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Relationships are key: building intercultural capabilities for Indigenous postgraduate coursework students and their teachers

Final report of the project *Keeping on track: teacher leaders for
Indigenous postgraduate coursework students*

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List of acronyms used

ACER	Australian Council for Educational Research
ALTC	Australian Learning and Teaching Council Ltd
AUSSE	Australasian Survey of Student Engagement
CAPA	Council of Australian Postgraduate Associations
COP	Community of Practice
DEEWR	Department of Education Employment and Workplace Relations
IHEAC	Indigenous Higher Education Advisory Council
ISU	Indigenous Support Unit
ITAS	Indigenous Tutorial Assistance Scheme
KOTL	Keeping on Track Lecturer
KOTS	Keeping on Track Student
NIHEWS	National Indigenous Higher Education Workforce Strategy
NIPAAC	National Indigenous Postgraduate Association Aboriginal Corporation
OLT	Australian Government, Office for Learning and Teaching
QUT	Queensland University of Technology
TLR	Teaching and Learning Regimes
UCoP	University Community of Practice

Executive summary

Relationships are key is the final report of the project *Keeping on track: teacher leaders for Indigenous postgraduate coursework students*. The project focused on disciplinary and cross-disciplinary leadership to enhance learning and teaching through leadership capacity-building in discipline structures, communities of practice and cross-disciplinary networks, with an emphasis on strengthening teacher leader capabilities of lecturers involved in the teaching of Indigenous postgraduate coursework students.

The overall purpose of *Keeping on Track* was to clearly delineate and to improve teacher leadership practices across higher education institutions in Australia serving Indigenous postgraduate coursework students, as differentiated from practices in supervision of postgraduate research students. Marshall (2008) states that studies that focus on the 'how' of development of leadership capability in learning and teaching are limited. It is the 'how' of teacher leadership which this project addressed, through the design and development of a *Blueprint for Intercultural Capabilities* informed by the experiences of Indigenous postgraduate course work students and their teachers.

The *Keeping on Track* project aimed to answer three research questions focused on the Indigenous postgraduate coursework experience by collecting and analysing the teaching and learning experiences of Indigenous students and their teachers in postgraduate coursework programs. Data were collected through an online survey and the establishment and operation of a *University Community of Practice* (UCoP) at participating universities, through which focus group discussions and interviews were held. Project end aims were to consider the implications of the data collected, and make recommendations for strengthening teacher leadership capabilities in the teaching and learning of Indigenous postgraduate students through the development of a teacher leadership capabilities framework which would be developed, trialled and evaluated.

Four findings became clear towards the end of the project:

1. the value of UCoP in forming an intercultural space in which the process of teaching and learning is the focus;
2. that intercultural capabilities are required by both teachers and students to engage fully with the cultural interface of teaching and learning;
3. that this requires intercultural sensitivity (Bennett, 2004); and,
4. that relationships are key to intercultural exchanges and building intercultural sensitivity.

As such, there is no recommendation for a teacher leadership framework, but rather recommendations for encouraging intercultural development through student/teacher encounters facilitated through the establishment of UCoPs. These are:

1. where UCoPs aren't established, that universities through their Learning and Teaching Centres (or equivalent departments), facilitate the development of one in order to encourage student/teacher encounters; and,
2. that the *Blueprint for Intercultural Capabilities* forms the basis for the functioning of UCoPs.

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Chapter 1: Keeping on track

In 2008 there were 1527 Indigenous postgraduate students across Australian universities out of a total enrolment of 278,323. This represents approximately 0.54% (DEEWR, 2010) – a clear shortfall against the accepted benchmark of around 3% (IHEAC, 2007). Undoubtedly more needs to be done to recruit Indigenous students into postgraduate programs, and, importantly, these programs need to be designed and taught with special attention to the needs of Indigenous postgraduate students. While there has been significant work in the area of supporting Indigenous researchers and supervisors (Devlin & James, 2007; Laycock et al, 2009), very little research has focused on similar issues for Indigenous students and their teachers within postgraduate coursework programs. The Council of Australian Postgraduate Associations (CAPA) believes that, in general, this is the case for all Australian postgraduate students: “We are unaware however, of any institution-wide policies on facilities and resources for postgraduate coursework students. We believe that this is due to the view, widespread throughout the sector, that the needs - both material and pedagogic - of postgraduate coursework students do not differ meaningfully from those of undergraduate students. We dispute this view” (CAPA, 2004, p.4). The *Keeping on Track* project aimed to address this lack of research by focusing on the postgraduate teaching and learning experiences of Indigenous students and their teachers.

The Project

Keeping on Track was funded project under the *Leadership for Excellence in Learning and Teaching* program. *Leadership for Excellence* projects build leadership capacity in ways consistent with the promotion and enhancement of learning and teaching in contemporary higher education. *Keeping on Track* focused on disciplinary and cross-disciplinary leadership to enhance learning and teaching through leadership capacity-building in discipline structures, communities of practice and cross-disciplinary networks, with an emphasis on strengthening teacher leader capabilities of lecturers involved in the teaching of Indigenous postgraduate coursework students. *Keeping On Track* consisted of an Australian Catholic University (ACU) and James Cook University (JCU) consortium, with ACU as the lead institution.

The overall purpose of *Keeping on Track* is to clearly delineate and to improve teacher leadership practices across higher education institutions in Australia serving Indigenous postgraduate coursework students, as differentiated from practices in supervision of postgraduate research students. This goal is well aligned with the funding body’s overall mission and the objectives for the *Leadership for Excellence*, specifically addressing strategic change, and the embedding of good individual and institutional practice in learning and teaching. *Keeping on Track* promotes and supports strategic change in that it addresses and takes action in an area that has been under-researched. Marshall (2008) states that studies that focus on the ‘how’ of development of leadership capability in learning and teaching are limited. It is the ‘how’ of teacher leadership which this project addresses, through the design and development of a teacher leadership framework informed by the experiences of Indigenous postgraduate course work students and their teachers.

The building of institutional leadership through capacity strengthening of teaching staff and the development of teacher capabilities and capacities is an important focus of the project. Teacher leadership is defined as the capacity for teachers to exercise leadership for teaching and learning within and beyond the classroom, and implies a redistribution of power and a re-alignment of authority within the institution (Harris & Muijs, 2008). It means creating the conditions in which people work together and learn together, where they construct and refine meaning leading to a shared purpose or set of goals. Teacher leadership is a shared and collective endeavour that can engage the many rather than the few, and is primarily concerned with enhanced leadership roles and decision-making powers for teachers without taking them out of the classroom. Teachers who are leaders, lead within and beyond the classroom, identify with and contribute to a community of teacher learners and leaders, and influence others towards improved educational practice. Teacher leadership is characterised by a form of collective leadership in which teachers develop expertise by working collaboratively with peers, observing one another's lessons and discussing pedagogy (Harris & Muijs, 2008). A central role of teacher leaders is one of helping colleagues to try out new ideas and to encourage them to adopt leadership roles. The emphasis on continuous learning and excellence in teaching can improve the quality of teachers, while the emphasis on spreading good practice to colleagues can lead to increasing the expertise of teachers throughout the school.

Collegial practices and collective practice are at the core of building teacher leadership capabilities. Capabilities are viewed as an all round human quality, an integration of knowledge, skills, personal qualities and understanding used appropriately and effectively not just in familiar and highly focused specialist contexts but also in response to new and changing circumstances (Stephenson, 2002; Duignan, 2006). Where teachers are able to work together on specific pedagogical tasks or with particular professional goals to achieve, there is evidence that this collaborative or collective activity can drive or at least contribute to transformation and improvement of their institutions (Harris & Muijs, 2008). Teacher leaders facilitate the working together of disparate knowledge systems, where the work of analysis and of acquiring knowledge applies to others as much as to oneself.

Keeping on Track took place over two years, commencing late 2010 and concluding late 2012. The principal aims of the project were to:

- collate and analyse the teaching and learning experiences of current and past Indigenous postgraduate students and their teachers;
- collate and analyse the teaching and learning experiences of teachers currently working with, and who have previously worked with, Indigenous students in postgraduate coursework programs;
- consider the implications of the data collected, and make recommendations for strengthening teacher leadership capabilities in the teaching and learning of Indigenous postgraduate students through the development of a teacher leadership capabilities framework; and
- develop, trial and evaluate the teacher leadership capabilities framework through a series of university-based workshops.

In February 2011 two *Keeping On Track* team members attended an ALTC Leadership Project Leaders' Meeting in Glenelg, South Australia at which Dr Milton Cox from Miami University, Ohio gave a keynote presentation on the use of communities of practice within universities. The original proposal for data collection involved surveys and interviews of Indigenous postgraduate coursework students and academics. As an alternative data collection strategy, and informed by the communities of practice literature, the project team agreed to use a university community of practice (UCoP) approach, to collate and analyse the teaching and learning experiences.

One of the first project activities was to conduct a series of literature reviews. The literature reviews generated theoretical foundations which underpinned and enlightened the research problems. The three topics broadly addressed Indigenous postgraduate study, teacher leadership and communities of practice. The following three chapters focus on this literature.

Chapter 2: Indigenous students and postgraduate education

For over twenty years much of the literature on the involvement of Indigenous Australians in tertiary studies (Bin-Sallik, 1989; Encel, 2000; Coates & Krause, 2005; James, Bexley, Anderson, Devlin, Garnett, Marginson, & Maxwell, 2008) has pointed to the “enormous disparity” (Andersen, Bunda, & Walter, 2008, p. 1) in the rate at which Indigenous people participate in higher education by comparison with the rate of participation of the non-Indigenous population. This disparity constitutes a “yawning educational gap” apparent not only in access and participation rates, but also in significantly lower rates of retention, completion and success for Indigenous students.

In 1990 the Australian Government released as a discussion paper the seminal *A Fair Chance for All* (DEET, 1990) which set the objective “that Australians from all groups in society have the opportunity to participate successfully in higher education ... by changing the balance of the student population to reflect more closely the composition of the society as a whole.” As Gale and Tranter (2011, p. 37) note “equity in higher education ... became a matter of equal representation”. The paper went on to identify six societal groups as under-represented in higher education: women in non-traditional studies, people from non-English speaking backgrounds, people with disabilities, people from socio-economically disadvantaged backgrounds, people from rural and remote areas, and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. Martin (1994) further developed this equity framework providing definitions of the six groups and devising the indicators that have enabled tracking of institutional equity performance against national targets. However, while Australia has had a robust system in place to monitor educational disadvantage for the past two decades, a system “unmatched internationally” (Coates et al., 2005, p. 45) and in advance of those in other developed English-speaking countries such as New Zealand, Canada and the United States, and while significant advances have been made in addressing the disadvantage for women, those with disabilities, and those from NESB backgrounds (Gale *et al.*, 2011), there has been “persistent under-representation in higher education” (James, 2008, p. 1) of the other three equity groups – people from low socioeconomic backgrounds, those living in rural and remote areas, and Indigenous people, many of whom also share multiple group membership in the two other stalled equity groups.

In 2009 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander enrolment in higher education programs for the first time exceeded 10,000 students, an increase of more than 10 per cent on the 2008 figures (DEEWR, 2009; DEEWR, 2010a). Although over the past two decades Indigenous enrolments have fluctuated, with some analyses (Brabham, Henry, Bamblett & Bates, 2002; NIPAAAC, 2005) suggesting this has been in line with the changes in government policy towards issues such as the “mainstreaming” in 2000 of Abstudy payments, the long-term trend has been one of increasing involvement. However, when the figures are examined from an equity perspective a different picture emerges, one of an “entrenched low participation rate” (Bradley, Noonan, Nugent, & Scales, 2008, pp 149). In 2009 the 10,465 Indigenous students enrolled in higher education courses made up less than 1 per cent of all higher education enrolments (DEEWR, 2010a) while Indigenous people make up 2.5 per cent of the Australian population (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2008). However although

Indigenous enrolments have increased, they have not kept pace with increasing domestic enrolments. Consequently the proportion of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students as a percentage of all domestic higher education students has remained almost constant since 2001 at around 1.3 per cent (IHEAC, 2011a). Other salient statistics indicate that Indigenous students are disproportionately represented in sub-degree enabling courses - 12.0 per cent of Indigenous students by comparison with only 3.2 per cent of all students. Their studies are also concentrated in three broad fields with Society and Culture, Education, and Health, making up 69.0 per cent of all Indigenous enrolment (DEEWR, 2010a). And in 2007 the Australian Council for Education Research (ACER) reported that "Indigenous university students have substantially lower completion rates or higher attrition rates than non-Indigenous students" (Marks, 2007, pp 4) estimating that 70 per cent of the Indigenous students in their longitudinal study would fail to complete a university qualification compared to only 18.2 per cent of the non-Indigenous students.

Impediments

The question that naturally arises from this situation is 'what are the factors that are preventing so many Indigenous people from accessing higher education or from succeeding at university?' A number of studies have addressed this question identifying impediments many Indigenous students typically face as they contemplate higher education while still at school or when enrolled as undergraduates. Anderson et al. (2008), provide a comprehensive list of fourteen factors that typically act as barriers to the achievement of equitable outcomes for undergraduates: socio-economic disadvantage, rurality, limited family exposure to higher education, lack of physical access to higher education in the home area, individual and cultural isolation, dissatisfaction with course or delivery mode, institutional inflexibility, unfamiliarity with academic skills and requirements, lack of access to educational resources, lack of family resources, crowded housing, family or personal disruption, community or family commitments, and financial problems. To this list can be added endemic educational disadvantage (James *et al.*, 2008), language and cultural issues (Nelson, 2002), low aspirations and lack of adequate career advice for those leaving school (Craven & Tucker, 2005) and the alienating cross-cultural nature of the university experience for many Indigenous people (Christie, 1988; Harris, 1988).

For postgraduate students, after having successfully negotiated the hurdles of an undergraduate course, further impediments emerge. A 1997 report by the Council of Australian Postgraduate Associations into Indigenous postgraduate education (CAPA, 1997), cited by Bourke & Bourke (2002), discusses the additional barriers which Indigenous postgraduate students face, some particularly applicable to those undertaking research degrees - difficulties with inappropriate supervision, a lack of mentoring, dubious research ethics, protocols around joint authorship of work; some applicable to postgraduate coursework studies - part-time study while in full-time employment; and some applicable to both - isolation, dealing with entrenched attitudes, lack of a forum for grievances, financial difficulties, insufficient social and academic support, and poorly understood cultural differences.

Anderson, Johnson, Milligan, & Stephanou, (1998) in their study of the "opportunities and obstacles" to postgraduate study, also draw on the 1997 CAPA report to isolate problems of

particular concern to Indigenous postgraduate students. Among the problems they list that are of relevance to coursework postgraduate students are isolation, especially of those working on their own by distance education; a lack of assertiveness skills needed to interact with staff and lecturers; under-developed academic skills and difficulty dealing with theoretical matter; insufficient mentoring and support; racism, both institutional and personal; staff being unwilling to take cultural advice from the Indigenous support unit; lecturers making few attempts to ensure that teaching styles or assessment methods are adapted to suit the individual needs of students; staff not appreciating the economic and family responsibilities of mature-age students; and, cultural differences - universities operating within a western epistemology that fails to acknowledge or value other ways of knowing.

Similar catalogues of problems are found in the international literature on participation in higher education (Nikora, Levy, Henry, & Whangapirita, 2002; Middleton, 2008) where patterns of school achievement, of barriers to access, of non-completion and under-representation of disadvantaged groups, including Indigenous groups (Maori, Pasifika people; Native Americans), follow very similar patterns to those for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in Australia. As Middleton (2002) points out, the inequity in these diverse education systems "is an international issue which suggests that the issue is systemic, it is something to do with the way these education systems work – or don't work." This underlines the recommendations of the Bradley Review (Bradley *et al.*, 2008) that if there are to be equitable outcomes for Indigenous people in higher education in Australia, then the education system as a whole, from the earliest years of schooling through to postgraduate education in the universities, needs to address what are "daunting and multi-faceted, but not insurmountable" problems (Anderson *et al.*, 2008, pp 2) and reduce or eliminate the current barriers to success in higher education that Indigenous people still face.

