the data were accessed in February 2025.

These figures show that CDU could benefit from a more targeted promotion of teaching as a career option to Aboriginal people. A partnership has been formalised in 2024 between CDU and the NT Department of Education and Training with the creation of the First Nations Teacher Education Hub. The work of the hub is to manage the RATE program and increase First Nations teacher numbers. Promotion of teaching is a necessary priority.

6.2.2 NT Department of Education and Training data

The NT Department of Education and Training was asked to provide data about fully qualified Aboriginal teacher numbers in the NT. This information was requested from the Department as the main stakeholder responsible for the promotion of teaching as a career. Data were provided on 19 July 2024 and approved for publication as school-based Aboriginal staff paid headcount, with the data current at the time of provision.

According to the data provided on gender, it is evident that there are more Aboriginal female teachers than Aboriginal male teachers in the NT. Aboriginal male teacher numbers have increased slowly over the years from 20, at the start of 2018, to 35, by the end of 2023 (see Table 5). The total Aboriginal teacher numbers did the same, showing a pattern of increasing, then decreasing, and then increasing again steadily over time. There were, for instance, 136 Aboriginal teachers at the start of 2018 and 160 by the end of 2023. However, this illustrates an increase of only 24 Aboriginal teachers after six years, confirming the need for increased efforts in and innovative strategies for the promotion of teaching.

Table 5: Paid headcount by pay period – gender

Gender	2018				2019				2020			
	201807	201813	201820	201826	201907	201913	201920	201926	202007	202013	202020	202026
Female	116	119	113	117	118	125	123	125	123	125	130	127
Male	20	22	25	25	23	25	30	29	27	28	30	33
Grand Total	136	141	138	142	141	150	153	154	150	153	160	160

Gender	2021				2022				2023			
	202107	202113	202120	202126	202207	202213	202220	202226	202307	202313	202320	202326
Female	132	127	125	122	116	122	121	127	123	125	126	125
Male	27	27	28	29	29	28	30	30	30	30	34	35
Grand Total	159	154	153	151	145	150	151	157	153	155	160	160

Data were also provided by the Department on teacher numbers per region. As Table 6 shows, the Darwin and Top End regions consistently have greater numbers of Aboriginal teachers. This could result from how teaching is promoted in the regions or could indicate easier access to teacher education. The fact that most schools in the NT are located in remote and very remote schools means that there is a demand for more Aboriginal teachers in these regions. Overall, 44% of the total NT student population attend those 71% of schools. This information can be seen on the NT Government, Teach in the Territory, Our Schools [Map] webpage (NT Government, 2023b).

Table 6: Paid headcount by pay period – region

Region	2018				2019				2020			
	201807	201813	201820	201826	201907	201913	201920	201926	202007	202013	202020	202026
East Arnhem & Barkly region	23	24	23	23	23	23	27	27	24	24	25	25
Big Rivers region	25	24	28	28	27	26	27	27	26	27	22	22
Central region	24	20	20	23	23	21	24	24	24	25	29	29
Darwin region	33	34	34	34	35	35	35	36	34	37	40	38
Top End region	31	39	33	34	33	45	40	40	42	40	44	46
Grand Total	136	141	138	142	141	150	153	154	150	153	160	160

Region	2021				2022				2023			
	202107	202113	202120	202126	202207	202213	202220	202226	202307	202313	202320	202326
East Arnhem & Barkly region	24	22	19	19	18	16	15	17	17	17	20	19
Big Rivers region	23	21	27	27	25	27	26	26	25	26	27	27
Central region	30	29	25	25	25	25	24	28	28	29	32	31
Darwin region	36	36	35	33	34	36	39	39	37	38	37	38
Top End region	46	46	47	47	43	46	47	47	46	45	44	45
Grand Total	159	154	153	151	145	150	151	157	153	155	160	160

6.2.3 Symposium

An online symposium for stakeholders was organised to present programs, knowledge, and expertise on increasing the number of Aboriginal teachers in the NT (see Figure 5). This provided an opportunity for sharing information and networking, as well as assisting with the project audit of current programs and strategies. Presenters included the NT Department of Education and Training, the NT TRB, CDU staff and researchers, and Catholic Education NT.

Department representatives discussed the NT Public Service Aboriginal Workforce Strategic Priorities and the RATE program. CDU representatives discussed scholarships, mentors for First Nations students, the Tertiary Enabling Program, and the role of the future student team. The representative from the NT TRB talked about special authorisations that allow for

Aboriginal Assistant Teachers to teach in community schools, and Catholic Education NT contributed stories from two Aboriginal teachers and information on two past teacher development programs: Grow Our Own and the Department-led More Indigenous Teachers program.

Figure 5: Advertising for the symposium



6.3 Student survey responses

6.3.1 Thematic analysis of student responses in NVivo – an overview

Thematic analysis in NVivo was used with open-ended question responses. The student data were first considered all together to understand the broader overarching themes (see Table 7). This was completed by both members of the research team as a process of team validation. Then, the responses to individual questions were analysed through an Aboriginal lens using the IWST approach to understand the responses from an Aboriginal perspective and reflect on the potential for improving the education system.

Table 7: Student thematic analysis overview

Negative perceptions of teaching as a profession	Other motivations	Positive perceptions	Promotion of teaching
Difficult students: 10	Giving back to community: 3	Financial security: 1	Talk to students and ask them if they want to be a teacher: 2
Stress: 5	Helping people learn: 3		Role model: 2
Poor pay: 2	Indigenous pedagogy: 1		Positive experience in schools that accept Aboriginal students: 2
Unhappy teachers: 1			Support learning better English: 1
Negative school environment: 1			Tell students that teaching is an option for them: 1
			Study in community: 1
			Can teach Aboriginal students: 1

Four main themes emerged, with underlying sub-themes:

1. Negative perceptions of teaching as a profession

This theme provides a significant indicator of why many students do not want to become teachers. In particular, they do not want to have to manage poor student behaviour.

This is what they had to say:

- “No, because teachers always complain about it, and they go on strike and a lot of them don't look enthusiastic about their job when they are teaching. I want to do something interesting.”
- “Students being rude.”
- “Dealing with kids’ behaviours.”
- “School environments are mentally damaging.”

2. Other motivations

Opposite to the previous theme, the students listed a number of motivations or reasons to become a teacher:

- “So, they can teach kids the way they wanted to be taught, offering more opportunities and a similar mindset.”
- “I want to help kids in my community to get education.”
- “To teach the next generation and follow in elders’ footsteps.”

- “I want to help people learn and expand their knowledge.”

3. Positive perceptions

An interesting positive perception about teaching was the financial security that it offers. One student said:

- “Having a good income to be financially secure.”

4. Promotion of teaching

The student responses on how to promote teaching revealed a lack of information and knowledge among students regarding the fact that teaching is an option. Some students said:

- “Sit & talk to them & ask if they are interested in becoming a teacher by explaining the benefits of helping young people.”
- “Telling them it would be a great opportunity to be a teacher and teach Indigenous students.”
- “Tell them that they can do it and do not need to be afraid.”

One student highlighted the importance of students having a positive experience of school. They said:

- “Maybe engage more students at school first because experience in school can also influence what we do in the future.”

These responses provided an initial emerging understanding of the important answers to the research questions. The analyses of each individual survey question provided more depth and detail.

6.3.2 Student responses to multiple choice and short answer questions

Q1. Please choose which of the indicators below best describe you. You can select more than one (e.g. remote school, Katherine region).

