

Recognising change and seeking affirmation: themes for embedding Indigenous knowledges on teaching practicum

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ABSTRACT

The imperative for Indigenous education in Australia is influenced by national political, social and economic discourses as Australian education systems continue to grapple with an agreed aspiration of full participation for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students. Innovations within and policies guiding our education systems¹ are often driven by agendas of reconciliation, equity, equality in participation and social justice. In this paper, we discuss key themes that emerged from a recent Australian Office for Learning and Teaching (OLT) research project which investigated ways in which preservice teachers from one Australian university embedded Indigenous knowledges (IK) on teaching practicum². Using a phenomenological approach, the case involved 25 preservice teacher and 23 practicum supervisor participants, over a 30 month investigation. Attention was directed to the nature of subjective (lived) experiences of participants in these pedagogical negotiations and thus preservice and supervising teacher voice was actively sought in naming and analysing these experiences. Findings revealed that change, knowledge, help and affirmation were key themes for shaping discourses around Indigenous knowledges and perspectives in the Australian curriculum and defined the nature of the pedagogical relationships between novice and experienced teachers. We focus particularly on the need for change and affirmation by preservice teachers and their teaching practicum supervisors as they developed their pedagogical relationships whilst embedding Indigenous knowledges in learning and teaching.

Keywords: preservice teacher education, Indigenous knowledges, pedagogical relationships, cultural interface, Australia

INTRODUCTION

International, Indigenous and Multicultural Imperatives for Education was the theme for the 42nd annual conference of the Australian New Zealand Comparative and International Education Society (ANZCIES). Set against the global educational imperatives inspired by the *Education for All* movement and the *Millennium Development Goals*, the aspiration to achieve educational targets is well-entrenched in broad international and national education policy statements. However, the realisation of these goals is dependent upon contestations

¹ See <https://www.education.gov.au/national-aboriginal-and-torres-strait-islander-education-strategy>

² See <https://www.qut.edu.au/about/oodgeroo/embedding-indigenous-knowledges-in-curriculum>

and contradictions, calling for stronger international partnerships, both North-South and South-South, bearing in mind the achievement of these goals in specific local contexts (McLaughlin, Iyer, Hepple, Hickling-Hudson & Sharma-Brymer, 2014). Accordingly, the conference convenors invited comparative and international educators to examine and develop methodologies and strategies that explored subjectivities, positionalities, location, place, space and time. In the tradition of comparative and international education meetings, papers covered a wide spectrum of educational issues adopting a range of relevant theoretical and methodological frameworks, with a focus on international and intra-national educational research.

Indigenous and intercultural perspectives were particularly sought, to explore new conversations and dialogue around re-thinking the dynamics of educational policies and implementation in specific contexts. Fittingly in the opening keynote address, Thomas (2014) challenged conference delegates to recognise the impact of colonial history, Indigenous knowledges and voices of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples as we investigate educational imperatives for Indigenous peoples, and persisting underlying questions. Lee Hong (2014) extended the conversation by exploring and showcasing existing educational leadership demonstrated by Aboriginal and Torres Strait peoples and communities, shifting the focus from hegemonic relationships through state and institutional policies to Indigenous emancipatory projects as clear examples of achieving parity in educational outcomes (Behrendt, 2012). A strong contingent of Indigenous Australian scholars contributed to this conversation including Clair Anderson, Marion Kickett, Peter Anderson, Grace Sarra and their non-Indigenous colleagues. We argue the realisation of the imperatives for Indigenous education is dependent on *all* educators recognising the significance of Indigenous knowledges and intellectual traditions to their professional work, here in Australia and across the globe.

In this paper, we will present findings from a recent project which investigated ways in which preservice teachers embedded Indigenous Knowledges (IK) on teaching practicum. We commenced from a standpoint that there is a need for recognition and acknowledgement of existing Indigenous knowledge systems and intellectual traditions and their place in pedagogy and curriculum. From this standpoint, we recognised and valued the Indigenous knowledges and perspectives that these preservice and their supervising teachers brought with them into the learning and teaching spaces. This project demonstrated that engaging in embedding Indigenous knowledges whilst on teaching practicum enabled the interrogation of dominant curricula taught and learnt from a homogenous standpoint (Hudson & Ahlquist, 2003) while silencing the active presence of Indigenous peoples and their knowledges and perspectives (McLaughlin & Whatman, 2015a).