Success

As well as this focus on the barriers to achievement, there is also a body of writing that approaches the issues from the other side and looks at the factors that lead to persistence, retention and success at university. As Devlin (2009, pp 1) argues, "a focus on success must now take its place alongside the existing focus on failure." In the international literature there are various explorations of the subjective experiences of the student. For example in New Zealand Williams (2010) recorded the experiences of sixteen adult Maori students who entered university via special admission and went on to attain undergraduate degrees. Four major factors were found to have contributed to their success: a strong determination to succeed, the extended family, strong social support networks with peers and faculty, and Te Ao Maori - the Maori World. In a similar study in the United States, Garcia (2000) listed the factors behind the ultimate academic success of twelve American Indian doctoral students as family support, spirituality, good role models and mentors, a strong desire to achieve, biculturalism, a belief in giving back, and pride in cultural heritage.

In Australia the focus has been more upon external institutional factors rather than on the student's experiences or personal qualities however Page, Farrington & Daniel-DiGregorio (2007), in a practical study of twelve Indigenous students undertaking a two-year Diploma

course at a large metropolitan university via block mode, advocate “listening to students” as a way of understanding the factors that influence Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander academic success. In their study they found that retention is fostered when: students are highly motivated to enrol, they enter an Indigenous program that provides a culturally safe place, the staff are approachable, and there is a well designed orientation program. Further strong evidence about the nature of the Indigenous experience of university life comes from the Australasian Survey of Student Engagement (AUSSE) conducted under the auspices of the ACER. The study (ACER, 2011a) found that: Indigenous students are engaged with learning at a similar or slightly higher level than their non-Indigenous peers; they report levels of overall satisfaction equal to or higher than their peers; however they are more likely to seriously consider leaving their institution. They continue to be less likely to complete than their non-Indigenous peers; they are more likely to be female, to be older and to come from regional or remote Australia; they are more likely to be studying externally and many do so by ‘Block Mode’ intensive programs. Only 58 per cent are studying fulltime on-campus, compared to 74 per cent of non-Indigenous domestic students and they report markedly higher levels of engagement in relation to work-integrated learning. The report notes that the AUSSE results provide “considerable grounds for optimism in terms of Indigenous students’ engagement in Australian higher education”.

Responsive institutions

According to the Bradley Review (Bradley et al., 2008, pp xi) the need for reform of the Australian higher education system is “critical”, and this is true nowhere more so than in the way the universities deal with Indigenous higher education. If the ambitious targets that the review sets for Indigenous access, success, retention and completion are to be achieved within the allocated timeframe, then Indigenous education within the universities must really become “a matter of the highest priority” (Bradley, *ibid.*, pp 36). The Review itself, with its numerous recommendations, most of which have been accepted by Government (Australian Government, 2009), sets out an agenda for change and renewal across the system. With respect to Indigenous people there is an acceptance of the importance of outreach and the provision of support. These themes are taken up by Andersen et al. (2008, pp 4) who argue that Indigenous higher education must be seen as “core university business” and not just the responsibility of the Indigenous support units and centres. They go on to provide a four-fold program of ingredients seen as essential for university success: a committed staff across the institution; the provision of vital early support which optimises the degree of comfort for beginning students with respect to cultural and academic issues; recognition and strengthening of Indigenous centres; and, regular reviews of Indigenous support mechanisms. For Bamber & Tett (2000) the responsibility of the university does not end on offering access “but begins at the point of entry”. They describe a two-way process in which “non-traditional” students negotiate a series of transformations as they grow within the new social and cultural environment and move towards becoming a professional. The university, on its part, provides “sustained support throughout the course in relation to internal and external factors that affect the learning process.” In similar vein CAPA (2008) notes that a university’s “responsibilities in support of participation do not end at the point of commencement”.

There is also a significant body of international literature relevant to issues of retention and

success at university, from Tinto's (1993) sociological classic on college attrition in the United States, to major literature reviews such as that by Kuh, Kinzie, Buckley, Bridges, & Hayek (2006) on student success, through to small-scale studies of innovative programs tailored to the needs of educationally disadvantaged students. For example Guillory & Wolverton (2008) propose a "Family Education Model" for Native American students which tries to "create a sense of family in the university", and Miller's (2005) "Prairie Ph.D.", a culturally inclusive, cohort-based, distance-delivered, graduate program. A common element in all these studies is that the problems should not be viewed as an attribute of the student, but rather as an imperative for the institution to become responsive to their needs.

Postgraduate experience

Turning now to an examination of the more specialised literature on postgraduate coursework students, and in particular of those who are Indigenous, two caveats must be made. First, as Bourke & Bourke (2002) have pointed out, when talking of postgraduate studies it is often important to make the distinction between postgraduate coursework students and research higher degree students, as although there are many similarities, there are also many significant differences, especially with respect to their teaching and learning experiences. Second, as Cluett & Skene (2006) note, the literature that deals exclusively with postgraduate coursework students is "sparse" and that which deals with Indigenous postgraduate coursework students is even sparser. Consequently in what follows the broader categories of "postgraduate", "Indigenous postgraduate", and "postgraduate coursework" are at times examined to seek clues to the nature and experience of "Indigenous postgraduate coursework" students and to elucidate their special needs.

A report on a recent study of the postgraduate coursework field (ACER, 2011c) labels its awards as "the forgotten qualifications that come in between undergraduate and research higher degrees." The field has also been described as a "rather confusing 'brand' with high levels of uncertainty attached to standards" (Forsyth, Laxton, Moran, Van Der Werf, Banks, & Taylor, (2008, pp 642). Such charges are not new – in the mid-1990s McInnis, James, & Morris (1995) were calling for monitoring of the coursework Masters degree in order that it "retain credibility as a degree of advanced standing". Such concerns are mirrored in several reviews carried out by universities on their own postgraduate courses, for example Swarbrick (2003) at the University of New South Wales, and an Australian National University review (ANU, 2005) which recommended a greater degree of standardisation and a rationalisation of courses. The Council of Australian Postgraduate Associations (CAPA, 2004, pp 24) lays much of the blame for this situation on the deregulation of postgraduate coursework when "universities began creating new courses and degrees as fast as possible". According to CAPA "these changes allowed universities to use coursework postgraduates as they had been using international students – as cash cows". CAPA (2008, pp 25), in its submission to the Bradley Review, stated that ensuring the quality of postgraduate coursework programs in exchange for the fees being charged was "among its core concerns" and called for a comprehensive review of the quality of programs offered and the fees coursework postgraduates are compelled to pay.

Nonetheless, despite the criticisms, there has been no drop in demand for postgraduate coursework programs be they masters by coursework, graduate diplomas or graduate

certificates. Overall enrolment in such courses rose from 116,813 students in 2001 to 307,973 students in 2009 – a 163.6 per cent increase in under ten years (DEEWR, 2010a). Such has been the popularity of these programs, especially amongst international students, that by 2009 postgraduate students comprised 27.1 per cent of all students, of whom 82.9 per cent were studying in postgraduate coursework programs. With respect to Indigenous enrolments, of the total of 10,465 Indigenous students in 2009, 1,631 or 15.6 per cent were enrolled in postgraduate programs, 74.2 per cent of whom were studying in postgraduate coursework programs. Of these figures, Indigenous postgraduate coursework students make up only 0.47 per cent of all postgraduate coursework students and it would take a five-fold increase for Indigenous students to reach parity with non-Indigenous students in this area. As James *et al.* (2008) and Trudgett (2009) have demonstrated, the disparities in participation rates for Indigenous students increases with the level of the academic program, and this is true from undergraduate enabling courses through to doctorates.

Student characteristics

The characteristics of postgraduate coursework students generally, and of specific cohorts within the group such as international students and Indigenous students, have drawn little attention in the literature. Although postgraduate coursework students make up 22.5 per cent of all student enrolments, and 11.6 per cent of all Indigenous enrolments, there is nonetheless “a lack of robust information about coursework students and provision” (ACER, 2011b, pp 2). Seemingly the interests of coursework students can appear secondary to those of postgraduate research students and undergraduate students – they are simply “less visible” (Cluett *et al.*, 2006, pp 1). This is a sector that has been described as “a myriad of discrete and seemingly unconnected bits” (ANU, 2005, pp 1) so it is not surprising that the characteristics of its students may be hard to establish, especially when they are said to be primarily characterised by “diversity” (Forsyth *et al.*, 2008, pp 641).

The Australian Council for Educational Research (ACER, 2011b) has recently gone some way towards providing a useful profile of Australian postgraduate coursework students and their engagement with their studies: about 30 per cent of coursework postgraduates conduct ‘all’ or ‘nearly all’ of their study online; only about one in five of these students are enrolled in courses where all classes and study is conducted face-to-face; international students are a notable component of the postgraduate coursework cohort, making up more than 30 per cent of respondents in the ACER study; and more than half of the postgraduate coursework group were from high socioeconomic (SES) areas with fewer than one in ten of these students (7.3%) classified as low SES. Results from the study of coursework postgraduate students’ engagement in education suggest that, while coursework postgraduates tend to have higher levels of engagement than undergraduate students, higher education providers could do more to improve student and staff interactions and provide enriching educational experiences.

Cluett *et al.* (2006) extend the profile of coursework postgraduates to student characteristics showing that by comparison with under-graduates, these students are more likely to be mature-aged; more likely to be female; likely to be working full-time or part-time; “overwhelmingly” engaged in professional lives; and have family and/or community commitments. Studies are primarily undertaken for career or professional development

purposes, and there is an expectation by students of quality in service delivery – they want “value for money”. The work by James et al. (2008) shows that Indigenous postgraduate coursework students share many of these same characteristics, however the actual teaching and learning needs and the motivations of the Indigenous students, as will be discussed below, can be significantly different from those of their non-Indigenous peers. One deleterious factor that is commonly reported by postgraduate students be they international (Su, 2006; Islam & Borland, 2006; Guilfoyle, 2006), domestic non-Indigenous (Coulthard, 2000; Watson, Johnson, & Walker, 2005), or Indigenous (Bourke, Burden, & Moore, 1996; Sonn, Bishop, & Humphries, 2000) is feeling isolated - socially, culturally or both, and this is often experienced when the student is transiting into a new or strange environment.

Transition issues

For Indigenous students the transition from school to university and the “First Year Experience” are areas that have received some attention (Skene & Evamy, 2009). Consideration has also been given to the transition needs of Indigenous higher degree research students as they design their research and seek to secure an appropriate supervisor (Coopes, 2006; CAPA, 2010; Chirgwin, 2010; Booth & Frappell, 2011; Trudgett, 2011). However at the postgraduate coursework level the information is more general. Symons (2001), referring to the move from undergraduate student to postgraduate coursework student, calls this the “neglected transition” and claims that for many students this can be “just as daunting” as the earlier move from school or work to university. Guilfoyle (2000), surveying international students, finds transition needs to be very high if somewhat different from those for first year undergraduates. Along with Lang (2002), he points to the characteristics of this group – older, coming from employment and possibly from a position of status, likely to have family or community responsibilities, and academically more accomplished. The primary transition need identified for such students is for support networks or “community”. Initial graduation for such groups is described by Humphrey & McCarthy (1999) as a “rite of passage” after which the student is likely to feel a right to privileges such as separate facilities and the opportunity to meet other postgraduate students. Symons (2001) also puts forward what she sees as the main concerns of new coursework students – worries about whether they can succeed; concerns about a ‘step-up’ in standards for this new level of study; commonly a concern that they have had time away from study; and sometimes anxiety about entering into a new discipline area. These concerns are not easily allayed but the support of peers from within the type of networks advocated by Guilfoyle could be helpful. Symons concludes that often there is “a general belief that since coursework students have completed an undergraduate degree they already know all they need to know about university study”. Too often, she claims, there is a mismatch between staff perceptions of need and the student’s actual circumstances.

Continuing support

All the literature on transition for graduate students referred to above, points to the need for continuing “support”. Similarly Bradley et al. (2008, pp149) state that “students from under-represented groups require significant additional support to undertake their studies

successfully". However what this means and who has the responsibility to provide it is not always certain. Tinto (2008), cited in Skene & Evamy (2009, pp 2), makes his position clear:

It is simply not enough to provide low-income students access to our universities and colleges and claim we are providing opportunity if we do not construct environments that support their efforts to learn and succeed beyond access. Simply put, access without support is not opportunity.

In the case of Indigenous higher education one of the first institutional forms of support came in 1973 at the South Australian Institute of Technology with the establishment of the first Indigenous Support Unit¹ (ISU) (Bin-Sallick, 2003) and since that time ISUs have been established in universities across Australia. The work of the ISUs, and their role in providing support to Indigenous students at both undergraduate and graduate levels, has been highly praised (Sonn, Bishop & Humphries, 2000; Morgan, 2001; James & Devlin, 2006; Nakata, Nakata & Chin, 2008) with Page & Asmar (2008, pp112) describing the ISU as "a haven of understanding" for beleaguered students. In a briefing paper issued by the ACER (2011b) on the Australasian Survey of Student Engagement (AUSSE) one third of the Indigenous students surveyed rated ISUs as among the 'best aspects' of how their universities engaged them in learning, leading to the conclusion that such centres play a vital supporting role. Other studies (Beattie & James, 1997; James & Beattie, 1996a; James & Beattie, 1996b; CAPA, 2003; Sharrock & Lockyer, 2008) have examined how support can be provided to external students studying by distance or flexi-mode and located in remote areas, a situation applicable to some Indigenous postgraduate coursework students. The CAPA report, which is focused exclusively on postgraduate students, puts forward many practical suggestions for supporting this "invisible" group including reducing isolation by using (and funding) block mode and residential schools; ensuring staff make special efforts to establish and maintain communications with remote students; having designated contact persons to reduce frustrations; and, taking pains to see that postgraduate procedures are clear and well disseminated. In this context "it is vital that equity of access to higher education is accompanied by equity of access to student support" (CAPA, 2003, pp 32).

With respect to this discussion the recent doctoral study by Trudgett (2008) deserves particular mention. Her research sets out to investigate the forms of support offered to postgraduate Indigenous Australian students. She proposes a three-tiered model for support with responsibilities residing with the Federal Government, the universities and the ISUs, and makes extensive recommendations for action by each of these groups. For Government the recommendations cluster around student funding issues, the reform/renewal of major support programs such as Abstudy and the Indigenous Tutorial Assistance Scheme (ITAS), and the use of communications and information technology to support students. For the universities the issues concern respect for non-Western knowledge traditions, cultural awareness, the involvement of the Indigenous community in aspects of higher education, an expanded role for ISUs, increasing the numbers of Indigenous staff, the provision of facilities, and minimum resource standards for Indigenous postgraduates. For the ISUs she makes recommendations concerning interactions with

¹ The use of the term Indigenous Support Unit (ISU) follows Trudgett (2008) who herself notes that with many ISUs now aspiring to Faculty status the title may be "outdated".

clients, employment practices including the establishment of positions for Indigenous postgraduate support officers, services offered including seminars and orientation programs, improved communications, and support groups. While highly supportive of the ISU concept she is also critical of the outworking of some ISUs and comments that they “could provide a higher quality of support to Indigenous postgraduate students” (Trudgett, 2009, pp 12). Overall her analysis (Trudgett, 2008, pp 238) concludes that:

Indigenous postgraduate students are not as well supported as they need to be to achieve their potential. Apart from the establishment of ISUs, very little has been done within universities to cater for the specific needs of Indigenous students.

Best practice

Although the term is not used, much of Trudgett’s work is an exploration of what “best practice” in the provision of Indigenous postgraduate support might be. Reid, Rennie, & Shortland-Jones (2005), in a report commissioned by the Australian Universities Teaching Committee (AUTC), examine best practice for ‘professional’ postgraduate coursework degrees within the fields of education, health and business, three of the four most accessed fields of study for Indigenous students. The focus is on students being taught through Faculties as a distinct cohort rather than on students studying through more dispersed courses. An extensive list of 25 best practice principles for professional coursework degrees is developed which can be used as a “practical checklist for developing, teaching, reviewing and benchmarking postgraduate programs”. From the perspective of this review the most important of these principles is that “the needs of students with different cultural backgrounds are met”. The principle emphasises that the curriculum and teaching and learning approaches should be “culturally inclusive and explicitly value diversity”. Cluett *et al.*, (2006) have also examined best practice for postgraduate coursework degrees but take a wider perspective. Their study picks up on the assertion by Reid *et al.*, (2005) that a lack of group identity is possibly the most important barrier to best practice in the postgraduate coursework area and recommend the provision of a “geographic home” for postgraduate coursework students to raise the profile and visibility of this neglected group. For Indigenous postgraduates such a facility that might be met through an expanded ISU program as proposed by Trudgett (2008). CAPA (2010) has also put out a discussion paper on postgraduate best practice, and although the specific focus is on research higher degree students, many of their recommendations are equally applicable to coursework students. They express as a major concern (CAPA, 2010, pp 1) “a decline in quality, standards and levels of access to services and representation for postgraduate students in particular” and have as their aim the promotion of quality, and continuous improvement in services and support for postgraduates.