Table 8: Student demographics

Options	Number of responses
Urban school	4
Rural school	0
Remote school	1
Very remote school	1
Darwin region	13
East Arnhem region	1
Katherine region	5
Barkly region	0
Alice Springs region	0
Catholic school	1
Independent school	3
Boarding school outside of the Territory	1

The majority of the student participants were from Darwin. Some students indicated the type of school they attended but not the region, whereas others indicated the region but not the type. Government school was not an option. It was expected that the majority of responses would be from government public schools because this accounted for the majority of schools approached to participate, unless indicated otherwise.

Q2. Do you attend school in your home community? (Yes or No)

Of the participants, 61% attended school in their home community, while 39% did not. This may be because not all schools have secondary education provision, especially in the NT, with many located in remote and very remote communities.

Q2(a). If you do not attend school in your home community, what region is your home community?

The Darwin region was the home community of 67% of the participants. For the remaining participants, 11% selected the East Arnhem region as their home community, and for 22% their home community was the Katherine region.

Q3. Would you like to be a teacher when you leave school? (Yes or No)

Of the participants, 35% said they would like to be a teacher when they left school, and 65% said they would not.

Q5. Why do you think that teaching would be a good job for an Aboriginal person? (You can pick more than one answer.)

Q5 – Why do you think that teaching would be a good job for an Aboriginal person? (You can pick more than one answer.) – Selected Choice	Percentage	Count
Caring for Aboriginal students	61%	14
Sharing Aboriginal knowledge	61%	14
Can explain Aboriginal ways of thinking and learning to non-Aboriginal students and teachers	61%	14
Helps to build confidence in our ability as Aboriginal people to be successful in education like a role model	57%	13
Helping our community	35%	8
Other. Please briefly explain.	9%	2

Question 5 contained a multiple choice option to provide all students with the opportunity to think about the broader benefits of being a teacher. It was offered as a multiple choice question because students might not have thought much about teaching or the cultural opportunities afforded to teachers.

Q6. What do you think would be the good things about being a teacher? (You can pick more than one answer.)

Q6 – What would be the good things about being a teacher? (You can pick more than one answer.) – Selected Choice	Percentage	Count
Teaching students how to learn and be successful	82%	18
Being a professional and serving the community	32%	7
Having a good income to be financially secure	32%	7
Teaching things that you are passionate about	50%	11
Other. Please briefly explain.	5%	1

The most popular good thing selected by students was “Teaching students how to be successful”. This was followed next by “Teaching things that you are passionate about”. Both of these answers concern the art and enjoyment of teaching. These would be ideal examples to use when promoting teaching.

Q8. Do you think that there should be more Aboriginal teachers?

Q8 – Do you think that there should be more Aboriginal teachers?		
Yes	82%	18
Maybe	18%	4
No	0%	0

None of the students surveyed said that there was no need for any more Aboriginal teachers. The majority of students confirmed that there should be more. This is promising

with regard to the promotion of teaching as a career, as it is clear that students think this is necessary.

6.3.3 Student responses to open-ended questions

Q4. Why or why not? (Asked in Q3 if students would like to be a teacher after leaving school.)

Table 9: Student interests

Alternative to being a teacher	Number of responses
Interested in something else	3
Leaving school behind	3
Not working with kids	2
Something else	2
A carpenter	1
A childcare worker	1
A health worker	1
Working out bush	1
Working at the mines	1

Students who did not want to be teachers after they leave school planned to be doing other things. It is acknowledged that not everybody will want to teach, but the reasons for this could help to inform how we promote teaching. For example, the student who wants to work out bush could teach out bush. A teaching degree could also be helpful for a childcare worker. It was also noted that the comments about not liking children and not wanting to work with them may reflect temporary attitudes that would not stop the respondents from pursuing teaching as a mature-aged student.

There were a couple of concerning comments. Apart from those about not liking children, there was also a comment about teachers always looking unhappy and complaining. Unsurprisingly, such a perception did not inspire this student to want to be a teacher. Other concerning comments addressed not enjoying school, not liking school, and wanting to leave school behind. A student's experience at school affects their future. It is, therefore, vital that students have a positive, enjoyable, and safe experience of school.

Q5 (a). Why do you think that teaching would be a good job for an Aboriginal person?

– Other. Please briefly explain.

Students were also given the option to select “other” and to write their own answer. Two of these responses were:

- “Build relationships easier connect easier make it feel like a safe space.”
- “Teach bilingual education.”

Both of these alternative answers offered by the students have cultural aspects to them regarding language, connectedness, and (cultural) safety. These answers underscore two things: that culture and language are intertwined, and that there is a need for Aboriginal students to feel connected and safe at school.

Q6 (a). What do you think would be the good things about being a teacher?

– **Other. Please briefly explain.**

As with the previous question, students were given the option of writing their own answer to this question rather than simply choosing among the multiple-choice answers. Only one student chose to write an answer. The student wrote:

- “Housing.”

In communities, housing provided to visiting teachers is an obvious benefit when it is available. The student who gave this answer has clearly noticed this. A housing shortage in remote and very remote communities would definitely be an incentive to be a teacher and should be used to promote the profession when available.

Q7. What might not be so good about being a teacher?

Table 10: Student concerns

Something not so good about teaching	Number of responses
Poor student behaviour	10
Stress	5
Poor pay	2
Going away to study	1
Having to pass an English and maths assessment	1
Being criticised by others	1
Not having confidence to teach	1
Difficulty if students don't understand you	1

The answers to this question were surprising and highlight the need to promote teaching in highly specific ways. “Poor student behaviour” appears to be a major concern about being a teacher. “Not having confidence to teach” and “Difficulty if students don't understand you” also concern teacher skills. These concerns reveal the need to tell students about the technical information that people learn when they train to be a teacher, such as behaviour management. When promoting teaching, it is important to provide information about what teaching students will learn and to explain that they will be supported in their learning.

Q9. What do you think is the best way to encourage young Aboriginal people to become teachers?

Student responses to Question 9 included discussion of the need for better engagement of students at school. Students wanted to be involved in conversations about whether they would like to be teachers and shown how to be a teacher, including by role models. This answer is explained in more detail in Sections [4.3.4](#) and [4.3.5](#).

6.3.4 Student responses summary

Most students agreed that there should be more Aboriginal teachers. Opinions varied about how to achieve this. Some students did not answer the question about “how”, and a couple of students said that they did not know. One student said that there was not a way to encourage others to become teachers.

To note any trends and improve understanding of how to promote teaching as a career choice, student responses were grouped by their home regions.

Students from the **Darwin region** (and urban areas) talked about the need for more information, explanations of the benefits of teaching, better engagement of students during schooling for a positive experience of school, and actual demonstrations of how to become a teacher.

Students from the **Katherine region** talked about the need to encourage students that they can become teachers, to encourage them to attend school and graduate, and stressed the importance of role models.

Students from the **East Arnhem region** (and remote areas) talked about being able to study in community, the need for support to improve English, the need for more Aboriginal teachers to promote teaching, and the importance of conversations with students to ask them if they are interested.

6.4 Teacher responses

6.4.1 Thematic analysis of teacher responses in NVivo – an overview

Following the same process as with the student data, teacher data were first considered all together to understand the broader overarching themes (see Table 11). This was undertaken by both members of the research team as a process of team validation. Teacher responses to individual questions were then analysed through an Aboriginal lens using an IWST approach.