We defined these preservice teacher participants in our project as future curriculum leaders as they demonstrated initiative to embed IK in their practice teaching in this contested field. We unpacked teacher education as a site for this contestation in relation to how teacher preparation programs enabled or hindered future curriculum leaders in embedding Indigenous knowledges in their future work as teachers. Our analysis was informed by the emerging themes from the project's research findings, two of which are discussed in this paper including *change and affirmation*. Further, we illustrate how practicum supervising teachers demonstrated their understandings of IK and their preparedness to work with preservice teachers in the embedding process. We conclude by proposing a 'process model' for supporting future curriculum leaders in embedding Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander knowledges and perspectives in teaching practicum and into their work as teachers (McLaughlin, Whatman & Neilson, 2014, see also, <https://www.qut.edu.au/about/oodgeroo/embedding-indigenous-knowledges-in-curriculum>)

Supporting future curriculum leaders in embedding Indigenous knowledges on teaching practicum project

‘Indigenous knowledges’ (IK) in the Australian curriculum and pedagogical space is a contentious phrase, often informed by the broader Australian socio-cultural, political and economic landscape³. This project investigated the learning and teaching relationships between preservice teachers and their teaching practicum supervisors who consented to participate as they were specifically interested and engaged in embedding Indigenous knowledges and teaching perspectives. The project allowed us to explore the negotiations of expectations, role modelling and the interactions that occurred between preservice teachers, their practicum supervisors, and university staff involved in supporting teaching practicum. It was designed to develop long-term, future oriented opportunities for teachers to gain expertise in embedding Indigenous knowledges and perspectives.

Our main driver for leading this project evolved from our work in supporting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students at our university. Over the years, we liaised on behalf of and lobbied for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander preservice teachers as they negotiated their teacher education and preparation program at the university, and how they demonstrated agency on teaching practicum. We witnessed their joy of success and, sometimes, their despair, as those who normally failed final teaching practicum graduated with a Bachelor of General Studies. Such an award did not qualify them to meet the requirements of full teacher registration by the State’s College of Teachers, instead qualifying these graduates to work as teacher aides in schools. The funding from OLT made the project possible, which allowed our work practices to extend to supporting Indigenous preservice teachers on field placements from 2011 – 2013, spanning over a period of 30 months.

The three participant groups consisted of preservice teachers, their supervising school teachers and university staff supporting preservice teachers on practicum. Specific project objectives included that these preservice teachers would be able to identify their own strengths in curriculum innovation and demonstrate successful ways to embed Indigenous knowledge into their practicum via their curriculum decision-making. They also would be able to showcase these strengths in their portfolios and applications for teacher registration. Another important objective was that practicum supervisors would undertake important conversations about assessment of embedding IK to support and lead future preservice teachers and their teaching peers in the endeavour of embedding Indigenous knowledge.

Preservice teacher education and imperatives for Indigenous education

The imperative for Indigenous education in Australia is entrenched in the nation’s history and policies and experiences of colonial settlement. Educational provisions for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples were influenced by a philosophical stance on whether Aboriginal people could be educated (Bin Sallik, 1991, p.21), resulting in restrictions of Indigenous participation in formal education. Consequently, colonial discourses continue to inform initiatives for Indigenous education, characterised by principles of compensatory education, and ideology for social justice and equity. While these imperatives are required for

³ See for example the recent weakening of the cross curriculum priority of teaching Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Histories and Cultures by the Australian Government appointed Wiltshire & Donnelly Review of the Australian Curriculum (2014) <https://www.studentsfirst.gov.au/review-australian-curriculum> and <http://docs.education.gov.au/node/36269>

‘closing the gap’ in educational achievement between Indigenous students and their non-Indigenous counterparts, it raises questions about the place and space for Indigenous knowledges and perspectives in curriculum, pedagogy and assessment. Mellor and Corrigan (2004) argued that the absence of Indigenous knowledges in the Australian curricula draws parallels to education as being a tool of assimilation whilst teacher preparation has also been described as predominantly assimilationist (Hickling-Hudson & Ahlquist, 2003).