Resourcing

A related area to best practice for graduate students, effectively a sub-set, is the establishment of minimum resource standards with the Council of Australian Postgraduate Associations (CAPA) a leader in this field (Bexley, 2004; CAPA, 2008). The Council reports that many universities now consistently support higher degree research students with

funding for study related needs. However, although examples exist where students in some postgraduate coursework programs receive good support for study costs and materials “there is no evidence of ... a clear and consistent university-wide policy in place for coursework postgraduate students” (CAPA, 2008, p. 21). The Council advocates that because of different needs and circumstances, distinctions should be made between coursework and research students. “Off-campus”, “part-time”, “international” and “Indigenous” are other categories that could potentially warrant particular consideration. However, of the material surveyed the primary differentiation made is between research and coursework needs. CAPA’s latest minimum standards document (Palmer, 2010) is organised into six areas - quality assurance provisions; induction and orientation; workspace, facilities and resources; direct costs of research; research for part-time, distance or external students; and postgraduate coursework students with a research component. In preparing the document CAPA found that 32 of the 38 institutions evaluated had minimum resource policies. Examples of such policies are University of South Australia (2003), Edith Cowan University (2008) and RMIT (2010).

Concerns over Indigenous student finances are ever-shifting and contentious. James, Bexley, Devlin & Marginson (2007, p. 3), in a major review of student finances, found that “overall, the students in the most difficult financial positions were full-time undergraduates – especially female students – full-time postgraduate coursework students, and Indigenous students”. Summarising the study results Marginson (2008) reported that by comparison with non-Indigenous students, Indigenous students were more likely: to be older, have family responsibilities, be sole carers, have a student loan, work longer hours, miss classes in order to work, and go without food and necessities because of costs. Brabham et al. (2002, p. 13), in an analysis of the changes to Abstudy payments, comment: “For a mature age Indigenous student to make the move from a managed-though-borderline family financial circumstance to the uncertainty of university study is now an undertaking of considerable courage.” However, the Bradley Review (Bradley *et al.*, 2008), in a series of recommendations accepted by Government (Australian Government, 2009), comprehensively addresses financial support for students in general, and more particularly for both Indigenous students and postgraduate coursework students. While the details are complex and the implementation fluid, the issue to note is that the Government is now beginning to address what has been a precarious situation for many Indigenous postgraduate coursework students.

As well as having minimum resource policies and sufficient levels of finance, the provision of appropriate and adequate human resources is of particular importance to Indigenous people and has a direct bearing on the nature of the support that can be offered to Indigenous postgraduate coursework students. The value of having Indigenous people in the university as researchers, teachers and support persons is widely recognised (Nakata, 2004; Gunstone, 2008; Asmar, Mercier, Ripeka, & Page, 2009; Fredericks, 2009) while the multi-dimensional and complex roles Indigenous academics are engaged in, have been examined by Asmar & Page (2009). The same researchers have also investigated and described the unrecognised and unacknowledged “hidden dimension” of support that many Indigenous academics provide their students, often to the detriment of their own careers (Page & Asmar, 2008). However, as the recently released National Indigenous Higher Education Workforce Strategy (NIHEWS) shows, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people are “dramatically under-represented” as employees of Australian universities at all levels

(IHEAC, 2011b). In 2009 there were 321 Indigenous academics across Australia's 38 higher education institutions whereas 1,114 Indigenous academics would be required for parity, a 247 per cent increase (IHEAC, 2011b). If the universities are going to be able to respond to the challenges, such as those advanced by Trudgett (2008), to increase the support offered to Indigenous postgraduate students through substantially increasing the Indigenous presence and activities in ISUs, then the strategies set out in the NIHEWS will need serious and sustained attention. As the Workforce Strategy comments (IHEAC, 2011b):

For representative Indigenous employment within the higher education sector, the principle of equal treatment will not in itself result in equitable outcomes. Treating unequal peoples equally merely entrenches existing inequalities. For significant improvement specific measures will need to be taken to overcome recognised disadvantages.

Leadership

In order to bring about the substantial changes that universities will need to make to reach the Bradley Review targets for Indigenous higher education, strong leadership will be necessary. As the IHEAC states "few things are more critical to the long-term advancement of Indigenous people than increasing the number of Indigenous people in university leadership roles" (James & Devlin, 2006, p. 5). With Indigenous higher education as a "priority for the university sector" (Australian Vice-Chancellors' Committee, 2006) and Indigenous education more generally being a "national priority" (Ministerial Council for Education, Early Childhood Development and Youth Affairs, 2011) much of that leadership will appropriately come from Indigenous people. Nationally, advice is provided to Government by the Indigenous Higher Education Advisory Council (IHEAC), but guidance will also be required at the institutional level. In agreement with the IHEAC stance other Indigenous leaders (McDaniel, Brabham, & Robertson, 2009) have recommended the creation of senior positions in universities, at professorial or perhaps Deputy Vice-Chancellor level, with a mandate to give institutions direction in Indigenous matters. The link with postgraduate coursework programs may seem tenuous, but the goal of substantially increasing the numbers of Indigenous graduates and postgraduates will not be reached without concerted effort: "Indigenous people need powerful advocates in universities" (James & Devlin, 2006, p. 5).

One of the central tasks for Indigenous leadership is to work towards the acceptance by the university community of the centrality to Indigenous people of Indigenous knowledge systems and of the role these systems have to play in the wider university. Bradley *et al.* (2008, p. 33) state that "it is critical that Indigenous knowledge is recognised as an important, unique element of higher education ... As the academy has contact with and addresses the forms of Indigenous knowledge, underlying assumptions in some discipline areas may themselves be challenged". However, the IHEAC claims (James & Devlin, 2006, p. 13) that "Indigenous culture and knowledge do not have an appropriate profile on most Australian campuses" and "typically remain marginalised" (Devlin & James, 2006, p. 19). Coopes (2006, p. 24) puts the situation in even more uncompromising terms: "the exclusion of Indigenous ways of knowing and knowledge on the basis that they do not conform to Eurocentric epistemologies and ontologies is cultural violence." Subsequently the IHEAC has

set as its fourth priority area for Indigenous higher education “to enhance the status on-campus of Indigenous cultures, knowledge and studies”.

Tensions

Many Indigenous students however, especially perhaps coursework postgraduate students with developing careers, find themselves in a struggle between resisting or denying their culture and the pressure of assimilation in higher education (Bourke, Burden & Moore, 1996). Page, Daniel-DiGregorio and Farrington (1997) citing McIntyre, Ardler, Morley-Warner, Solomon and Spindler, (1996, p. 140) make the same point: “successful experience in formal education means learning the 'academic culture' of its institutions, which may be in conflict to Indigenous cultural meanings”. In New Zealand by McKinley, Grant, Middleton, Irwin, and Tumoana Williams (2011) examined the stress this can create for Maori postgraduate students. They identify two tensions: the first, between the academic disciplinary knowledge framework and the framework of knowledge drawn from the Indigenous world; the second, between the Indigenous student’s cultural identity and his or her emerging identity as researcher or scholar. For the Indigenous postgraduate student these are difficulties with which most of their non-Indigenous peers do not have to struggle. However the challenge for Indigenous students is to recognise this “cultural interface” (Nakata, 2007) for what it is – a place “where gaps in understanding from both sides contribute to failure. But it is in this gap where the possibilities for producing more useful ‘intersubjective’ understanding clearly reside” (Nakata et al., 2008, p. 143).

Engagement

Nakata et al. (2008), in their wide-ranging paper, have provided something of a roadmap for Indigenous students and for those who would engage with them in teaching and learning. The paper offers a useful catalogue of studies on Indigenous tertiary students as learners, albeit most of them written from the perspective of Western theories of learning. Central to the argument is the contention that Indigenous students, particularly those with limited prior academic achievement, bring as important assets to their studies, their own sets of Indigenous knowledge which set them apart from others. The task then is for the development of Indigenous academic skills that equip Indigenous students with “tools for engagement” with the content of Western disciplines.

At a more mundane level there are studies that explore the use of new technologies specifically for the delivery of postgraduate coursework programs. James and Beattie (1996a; 1996b) examine the broad management implications of this delivery mode (standards, cost, infrastructure requirements) in what is now a rapidly changing field; and as Beattie and James (1997) they report on the pedagogical issues, concluding that “on the score of encouraging intellectual independence many non-traditional delivery methods are fairly robust - on managing complexity or uncertainty and encouraging a lively critical inquiry, they fare less well.” In their view the most effective strategies at postgraduate coursework level “use integrated delivery approaches to create flexible learning environments with premiums on individual time management and practical application of learning.”

Although there is not much in the literature about enhancing the teaching and learning conditions for postgraduate coursework students, Watson, Johnson, & Walker (2005) have explored characterising a group of such students as a “learning community”. The study, set within the Education Faculty of an Australian metropolitan university, examines the characteristics and levels of satisfaction of the students with a view to providing a “supportive learning environment that enhances the satisfaction, achievement and retention of this community”. However the authors found that for many of the students “the possibilities of forming a viable affinity group were thwarted by a perceived sense of isolation from staff and peers (electronically or in person) and difficulties with finding a satisfactory fit between academic demands and those of family, professional and personal life”. The key problem in forming an affinity group or successful learning community was simply the lack of opportunity many postgraduate students had to talk and interact with like-minded people.

In considering the possibility that Indigenous postgraduate coursework students could be perceived as part of a learning community, an important factor is that such a community operate within a culturally safe environment. The National Indigenous Postgraduate Association Aboriginal Corporation (NIPAAC) has set out the elements for a culturally inclusive education that all Indigenous students have a right to receive within higher education institutes: control over their own construction of identity; valid representation of Indigenous perspectives and intellectual traditions; adequate support and culturally appropriate supervision; a higher education wherein benefits flow back to Indigenous communities; and the eradication of cultural prejudice and racism in the university (Bexley, 2003, p. 18).

Much of the literature about Indigenous participation in higher education however is still written from a deficit perspective. While the depiction of Indigenous participation and completion rates may be bleak, this is not the whole story. The AUSSE study quoted earlier, entitled “Dispelling Myths” (ACER, 2011a), shows that Indigenous students who do access higher education and participate, are engaged with learning at a similar or slightly higher level than their non-Indigenous peers. Heagney (2010) has shown with respect to the Group of Eight (Go8) universities, that “once enrolled in postgraduate programs, students from under-represented groups do very well.” For example, in 2007 Indigenous students in Masters by coursework programs at Go8 universities had a high success rate of 83.9 per cent. Admittedly the numbers of Indigenous students enrolled at these “elite” institutes is relatively small, in 2009 averaging 188 students per university (DEEWR, 2010) – but the trend, in general, holds up for Indigenous postgraduate coursework students across the system. The DEEWR figures for completion bear this out - in 2009 31.6 per cent of the Indigenous postgraduate coursework cohort successfully completed an award, a figure that compares favourably with the 39.6 per cent of completions for all postgraduate coursework students.

Outcomes

What then of the outcomes for Indigenous students who do go on and graduate? Edwards and Coates (2011) present results from the Graduate Pathways Survey which shows that for the respondents to the survey, the vast majority of Indigenous people graduating with a

Bachelors degree (96.6 per cent) were working by the fifth year after graduation compared with 90.9 per cent of the non-Indigenous graduates. Indigenous graduates also tended to be more positive than other graduates about the overall benefits of their degree to the work they were undertaking and for their long-term career goals. In total 65.4 per cent of Indigenous graduates indicated that their degree had been 'very' beneficial to their work compared with 50.3 per cent of non-Indigenous graduates and 63.8 per cent saw it as 'very' beneficial to their long-term career goals compared with 49.6 per cent of others. The authors claim that "by five years after university graduation, many of the social and cultural barriers to success are removed and significant differences between graduate outcomes on these measures largely disappear". There is no reason to suppose that similarly positive trends would not also apply to Indigenous people who have graduated from higher degree courses including postgraduate coursework programs. With reference to disadvantaged groups, including Indigenous students, the study highlights as an important insight that:

...university education has helped ameliorate the differences seen in socio-economic disadvantage on entry into the system. Clearly then the primary challenge resides in improving the access and participation of students from such backgrounds.

In conclusion, the words of Nakata *et al.*, (2008, p. 143) can serve as a reminder for all those engaged in assisting Indigenous students move towards the goal of graduation:

The need to understand Indigenous students as learners who are required, in many learning events throughout their study, to negotiate the complex intersections between their own knowledge, perspectives and experience and the authoritative knowledge of the disciplines they must engage with in their courses is both urgent and at the centre of quality, successful Indigenous education.

Chapter 3: Teacher leadership

In seeking a clear definition of teacher leadership, which tends to focus on schools an immediate problem emerges, it is evident from the international literature that there are overlapping and competing definitions of the term. Somewhat inevitably, therefore, there exists some conceptual confusion over the exact meaning of teacher leadership. For example, Wasley (1991, p. 23) defines teacher leadership as ‘the ability to encourage colleagues to change, to do things they wouldn’t ordinarily consider without the influence of the leader’. Similarly, Katzenmeyer and Moller (2001, p. 17) define teacher leaders as: ‘teachers who are leaders lead within and beyond the classroom, identify with and contribute to a community of teacher learners and leaders, and influence others towards improved educational practice’. Boles and Troen (1994, p. 11) contrast it to traditional notions of leadership, by characterising teacher leadership as a form of ‘collective leadership in which teachers develop expertise by working collaboratively’.

However, the vast leadership literature also reveals that it is largely premised upon individual endeavour rather than collective action, and a singular view of leadership continues to dominate, equating leadership with headship in schools (Day et al., 1999). As Murphy (2000) notes, despite a groundswell towards leadership as empowerment, transformation and community building, the ‘great man’ theory of leadership prevails. Possibly, this is because schools as organisational structures remain largely unchanged, equating leadership with status, authority and position. In direct contrast, one of the most congruent findings from recent studies of effective leadership is that authority to lead need not be located in the person of the leader but can be dispersed within the school in between and among people (Day et al., 2000; Harris 2002; Jackson, 2002). In this sense leadership is separated from person, role and status and is primarily concerned with the relationships and the connections among individuals within a school.

The literature reveals that the five effective leadership practices are:

1. providing a clear sense of direction and/or strategic vision;
2. creating and fostering a positive collaborative work environment where staff support and facilitate the direction set;
3. having integrity and credibility, being considerate, trustworthy and empathetic, treating staff fairly and acting as a role model;
4. communicating developments and providing constructive feedback on performance;
5. proactively promoting the interests of the department/institution within and external to the school, respecting existing culture but seeking to advance values through a vision for the department/institution.

Leadership in Higher Education

Concepts and theories about leadership can be broadly divided between those that focus on individual, formal or hierarchical forms of leadership and those that focus on collective, participatory or shared forms of leadership. As the research reported on in this review

indicates, there is an intricate nexus between the values and behaviours of individual leaders and those of the team who are directly involved with students' learning.

Many of the studies into academic leadership in the higher education sector draw from the leadership theories based on transformational and transactional perspectives. However, this emphasis underplays the diversity of approaches and learning that can emerge and inform practice. The premise that effective leadership in higher education involves the leader motivating, inspiring and enabling individuals to achieve an explicit strategic vision is well supported (Gibbs et al, 2009; Hesburgh, 1988; Pounder, 2001; Ramsden, 1998; Rantz, 2002). Leadership is seen to play a pivotal role in the success of higher education institutions and is a critical factor in sustaining and improving the quality and performance of universities (Gibbs, Knapper & Picinnin, 2009; Hesburgh, 1988; Martin, Trigwell, Prosser & Ramsden, 2003; Osseo-Asare, Longbottom & Murphy, 2005). Traditionally effective leadership in higher education has been associated with personal academic achievement for example journal and other scholarly publications, conference presentations, and research supervision of students (Rowley, 1997). More recently effective leadership in a higher education context has evolved to be more explicitly associated with specific indicators and practices (Bryman, 2009; Gibbs et al, 2009; Scott et al, 2008).