Table 11: Thematic analysis of combined teacher interview and open-ended survey responses

Challenges	Culture	Teacher training	Promotion of teaching
Workload: 4	Importance of culture in schools: 5	Higher education support for Aboriginal people: 3	Student growth and development: 7
Realistic understanding: 3	Sharing Indigenous knowledge and perspectives: 3	Pathways information: 1	Making connections: 6
Colonialism: 2		Pedagogical approaches: 1	Making a difference: 3
			Began working in another school-based role: 3
			Helping community: 3
			Perceptions of school as a student: 3
			Motivation to teach: 3
			Need role models: 2
			Younger cohort: 1

The teacher responses provided more detail than those of the students. The main themes that quickly emerged were the significance of culture for Aboriginal people in education; that teaching should be promoted to young people, who should know about its rewards and challenges; that there are supports in place if people want to study; and the knowledge that you can give back to community and become a teacher even after you experience other roles.

Some teachers gave the following responses:

Challenges

- “There are a lot of expectations and demands on time, such as with administration tasks. Things like that tend to get in the way of teaching. Which means that being a teacher is not always student focused.”

Culture

- “I also stress the importance of working with non-Aboriginal people to help them better understand Aboriginal Australia.”
- “Explaining Aboriginal ways of thinking and learning is a big focus.”
- “Sharing knowledge and experiences.”
- “I also like to put my Aboriginal perspective/knowledge into my teaching program and educate young people about Indigenous Australia.”

Teacher training

- “Should provide students with more information up front about scholarship opportunities and how it can benefit students with their studies. I had a scholarship, and it was the best thing that motivated me to complete my studies.”
- “Indigenous support services are good.”

Promotion

- “I was working with youth. I had quite a large caseload. I decided to help support young people to stay in school. 95% of the people I was working with were Indigenous. So, I started my degree as a mature age student.”
- “Not just going along with collaborative planning but working at embedding Indigenous content and using different pedagogical approaches.”
- “And building relationships with those students.”
- “Working experience in schools including sports development officer (visiting schools), Teacher Assistant, tutor, after school care, SESA [special education support assistant], etc.”
- “I wanted to work around kids and work in my community.”
- “I love working with children, especially Aboriginal students. I love being in the classroom and preparing activities that benefit student learning.”

This information from the thematic overview is further investigated through the analysis of individual questions below.

6.4.2 Teacher responses to short answer and multiple-choice questions

Q1. How long have you been a teacher?

Table 12: Teaching experience

Time range in years	Number of responses
0–5	5
6–10	1
11–15	3
16–20	1
21+	3

The majority of teachers who agreed to participate had been teachers for 0–5 years. However, the spread of respondents had a representation across the time ranges given, meaning that responses reflected both new and experienced perspectives.

Q2. Please select the choices below that best describe your school. You can select more than one (e.g. remote school, Katherine region).

Table 13: Teacher school location

School descriptors	Number of responses
Urban school	7
Rural school	0
Remote school	2
Very remote school	1
Darwin region	6
East Arnhem region	0
Katherine region	1
Barkly region	0
Alice Springs	3
Catholic school	2
Independent school	0

Two respondents did not indicate their region. Even without all regions recorded, the information collected shows that most respondents were from Darwin and an urban setting. There was, however, some representation from remote and very remote schools and the Katherine and Alice regions. Two Catholic education teachers also participated, reflecting perspectives from that sector and enriching the information for later promotion.

Q3. Do you teach in your home community? (Yes or No)

Six teachers confirmed that they taught in their home communities, while seven confirmed they did not. The seven who did not teach in their home communities brought with them the perspectives of their home communities, adding to the richness and diversity of the responses.

Q3 (a). If no, where is your home community?

Table 14: Teacher home region

Home region	Number of responses
Darwin region	3
Katherine	1
In another state	3

In the NT, like the rest of Australia, we have teacher shortages, and it is common for teachers from interstate to come to the NT to teach. Three teacher respondents listed their home communities as interstate, providing a broader range of responses about how to best promote teaching.

Q4. Did you decide to be a teacher while you were still a student in school? (Yes or No)

Four teachers decided that they would be teachers while they were still students in school. Nine had not decided to be a teacher until after doing other things first. This is an interesting piece of information because (i) more could be done to encourage students while they are in school to think about teaching as a career and (ii) it suggests there are motivations after graduation that empower Aboriginal people to become teachers. Some participants described being involved in youth-related and school-based employment and that this helped them to decide to be a teacher. Mature-aged students are a target audience of interest to increase the numbers of Aboriginal teachers in the NT.

Q6. Why do you think that teaching is a good career for an Aboriginal person? (You can pick more than one answer.)

Table 15: Teacher upsides

Multiple-choice options	Number of responses
Caring for Aboriginal students	9
Sharing Aboriginal knowledge	7
Can explain Aboriginal ways of thinking and learning to non-Aboriginal students and teachers	8
Helps to build confidence in our ability as Aboriginal people to be successful in education like a role model	10
Helping our community	8
Other	5

These multiple choice options were provided to encourage teachers to reflect on how they enact their culture in their teaching practice. The participants saw themselves predominantly as role models, and secondly as caring for Aboriginal students. These two aspects of the job were followed by the importance of demonstrating Aboriginal pedagogy and helping the community.

These elements are significant in the promotion of teaching as a career for Aboriginal people in the NT.

6.4.3 Thematic analysis of teacher responses by open-ended questions

Q5. What made you decide to be a teacher?

Table 16: Teacher motivations

Motivation	Number of responses
Working on other school-based jobs	2
Working with youth	2
Teacher role models	5
To be better than the teachers they had	1
Always wanted to be a teacher or work in a school	3
Work with community	1
Enjoyed school	2
Wanted to improve Indigenous education outcomes	1

The responses here suggest that teacher role models had the greatest effect in decisions to become a teacher, followed by a long-standing desire to be a teacher or to work in schools. The power of visual examples needs to be understood and used to promote teaching to Aboriginal people. There are scattered examples of this—such as in the national Be That Teacher campaign and on the Education NT YouTube channel—but there is no organised visual campaign such as could be provided through an Aboriginal teacher role model association or an NT Aboriginal-focused curated website. There should also be formal recognition of Aboriginal leadership through acknowledgement and remuneration.

Q6 (a). Why do you think that teaching is a good career for an Aboriginal person?

Five participants chose to write their own answer to Question 6. This is what they said about why teaching is a good career for an Aboriginal person:

- “Aboriginal people can fight against the negative views about Aboriginal people.”
- “As an elder [sic] and professional in another area of expertise I can bring my experience in industry and travel (including life experience) into the classroom. It also helps to have a chemist teaching science when there are so many teachers that are teaching outside their field. This helps build rapport and build excitement for the teacher and that flows through to the students and inspires interest in science.”
- “Role model for girls on country and to combat racism.”

- “I believe that providing Aboriginal students with a sense of belonging is very important.”
- “Aboriginal students need more role models and then there'll be a ripple effect to teach children. Teaching pays for a good living with economic security. It means that I can be in control of my life.”

Q7. What do you enjoy most about being a teacher?

Table 17: Teaching benefits

Enjoy most about being a teacher	Number of responses
Working with, supporting, and building relationships with students	7
Love teaching	1
Seeing students learn	5
Designing differentiated learning	2
Connecting with families	1
Having school holidays to allow for family time	1
Fun events	1
Supportive leadership	1
Caring about student wellbeing	1
The aspect of “giving”	1

Without a doubt, what the teachers enjoyed most about teaching was the students—engaging with them and helping them to learn and grow. Seeing the reactions of students when they understand something for the first time is extremely rewarding, and these teachers felt strongly about this.