Since 2000, some major projects in policy development, discussion papers and research on Indigenous education have occurred. The *Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Plan 2010 – 2014* (the Plan) (Ministerial Council for Education, Early Childhood Development and Youth Affairs [MCEECDYA], 2010) sought to progress policy directions and priorities documented in previous policies such as the *Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Policy* and the *Melbourne Declaration on the Educational Goals of Young Australians*, part of the Australian government reform agenda that proposed to close the gap between the educational outcomes of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students and their non-Indigenous peers (MCEECDYA, 2010, p. 4). The 2010 – 2014 Action Plan outlined six priority domains including *Readiness for school; Engagement and connections; Attendance; Literacy and numeracy; Leadership, quality teaching and workforce development and Pathways to real post-school options*. While some of these priorities reflect intents of previous policy statements, targets and performance indicators, it brings to fore the ongoing challenges for Australian policy makers and educators grappling with Indigenous educational disadvantage.

The *Leadership, quality teaching and workforce development* priority of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Plan (the Plan) (MCEECDYA, 2010, p. 24) aspired to develop a strategy to assist educational providers to progress the ratio of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff to students. Further, the Plan proposed to attract more Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians into the education workforce and support their professional, leadership and career aspirations (p.24). While these are noble intentions, there was nothing specific to support aspiring Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander teachers to succeed in teacher preparation programs, particularly on practicum, and their retention in the education workplace after graduation from teacher education preparation institutions. A report into the *Retention and Graduation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Students enrolled in initial Teacher Education* (Patton, Lee Hong, Lampert, Burnett & Anderson, 2012, p.9) highlighted the contemporary underrepresentation of Indigenous teachers, approximately 1% of the teaching force in Australian schools.

The *More Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders Teacher Initiative* (MATSITI) was aligned with the Council of Australian Governments (COAG) National Indigenous Reform Agreement and associated with closing the educational gap campaigns. Targeting Indigenous education disadvantage, MATSITI aimed to address the above concern, and to work towards increasing Indigenous education workforce. Patton et al (2012) identified a variety of factors that contributed to success in teacher education programs including the availability of support from the Indigenous Higher Education Centres, and the need for professional and cultural awareness development of non-Indigenous staff and faculty. On the other hand, they reported that Indigenous preservice teachers were likely to drop out at critical points in their study including the transition into university study in first year, difficulties in reaching benchmarks in assessments and examinations and of significance for this study, after professional / field/ practicum experience.

Teacher education providers and their capacity to support aspiring Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples into the teaching profession have been positioned in the above-mentioned policy discourses as critical to the achievement of educational parity by

challenging and reducing the ‘normality’ of low educational achievement by Indigenous students. These initiatives are firmly entrenched in discourses of equity and social justice.

However, we argue for a shift in this discourse, to one that recognises and welcomes Indigenous knowledge claims (Hart & Whatman, 1998). This may only occur by disrupting teacher education providers’ theoretical and practical approaches to growing the Indigenous educational workforce, from one that sees Indigenous knowledges and pedagogies as being relevant only to teaching Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students to knowledges that are important for *all* Australian students.

Nakata’s (2002, 2007) theory of the cultural interface and Indigenous knowledges, that knowledge *about, with and for* Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples occurs within the cultural interface, requires constant critical reflection upon the ‘Self’, the relationships between ‘Self’ and ‘Others’ (adapting Levinas, 1978/1981) and how this informs an epistemological and ontological understandings of one’s cultural and social positioning. This project was conceptualised on this theoretical position, while maintaining observations of the cultural interface as the locale of the learner, which is simultaneously a place of agency and a place of tension (Nakata, 2011). The cultural interface enabled us to view sites of curriculum and pedagogical decision making between these stakeholders as places of knowledge convergence and productive engagements, rather than as sites of divergent knowledges and irreconcilable differences.

In this project, we problematized teacher education as the site for developing future curriculum leaders in the project of embedding Indigenous knowledges in curricula and pedagogy. The project allowed us to explore the negotiations of expectations, role modelling and the interactions that occurred between preservice teachers, their practicum supervisors, and university staff involved in supporting teaching practicum. We now turn our discussions to our methodology, findings and discussions of this research.