Another notion well supported by research and literature is the fact that effective leadership is not about possessing and exercising a concise set of capabilities but rather employing different combinations of leadership practices depending on and appropriate to a particular situation. Promoting collegiality, ensuring that the needs of the organisation are aptly matched to the capacity of available resources and not avoiding difficult or controversial decisions are examples of leadership practices that can significantly impact on effective leadership in most situations in the higher education context (Gibbs, Knapper & Picinnin, 2006 & 2009; Pounder, 2001; Rantz, 2002). Middlehurst, Goreham and Woodfield (2009) identify the relevance and need for transformational leadership in higher education. Transformational leadership is a style of leadership whereby the leader inspires followers through a shared vision for the future. On the other hand, departmental leadership is quoted as the key to improving approaches to teaching and student learning in higher education; the role of the head, or chair, of department needs reworking and this will require improved leadership and management training for department heads (Knight & Trowler, 2000).

Recently the focus of leadership in higher education has moved away from one of the super leader and the premise of developing the individual as a leader to one of realising the potential for effective leadership that exists broadly within an organisation. This concept of leadership has been referred to as collective, shared, dispersed or distributed leadership and in the higher education context it is not intended so much as a successor to traditional leadership but rather a means of complementing and enhancing the hierarchical structures that exist in higher education (Bolden, Petrov & Gosling, 2008).

This distributed perspective of leadership has been acknowledged as being highly appropriate for the higher education sector (Anderson & Johnson, 2006; Bolden et al, 2008; Rowley, 1997) and focuses on the dispersion of leadership among individuals who collectively have the skills to competently manage the range of leadership responsibilities required in various circumstances. Gibbs et al., (2006 & 2009) in their investigation of eleven world-class universities across eight countries found that some form of distributed leadership was prevalent in every case investigated with the formal allocation of roles

common practice. Rowley (1997) also supports this distributed notion of leadership and stresses the need for academic leadership to involve more of a focus on empowering others rather than an individual assuming sole responsibility for leading.

Teacher capabilities

Academic staff in their teaching role face probably the biggest set of challenges to their capabilities. They bear the ultimate challenge of having to "do more with less", as student numbers increase without matching funding. They are being asked to teach a wider range of students (mature, disadvantaged, part time) in different ways involving new methods and technologies. Their accountabilities are being sharpened and made explicit, as quality reviews and assessments examine what they do. In this environment a teaching staff member would be expected to possess the following capabilities:

- awareness and understanding of the different ways in which students learn;
- ability to teach a diverse range of students, from different age groups, socio-economic backgrounds, ethnic groups, etc, throughout a longer day;
- knowledge, skills and attitudes relating to assessment and evaluation of students, in order to help students learn;
- commitment to scholarship in the discipline, maintaining professional standards and knowledge of current developments;
- awareness of IT applications to the discipline, both as regards access to materials and resources world-wide and as regards teaching technology;
- sensitivity to external "market" signals as regards the needs of those likely to employ graduates of the discipline;
- mastery of new developments in teaching and learning, including an awareness of the requirements of "dual mode" tuition with face to face and distance learning using similar materials;
- 'customer' awareness, as regards the views and aspirations of stakeholders, including students;
- understanding of the impact that international and multicultural factors would have on the curricula;
- skills in handling larger numbers of students in formal lectures, seminars or workshops than hitherto, without the loss of quality;
- development of personal and professional "coping strategies".

Teaching roles and leadership levels

There are a number of roles an academic can assume, moving from relatively small-scale leadership roles through to whole of course responsibilities. For example, some key roles, in graduated order are:

- tutor/demonstrator;
- unit coordinator of a small course (course developed and convened by another academic);
- unit convener of a small course;
- teaching area coordinator (i.e. oversight of a few units that form a suite or plan);

- unit coordinator for a large unit (co-coordination or shadow coordination);
- unit convener for a large unit (involving multiple tutorial groups and sessional staff);
- shadow course coordinator;
- course coordinator/convener (a distinction between coordinator and convener is assumed where a coordinator is responsible for the conduct of a course or unit according to another's design and a convener is responsible for the design of a course/unit and the development of all course/unit materials.)

The Queensland University of Technology's (QUT) *Course Leadership Development Program* (2003) proposed three levels of leadership

1. Functional leader: is well able to teach in a tertiary context, but is working at an awareness level of policies, protocols, and pedagogical practices.
2. Developing leader: Is beginning to develop broader perspective regarding the relationships between units, and course development issues.
3. Strategic leader: Has a mature understanding of teaching and learning across a range of tertiary teaching contexts and contributes actively to the improvement of teaching and learning beyond their own units and/or courses in alignment with University and faculty Strategic objectives.

Capabilities

Walker's *Capability Approach* (2006) identified a list of capabilities for fostering in higher education by compiling different approaches including Nussbaum (2000), Robeyns (2003b), Flores-Crespo (2007), and Narayan & Petesch (2002). In this approach capabilities are understood as both opportunities and skills and capacities that can be fostered. These include:

1. Practical reason: being able to make well-reasoned, informed, critical, independent, intellectually acute, socially responsible and reflective choices; being able to construct a personal life project in an uncertain world; and, having good judgement.
2. Educational resilience: being able to navigate study, work and life; to negotiate risk; to persevere academically; to be responsive to educational opportunities and adaptive to constraints; being self-reliant; and, having aspirations and hopes for a good future.
3. Knowledge and imagination: being able to gain knowledge of a chosen subject - disciplinary and/or professional – its form of academic inquiry and standards; being able to use critical thinking and imagination to comprehend the perspectives of multiple others and to form impartial judgements; being able to debate complex issues; being able to acquire knowledge for pleasure and personal development, for career and economic opportunities, for political, cultural and social action and participation in the world; an awareness of ethical debates and moral issues; open-mindedness; and, knowledge to understand science and technology and public policy.
4. Learning disposition: being able to have curiosity and a desire for learning; having confidence in one's ability to learn; and, being an active inquirer.
5. Social relations and social networks: being able to participate in a group for learning, working with others to solve problems and tasks; being able to work with others to form effective or good groups for collaborative and participatory learning; being able

to form networks of friendship and belonging for learning support and leisure; and, mutual trust.

6. Respect, dignity and recognition: being able to have respect for oneself and for and from others, being treated with dignity, not being diminished or devalued because of one's gender, social class, religion or race, valuing other languages, other religions and spiritual practices and human diversity; being able to show empathy, compassion, fairness and generosity, listening to and considering another person's point of view in dialogue and debate; being able to act inclusively and being able to respond to human need; having competences in inter-cultural communication; having a voice to participate effectively in learning, to speak out, to debate and persuade; and, being able to listen.
7. Emotional integrity, emotions: not being subject to anxiety or fear which diminishes learning; and, being able to develop emotions for imagination, understanding, empathy, awareness and discernment.

In the QUT Teaching Capabilities Framework (2003), the scholarship of teaching practice encompasses four key dimensions:

1. Engaging learners: engaging learners in the process of learning involves teachers adopting and fostering active, interactive and deep learning approaches so that learners can interact meaningfully with the concepts, materials, processes and people in a course.
2. Designing for learning: designing for learning requires planning and design of appropriate curriculum, activities, environments and assessment to support student learning and achieve planned student learning outcomes.
3. Assessing for learning: assessment informs what and how students learn. Setting appropriate and challenging standards, assessing the learner and their learning progress (through diagnostic, process and outcome assessment) are integral to learning process.
4. Managing for learning: managing teaching and student learning is enhanced by effective administration and organisation of time to plan and generate resources, organise and plan systems and people. It requires an engagement with the policies and organisational priorities that impact on teaching and learning.

These four dimensions serve as overarching principles which can be expanded into a set of contextual elements which cover pedagogical/organisational knowledge, discipline, curriculum, learner, environment and scholarship. Each of these contextual elements can be exploded into a set of scholarly goals that academic staff and teaching teams can draw upon to identify relevant and meaningful capabilities, which can guide their own approaches to teaching and learning.

Further research

Much of the research on higher education leadership, teaching and learning is conceptual or theoretical. Case-based data have often been derived only from participants' testimony. These forms of investigation cannot provide a sufficient foundation on which to build broadly applicable, substantial understandings of leadership, teaching and learning. Many of the studies into academic leadership in the higher education sector draw only from the leadership theories based on transformational and transactional perspectives.

Work is needed to conduct large-scale, long-term research to measure the nature and effects of leadership and (teacher) leadership development on student learning to derive more precisely nuanced concepts that can provide more secure guidance to leadership developers and others at all levels within the education sector who are charged with effecting teaching and learning reform.

Chapter 4: Community of practice

The term “community of practice” emerged from Lave and Wenger’s (1991) study that explored learning in the apprenticeship model, where practice in the community enabled the apprentice to move from peripheral to full participation in community activities. Wenger, McDermott and Snyder (2002) describe communities of practice as:

Groups of people who share a concern, a set of problems, or a passion about a topic, and who deepen their knowledge and expertise in this area by interacting on an ongoing basis. . . . (As they) accumulate knowledge, they become informally bound by the value that they find in learning together. Over time, they develop a unique perspective on their topic as well as a body of common knowledge, practices, and approaches. They also develop personal relationships and established ways of interacting. They may even develop a common sense of identity. They become a community of practice (pp. 4-5).

A Community of Practice (CoP) is different from traditional organisations and learning situations, such as task forces or project teams. While a team starts with an assigned task, usually instigated and directed by an “authority” figure, a CoP does not have a formal, institutional structure within the organisation or an assigned task, so the focus may emerge from member negotiation and there is continual potential for new direction. A CoP encourages active participation and collaborative decision-making by individuals, as opposed to separated decision-making that is present in traditional organisations (Johnson, 2001). Members can assume different roles and hierarchical, authoritarian management is replaced by self-management and ownership of work (Collier & Esteban, 1999). The community focuses on completely authentic tasks and activities that include aspects of constructivism, such as addressing complex problems, facilitation, collaborative learning, and negotiated goals (Johnson, 2001). These characteristics provide an ideal environment for tertiary educators to share, debate and build their learning and teaching expertise, within a “safe” and supportive community of practice environment.

A CoP takes a variety of forms depending on their context; however they all share a basic structure. A community of practice is a unique combination of three fundamental elements (Wenger, 1998). These elements are a **domain** of knowledge that creates a common ground and sense of common identity, a **community** of people who care about the domain and create the social fabric of learning, and a shared **practice** that the community develops to be effective in its domain. In this case study the *domain* of knowledge and *practice* is learning and teaching postgraduate coursework, and the community consists of course leaders and postgraduate students.

Community of Practice and assumptions of learning

The CoP approach is based on certain assumptions of how learning takes place, and also on a perspective of professional practice. These assumptions are:

- learning is fundamentally a social phenomenon.
- knowledge is integrated in the life of communities that share values, beliefs, languages, and ways of doing things.
- the process of learning and the process of membership in a CoP are inseparable.
- knowledge is inseparable from practice.
- empowerment – the ability to contribute to a community – creates the potential for learning.

According to Wenger et al. (2002), a CoP varies in size (ranging from a few people to thousands of members), life span (long-lived or short-lived), location (co-located or distributed), membership (homogeneous or heterogeneous), boundaries (within businesses, across business units, across organisational boundaries), and formality (spontaneous or intentional, unrecognised or institutionalised). This diverse membership, ranges from old-timers (masters, mentors) to novices. Through legitimate peripheral participation novices learn from mentors, and then eventually participate fully in the CoP (Lave & Wenger, 1991). Initially the novices are not fully aware of the norms, values, and resources of the CoP but eventually they learn from the core members who are experts of the field. Learning also occurs at the boundaries as learners may not fully participate directly in a specific activity, but participate on the periphery (Altalib, 2002).

Barab and Duffy (2000) suggest that a CoP has three main characteristics:

1. a common culture and historical heritage - members share a common historical heritage, with shared practices, goals and meanings;
2. an interdependent system - members work and interconnect to the community, sharing purpose and identity;
3. reproduction cycle - new members are enlisted who then become practitioners and guide the community into the future.

Community of practice in the Australian higher education context

An online search to identify CoP in Australian higher education institutions found limited evidence of reported CoP on university web sites, although literature searches and personal contacts identified the existence of informal or planned implementation of CoP. The Australian National University has a Carrick Institute for Learning and Teaching in Higher Education grant to investigate leadership in teaching and learning using a CoP approach; Griffith University's School of Business has a CoP centred around learning and teaching issues; and, Deakin University has established two teaching fellowships through their Institute for Teaching and Learning to implement CoP across the University. Other examples are references to resources provided for communities of practice in learning and teaching by the flexible support and development network at the University of New South Wales and the call for CoP to support transnational educators at Southern Cross University (Dunn & Wallace, 2005). The University of Southern Queensland probably has the most well-established COP (McDonald & Star, 2006).

Does the lack of a sector wide application of CoP in Australian higher education mean that communities of practice are more suited to industry and training organisations? Historically that may be the case, but the case study at *'The University'*² in this paper suggests that a University Community of Practice (UCoP) is an innovative means of regenerating current learning and teaching practice, and that they are a particularly appropriate way of building a dynamic academic community striving to address the range of issues facing postgraduate coursework Indigenous students. Cox (2006) suggests that CoPs create opportunities for mutual learning, align with learning organisation theory and practice, can meet the demands of rapid change, and are well suited to higher education.

² A pseudonym.

University Communities of Practice

In this project, a University Community of Practice (UCoP) approach to teaching and learning in higher education provided a space for staff and postgraduate Indigenous students to collaboratively reflect, review and regenerate current teaching and learning practices. Within higher education, the organisational structures and culture of individualism (Laurillard, 2006), produce a situation where many individuals are often isolated and unaware of the practices of others and of the real worlds of Indigenous students. While initiatives to overcome this individualism within research endeavours, such as research centres and research networks, are well advanced, these are less common in relation to teaching in higher education (Laurillard, 2006). The consequences of a lack of formal or informal structures for sharing of learning and teaching practice contributes to a lack of institutional memory regarding teaching and learning innovations, little acknowledgement or recognition of the diversity of good teaching and learning practices outside formal award mechanisms, and little support for individuals in need of mentoring or guidance in reforming, improving, or reflecting on their teaching and learning practices.

UCoP specifically grow, or are fostered, to provide a shared space around shared concerns – in this case, the learning outcomes of postgraduate Indigenous students. Individual members face shared challenges provided by their student cohorts (Sharrock, 2000; Biggs 2003), their institutional context, and the challenges facing the wider higher education sector (Harman, 2004; Schapper & Mayson, 2004; Marginson & Considine, 2000). These shared challenges provide the basis for a common understanding between members, which in our case was further strengthened by the collaborative identification of priority issues to be addressed by the group. Establishing and nurturing a shared sense of identity provided the missing element in ensuring the sharing of teaching and learning practices. It also provided a safe place for reflection and experimentation on teaching and learning for individual staff members and postgraduate students.

Possibilities and Limitations

The literature review indicated that centrally-provided resources, workshops, or formal teaching programs has marginal impact on disciplinary 'teaching and learning regimes' (TLRs) (Boud & Middleton, 2003; Viskovic, 2006). This term, coined by Trowler and Cooper (2002) referred to the way disciplinary understandings of learning and teaching are internalised over time and become inextricably linked to academic identity. Trowler and Cooper (2002) distinguished between these 'unique mini cultures' and communities of practice. The former can secure a level of teaching quality within a discipline, and block new perspectives and marginalise innovators, while UCoP can be designed to counter the noxious effects of TLRs, without detracting from their value (Roxa, 2005).

However, successful UCoP are thin on the ground in universities (McDonald & Star 2006). Those successful UCoP reported in the literature tend to consist of small, motivated groups of staff (e.g., Walker 2001; Warhurst 2006). Unlocking the potential for UCoP to support wider shifts in disciplinary pedagogy means grappling with the specificities of the workplace environment in higher education, particularly in relation to the material/industrial constraints. Harnessing the resources necessary to develop and sustain UCoP is challenge. UCoP require money for administrative and technical support, particularly if web-enabled

communication and resources are involved. They also require time from academics who are already struggling with increasing teaching workloads, within a culture (they feel) devalues this aspect of their role. Face-to-face events also require a place to meet, but traditional meeting places on many campuses have been sacrificed to accommodate increasing student numbers, and in any case, many faculties now operate as multi-campus entities.