Q8. What is not be so good about being a teacher?

Table 18: Teaching drawbacks

Not so good about being a teacher	Number of responses
Work demands on your time, meetings	6
Administration – paperwork and compliance	1
Feeling out of place, difficult colleagues and parents	1
Racism – school and community	2
Tokenism	1
Having to protect your intellectual property	1
Cultural load	5
Keeping up to date with programs and practice	1
Substandard and burnt-out teachers	4
The lack of new programs and innovation	1

Low attendance	1
Lack of community inclusion	1
Not always student focused	1
Teachers who don't implement training such as cultural responsiveness, trauma informed practice	1
No respect for the teaching profession	1
Exhaustion	1

Teaching can require a large investment of time and effort. Teachers care about their students, and they also care about things that they perceive as detracting from effective teaching and inclusive practice. Work demands on teacher time (such as attending meetings), the inequity of cultural load, and substandard teaching were all rated highly as detracting from the teaching experience.

Q9. How would you promote teaching as a career of choice to other Aboriginal people?

The participants had many different ideas about how to promote teaching to Aboriginal people. Participants suggested:

- focus on capabilities and positive impact
- share teacher stories and have higher visibility
- recognise that there are personal rewards, and teachers can make a difference
- encourage potential Aboriginal teachers to be passionate and proud of their culture
- use role models and encourage more young people
- mentor through placement and effective communication about teaching
- promote innovation in education
- use training, learning, meeting, and talking
- encourage teaching in different locations and tell people that it can be demanding and emotional
- explain that the education system is Western and that allies are important.

Q10. What could universities and other teacher education providers do to make more Aboriginal people want to become teachers?

This answer is described in detail in [Section 7](#), but participants suggested:

- greater pre-service teacher support
- more promotion of successful teacher stories
- more information about scholarships, modes of study, and pathways
- training in community with no need to travel
- greater leadership support in schools
- targeting young adults and providing mentoring, tutoring, student accommodation
- reducing cultural load and establishing student belonging at institutions.

6.4.4 Teacher responses summary

The surveyed teachers explained their motivations behind their career choice. There were common responses across regions—working in related roles, teacher role models, always wanting to be a teacher, working in another field and then becoming a teacher, wanting to work in the community, and enjoying school. A less common response was noting and wishing to redress the inequity in education.

Some teachers provided additional information on what is good about being a teacher. Apart from the multiple choice options, participants discussed bringing both cultural and professional knowledge to their role, inspiring students, creating a sense of belonging for Aboriginal students, and teaching about Aboriginal Australia to all students. Also discussed were the economic security of the job and the importance of combating racism and negative views of Aboriginal people.

The Aboriginal teacher participants loved different aspects of teaching. Working with students, and helping them grow and learn were what they loved the most. Building relationships and connecting with family were also important, as was embedding Indigenous content/perspectives/knowledge and pedagogy. Job security, pay, and holidays were also mentioned.

The Aboriginal teachers went on to address the challenges they faced. Overall, a number of key themes were reported. These included leadership expectations and demands on time, dealing with difficult parents or difficult colleagues, racism and ignorance, cultural load, upskilling, lack of community engagement, low student attendance, a lack of consistency, non-Aboriginal teachers not embedding cultural responsiveness training into practice, too much administration and too many meetings, a lack of respect for the profession in society, and exhaustion. Two concerns that were also noted were feeling out of place and feeling like there were double standards.

To note any trends and inform how to promote teaching as a career choice, teacher responses were grouped in their home regions.

Teachers from the **Darwin region** talked about the need to stay positive and work on capabilities and impacts, share their stories and make these more visible, and tell people how rewarding it is to do something that you love. They also noted that Aboriginal teachers make a difference just by being a part of a school, and that Aboriginal teachers have a role to play in the continuation of culture and are not to be deterred.

Teachers from the **Katherine region** (and remote areas) talked about the need to continue being role models and encourage younger people to consider teaching as a career option, to let other Aboriginal people hear teachers' stories and learn about the joys of being a teacher, and to provide mentors for Aboriginal teachers. They also discussed the need to better promote teaching, including sharing success stories, stressing that anything is possible, and making sure pathways are clear and communicated with more people.

Teachers from **interstate** talked about teaching away from home and out bush, that people should be encouraged to work where there are other Aboriginal educators and existing examples of culturally appropriate practices, and the need to tell Aboriginal people the real story—that teaching is hard but is vitally important for the students. They also mentioned the

comfortable pay and lifestyle, that it can be hard to create a work–life balance, and that it is important to find encouraging and positive people to work with.

6.5 Regional considerations for promoting teaching to Aboriginal people

Discussion of regional considerations is important in acknowledging Aboriginal diversity and the fact that Aboriginal peoples have many differences that are uniquely inclusive of cultural beliefs, languages, and cultural practices. It is, therefore, important to understand that not only location and the degree of remoteness, but also cultural nuances would affect ways of thinking about education and promotion of teaching. Table 19 outlines some of the regional considerations that should be considered in the promotion of teaching.

Table 19: Regional considerations for promoting teaching in the NT

Region	Common focus points raised
Darwin region	- Importance of positive school experiences to drive aspirations. - Need for more information including technical information about learning to be a teacher. Sharing stories of the personal rewards and benefits of a teaching career.
East Arnhem region (and remote)	- Being able to study without leaving their community. - Concern over being able to meet the literacy requirements of Standard Australian English.
Katherine region (and remote)	- Need for more Aboriginal teachers to be role models and encourage more and more Aboriginal people to teach. More information about the possibilities of teaching. - Active encouragement of young people to think about teaching.
Alice Springs region	- Reiterated the call for role models and face-to-face stories and experiences. - Need for positive school experiences. - Appropriate support at university.
Interstate	Stories of teaching experiences including potential challenges.

*The highlighting is to show the matching of sentiment across regions. The same sentiment has the same colour.

In the Darwin and Alice Springs regions, promotion could focus on the importance of positive school experiences and the sharing of teaching stories and experiences. Both the Darwin and Katherine regions require the provision of more information about teaching as a career option. Katherine and Alice Springs promotions could focus on the stories of role models and even the possibility of face-to-face conversations.

When promoting teaching in East Arnhem, it would be pertinent to consider how study can be made accessible without having to leave community, and how students can be supported to learn and be confident in English.

The participant pool also included teacher respondents who listed their home communities as interstate and who thought that it was important to include information about the potential challenges of teaching.

7. Discussion and recommendations

7.1 Introduction

This section discusses the research questions in relation to the interpretation of results. It also provides a comparison to existing research, recommendations, and limitations.

7.2 Research questions answered

7.2.1 RQ1: Do Aboriginal senior secondary students aspire to be teachers?

This research question was addressed by the student survey questions 3 and 4. The students were asked: "Would you like to be a teacher when you leave school? Yes or No" and "Why or why not?"

In short, the answer was "Yes!" Some Aboriginal senior secondary students do aspire to become teachers. Approximately one-third of the students surveyed wanted to become a teacher when they left school. Two-thirds of students had other plans.

Students who would like to be teachers said:

- "Yes, because I enjoy showing people new things."
- "I want to give back."
- "I want to help kids in my community to get education."
- "I'm already currently attending a vet [vocational education and training] course (Cert3 in Early childhood education and care) to help as a bridging course to work as a teacher."

Some students were decisive in saying exactly why that did not want to be a teacher. They said:

- "I would rather be a childcare worker."
- "No, I feel that after graduating I will leave my school life behind."
- "Teaching isn't something I'm interested in."
- "No because teachers always complain about it."