RESEARCH DESIGN AND DATA ANALYSIS

The exploration of pedagogical relationships between preservice and their supervising teachers was the aim of this project. Therefore, phenomenology as a methodological approach (van Manen, 1984) was adapted to direct attention to the nature of subjective (lived) experiences of participants in these pedagogical negotiations. Preservice and supervising teacher voice was actively sought in naming and analysing these experiences. The central question explored in this research was: *what is your experience of embedding Indigenous knowledges during teaching practicum?*

Principles of Indigenous research methodology and privileging of Indigenous knowledges and perspectives (Rigney, 1999) guided the conceptualisation of this project. As advocates of decolonising methodologies (Smith, 1999; Denzin, Lincoln & Smith, 2008; Mertens, Cram & Chillisa, 2013), the research process was informed by our engagements with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander preservice teachers as bearers of knowledges by virtue of their Indigeneity. Thus, the methodology privileged and made space for the voices of Indigenous preservice teachers, alongside their practicum supervising teachers and non-Indigenous preservice teachers undertaking the Indigenous Studies minor in their Bachelor of Education program.

Project participants included 25 preservice teachers, of whom 21 were Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander, all with a commitment to and passion for embedding Indigenous knowledges and perspectives in the school curriculum. We extended participation to include non-Indigenous preservice teachers who had already committed to an optional Indigenous Studies Minor in their teacher preparation program. Over the 30 months project, four non-Indigenous

preservice teachers participated in the project. Over a three semester period, a total of 23 supervising teachers in 21 schools participated in this project in both urban and rural schools in Queensland. Seven university liaison academics participated in two professional development workshops organised for the project. Individual interviews and focus group workshops were organised as primary data collection strategies. All qualitative data collected through individual interviews, focus groups and workshops were analysed by NVivo and Leximancer, qualitative data analysis software.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS

Recognition of Change

‘Change’ emerged as the primary key theme in this project. Project participants recognised a need for change, providing the necessary platform to facilitate the process of embedding Indigenous knowledges and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander perspectives in the curriculum. There was strong evidence of both policy mandates within the workplace and formal curriculum and professional commitment from project participants. Participants understood their professional responsibilities as espoused by the Department of Education, Training and Employment (DETE), the Queensland College of Teachers (QCT) and Professional Teacher Standards advocated by the Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership (AITSL). Supervising teachers’ observations affirmed the need for change, when reflecting upon the impact on their students’ interest and engagement in learning during exemplar lessons on IK taught by participating preservice teachers.

The process of change to embed IK, facilitated by the presence of the preservice teachers, enabled both novice and experienced teachers to reflect upon the often tokenistic approaches to including IK teaching and learning. To shift the representation of Indigenous Australia in schooling requires interrogating existing colonial representations in the official curriculum and engaging with the wider community. For Vanessa, a primary preservice teacher, embedding IK meant that she made genuine connections to the parents of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children in her class, and the wider school community.

That is the thing for me when they say ‘embedding’, why does it have to be, I’m going to take myself up and do a rain dance? That is not what it is... I’m like, umm? Now they have these big telegraph poles that have been painted up by one of the parents who is an Aboriginal artist and so they have these totems that represent the seven families in the local area, their animal totems and they have these native plants and they are bringing in bush tucker plants and the Yugumbeh community to come in and plant them and they will have a place in the school to look after the gardens. They were like - what is the point of this? It is just plants? Who cares? (But) we are getting parents, Aboriginal parents... and they are coming into the school. They are seeing that you are valuing them and you are valuing their children, they are going to value what you do. In my mind it is a circle, you bring them in and they will help you... I’m a non-conformist (Vanessa, preservice teacher, 2013).

During this project, supervising teachers had the opportunity to negotiate curriculum decision making with preservice teachers and to reflect upon the impact that embedding IK made had on students’ learning, and their own curriculum decision-making processes. Donna supervised Rosie, a primary preservice teacher, and as a consequence of being project participants, both Donna and Rosie engaged in important conversations about curriculum

decision-making, curriculum relevance, meeting the learning needs of the students and meeting wider policy and professional demands. As an experienced supervising teacher, Donna recognised the Indigenous knowledges that the preservice teacher had brought into classroom and the value of such knowledge for all student learning.