Gaining the material support necessary to develop UCoP therefore means convincing management of their high value; this challenge can be difficult to surmount, as accounts of funding application knock-backs illustrate (e.g., McDonald & Star 2006). Other challenges arise as a result of academic values and work practices. Academics may well be suspicious of the concept of 'community'. Academic life is a "curious and conflicted thing": the ideal of collegiality develops paradoxically in a culture "infamous for fragmentation, isolation, and individualism" (Palmer in Cox 2006, p.94). For many, teaching, in particular, means "pedagogical solitude" (Shulman 1993 p.6). Moreover, the "current rules of the 'academic game'" can function to exclude some groups, such as women, more than others from the collegiality (Churchman 2005, p.15). So can employment conditions, particularly for sessional staff. High rates of casual employment, high staff turnover, and lack of institutional support position sessionals as permanent novices on the 'tenuous periphery' of the workforce (Kimber 2003). Without the funding available to attend meetings or staff development programs, sessionals are effectively cut off from legitimate participation in the cultural and organisational life of the faculty.

In this context, Lave and Wenger's commonly evoked development trajectory from the periphery to the core raises several questions. What happens when senior staff are imported from elsewhere (see also Fuller et al, 2005) – a common occurrence in universities, given our highly mobile workforce and increasingly fluid paths to promotion within academe? Do these experienced newcomers skip the peripheral stage, and head straight for the core? Moreover, we can't assume that any experienced staff has the motivation or the time to function as (teaching) mentors, when current reward systems offer no incentive to do so (Viskovic 2006). Neither can we assume that tutors can, or want to view their position as an 'apprenticeship' into academia – in many vocationally oriented faculties, tutors tend to be mature and established professionals. Although Lave and Wenger (1991, p.117) acknowledge that "everyone's participation is legitimately peripheral in some respect", the linear trajectory implied in much UCoP thinking paradoxically "shares one characteristic with the standard paradigm ... they set out to oppose", that is, the top down teacher-centred model (Fuller et al, 2005, p.52).

Chapter 5: Methodology

Keeping On Track used two methodologies: quantitative, in the form of an online survey designed to collect responses to several statements; and qualitative, in the form of interviews and focus group discussions. The three main research questions on which the survey and the interviews were based were:

1. what are the teaching and learning experiences of current and past Indigenous postgraduate students?
2. what are the teaching and learning experiences of their lecturers?
3. what are the implications of these experiences for strengthening academic leadership capabilities for the teaching and learning of Indigenous postgraduate students?

The number of informants, participating universities and location of sites were determined by the outcome of an extensive search of government reports, individual university handbooks and their annual reports, and reports made by key organisations such as NIPAAC and IHEAC. This identified cohorts of students, specific postgraduate coursework programs and cohorts of academics of these programs. Universities that had high enrolments of Indigenous postgraduate coursework students were invited to participate, with four³ accepting the invitation.

It is important to note that data collected from students, especially from the UCoP meetings, formed the basis for the development of the blueprint which was enhanced by the data from their lecturers.

Survey

The online survey for both students and lecturers required responses to several statements that focussed on teaching and learning. In their study of departmental leadership for quality teaching Gibbs, Knapper and Picinnin (2007) state that good quality learning is defined by the approach students take to their learning. They based their data collection on three measures of which *Keeping On Track* used and modified: the Approaches to Studying Inventory (ASI), the Course Experience Questionnaire (CEQ) and the Approaches to Teaching Inventory (ATI).

The *Keeping On Track* Survey required student participants to rate their responses using a five-point scale from *strongly disagree* to *strongly agree* to the following statements:

1. The teaching staff demonstrate understandings of Indigenous cultures and traditions.
2. The teaching staff of this course motivate me to do my best work.
3. The teaching staff make a real effort to understand the difficulties I might be experiencing with my studies.
4. The teaching staff give me helpful feedback on how I am progressing with my studies.
5. The teaching staff work hard to make their subjects interesting.

³ During the course of the project one university withdrew their participation because of changes to staff.

6. The teaching staff provide relevant assessment tasks.
7. The teaching staff provide timely and constructive feedback on learning.

In addition student participants had to choose:

8. Four (4) best aspects of my postgraduate experience:
 - Course content
 - Assessment and feedback
 - Academic support
 - Course organisation and management
 - Learning resources
 - Personal development
9. Four (4) aspects of teaching that need improvement.
 - An understanding of adult learning principles
 - An understanding of working in cross-cultural settings
 - Adaptation of course materials to suit students learning styles
 - Preparation for lectures/tutorials/workshops
 - Enthusiasm for the subject
 - Proficiency in actual delivery of lectures

The *Keeping On Track* Survey required lecturer participants to rate their responses using a five-point scale from *strongly disagree* to *strongly agree* to the following statements:

1. The institution prepares lecturers to work with Indigenous students.
2. There is a need for teaching staff to attend workshops, seminars, etc., specifically about teaching Indigenous students.
3. I understand the similarities between undergraduate and postgraduate coursework study needs for Indigenous students.
4. I understand the differences between undergraduate and postgraduate study needs for Indigenous students.
5. The transition needs of Indigenous students from undergraduate to postgraduate coursework are well catered for at this institution.
6. The modes of coursework delivery at this university are effective ways of delivering postgraduate coursework to Indigenous students.
7. The teaching/learning strategies promote authentic experiences for Indigenous postgraduate coursework students.
8. I have a good understanding of what is meant by teacher leadership.

In addition lecturer participants had to choose:

9. What are the four (4) major challenges facing postgraduate Indigenous students?
 - Sustaining motivation
 - An understanding of academic language and literacy
 - The capacity to understand and engage within cross-cultural university contexts
 - The acquisition of research skills
 - The acquisition of academic writing and referencing skills
 - The development of skills in critical reading
 - The development of skills in oral presentation
 - The development of skills in the use of a variety of technologies

10. What are the four (4) teacher leadership capabilities that need strengthening in order to improve learning outcomes of postgraduate coursework Indigenous students at this university?

- Applying adult learning principles
- Being well-prepared to teach the subject in cross-cultural settings
- Understanding the cultural worlds of Indigenous students
- Willingness to help beyond the minimum requirements
- Ability to stimulate further learning and independent study
- Capacity to encourage student participation
- Punctuality
- Treating students in a fair and equal manner

Interviews and focus group discussion

Qualitative data was collected through the establishment and operation of UCoP at participating Universities, with each UCoP meeting at least three times during the first eight months of 2012. Each UCoP had a Facilitator who was supported by a *Keeping On Track* team member (UCoP Coordinator) who assisted with establishing and coordinating the UCoP activities by:

- developing a UCoP Facilitator guide
- conducting UCoP Facilitator training
- providing ongoing support and assistance to UCoP

UCoP were based on notions of participation as reciprocity and exchange with both students and lecturers participating in UCoP meetings. In the following case study at *The University*, the facilitator and *Keeping On Track* team member strove to develop a *praxis* in that particular context; addressing concerns revolved around the meaning of 'community' and 'practice', identity and boundaries, access and inclusion, and finally, agency.

The University UCoP

Participants were drawn from two of *The University's* Campuses A and B, and were identified by word of mouth via the student cohort. Teaching staff and coordinators of Postgraduate Coursework programs across the campuses were also asked, at the time of contact, to invite students who were known to identify. However most of the student pool came through word of mouth from student -to -student. The total student participant pool represented one fifth of entire Indigenous postgraduate by coursework cohort, and at the time of writing consisted of ten students across both campuses. The academic participant pool consisted of seven teaching staff across both campuses.

Participants came from the disciplines of Business, Education, Health, Indigenous Australian Studies, Social Science, and Social Work, with Health being the discipline for six of the seventeen participants. All were enrolled in, or had completed masters by coursework. All have had professional lives and careers prior to enrolment, and as mentioned, many hold positions of responsibility within their communities.

Data was collected primarily from UCoP meetings, individual interviews, and focus group

activities. Online surveys were distributed; however, many participants did not complete the survey online, as they felt that their responses were too broad or varied and did not comfortably fit into the survey categories.

UCoP meetings provided a platform for understanding context, regional, and campus dynamics. Focus group activity within or following UCoP meetings grounded interview rounds and developed approaches for subsequent rounds. Five UCoP meetings were held: two with Campus A students only, two with Campus B students and lecturers, and one with participants from both groups, and both campuses. The central function of these meetings consolidated participant membership, established a *community* and maintained momentum over the duration of the study.

Despite being focused on the one study, the nature of these meetings were notably divergent across the two campuses. Campus A student pool were all enrolled through the one school, most were geographically distant to the campus, only coming into the city a few times per year for block mode study. One of these blocks had just occurred prior to data collection. Campus B meetings, in contrast, were dynamic and lively. Participants willingly shared personal stories of identity, values, experiences of racism and the meaning behind academic pursuit. These meetings became quite central to the data collection process across both campuses, and were pivotal in creating a platform for finalising interview rounds, generating new organically derived foci for individual interviews, creating a comfortable 'home base' for focus group activities, and perhaps even more importantly, a context for subsequent interviews.

Chapter 6: Data collection and building theory

Data were collected at UCoP meetings, using online surveys, person-to-person and phone interviews, and informal meetings. Data collection at interviews and UCoP Meetings focused on three questions:

1. What are the teaching and learning experiences of current and past Indigenous postgraduate students?
2. What are the teaching and learning experiences of their lecturers?
3. What are the implications of these experiences for strengthening teacher leadership capabilities for the teaching and learning of Indigenous postgraduate students?

Data were gathered at the three participating sites by the UCoP facilitators. These meetings proved to be far more effective with both the students and their lecturers. Data were rich for multiple interpretations and managed to uncover many issues and challenges.

Data collection

Broadly speaking, the UCoP facilitators at Sites A, B and C recruited participants and undertook the data collecting activities. Data were collected from UCoP meetings, individual interviews, and focus group activities. Online surveys were distributed; however, many participants did not complete the survey online, as they felt that their responses were too broad or varied and did not comfortably fit into the survey categories. The interview questions developed by the project coordinator were asked and recorded with the process generally taking between fifteen and twenty minutes. The mp3 files were sent to a transcribing service and sent back to the project coordinator. This process generally took around five to seven days. The manuscripts were then de-identified. Individual interviews were coded based on recurring themes and topics, underlying context of individual voices, participant histories, campuses and disciplines. These were then collated and main themes cross referenced for similarities and differences between teaching staff and students. As a measure to eliminate dominant participant voices interviews were analysed as a collective according to a priori codes of original interview schedule, questions and topics that arose organically, recurring themes and organic changes following interview rounds, focus group activity and *Community of Practice* meetings.

UCoP Meetings at Site A

The UCoP facilitator worked closely with the UCoP coordinator who provided research advice including interview and discussion techniques. Due to the distances amongst the research participants, the UCoP Facilitator conducted three teleconferences over the data collecting period.

UCoP Meetings at Site B

Two UCoP meetings were held, the first in April, and the second in July 2012. Five students, one graduate and two lecturers attended the first meeting; with five students, one graduate, an Aboriginal academic, the UCoP Coordinator attending the second. The meetings followed a loose agenda but generally facilitated discussion.

UCoP Meetings at Site C

The UCoP Facilitator's induction and ongoing support by the UCoP Coordinator was important to the project outcomes. The UCoP Facilitator's contact and interactions with the participants during the second UCoP meeting was integral to the richness of the data gained, and ongoing enthusiasm for the project. This was seen as an invaluable input into the project. Two colleagues at Site C actively supported the UCoP Facilitator through communications with participants, encouragement and support of independent action and professional development throughout the duration of the project. One of these colleagues was instrumental in recruiting participants while on a writer's retreat.

Online Survey

These Surveys were not well received with only one student and twelve lecturers completing the survey questionnaires. Time and access were the main reasons given for this paucity of responses. The data from the one student was not considered to be insightful enough to warrant inclusion.

Data

Data were collected at UCoP meetings, using online surveys, person-to-person and phone interviews, and informal meetings. There were a total 40 interviews: eight with lecturers, six with lecturer and student groups, and sixteen with students. There were 13 responses to the survey: twelve by lecturers, and one by a student. There were minutes from 7 UCoP meetings which varied in duration from thirty minutes to one hour. In addition there were minutes from one UCoP Facilitators' meeting.

UCoP Facilitation

UCoP discussion groups and individual interviews within the qualitative process of grounded theory provided the most appropriate approach. A space was created for the conceptualisation of experiences, through the dialogic nature of open conversation. The complementary use of grounded theory, discussion groups within the UCoP and interviews created the dialogic relationship between participants as both narrators and audience. Through the interaction of retelling, reliving and recreating their experiences in conversations, Indigenous postgraduate coursework students and their lecturers conceptualised their individual subjectivities in a process of self-construction.

How the UCoP were facilitated was critical. Indigenous students and their lecturers talked about the frustrations and implications of inappropriate research being conducted by researchers with Indigenous individuals and communities. Although these students were not higher degree research students, they constantly reminded the facilitators that it was not always necessarily a matter of researchers being ignorant of, or insensitive to Indigenous methodologies, but rather an ingrained attitude that placed Western-based methodologies as the only valid and rigorous approach to research, ones that would present the researcher's work as being acceptable in established, hegemonic Western academia. It is not just Western-based methodologies but the entire university learning experiences that Indigenous students found particularly disempowering. As Frawley, Nolan and White (2009) state:

Given the statistical evidence, it would be hard to deny that there has been significant growth in the participation of Indigenous students over the past two decades. However, we must constantly ask whether the learning journeys of those students have been quality experiences undertaken in culturally supportive learning environments, and whether Indigenous students...today truly feel part of the academy. For many Indigenous people, universities have remained white man's institutions', places where, of necessity, they have engaged in learning that has given them a qualification that is recognised in the outside world but has done little to enhance their value as Indigenous people. University curricula, governance and leadership have traditionally been attuned to the dominant Western paradigm with no acknowledged place for Indigenous knowledge systems, Indigenous pedagogy and Indigenous forms of governance and leadership' (p. 1).

Similarly, in their Report to Members of the United Nations Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues (2009), the National Indigenous Higher Education Network (now the National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Higher Education Consortium), argued that:

The successful implementation of the Rights of Indigenous Peoples to Education rests upon the acceptance and implementation by nation states of a more culturally astute and competent education system. This system must be based upon a more inclusive set of criteria and an explicit set of values that underpin the development of policies to enhance the level of Indigenous participation and progression within the western education system. Such a system must be based upon a framework that is inclusive of Indigenous epistemologies and practices contained within the scholarship of Indigenous knowledge systems and cultural world views. Such a world view needs to underpin the disjuncture that exists between Indigenous and non Indigenous education and the appalling retention and graduation rates of minority students within mainstream institutions. While this is of major concern for Indigenous men, it raises particular issues for Indigenous women. Statistically they are three times more likely than their male counterparts to enrol in post compulsory education, the retention and graduation rates of Indigenous women continues to be an area of concern. There are many factors that contribute to this situation. Impoverishment, high incarceration and mortality rates of many Indigenous men, limited support networks and poor health act to inhibit the ability of many Indigenous women to progress successfully through the education system. The Australian Government's commitment to "closing the gap" on Indigenous poverty and enhancing their emotional and social wellbeing will be to little avail if more strategic action is not given to address these issues (p. 4).

Project challenge

The project challenge was then to acknowledge and convey the call by Indigenous peoples for more culturally appropriate research approaches that recognised Indigenous methodologies and demanded respectful relationships (Huggins, 1998; Moreton-Robinson,

2000; Sheehan, 2004; Smith, 1999). This might not only have the potential to change the way knowledge is produced but also acknowledges that Indigenous peoples may have distinctly different ways of thinking about and naming research in bringing their values, attitudes and practices to the forefront (Smith, 1999, p. 124). This was emphasised by one lecturer participant:

Many of the methodologies in Indigenous research require things like participatory action research or grounded theory or other qualitative approaches and many ethics committees don't understand that.