These reasons why and why not can be strategically noted as concepts to promote teaching as a career.

7.2.2 RQ2: How can we encourage more Aboriginal senior secondary students to want to become teachers?

This research question was addressed by student questions 8 and 9. The students were asked: "Do you think that there should be more Aboriginal teachers? Yes, No, or Maybe" and "What do you think is the best way to encourage young Aboriginal people to become teachers?"

Although the question about promotion was asked of the senior secondary student cohort, teachers also mentioned the need to attract younger people to the profession.

Students suggested:

- “Come to school every day, learn and encourage other students to do so.”
- “By being a good role model for them as a teacher.”
- “More information.”
- “Let them study in community with family and support. Help to get better at English.”
- “Maybe engage more students at school first because experience in school can also influence what we do in the future. For example, I find Biology interesting, and I like learning about the evolution of animals. I learnt about this in school and now I aspire to be a Zoologist or someone in that field of work.”

7.2.3 RQ3: What do existing Aboriginal teachers and students think are positive reasons to become a teacher?

This question generated many criteria that could be used to shape convincing promotional resources. Teacher responses to questions 6–8 and student responses to questions 4–7 all contributed to answering this question.

There were numerous suggestions, but the key themes dealt with the benefits of supporting Aboriginal students and the rewarding experience of teaching and watching students learn. Relationship-building and the ability to find connections through culture in education were also mentioned in conjunction with the need to see examples of others' success. A lot of what was said concerned seeing, feeling, and talking, supporting a personal and face-to-face approach to promoting teaching as a career to Aboriginal people.

Some teachers said:

- “I love watching students learn a concept, the aha moments. I enjoy putting my own perspective on learning and not just going along with collaborative planning but working at embedding Indigenous content and using different pedagogical approaches.”
- “I love working with children, especially Aboriginal students. I love being in the classroom and preparing activities that benefit student learning. I am passionate about wellbeing and getting students be “school ready”. I also like to put my Aboriginal perspective/knowledge into my teaching program and educate young people about Indigenous Australia.”

Students agreed that there were positive things about being a teacher but did not nominate other reasons apart from the multiple-choice options such as “Teaching students how to learn and be successful”, “Teaching things that you are passionate about”, “Caring for Aboriginal students”, “Teaching about Aboriginal knowledge”, and “Giving back to the community”. The student responses to RQ2 also provide a lot of insight and contribute to answering this question.

7.2.4 RQ4: How do Aboriginal teachers think teaching should be promoted to other Aboriginal people?

Responses to teacher questions 4, 5, 9, and 10 all contributed to answering RQ4.

The results show that Aboriginal people want to hear real stories from Aboriginal teachers as role models. It is important to be able to see that others can work in this role. Aboriginal teachers' greatest motivations to teach include supporting Aboriginal students, sharing their knowledge and experience, and building relationships with students. These positive messages should be used to promote teaching while still mentioning the demanding side of the job as well.

Student responses

Teaching as a career should be promoted to Aboriginal senior secondary students and should include more information about how to become a teacher and the benefits (including cultural benefits) of becoming a teacher. Students should be encouraged to reflect on the positive ways that they have been engaged at school and how becoming a teacher could ensure that the next generation of Aboriginal students also have a positive experience of schooling.

Students should be exposed to the fact that teaching is an option for them and that they could become teachers. Having Aboriginal teachers as role models share their stories of how they succeeded in becoming a teacher is invaluable.

The available pathways (ATAR as well as VETiS) to teacher training should be presented to students, and the requirements—such as completing Year 12 and achieving language and numeracy proficiency—should be discussed. Students should be involved in career education conversations to help them make informed decisions about how they can become a teacher.

Teacher responses

Teaching as a career should be promoted to Aboriginal people and should include positive, real stories from Aboriginal teachers (as role models) about what it is like to study and then be a teacher, face-to-face where possible. The significance of positive impacts for Aboriginal (and non-Aboriginal) students should be highlighted, along with the amazing rewards of being a teacher. It should be communicated to potential teachers that cultural knowledge, combined with professional knowledge of teaching, enables Aboriginal teachers to connect and engage students in a unique way that enhances learning.

Pathways and possibilities should also be discussed and explained. A targeted approach should be used to encourage more young people to consider teaching as a career. A system of mentors should be created to support people once they have begun their teacher training.

It should also be communicated that, although the work is hard, teaching is very rewarding. Teaching pay could be better to match the effort, but it can still allow for a comfortable lifestyle.

7.3 Media preferences and policies

The findings of this research increase the likelihood of understanding an audience of potential Aboriginal teachers well enough to create effective advertising about becoming a teacher. The goal is to understand participants' views to identify an audience bliss point in the promotion of teaching as a career. In Table 20, the associated criteria are listed as they exist alongside the corresponding ideal. The promotion of teaching should use the ideal criteria based on the research findings to promote teaching as a career to Aboriginal people.

Table 20: Criteria for advertising about becoming a teacher for an Aboriginal audience

Existing	Ideal
Majority of teachers are non-Aboriginal.	More Aboriginal teachers supporting Aboriginal students.
Some role model activity but not formalised, such as through an association or curated website.	More role models.
Not enough conversations with students or stories from Aboriginal teacher role models	Face-to-face conversations and stories.
Negative student behaviour, students not able to understand teachers, lack of confidence with Standard Australian English. All of these were raised as deterrents by senior secondary students not wanting to be a teacher.	Explanation of what people learn in preparation to be a teacher, technical information, and information about supports in place.
Some non-Aboriginal teachers not confident to teach Aboriginal content or in Aboriginal contexts.	Cultural inclusion in education.
Potential teachers not given enough detailed information about studying and becoming a teacher.	A mix of positive stories and explanation of the challenges of teaching. More information.

The advertising bliss point refers to the optimal level of a stimulus for successful promotion. Although this Fellowship research focused on the richness of content, promoters may also want to consider the frequency of advertisements and emotional appeal, which were outside of the scope of this project. Advertising fatigue may also be something to consider. Essentially, the optimal combination and number of criteria can create a sweet spot where advertising resonates most effectively with the target audience.

The need to focus on promotion strategies has been recognised by government in Australia and the following are some general examples of this.

In 2014, the Australian Government's Department of Finance (2014) published a report entitled *Media Consumption and Communication Preferences of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Audiences*. This report primarily addressed the perceptions of government communication and concluded that:

adopting strategies that differentiate between the following elements would maximise the effectiveness of government communications:

- primary and secondary sources of information

- mainstream and Indigenous media channels for general information and Indigenous specific information
- levels of English proficiency (i.e. 'everyday' or 'broken' English) for oral and written communications. (Department of Finance, 2014, p. 10)

The report contains a series of recommendations that are listed as seven principles. Interestingly, Principle 3 suggests to “Choose strategies based on information preferences and demographic profile” (p. 12). This has emerged as a finding of this Fellowship research, specifically that promotions should be specific to the geographic region and participant group (student or mature-aged).

Principle 6 of the report is particularly relevant and echoes the foundations of the Fellowship research: “Use culturally specific elements for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples in Indigenous specific campaigns” (p. 12).

Principle 7 of the same document is also relevant as a recommendation of the Fellowship project. It states: “Be an active provider of information. Government agencies should provide information proactively and not assume that the target audience will seek out information on their own, without being notified to do so” (p. 13).