It was good for me too because like Rosie was embedding the Indigenous culture in the curriculum and that was great and how we worked it in so I am thinking, we don't do enough of that, so that was great the Rosie was able to put that into the program, her teaching here (Donna, supervising teacher, 2012).

One of the more significant findings about teachers' recognition of the need for change was a shift in the perception of themselves as in charge of all curriculum decision making. As we have argued (Hart, Whatman, McLaughlin & Sharma-Brymer, 2012), embedding Indigenous knowledges in curricula requires challenging hegemonic power relations and the Eurocentric approaches to learning and teaching. Genuine change in decolonising of the Australian curriculum process requires the recognition of Indigenous knowledges and valuing this as knowledge for all Australian students. As Gary, who had many years of teaching experience in Aboriginal communities, clearly asserts, this process requires teachers to be prepared to recognise and admit that they may not be the experts or are the bearers of all knowledges, but in this case, recognise that Indigenous peoples and communities are experts in Indigenous knowledge systems.

I think in our culture in the dominant culture in Australia at the moment, it seems to be that teachers are seen to be having all this knowledge. We need to let go of it a bit. You need to realise and be comfortable and be honest. That is the main thing. I have never pretended that I knew what this was about and I even said that when I was in the community, when I walked in, it was their opportunity to teach me. I became the learner. Yeah number one is to make contact with people who have been in the Kimberleys and who can talk to the students, with the students, about the sorts of experiences that they will have. The sorts of things that they can do in a school setting to embed, genuinely and authentically, Indigenous perspectives (Gary, supervising teacher, 2013).

Change, as the dominant theme emerging from this research allowed the project team to problematize the perception that sources of Indigenous knowledges and perspectives did not or could not exist within the school and university (teacher education provider) settings through policy and curricula alone. The recognition of change to the process of teaching and learning Indigenous knowledges also enabled teachers to see that they have to power to effect this change – in their approach to teaching and learning decision making - and understanding that how they are socialised and professionally prepared through teacher education to see themselves as “all knowing” can hinder this change was essential. Such productive engagements created the circumstances that resonate with Nakata's (2011) concept of knowledge convergence – natural opportunities to embed Indigenous knowledges within the Australian curriculum. We contend that with knowledge, recognition of and respect of IK, both preservice and supervising teachers are capable of transforming teaching and learning through Indigenous Australian perspectives.

The need for affirmation

Affirmation was also identified as a major theme in the project findings. The recognition and valuing of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander knowledges and perspectives instigated teachers' determination to embed Indigenous knowledges in the curriculum and pedagogy. Yet, there was much uncertainty and anxiety by non-Indigenous preservice, their supervising teachers and school site coordinators (often Deputy Principals) on what, how and when to embed. We had predicted in the conceptualisation of this project that there would be much uncertainty around how to embed IK but that this very uncertainty could be mediated through facilitated (by the project leaders) opportunities for conversations to occur between stakeholders, which could take different forms, determined by contexts and needs of all stakeholders. These conversations transformed into opportunities for role modelling and provided the necessary affirmation of successful embedding processes through what can be described as a restorative pedagogical relationship.

Gary, who was an experienced teacher, a school liaison officer and senior administrator in regional Queensland, reflected upon opportunities for role modelling from within the school community and therefore, created the agency for IK held in the community to impact upon core school learning:

I mean that there are some really good resources in terms of human resources and people in communities that you can talk to. I am thinking even from my experiences, the Elders from within the community, who are also teachers and they are good to speak to. It is also good to see the regular white perspective in terms of non-Indigenous who go into a community and teach and have you know this, just getting their views and experiences and knowledge about what they do. I was very fortunate to work with, I had some very wonderful teaching partners in my first year. There was one lady who was a parent, second year she was my student teacher and in the third year my teaching partner. She was Aboriginal and she was able to switch so beautifully, you could hear the Aboriginal language when she was talking with the kids and then she would switch back. It is being comfortable with being who you are too. I didn't pretend in any way to own this knowledge (Gary, supervising teacher, 2013).