There is always a certain vulnerability for the participants and the researcher, our relationships, and ultimately for the study. In the current climate of "post modernist " scholarship there is much engagement with power, cultural authority, representation and agency. Not only had we needed to ask why we were doing this study, but also who would it benefit, how productive would it be for the Indigenous postgraduate coursework students and their lecturers, and how would the use of UCoP and grounded theory serve the aims of the study?

One of the students, Ross⁴ said to one of the facilitators that he trusted her to do the right thing by him and the others. Students also had unspoken reservations and this is where continued consultation is vital in maintaining focus and accountability. Nakata (2004, pp. 2-3) emphasises the importance of opening "difficult dialogues" on a conceptual level as the "essence" of the necessary restructuring of Indigenous/non-Indigenous relationships. It is certain that the complexities involved in such dialogues will produce discomfort and risk for those willing to participate.

Indigenous students were viewed as not being "powerless" in this situation. They had the option to withdraw at any time, making the research inoperable. In caring about their opinions of the facilitators as ethical researchers, they had the power to negate their efforts and erode their self-perceptions. According to Foucault (2002, p. 298), power relations between people in any situation will always be present and unbalanced, but the point is to work at lessening the level of domination one holds over another.

In searching for new theory emerging from the context-embedded interview texts, a process of combining the use of grounded theory, UCoP discussion groups and individual interviews offered possibilities for creating respect in research relationships. Respect in research is essential for it is "a reciprocal, shared, constantly interchanging principle which is expressed through all aspects of social conduct" (Smith, 1999, p. 120).

University Communities of Practice participation

When asked for their opinions on how they felt about participating in the UCoP and its suitability for further use, some of the student participants' responses were:

⁴ In keeping with ethical requirements of this project, pseudonyms are used throughout this paper in order to maintain confidentiality.

The UCoP is not a new concept to Aboriginal people ... generally speaking, a group of people getting together in community consultation, collaboration and decision-making, sometimes of mixed gender and different ages is representative of cultural practice and still is now (KOTS1)⁵. It was fantastic to talk to other Indigenous students about our issues and problems (KOTS2). It's a bit funny ... it's a strange thing for me ... I take a step backwards because I'm a reclusive sort of person ... but I think this works OK ... because there are four people here so you can listen to each other's stories ... have a bit more of an open conversation. Someone will tell you a story and you'll feel some way about that story and that will remind you of an experience you had then you'll talk about it ... something good is going to come of it (KOTS3). Personally, I don't mind this style of research (KOTS4). I only knew one other person ... I felt a bit uncomfortable to a certain degree .., I didn't really want to talk. Yeah ... but I'm quite happy with the way things went today ... I think today was great (KOTS5).

Even though the student participants' candid responses suggested some reservations, their feelings mostly indicated that the idea of using Community of Practice principles as a means of gathering field texts had legitimacy and was worth investigating as a continuing method.

In creating a relaxed physical space, students had the option of choosing their time and level of participation according to their preferred social and cultural communication practices. Conversations evolved with the students deciding on how and when they contributed and the field texts emerged as narrative rather than prescriptive answers. In a group situation there was space for physical silences, cultural knowledge silences, and gender and age priorities; for example, who could speak, when they could speak, when it was time to defer to others. The situations also acknowledged the multiplicity of life experiences, subjectivities and individual personalities. Accordingly, the use of discussion groups as a means of collecting field texts did not necessarily suit all participants and alternative options were discussed.

At the same time, the UCoP operated as a dialogic space where students entered relationships with the other participating students as both narrators and members of an audience. As a result they would construct the self through a process of re-envisioning their life experiences as Indigenous tertiary postgraduate students and lecturers.

In borrowing from Wortham (2001, p. 7), the sharing, comparing and sorting of stories with others helped the students and academics to express and manage multiple, sometimes fragmented or contradictory selves. Operating as an open conversational space extended the dimensions and possibilities of discourses beyond the narrowing scope of formal focus groups. Sampson (1993, p. 97) described conversations between people as "communication in action" and that as they dominated our lives, it was time that they were taken seriously as a tool for counteracting the monologic construction of Western privilege.

⁵ KOTS1 – date code: Keeping On Track (KOT); Student (S); 1 (participant number).

Building theory

By adapting the grounded approach to building theory (Strauss & Corbin, 1998), emphasis was placed on theory construction through the conceptualisation of what was contained in conversations and the verification of such interpretations through either re-examining the field texts or speaking with the participants to confirm or modify. In many instances the students themselves gave voice to phenomena and named them in conceptual terms. Examples of this were the use of terms such as "cultural capital", "breaking the code" and "role model", which they then developed by sharing experiences and drawing together the overriding concept of how they "operated in two worlds" in gaining their life successes.

While the students found related concepts among their varied experiences, it remained clear that differences between individuals were present regardless of any commonalities that existed in their groups. They had their Indigeneity in common but may have had little else in common pertaining to their backgrounds, affiliations and goals. Individuals in the groups brought with them to the discussions awareness of such diversity among all group members and served to dispel the notion of the binary Indigenous/non-Indigenous category (including an essentialist Indigenous category) in which either could be positioned as the Other.

In the past, and in many cases still present, this binary notion based on race and culture has prescribed what is attached to each category representing each as unique, separate and oppositional in entity. As a result, discourse within the paradigm sets itself up to negate individuals' voices, those often being the voices of people already historically silenced. Persistence of a binary position in failing to recognise the complexities of all people's lives only serves to perpetuate the condition and prevent a moving forward in understandings and relations among people.

However, Nakata (2000, p. ix), with McConaghy's (2000, p. 2) challenge "old discursive regimes", that is, it is not necessary to erode "the cultural, linguistic and political resources of Indigenous people." It involves a working through of the issues surrounding an essentialist view rather than a total dismissal of its existence. Participating in UCoP discussions and interviews hopefully gave Indigenous students the opportunity to employ "different intellectual theorisations of their positions in relation to all the discourses that intersect their lives" (Nakata, 2000, p. ix). Nakata (1997), in his experiences as a Torres Strait Islander, dispels the simplicity of the "them" and "us" positions and proposes an "interface" between the two, a political space that circumscribes the ways in which Islanders make sense of and enact their lives. An opportunity to speak and be heard is supported by hooks (1992, p. 116) and Foucault (1980) who advocate the possibility of resistance in the form of developing agency within the power/knowledge struggle that takes place between all participants in such discourse.

Indigenous students did not want to talk about their Otherness and wanted to celebrate it through a dialogic alternative (Sampson, 1993, p. 14). In providing an alternate space for voice freedom, all participants could have the opportunity to express themselves, which included not only defending their positions but also making effective use of those opportunities for significant change. Within a designated space, Indigenous students, in

particular, could perhaps negotiate those margins, gaps and locations where agency could be found. This was how the facilitators hoped the students would view their participation.

In adopting certain concepts of Charmaz's (2000) constructivist grounded theory, depth and richness of dialogue was necessary for revealing deep meanings in Indigenous students' life experiences. The UCoP encouraged a flow of ideas and cultivated deeper conceptual thinking. However, the use was limited, if not inhibited, by time. The development of thick description as the flow of ideas may move too quickly for detailed development of stories and ideas. Therefore, having the option of one-on-one conversations at a later date, which did happen, proved successful. That allowed them more time to individually build on stories and ideas raised in the UCoP and provided privacy for revealing things that perhaps were too personal or sensitive to disclose in their group situations.

Gaining meanings from the interactions was complicated through the shifting combinations of parties to the conversations. In the extended audience of the UCoP the students may have taken on different personas or subjectivities as they positioned themselves according to others and their own experiences. Wortham (2001, p. 160) claims that where an individual has a group audience there is opportunity for a more dialogically rich ground upon which to develop a conceptual understanding in emerging multi-voiced conversations. Multiple layered stories produce conceptual propositions of which the students at the time (and the researcher later) either consciously or subconsciously link, through world and experiential knowledge, into relational webs (Bower & Morrow, 1990, p. 44). Evolving conceptual patterns can also be linked to interpretations of students' interactional positioning through dialogic descriptions of time-space relationships such as those of Bakhtin (1986).

Within the climate of the UCoP the students were able to speak relatively freely and, by interpreting and giving meaning to their experiences, could be able to access a process of "conscientisation" that Freire (1985, p. 68) proposes, of not only being in the world but with the world, together with others. In this sense then the students were making conscious contributions; attempting to construct something meaningful and coherent to further our understanding as well as their own.

Reason (1998, p. 264) believes that people are to varying degrees self-determining in their intentions and purposes. In accordance with the Project's ethical stance on researcher/participant relationships, it was vital for the validity of the research to acknowledge that what they said and how they interact in the UCoP would be largely determined by them. Therefore, it was anticipated that formulating theory together from retelling and recreating experiences placed them in a position of co-researching with the facilitators in a research relationship (Stewart & Mackinlay, 2003, p. 4).

Together multiple perspectives as co-researchers helped to validate the existence of differing ways of knowing, with recognition that all ways of knowing are significant in the role they play in resisting oppression and exploitation. The Project's intention was to move away from an assumption in ethnography that the Indigenous students would be there to be constituted as others and to be known by the facilitators from a distance (Nakata, 1995, p. 41). This process placed the practices of grounded theory and UCoP in accord. Theories

must emerge from specific contexts in order to examine such contexts critically; in this case the context of the co-researchers within the environment of the UCoP and the context of their lived experiences. It was important that the concept of Indigenous students as "intellectuals", as creators of theory but also as consenting and effective participants, was modelled.

Bruner (1987, pp. 19, 21) discusses the developing "empowerment and subjective enrichment" of the individual's performance in the group allowing that person to stand back from the unfolding story as one who is neither formed by nor owns experience. He also speaks of an undercurrent of consciousness in which there is a shift in the narratives from expository to perspectival language and the person becomes a protagonist in his or her own story. In one of the discussions a student could "see" her shifting position as she interacted in the dialogue with seemingly "empowered" other Indigenous students:

[life experience] changes your perception of what success is, what failure is ... just today I've seen something ... 'failure is an event, not a person' ... and that's it you know ... so it's how you do it and what you want to get out of it really (KOTS1). I'm getting there ... I'm working at it now (KOTS2). I just know it's all happening in this time and space right now where my whole life is changing both internally, spiritually (KOTS3).

This story, as did those of the other students, became not merely an articulated reflection of their individual university experiences but products of engaging in the social networks of the group (Gergen, 1994, p. 22). Wortham (2001, p. xii) draws on "slippery Bakhtinian concepts" when he concludes that the relational context of a group has significant, if somewhat complicated, effects on the transformative power of re-envisioned life stories. The utterances take on a life of their own in the context of the group interactions. Participation could produce varying degrees of acceptance or resistance comprising multiple, shifting and unpredictable variables as the conversations and narratives unfolded.

Complexities and cycles in human relationships act to confuse methodological procedures and impact on the meaning-making process in field texts. In dealing with the seemingly endless challenges that continually arise, this quote has provided an insightful message. "Nonlinearity means that the act of playing the game has a way of changing the rules" (Gleick, 1987, p. 24). In such uncertain situations such as these UCoP, mutual respect for everyone becomes paramount. In accepting that the choice of methodology in working with Indigenous students would not still criticism and "solve problems", relinquishing some control over the process allowed most to be gained from the complementary use of grounded theory and group discussions. UCoP offer an opportunity for the construction of narratives and grounded theory proposes a meaning-making process for those narratives.

Rather than use the restricting prescriptiveness of how focus groups are organised, conducted and evaluated with the expectation of definitive results (Patton, 2002, p. 385), the basic elements of a group of people coming together for discussion was adapted to suit the requirements of the UCoP. The term "conversation" was used, preferring to instil a suggestion of casualness, which would hopefully encourage freeflowing dialogue that did not impede, control or limit the Indigenous students' and their lecturers' contributions.

Establishing right relationships was critical to the UCoP. At the very first meetings ethical issues regarding confidentiality and trust were discussed. The UCoP facilitators and Project Consultant discussed in detail the process. All discussions that could be identified would not be disseminated outside of the UCoP. Firstly, these discussions and transcripts of interviews would be de-identified with acronyms used before being made available to wider audience. For example, students would be identified only as 'Keeping on Track Students' (KOTS) and a number beginning with 1 (KOTS 1).

Relationships are key to postgraduate Indigenous coursework students. The comments below were echoed throughout interviews, surveys and focus groups.

The teaching staff, while it's a very professional relationship, they're still very much part of the group. People don't feel afraid to come and ask and those sorts of things. I think that's where people do become motivated, that somebody actually cares and support them. (KOTS 3)

You want to connect to the content but to connect to the content you want to connect to the person that's delivering the content. I don't know if that's different to non-Indigenous people or it's a personality trait or whatever but I tend to think we want to be more comfortable with the person and then I think that helps us with information. – (KOTS 4)

Chapter 7: Data analysis and discussion

A strong focus on building relationships with students echoed across UCoP sites, with lecturers giving voice to the importance of these relationships in terms of supporting off-campus, remote and distance students. This voicing, like most other aspects of Indigenous postgraduate by coursework factors, is complex, and multifaceted. As a way in to discussing relationships as the central underpinning theme in the data analysis, let us take a brief look, at the relationship mismatches between staff and students that result in difficulty when it comes to meeting student need.

Perspectives

The figures below, aim to represent relationship dynamics as found in preliminary analysis, although the authors acknowledge that the reality is far more complex than can be truly captured here. From the student perspective, community is the primary consideration (*Fig. 1*). Effects of study on community, positions of responsibility and family obligations serve to provide support, and also to inhibit performance. While academic performance is the goal, and as such is diametrically positioned – community must be situated in the middle. For many students, community is the driving factor behind the desire for academic and professional achievement. After this come peer interactions and strength drawn from peers, interactions and support from academics, and finally institutional affiliation and recognition of the institution as a limiting or liberating factor.

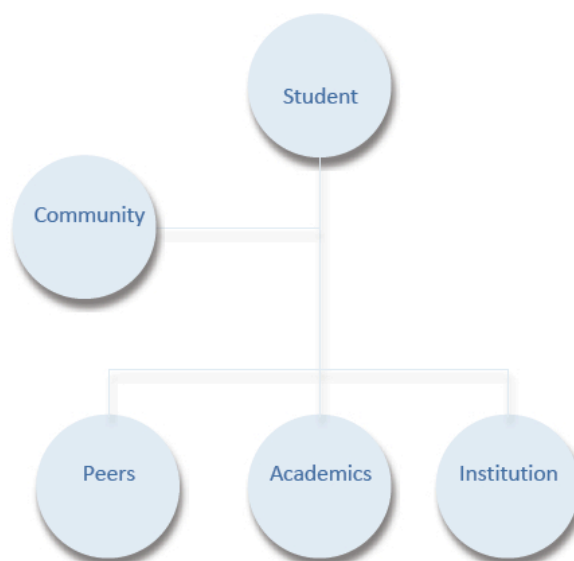


Fig1. Student perspective

Compare this to the experiences of academic staff (*Fig. 2*), who unanimously mention the institution and governmental restrictions, in terms of limiting or prohibiting factors in student success and improved outcomes. For staff, the institution, policies, funding and commonwealth agenda's fill the position of community; something that both supports, and inhibits the goal of improved outcomes for students. Efforts to create constructs and institutional frameworks to support student capacity are usually sought through external funding. In this model the students are diametrically linked to the academics – as the

students represent the primary area of concern, but between the academic and the student lie the institutional and governmental obstructions. For example, in response to the Bradley Report (2008), universities have been directed to become more efficient and self-supporting. This readily translates to institutions narrowing the curricula with a strong emphasis on retaining only those subjects and degrees that demonstrate income generation. Therefore, community engagement comes last primarily though lack of time, resources and funding – not because of lack of willingness or desire.



Fig. 2 Academic perspective

The notion that improved outcomes for students need be negotiated through institutional funding is certainly not new, or surprising, and in terms of relationships as a central theme rests on the idea that relationships between academics and institutions, while essential to maintaining student support, are strained. The issue of funding, workplace formula and academic workload is recurring, and underlies improved outcomes, evoking the notion of improved outcome for academic staff as intimately connected to improved outcomes for students.