The New South Wales government (2025) has published a webpage entitled *Multicultural and Aboriginal Advertising Policy guidance: Applying the Multicultural and Aboriginal Advertising Policy to NSW Government Advertising Campaigns*. The site states that because of an increase in multiculturalism and the lessons learned during the crisis situation of the COVID-19 pandemic, communication needs to be more effective. Updated policies now require that “at least 9% of an advertising campaign media budget is to be spent on direct communications to multicultural and Aboriginal audiences” (New South Wales Government, 2025, para. 9). Cultural considerations are discussed as imperatives. This aligns with the findings of the Fellowship research.

The New South Wales Department of Health (n.d.) has also highlighted the importance of developing a “media strategy for an Aboriginal audience” (para. 1) when promoting health jobs to Aboriginal applicants. The main message on this website concerns where and how information should be communicated, including the need to use appropriate language and to include the messages that New South Wales Health is committed to diversity and that Aboriginal people are strongly encouraged to apply for positions. This is on the *Good Health – Great Jobs: Stepping Up* website (Department of Health, n.d.).

Although the Be That Teacher campaign does incorporate a range of promotion materials, it is not focused only on Aboriginal people and does not use all of the strategies mentioned above. Unused strategies include addressing the demographic profile and developing a campaign that utilises culturally specific elements. This Fellowship’s research findings provide greater insight into what is required to promote teaching to Aboriginal people in the NT, and how to provide it in a way that Aboriginal people are receptive to the message. The following section outlines the suggested recommendations.

7.4 Recommendations

The findings from this Fellowship inform recommendations for the NT Department of Education and Training, as well as schools, teachers, CDU, and, potentially, other interstate departments of education and teacher education providers. Recommendations have been divided into two sets—one for the NT Department of Education and Training, Teacher Registration Board, schools, and other interstate departments of education and a second for CDU and other teacher training institutions.

7.4.1 Recommendations for the NT Department of Education and Training, Teacher Registration Board, schools, and other interstate departments of education

1. Teaching as a career should be promoted more proactively to Aboriginal senior secondary students. This should include more information about how to become a teacher, such as what you learn while studying teaching (such as behaviour management) and the benefits (including cultural benefits) of the job.
2. Students should be encouraged to reflect on the positive ways they have been engaged at school and how becoming a teacher could ensure that the next generation of Aboriginal students also have a positive experience of schooling.
3. Students should be told that teaching is a career option and that they could become teachers.
4. As role models, Aboriginal teachers should share their stories of how they succeeded in becoming a teacher. Such stories are invaluable.
5. The available pathways (ATAR as well as VET in Schools) to teacher training should be presented to students.
6. Requirements, such as completing Year 12 and achieving language and numeracy proficiency, should be discussed.
7. Students should be involved in career education conversations to help them make informed decisions about how they can become a teacher.

7.4.2 Recommendations for CDU and other teacher training institutions

1. Teaching as a career should be promoted more proactively to Aboriginal people and should include positive real stories from Aboriginal teachers (as role models) about what it is like to study and then be a teacher, face-to-face where possible.
2. The significance of positive impacts for Aboriginal (and non-Aboriginal) students should be highlighted, along with the amazing rewards of experience as a teacher.
3. It should be communicated to potential teachers that Aboriginal teachers' cultural knowledge combined with professional knowledge of teaching enables them to connect with and engage students in a unique way that enhances learning.
4. Pathways and possibilities should be better explained and discussed.
5. A targeted approach should be used to encourage more young people to consider teaching as a career.
6. A system of mentors should be created to support people once they have begun their teacher training.
7. It should be communicated that, although the work is hard, teaching can still pay for a comfortable lifestyle.

7.5 Impact

7.5.1 Strategy for disseminating outputs and ensuring impact

Because of the limited timeline of the project, media coverage was important to reach potential Aboriginal teachers as well as stakeholders and supporters. For this purpose, social media was used. The project required a media manager to help ensure impact as well as to organise and chair the online symposium.

Impact was measured by the CDU media and marketing team using data collected through:

- attendance and engagement with the symposium
- the success of *The Conversation* pitch resulting in an article
- the article metrics collected by *The Conversation*
- social media reads, likes, and shares
- the metrics from the Needed Now in Learning and Teaching article
- the identification of potential areas for the promotion of teaching
- the success of resource production
- the success of resource implementation and evaluation (although this may be a longer-term measure)
- CDU media stories and uptake metrics
- Q1 peer-reviewed journal publication.

There could be an evaluation of the success of the collaboration between the NT Department of Education and Training, the NT TRB, and CDU, and the degree to which findings are used for implementation in other departments of education or by other teacher education providers.

Some impacts can be seen within the 12-month period of the Fellowship, whereas other evaluations will take longer, extending beyond the life of the Fellowship.

7.5.2 CDU media report for 2024

The following is taken directly from the CDU media report:

Here is your media coverage summary for 2024. Thank you for providing your time and expertise to issues and ideas that were of interest to media. You had **79** mentions in the media and reached a potential audience reach of **97,224,405** worldwide. This equates to **\$924,223.34 USD** in marketing value.

Some of the highlights were:

- First Nations educators key to plugging Northern Territory remote teacher shortage
- NT education: CDU's Tracy Woodroffe sights set on First Nations educators
- Election 2024: Education expert Tracy Woodroffe responds to Territory Labor, CLP plans

Your performance was excellent, among the most high impact. Your willingness to participate in these opportunities is reflected in the numbers and we appreciate your efforts. (Email communication from CDU Media, 10 December 2024)

7.6 Industry collaboration

The ACSES Fellowship required collaboration. Industry collaboration is particularly important for research to affect policy and practice. Basing research on industry expertise and insider knowledge increases its credibility. The ability to practically implement research findings has the potential to directly benefit Aboriginal students and classrooms. At the end of the Fellowship collaboration with NT Department of Education and Training, 550 copies of the *Conversation Starter* text were handed over to the Department. Catholic Education NT also requested copies and 106 copies were delivered. This was a significant milestone because the collaboration had resulted in an output (the *Conversation Starter*) that was created based on the findings of the research. The messages in the text were developed using the participant words and perspectives that had been collected, analysed, and translated through an Aboriginal lens into the strength-based form of a book to be used in schools. The resource is a concrete example of how research can directly impact what happens in a classroom for the benefit of Aboriginal students. The onus now is on the Department to ensure that the text is used, as intended.

A partnership was formalised in 2024 between CDU and the NT Department of Education and Training for the creation of the First Nations Teacher Education Hub. The work of the hub is to manage the RATE program and increase First Nations teacher numbers. The hub has supported the activities of the Fellowship and actively implemented recommendations, including suggestions when creating role model videos.

The 2023 federal directive for states to increase the numbers of teachers—for instance, the Be That Teacher campaign—in conjunction with scholarships has not solved the teacher shortage yet, and there remains a lack of Aboriginal teachers. There is, therefore, a need for further industry collaborations to at least address how to make messages for potential Aboriginal teachers relevant with cultural-specific elements as recommended in this research. The research Fellow had an opportunity to present the project to members of the Australian Federal Government Department of Education, which was well-received. Twenty copies of the *Conversation Starter* text were distributed to interested staff.

A potential way to increase impact could be to collaborate on further research into the phenomenon called the role model effect. In this context, the positive impact of role models has been studied in detail. In particular, there is evidence that African American students are more likely to succeed in school and enrol in college if they had at least one African American teacher by their third year of schooling. The percentage of educational success increases proportionally with the number of African American teachers a student has (Dee, 2004, 2005). The role models provide an example of educational success that students can relate with. They can see themselves in the teachers. Such teachers are also more likely to have high expectations of the students (Dee, 2004, 2005).