It can be argued that building community connections and engagement is critical for incorporating IK in school curricula. Community Elders and members are holders of IK, however, a genuine relationship built on trust, respect and reciprocity can pave the way for authentic partnerships in education. Formal education in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures and identities may generate awareness and sensitivity to Indigenous knowledges, but the reality of this embedding work was shaped by local contextual issues, by acknowledging diversity and via teacher self-interrogation. Sean further explained:

Aboriginal people in the SE corner that people may be exposed to are different to North. Yulangi culture here is alive and well here and you can touch it. That is what makes this stuff that I am talking about actually easy. We have a defined community. So they (preservice teachers) need to know history and they need to know data about the gap and they need to know the reality of the regional centres that they might be going to. Then what they need is some sort of skills in terms of relating to students. Now from my experience, Bama kids here have a heightened awareness of whether you really care or not. They know, they know. I've learnt from my experience

with the Elders and I remember this from the very first meeting I went to and Richard invited me to come along and Richard is like we are mates. I saw the old ladies sitting there in the group, looking at me as if to go... what is this bloke all about. Is he full of crap? (Sean, site coordinator, 2013).

The above insights draw attention to policy imperatives designed to solve problems of educational disadvantage for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students. The issue we infer from this remains with confirmation and affirmation of policies designed to effect change and the instruments of measuring or validating its implementation strategies. It also returns the gaze back to teacher education providers and their ways of validating and affirming knowledges and ways of knowing. We contend that to appropriately locate Indigenous knowledges in curricula and pedagogy, engagement with local contexts and local communities is imperative as by virtue of their Indigeneity, they are strategically placed to be sources of affirmation for those engaged in embedding IK. While this may sound problematic in some contexts, particularly where teachers feel that they have no connection with local communities, affirmation of IK is always possible in the classroom through the connections created by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students and their wider families.

CONCLUSION

This project was informed by Indigenous knowledges and perspectives and primarily based on the recognition and valuing of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander ways of knowing. This project facilitated opportunities to recognise the need for change and to seek affirmation around embedding IK endeavours by supporting professional relationships between practicum stakeholders as they developed their pedagogical relationships and negotiated the embedding of IK in the school curriculum. From these findings, we developed a process model that revolves around the understanding of the cultural interface as a place of convergence of knowledge systems and experiences (Nakata, 2011) that inspire innovative learning experiences for all students (McLaughlin, Whatman & Neilson, 2014, see <https://www.qut.edu.au/about/oodgeroo/embedding-indigenous-knowledges-in-curriculum>). So, in terms of project objectives, our preservice teacher participants and their supervising teachers indeed had the opportunity to create new curriculum products as a consequence of their conversations and engagement with IK. They experienced how it could be done, as a pre-cursor for role modelling embedding endeavours with current and future colleagues.

These future curriculum leaders then could be argued as being not only agents of change but of *momentum* in embedding Indigenous knowledges, depending on where their host school was already at with embedding – an agent for change, an agent for building momentum, an agent for inspiring and enthusing more experienced colleagues. As teacher education institutions and their work in teacher preparation are sites for knowledge convergence (Nakata, 2011), serious conversations about Indigenous knowledges and their place in Australian curricula must occur here.

The project provided an opportunity for future curriculum leaders to develop their agency, and with the support of their supervising teachers, to develop sustainable pedagogical approaches for embedding Indigenous knowledges in the preservice teacher education and teaching practicum. A decolonising approach to educational change is clearly effective. Recognising diversity and utilising Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander perspectives and knowledges whilst adhering to community protocols can complement policy imperatives in facilitating Indigenous knowledges as knowledge for all students in Australian schools.

Sean's comment below is an eloquent vignette in closing summary of what we had hoped to achieve with this project:

My philosophy about teaching is that it is all about relationships, 90% about what you do is about relationships, it is not about what you know and content and all that other stuff. Aboriginal and Islander kids in my experience it is relationship. They suss you out, they know whether you are full of crap or whether you are a genuine person. And if they think that you are genuine person they will latch onto you like there is no tomorrow. It is actually quite humbling. I think that preservice teachers need to know about that and how to develop relationships, for all teaching, it is not just about the Indigenous kids. They need to also be able to, in any unit that you teach, it doesn't matter if you are an English teacher or a maths teacher, science teacher, they need to have some knowledge to be able to always when they are planning a unit, always if you are teaching in a school like this. You need to think about it from an Indigenous perspective. What could I do? What resources could I tap into? A lot of that is going to be given from a local context.

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