Everything is online, but she can't access it half the time. You know I'm downloading stuff and actually faxing her material...and then I'm talking her through material... she can't do...because she's...got a really, really slow download...I have to adjust the assessment...She's on her own, in one of the most remote parts of Australia, very dodgy internet connection, very dodgy phone connection, and she's not entitled to any help...so all the time that I'm spent supporting her, and it's a lot of time, is completely unfunded. What she needs to get through and the time I need to put in is completely unfunded...these people are asserting their agency...and that assertion needs to be funded. (KOTL2).

The desire for community that supports, renews, refreshes and motivates is reflected throughout data as the most central, consistent theme, and is voiced by students and teaching staff alike. Beyond the need for a professional community that supports academics

to support their students, is the need for personal relationships between staff, students, community and peers, that nourishes meaning and supports motivation:

We want a personal relationship, we connect more and that's a different cultural thing too. We're looking to connect to our lecturers and our tutors personally...I think we have a different desire... its relationship based, we want to be able to connect to the person..." (KOTS3). To me having a safe place or a safe base is about being together and building relationships and building trust and all that kind of stuff in an environment where you're together... (KOTS9). You get to meet other students; you build a network; you've got them as support' (KOTS10). It is necessary to develop solid relationships with students – to understand their backgrounds... If students trust you and you trust them, and you respect them and they respect you – if there's genuine care in that process... you actually have to care (KOTL3.) Fundamentally the other motivation that people have – is they want to get it done for their family for their community, because of things people have sacrificed for them to be here and to do it, people know what the elders sacrificed. (KOTL10)

The meaning of meaning

The original interview schedule consisted of open-ended responses to the survey questions. This approach provided a way to ascertain survey response while allowing the opportunity for participants to respond in a more personal and in-depth manner. The original survey questions varied slightly in nature between teaching staff and students – but were primarily based on pedagogical support and interactions on a subject level. The main foci for improved outcomes at this stage were relationships, expectation, identity, coursework materials, mode of study, levels of support, transition preparation, and institutional flexibility. Institutional flexibility is an essential thread in terms of sustainable and immediate improved outcomes.

Whilst these themes continued to appear, the nature of conversation and reflection moved toward more personal experiences as the participants had time to reflect on their experiences, desires and motivations. Relationships remained central to these reflections, and were discussed in terms of student success, engagement, motivation, authentic assessment, incorporation of Indigenous worldviews and types of knowledge, institutional and interpersonal racism, increasing postgraduate coursework student numbers, and the *meaning* of postgraduate qualifications to the individual and community.

Underpinning all of these themes, as an essential component to success for postgraduate coursework students is the notion of *meaning*. When asked the question “What is an improved outcome for Indigenous postgraduate coursework students in your view?” No answers were directed specifically toward a qualification in and of itself; rather, they were directed toward *personal meaning*. This questions attitudes toward Indigenous education that are “*spoken about in utilitarian terms. Get him a job, putting the men to work, you know?*” (KOTL2), and directs our attention to attitudes toward coursework that have impacted on Indigenous students, who have experienced “*...a few comments that made me feel really uncomfortable about doing coursework. [as if] It wasn't as good as doing*

research.” (KOTS2). In contrast to these attitudes, responses to indicators of improved outcomes for Indigenous students belied the often utilitarian view of postgraduate studies by coursework, and included statements such as:

Standing proud and standing strong as an Indigenous person ... Being able to articulate issues and respond confidently (especially in conflict situations) ... Confidence to question the status quo ... More Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students participating and completing (Anon UCoP workshop responses). Recognition, validation ... (KOTS16) ... It will build that capacity to bring the community along with us and not really about us ... obviously it's personal for you and your family. But it's got to be more than that; it can't just be about your own individual betterment (KOTS5) ... You also gain an appreciation of how big the Indigenous think tank is out there and the capacity within the group to articulate what's happening in and around Indigenous communities and Indigenous people (KOTS3) ... So the interaction is good but I think something that's missing is for the university also to nurture those think tanks in terms of bringing out their voice and helping them to gain a voice to speak. Because I think that Indigenous student networks can have a big impact as well on how policy is formulated and how service is delivered. But it's something I think that is missing at the moment (KOTS4).

Shifting cultural capital

Fostering intangibles such as meaning and relationships within an institutional environment need not be as difficult as it initially appears, after all, universities are filled with people, and our innate tendency is to seek relationships with those around us. However, as mentioned above, the inhibiting factor in these relationships is the disembodied institution. Preliminary data suggests that we have open to us a pathway that can bring the mismatched relationships into closer alignment. This requires reconsideration of what coursework looks like, does, and sets out to achieve. According to one participant:

We think of coursework as something we teach to people. We don't do it as a co-learning experience. Postgraduate coursework is an opportunity for practitioners and academics to sit together on an equal playing field and to explore something. But I think we don't explore enough, for Indigenous practitioners, who are doing coursework, to relate it to – not just work-based learning, but to relate it to reflective practice. Actually, I don't think we sell that enough as authentic learning – creditable piece of work. (KOTL7)

Independent study subjects enable a two-way learning, recognise cultural knowledge and prior professional, or life experience, and foster relationships between students and teaching staff, and strengthen relationships between students and community. However, the potential significance of independent research subjects is really situated in the possibility of fostering shared meaning and relationships between institutions and communities. Historical distrust, social and cultural inequity in capital, language and access to education currently inhibit these important relationships. This is exemplified in the following quote:

I had a student explain to me that she crosses a river every day to come to work. That she lives in a world that she has to leave to come in to this world. Then she spends the day in this world – then she has to cross the river to go home. That she has a different standing in those two different worlds. At university, within higher education – there’s a higher status than when she’s on the other side of the river.... Her way of coming across the river and going back across the river in a canoe, that she has to make her own canoe, was a really powerful way for me to understand that when she’s sitting with me, studying and learning that she’s made a conscious effort to come out and cross that river (KOTL8).

Both teaching staff and students recognised cultural and linguistic barriers as inhibiting factors for positive learning outcomes, relationships and experience. These barriers can also bring into question, or challenge personal meaning for students. These challenges can create self doubt: “...it’s just that you’re coming into a foreign language or even a foreign way of doing something and you just mentally build it in your head that it’s insurmountable” (KOTS16). They can also reinforce previous experiences of being or feeling marginalised and discounted by researchers: “I think that’s the hardest thing for us as Indigenous students and especially post-grad students that we can’t make a difference – we can’t even change the thinking at that level” (KOTS7). Or they can promote lack of engagement or inhibit deep engagement:

I think that is why a lot of people disengage... it’s like you just have to play this role or you have to subscribe to their way of thinking to get anywhere and then once you get there you can then kind of influence and change things. It’s like you’ve got to do it in the system to get to that level and then you may have some influence. But I don’t know how many people actually really – I don’t know how many managers of people, the teachers and professors and that, really do try to think about what it would be really like to be an Aboriginal person and walk in our shoes. (KOTS6).

Preliminary analysis suggests that overcoming these doubts, fears, prejudices and past experiences will require implementation of strategies that enable Indigenous students to utilise their own cultural and workplace capital. Introduction of, or promotion of independent research subjects that can be utilised in ways that incorporate this capital will go a long way toward addressing these multi-layered challenges. What is important about this research is that it has emphasised the importance of interpersonal relationships to them. Relationships that provide and support shared meaning. Meaning *can* be supported by the institution in ways that relate to a ‘direct positive outcome’ for Indigenous people or communities.

It’s not about a vessel being topped up all the time. It’s a vessel that’s actually overflowing, that actually needs some time to catch some of that overflow and make some sense of it. The space within an independent study subject, is to say – okay, you’ve been doing this type of work for 10 year in this community. Sit down and write your framework. Don’t go out and read other stuff. Use the time to order and make sense of and develop models of what you are doing...I think we

need a lot more of that type of postgraduate coursework. Coursework that doesn't predefine structures, content and processes. That actually just creates postgraduate coursework space for people to systematise their own understanding – from their own practices. So if we say we are going to let you in because you've got this experience, and then we negate that experience by then teaching you something – God help us. (KOTL6.)

Shared meaning and strong relationships assist in breaking down, or reducing cultural and linguistic barriers. Independent research subjects have the potential to truly engage students in ways that echo the sentiment:

to me our motivations have to be about improving our mob...for our communities and for our families...I think the way in which our mob live in the world, the fact that we're people centred and our value systems, make a huge contribution to the world we live in. It's not just about our mob it's for everybody too. (KOTS11).

Conclusion

Academic and support staff who work with, and for Indigenous postgraduate by coursework students, want to assist in levelling the unequal power relationships of cultural and social capital for these students, their families, and communities.

The building of relationships is also related to the developing of social capital...It's often – and I find that with the Indigenous students. They're very keen; they often want to contribute to their communities, so that is building social capital, that's what they want to do. (KOTL6).

However, there are society-wide “old habits of racism...patronisation...underestimation and inability to deal with the different ontologies” (KOTL2). There also exist relationships of unequal power, negative politics and mostly we have been ‘tinkering at the edges’ (Tinto 1987, p. 9) for too long now. As Chappell and Price (2009, p. 8) suggest “Representation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students as a disadvantaged group provides a framework for equity and social inclusion initiatives at national and institutional levels but this still concentrates on changing individuals not systems.”

I think ... a lot of problems originate from the federal government. So called productivity and what they do is they clamp down on completion times, and unfortunately, people from complex backgrounds sometimes take longer to get through ... if we want to give priority to people from difficult backgrounds, then we have to allow a bit of extra time without it cutting into funding. Otherwise it becomes discriminatory ... I think the inflexibility is coming from the Commonwealth ... and that moves downstream about completing time and if there's a clamp on time, then you will have a deterioration of completion rates, so universities that deliberately try to accommodate people from difficult backgrounds will end up losing, whereas the more carnivorous universities, who won't even bother to do that will, obviously, get more funding. (KOTL1).

The staff and student voices in this study are asking not only for acceptance and understanding but also for time. Development of relationships that matter, that can hold and support students, staff and communities, and allow academic work to grow and develop into something that has 'real' outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Island people are essential. Underneath the call for acceptance and understanding, is the call for recognition of *"the fact that we're people who are centred and our value system can make a huge contribution to the world we live in"* (KOTS5).

Chapter 8: A blueprint for intercultural capabilities

The *Keeping on Track* data revealed that most of the Indigenous coursework students are pursuing postgraduate study on a part time and/or external basis. Most of these students attend university only for block residential periods. They are of mature age and many are working full time. Some have young families and juggle work, home and study responsibilities. University study is very high up on the list of priorities as many are the first and sometimes only member in their families to attend a tertiary institution. Some are accepted into postgraduate study based on recognition of prior learning which in itself adds to the challenges of tertiary study. Trying to juggle time to meet all the demands and commitments is often a concern:

Because I'm up front about my situation that I'm a sole parent and sometimes I just can't find child minding (KOTS7) ... But the thing was that because I'm the first one out of my family to come and do university, it was very scary for me (KOTS9) ... I guess it's hard when you work during - well, shift work and you need to get in contact with people at the uni, and it's not that easy because you finish at nine at night (KOTS4) ... They come into postgraduate study, and we assume they have quite significant study and research skills, and they don't, often (KOTL8).

Data analysis uncovered the urgency for building relationships through intercultural understandings. This was critical to improving the experiences of postgraduate coursework Indigenous students and their lecturers.

The cultural interface, both ways and interculturalism

As noted earlier, the challenge for Indigenous students is to recognise the “cultural interface” (Nakata, 2007), that is a place “where the possibilities for producing more useful ‘intersubjective’ understanding clearly reside” (Nakata et al., 2008, p. 143), requiring the development of academic skills that equip Indigenous students with “tools for engagement” with the content of Western disciplines. The flip-side to this, is the requirement for non-Indigenous academics to acquire similar tools of engagement, however these tools are neither specific Indigenous or non-Indigenous tools. The space that the engagement takes place is not one or the other, it is a negotiated space, a both ways/intercultural one.

Aboriginal people have been suggesting an alternative educational ideology for many years, referred to as ‘both ways’ (Ober & Bat, 2007), which is ‘a way of talking about the knowledge systems of two cultures working together’ (Marika, Ngurruwutthun & White 1992, p. 28). At its simplest, ‘both ways’ is about the linking and intersection of two cultural worlds where through the encounter an overlap occurs (Frawley & Fasoli, 2012). The overlap is the intercultural space.

‘Both ways’ has similarities with the concept of interculturalism. Interculturalism ‘is an idea that proposes an encounter between cultures that take place from fundamental characteristics, matrices, and unique aspects of each individual culture’ (Coll 2004, p. 27). To be engaged in an intercultural process, ‘is a releasing experience for each of the cultures involved leading to an awareness of the limits that are inherent to our own cultures and

worlds' (Coll 2004, p. 28). From this basis, meaningful dialogue can occur in order to shape and negotiate the development of the intercultural space. This requires intercultural reasoning that, 'emphasises the processes and interactions which unite and define the individuals and the groups in relation to each other' (Abdallah-Pretceille 2006, p. 476).

The perspectives on interculturalism and 'both ways' can be synthesised to identify a number of common features: mutuality in recognising that a space for collaboration in search of shared meaning is a desirable and achievable state, and the benefits it generates for those engaged; valuing diversity and authentic relationships; and, reciprocity (Frawley & Fasoli, 2012). An essential 'tool of engagement' is respectful relationships.

Respectful relationships built on successful intercultural interactions are at the heart of working with postgraduate Indigenous students. Together with teaching the skills of research, writing and communicating at postgraduate level, it is critical that as part of the engagement process, the players (the students and academics) interact successfully with each other. In an intercultural space, this requires certain capabilities for *all* players.

Capabilities or competence

In the early 2000s, the literature on leadership frequently described it in terms of a set of 'competencies'. Current literature overwhelmingly rejects this approach. Instead, it recognises leadership as inherently bound to particular contexts; sees professional performance as an interrelated whole rather than as a list of skills; and sees the skills themselves in terms of a continuum rather than a yes or no checklist. Instead of competencies, it may be better to use Duigan's (2006) concept of 'capabilities', in which skills must be associated with confidence, commitment, character and judgement in order to be effective. Analysis of the data in the 'Keeping on Track' Project confirms the importance of the above concept. This is also aligned with University of Australia (2011) when discussing the notice of culture competence⁶ to include "*the ability to critically reflect on one's own culture and professional paradigms in order to understand its cultural limitations and effect positive change.*"

A Blueprint for Intercultural Capabilities

The UNESCO guidelines on intercultural education (2006) state that intercultural education cannot be just a simple 'add on' and so it needs to address wider teaching and learning. Further, to be engaged in an intercultural process, 'is a releasing experience for each of the cultures involved leading to an awareness of the limits that are inherent to our own cultures and worlds' (Coll 2004, 28). From this basis, meaningful dialogue can occur in order to shape and negotiate the development of the intercultural space. This requires intercultural reasoning that 'emphasises the processes and interactions which unite and define the individuals and the groups in relation to each other' (Abdallah-Pretceille 2006, 476). Therefore, the capabilities that inform an intercultural blueprint applies both equally to students and their teachers. It is suggested by *Keeping on Track* that all participants in a postgraduate coursework context – whether Indigenous or non-Indigenous – be viewed as

⁶ Keeping on Track project suggests 'cultural capabilities' is a more encompassing term.

working together, and not apart, and that intercultural capabilities apply equally to both. Therefore, the proposed *Blueprint for Intercultural Capabilities* consists of a number of elements that have emerged from the data analysis. These are: attitudes, knowledge, skills, and outcomes (internal and external).

Attitudes are critical, those of respect, openness, curiosity and discovery. Openness and curiosity imply a willingness to risk and to move beyond one's comfort zone. As noted by a lecturer: *I think more interaction with students would be better (KOTL2)*. In communicating respect to others, it is important to demonstrate that others are valued. There is an appeal for this: *They think they know what's right for our mob and how to counsel stuff and how to make the difference and more times than not the real high powered researchers they - whether they want to or they don't want to or they think it's irrelevant, particularly don't worry about that stuff getting in the road, they just go ahead anyway. I think that's the hardest thing for us as Indigenous students and especially postgrad students that we can't make a difference - we can't even change that thinking at that level (KOTS7)*. Establishing the right attitudes to encourage openness are foundational to the further development of knowledge and skills needed for intercultural capability.