It has been agreed that Aboriginal teachers make a considerable impact on the educational success of Aboriginal students (Johnson et al., 2016). Researching and demonstrating the role model effect in Australia could further underscore the need to pursue a national

Aboriginal targeted campaign to increase Aboriginal teacher numbers and seriously address disadvantage affecting Aboriginal Australians as reflected in the Closing the Gap targets (Closing the Gap, n.d.).

7.7 Limitations

The main limitation of the research was the fact that it only investigated the issue with part of the Australian population—Aboriginal senior secondary students and Aboriginal teachers in the NT. The research Fellow is not apologetic about this because the issue is critical for Aboriginal people in the NT. The difficulty is in overgeneralising the findings. Throughout this report, it is stated that to respect Aboriginal diversity across Australia, localised answers and perspectives should be sought. This does not minimise the importance and value of this Fellowship project. The project sits as an example to people in other regions to also conduct similar research as modelled by the Fellowship. This is because the research provides an Aboriginal positioning concerning the potential of creating targeted career information by incorporating the use of culturally specific messaging or marketing.

The use of different region classifications within the project was an oversight. Whereas the NT Department of Education and Training uses the agreed NT government classifications, the regions used here in the participant questions differed from these. Therefore, there may be some difficulty in aligning data and making recommendations without explaining these differences. Table 21 provides an approximate alignment of the regions.

Table 21: Regional alignment

Region attributions used in survey and interview questions	Main city/town centres	NT Government agreed regions
Darwin region	Darwin	Top End – the Daly region, West Arnhem including Jabiru, and the Tiwi Islands
		Darwin, Palmerston, Litchfield (matches ABS SA4 Greater Darwin)
East Arnhem region	Nhulunbuy	East Arnhem
Katherine region	Katherine	Big Rivers
Barkly region	Tennant Creek	Barkly
Alice Springs region	Alice Springs	Central Australia

The Fellowship project was limited by the requirement not to intrude on student learning time and not take away teacher instruction time. These were requirements for the approval to conduct research by the NT Department of Education and Training. To enable this, short and easily accessible online surveys were used, and the student cohort was 16 years and older, allowing them to make the decision about participation. This age group was also required because the research was about what students, who would soon be school-leavers, thought about post-school options.

Although teachers were offered the choice of an interview or a short online survey, more opted to complete the survey. It was assumed that more information would be volunteered during interviews, but this did not turn out to be true. Some of the survey participants provided lengthier and more detailed responses.

A small sample size could be considered a limitation. However, because the right participant segment was included, the research findings are relevant despite this smaller sample size (Palinkas et al., 2015). It can also be argued that saturation was reached given the similarities among the responses from Aboriginal senior secondary students, and among those from Aboriginal teachers. Common themes were visible in both groups.

One other aspect of the research could be considered a limitation. Although this research was designed to investigate the opinions of Aboriginal people concerning how to promote teaching effectively, the operational budget was not designed to then pay for the production of promotional resources. However, mock-up examples of possible resources were created and embedded with the findings of the research. Some of these examples have been included in this report. Copies of all of the developed examples were provided to the NT Department of Education and Training, the main collaborator in this Fellowship project. The Department's involvement allows for two things: (i) for these resources to be further developed and produced using government funding and (ii) for the influence of the Department to be used to ensure the project has its desired impact.

7.8 Examples of promotional resources created

One of the example resources created was a role model video of an Aboriginal teacher—the research Fellow—discussing their experience as an Aboriginal teacher and deliberately discussing some of the themes raised by participants. Using this format, I was able to describe my experience of growing up locally and attending CDU after high school and discuss what it was like to study teaching and then what it was like to become a teacher and work for the NT Department of Education and Training. The presentation was in the form of a public presentation available online and in person, which was recorded and then edited to fit with the themes of the project findings (see Figures 6 and 7). This output is an example of a role model telling their story, describing both the absolute joy of teaching, along with the challenges and, importantly, how these challenges can be overcome.

Figure 6: Role model presentation showing Northern Institute advertising and CDU photo used on slide



Figure 7: Role model mock-up video provided to the NT Department of Education and Training



A second example resource created was a series of infographic posters that showed what Aboriginal people thought about teaching as a profession (see Figures 8 and 9). These infographics were created by Ms Khushi Chauhan, the research associate on the project.

Figure 8: Aboriginal student perception survey findings (infographic created by Ms Khushi Chauhan)

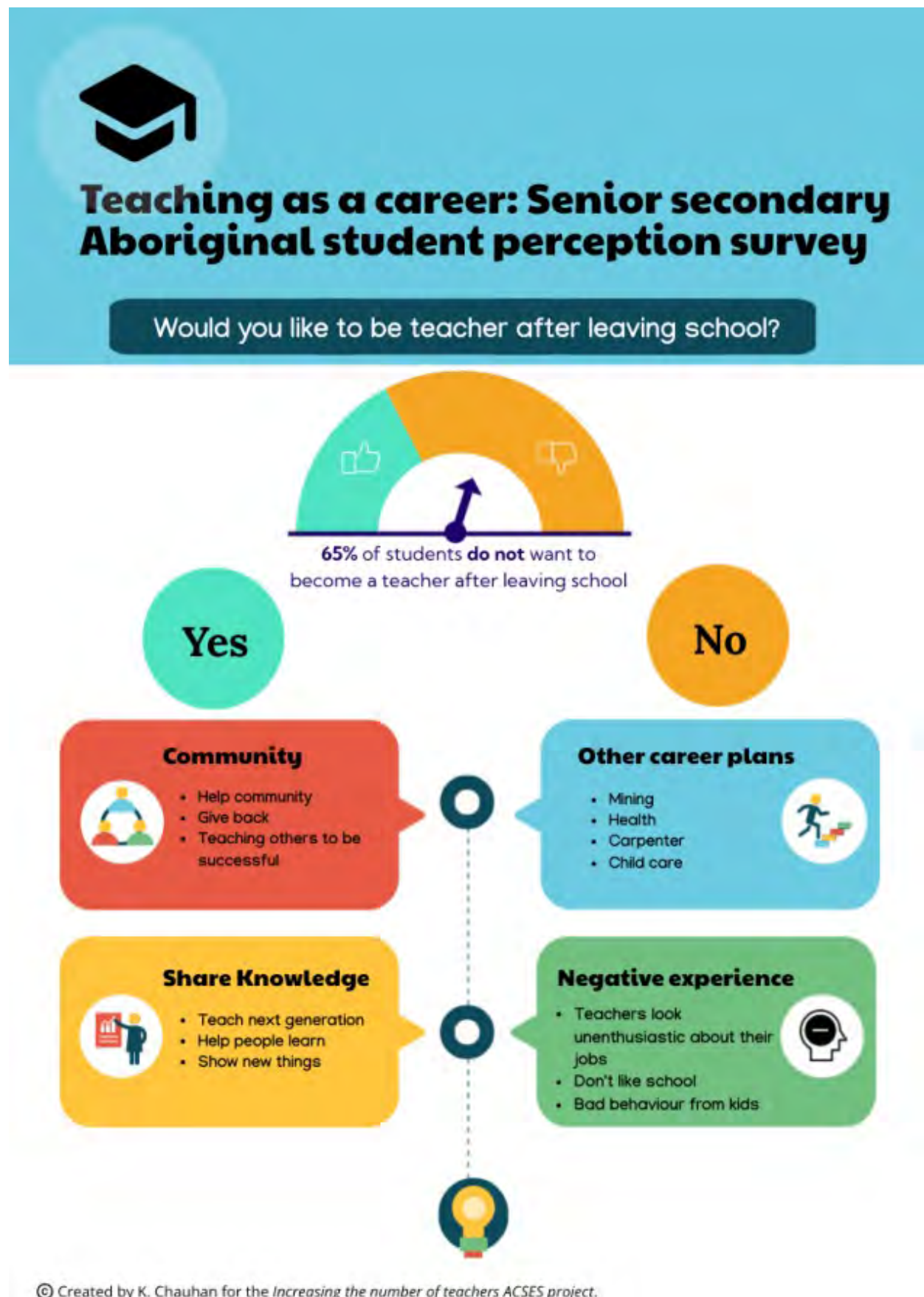
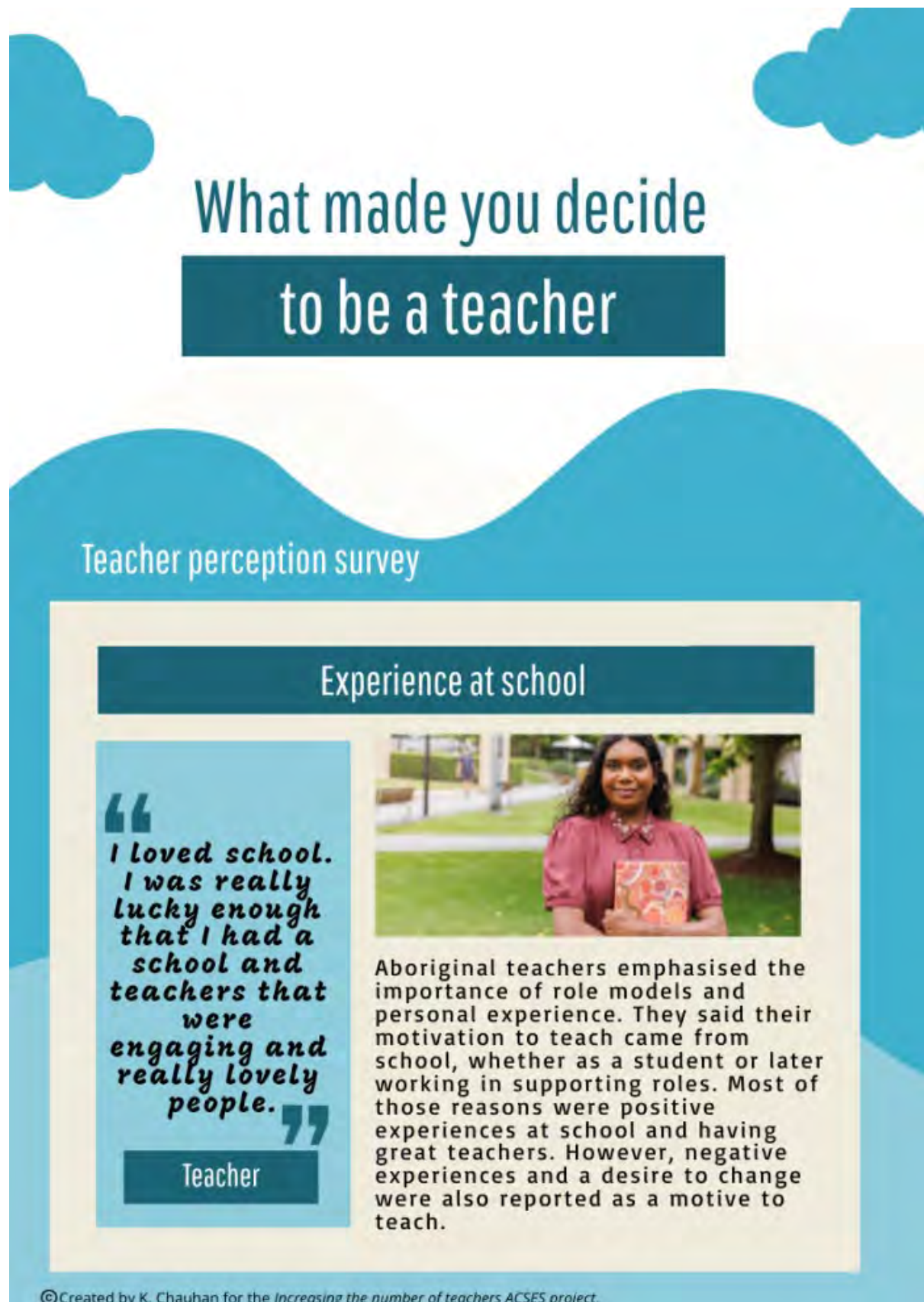


Figure 9: Teacher reported reasons for becoming a teacher (infographic created by Ms Khushi Chauhan)



One of the final example resources created was a book for Aboriginal senior secondary students (see Figures 10 and 11). This was a conversation starter to inform conversations about becoming a teacher.

Figure 10: Conversation Starter cover art by UniPrint (Woodroffe & Chauhan, 2025)



Figure 11: Conversation Starter book contents page (Woodroffe & Chauhan, 2025, p. 3)

Contents	
Do you want to be a teacher?.....	4
We need more Aboriginal teachers!.....	5
Why we need Role Models.....	6
Aboriginal Teacher Role Models.....	7
What Aboriginal teachers and students think about why we need more Aboriginal teachers.....	8
Importance of more Aboriginal Teachers	10
Pathways to teaching.....	12
Study your way.....	14
When you learn to be a teacher, you will be taught many things.....	15
Courses.....	16
Scholarship Programs.....	17
Useful Links and Contacts	18

8. Concluding remarks

The analysis of existing literature highlights the need for inclusive and representative promotional strategies that reflect the aspirations and identities of Aboriginal communities. The successful promotion of teaching requires a multi-layered strategy: one that is culturally grounded, community-informed, and empirically tested. The effective marketing and promotion of teaching must move beyond tokenistic inclusion to genuine representation and co-creation. This is the new knowledge established by the Fellowship research. Some of the outputs produced were practical examples of how to enact these findings.

The concept of the bliss point, as applied to promotion or advertising, refers to the optimal level of a stimulus that maximises consumer engagement and response without leading to ad fatigue or negative sentiment. The application of this concept in the promotion of teaching as a career to Aboriginal people emphasises the need to include culture-specific information and to ensure that messages are delivered and accessed through relevant modes and channels. Getting this right could increase the effectiveness of teacher recruitment and retention strategies.

Not everyone is meant to be a teacher, but the Aboriginal people who are need to know that teaching is the ideal profession for them and that Aboriginal students need them. The Fellowship findings allow for stakeholders to be more strategic in their approach to something that is of national concern—stopping teacher shortages. Although there are many reasons why people may choose not to be teachers, or not to continue being a teacher, such decisions should not be made because people simply did not know enough about the profession and potential in the first place.

Aboriginal people want more information about how and why to become a teacher. More needs to be done to promote teaching as a profession to Aboriginal people. To have the desired impact, this must be done the right way. The new knowledge presented in this fellowship report explains how to do that.

8.1 Suggestions for further research

Future research should include an evaluation of the impact of the recommendations implemented by stakeholders and the resources created. There was not enough time within a 12-month project to do that. To reflect the diversity of Aboriginal people and the messaging required to promote teaching to Aboriginal people in those regions, further research should include similar projects conducted in other states and territories. Finally, extensive exploration of the role model effect in Australia would add to the knowledge in the field and solidify understanding about just how much Aboriginal teachers are needed.

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