Knowledge consists of a cultural self-awareness, that is the ways in which one's culture has influenced one's identity and worldview; culture-specific knowledge; and, deep cultural knowledge including understanding other world-views. Being strong about identity for both students and lecturers was seen as being important: *I think one of the best strategies is for the lecturer to be really competent and confident in their own identity. I think if you are then you are respectful of other cultures too. I think it's when lecturers are not too sure how to deal with other cultures, they've never really thought through their own culture. (KOTL6)*. Knowledge also includes being safe in culture and ensuring that due respect is given across cultures: *I've also seen another lecturer get up before we start any of our workshops and talk about feeling culturally safe, and that's for everybody, and the respect that's due from one person to another. (KOTS2)*

Skills includes not only the acquisition and processing of knowledge through observation, listening, evaluating, analysing, interpreting, and relating but also the ability to engage in meaningful ways. *So you've got to be able to engage with those students in ways that are meaningful, and that means sometimes going outside the box. Not just standing up the front, and talking like mad (KOTL9)*. Engagement is also about honouring contributions: *Our community mob are nothing if not about contribution and relationship. So I think for everybody that I've seen it's been about being valued and having your contribution recognised. I think the more ways we find to honour people and to do that, then the better we will be at supporting people (KOTS5)*. It is also about being reflective of values, beliefs and practices: *I don't know how you can be well prepared to teach a subject in cross-cultural setting, it's a process of continually preparing, and it's a process of reflection (KOTL8)*.

Outcomes (internal) consists of flexibility, adaptability, an ethno-relative perspective and empathy. These are aspects that occur within the individual as a result of the acquired attitudes, knowledge and capabilities necessary for intercultural competence. At this point, individuals are able to see from others' perspectives and to respond to them according to the way in which the other person desires to be treated. *You've got to be able to get*

students to trust you, and you have to have a - it's reciprocity process. If students trust you and you trust them, and you respect them and they respect you - if there's genuine care in that process - there is care involved. It's not just being a robot up the front or whatever. You actually have to care, I think. (KOTL8). Individuals may reach this outcome in varying degrees of success. *Look, some people in academia are very good at relationships that are not - a lot aren't. A lot of these kind of people that it's my way or the highway kind of - and they're really not very good at negotiating outside of their own way of seeing the world and they're very dogmatic and I don't know whether any number of workshops would change that (KOTL3.)*

Outcomes (external) are demonstrated through the effective and appropriate behaviour and communication of the individual, which become the visible outcomes of intercultural capability experienced by others. It is important to understand the implications of “effective” and “appropriate” behaviour and communication. *They might have had experience in working with Indigenous people but the biggest challenge is that there is no real understanding of where Aboriginal people are coming from. They use technical terms of things like epistemology, ontology, axiology and I think that if they could understand that fundamentally we come from a completely different viewpoint if you like, that would go a long way to see people understanding how to teach Indigenous students (KOTS2).* Effectiveness can be determined by the individual while the appropriateness can only be determined by the other person – with appropriateness being directly related to cultural sensitivity and the adherence to cultural norms of that person. *For me, it seems like cultural awareness might be an introduction to a culture that - a brief overview - where cultural confidence, you can demonstrate that you have the cultural knowledge to be able to teach or embed cultural knowledges in your subject. (KOTL7)*

Respectful relationships: the possibilities of UCoP

The *Keeping on Track* project aimed to answer three research questions focused on the Indigenous postgraduate coursework experience by collecting and analysing the teaching and learning experiences of Indigenous students and their teachers in postgraduate coursework programs. Project end aims were to consider the implications of the data collected, and make recommendations for strengthening teacher leadership capabilities in the teaching and learning of Indigenous postgraduate students through the development of a teacher leadership capabilities framework which would be developed, trialled and evaluated. Four things have become abundantly clear in the project:

1. the value of UCoP in forming an intercultural space in which the process of teaching and learning is the focus;
2. that intercultural capabilities are required by both teachers and students to engage fully with the cultural interface of teaching and learning;
3. that this requires intercultural sensitivity (Bennett, 2004); and,
4. that relationships are key to intercultural exchanges and building intercultural sensitivity.

As such, there is no recommendation for a teacher leadership framework, but rather a recommendation for encouraging intercultural development through student/teacher encounters facilitated through the establishment of UCoP. This can be best described as an

intercultural encounter for those engaged in the teaching and learning of Indigenous students in postgraduate coursework programs (Fig. 3).

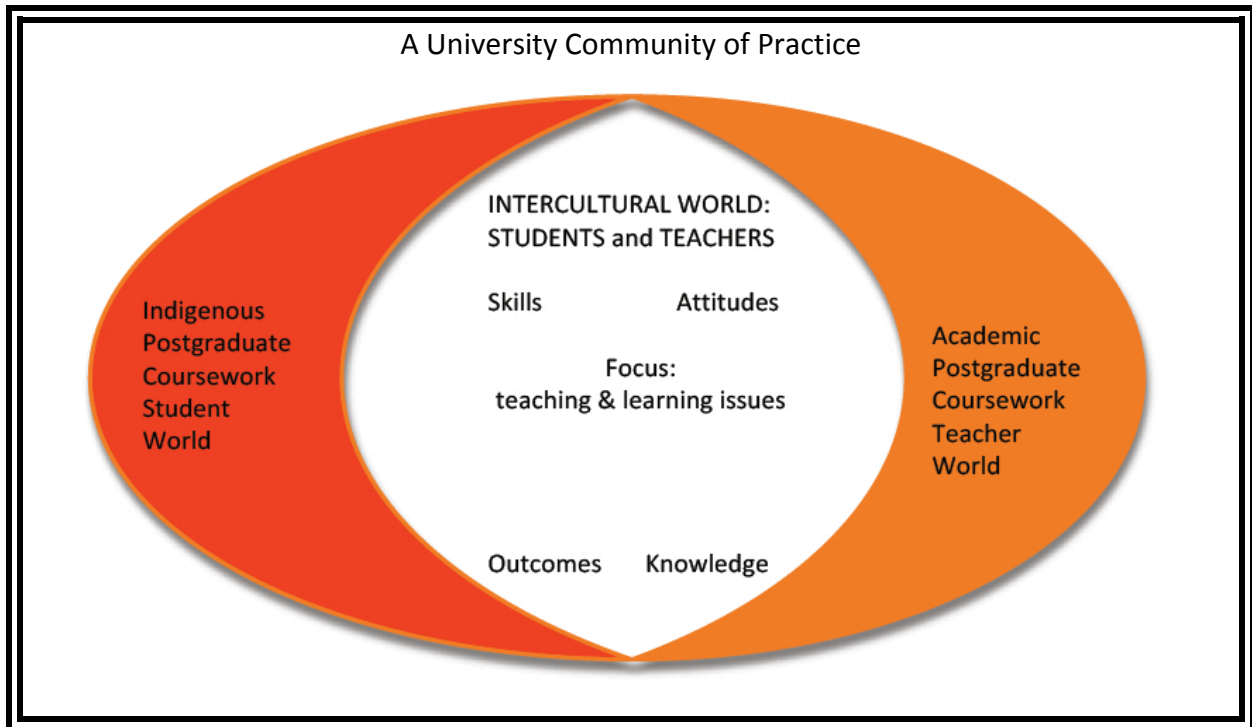


Fig 3. An intercultural encounter

Furthermore, it will be from this blueprint that contextualised frameworks can be developed and trialled at each institution. The applicability of the intercultural blueprint extends beyond the Indigenous and non-Indigenous intercultural encounter. It has the capacity to be very effective in any situation where cultural and linguistic differences are evident and acknowledged.

The blueprint illustrates that it is possible for an individual to have the requisite attitudes and be minimally effective and appropriate in behaviour and/or communication, even without further knowledge or skills. Adding the necessary knowledge and skills may ensure that an individual can be more effective and appropriate in one's intercultural interactions. With the added flexibility, adaptability, and empathy, one can be even more effective and appropriate in intercultural interactions.

This encounter, in the context of a UCoP, illustrates that intercultural capability is a process – a lifelong process – and there is no one point at which an individual becomes completely interculturally capable, although it is a developmental process where those engaged in the encounter develop over a number of intercultural sensitivity stages (Bennet, 2004). Thus, it is important to pay as much attention to the development process – of how one acquires the necessary knowledge, skills, attitudes and outcomes – as one does to encounter and as such, critical reflection becomes a powerful engagement tool in the process of working at the cultural interface (Nakata, 2007).

Intercultural capabilities unfortunately do not “just happen” for most; instead, they must be intentionally addressed. Intentionally addressing intercultural capabilities development at

the tertiary level through programs, orientations, experiences, and courses – for both our domestic students, both Indigenous and non-Indigenous, and international students is essential if we are to graduate global-ready and global-aware students and academics. Having a blueprint for intercultural capabilities such as the one discussed in this chapter can help guide our efforts in ensuring a more comprehensive, integrated approach.

Since intercultural capabilities are not a naturally occurring phenomenon, we must be intentional about addressing this at our institutions- through curricular and co-curricular efforts. In utilising such a blueprint in our orientations, our efforts toward developing intercultural capabilities in our students and academics can be included in a more comprehensive, integrated approach instead of through random, ad-hoc approaches that often occur. It is also important that we assess our efforts – both to improve what we are doing to develop intercultural capabilities among students and academics and to also provide meaningful feedback that could aid everyone on their intercultural journey. Developing Intercultural capabilities is complex but doable, and absolutely essential in moving the field toward a greater understanding of teaching and learning in an intercultural world.

Therefore, within an institutional academic context, the *Keeping on Track* project makes two recommendations:

1. where UCoP aren't established, that Universities through their Learning and Teaching Centres (or equivalent departments), facilitate the development of one; and,
2. that the *Blueprint for Intercultural Capabilities* forms the basis for the functioning of UCoP.

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Appendix A: External Evaluation Report

External Evaluation Report of the project Keeping on track: Teacher leaders for Indigenous postgraduate coursework students

LE10-1608

Dr Paul Chesterton

December 2012

1.0 Introduction

This report outlines details and findings of an external evaluation of the project entitled *Keeping on track: Teacher leaders for Indigenous postgraduate coursework students*, undertaken by Dr Jack Frawley and Professor Nereda White from Australian Catholic University (the Lead Institution) and Professor Sue McGinty and Dr Felecia Watkin-Lui from James Cook University (the Partner Institution). The project was funded initially by the Australian Learning and Teaching Council (ALTC) and subsequently by the Office for Learning and Teaching (OLT). The external evaluation was conducted by Dr Paul Chesterton, an independent evaluation consultant.

The following sections outline the purpose and intentions of the project, the functions, scope, approach and procedures of the evaluation, key evaluation findings and overall conclusions.

2.0 Purpose and intentions of the project

The overall purpose of the project was outlined in the project proposal as follows -

*... to clearly delineate and to improve teacher leadership practices across higher education institutions in Australia serving Indigenous postgraduate coursework students.
... Therefore this project will:*

- 1. investigate the teaching and learning experiences of current and past Indigenous postgraduate coursework students and their teachers;*
- 2. consider the implications, and make recommendations for strengthening teacher leadership capabilities in the teaching and learning of Indigenous postgraduate students through the development of a teacher leadership capabilities framework; and,*
- 3. develop, trial and evaluate the teacher leadership capabilities framework through a series of university-based workshops.*

Analysis of the project proposal pointed to the following output, outcome and longer term impact intentions -

Output: a teacher leadership capabilities framework

Outcome: strengthened teacher leadership capabilities of lecturers involved in the teaching of Indigenous postgraduate coursework students

Impact: improved teacher leadership practices across higher education institutions in Australia serving Indigenous postgraduate coursework students.

3.0 Functions and scope of the evaluation

The project proposal identified the intended functions of the project's evaluation as

- clarifying the structure, operation and delivery of the program;
- providing information about the implementation of the project; and
- assessing the project's processes and outcomes.

The proposal in turn listed the following questions to be addressed in the evaluation.

1. What are the project's objectives and rationales?

2. Are these plausible and feasible?
3. How is the project progressing?
4. Is it operating according to plan?
5. How could it be changed to make it more effective?
6. Are defined outcomes being met?
7. Have the project's goals and objectives been achieved?
8. What were the unexpected events, critical events and outcomes, and how were these addressed?

Two contributing questions were subsequently added to question 5, namely

- What factors are aiding the project's effectiveness?
- What factors are hindering the project's effectiveness?

The project was designed to incorporate both formative and summative evaluation. The evaluator was given access to project documentation and personnel and accordingly was able to conduct progressive evaluative enquiry and provide periodic feedback to the project team during the project's operation.

4.0 Approach and procedures

A process-outcome approach was adopted for the evaluation. This involved the evaluator reviewing project documentation and information gathered by the project team, along with information gathered directly, in order to clarify and assess the project's structure, logic and operation; identify issues arising and how they were addressed during implementation; and ascertain the project's short term effects and potential impact.

The information gathering techniques employed in the evaluation included a review of documentation and online material associated with the project (such as the project proposal, the ethics approval application, literature reviews, community of practice resource material, data gathering instruments, interview transcripts, minutes of meetings, grants scheme progress reports, and website material), participation in a team planning meeting, observation of a training session for a University Community of Practice (UCoP) Facilitator, and interviews and discussions with the Project Leaders, Team members, the Project's UCoP Consultant, and the UCoP Facilitators.

5.0 Findings

As previously noted, the evaluation's functions were identified as -

- clarifying the structure, operation and delivery of the program;
- providing information about the implementation of the project; and
- assessing the project's processes and outcomes.

Findings in relation to each of these are outlined in the following sections.

5.1 Structure, operation and delivery of the program

The approach initially proposed for the project involved surveys and interviews of current and past Indigenous postgraduate students and their teachers in a range of universities, focusing on their teaching and learning experiences, in order to inform development of a

teacher leadership capabilities framework. Participation by two of the team members in an ALTC-sponsored Leadership Project Leaders' Meeting in Glenelg in February 2011 led to a re-thinking of the survey and interview strategy. At that meeting, Dr Milton Cox, a keynote speaker from Miami University, Ohio, presented material on communities of practice. The project approach and design were subsequently revised to incorporate the development and use of communities of practice in each of the participating universities. This was seen as a more useful approach for project participants by enabling them to become more engaged with the issues, while at the same time generating data to inform the capabilities framework and promote improved teaching and learning. Key features of the revised project design are outlined in the following.

The intended project outputs, outcomes and impact remained unchanged in the revision, as did the underlying notion that collegial practices and collective practice are at the core of building teacher leadership capabilities.

Ten universities were invited to participate in the project as sites for UCoPs, with the view of engaging a minimum of four sites. These ten universities had been identified as having postgraduate coursework programs with significant Indigenous enrolments and completions.

A consultant was appointed by the team to undertake literature reviews on a) communities of practice within a university context and b) teacher leadership capabilities within higher education, particularly at postgraduate level. These reviews were seen as supplementing the initially planned review of national and international models of support for Indigenous postgraduate students and their lecturers, and associated issues. The consultant was also charged with preparing a UCoP Facilitator Guide, developing a wikipage for the UCoP network including protocols and guidelines for use, conducting UCoP Facilitator training, providing ongoing support and assistance to UCoP, and assisting with the development of the teacher leadership framework.

The design involved a UCoP Facilitator being appointed in each of the participating universities. The role of this person was seen as establishing and maintaining a local UCoP comprising Indigenous postgraduate coursework students and lecturers. The consultant would develop training materials and work through these with each Facilitator. The consultant would then be available by telephone and email contact to provide ongoing support and advice to the Facilitators.

UCoP members were to be invited by the Facilitators to complete an online survey and engage in focus group discussions, as a means of generating data that would inform development of the teacher leadership capabilities framework. The survey and discussions were planned to focus on three main questions:

- what are the teaching and learning experiences of current Indigenous postgraduate students?
- what are the teaching and learning experiences of their lecturers?
- what are the implications of these experiences for strengthening teacher leadership capabilities for the teaching and learning of Indigenous postgraduate students?

The resultant data would then be analysed to identify key themes and principles that in turn would inform the teacher leadership capabilities framework.

The structure and intended operational procedures of the project, as outlined above, were designed to achieve its overall purpose or objective, namely 'to clearly delineate and to improve teacher leadership practices across higher education institutions in Australia serving Indigenous postgraduate coursework students'. The plausibility and feasibility of the design as a means of achieving the objective may be seen to rest on the extent to which its underlying assumptions could be realised.

The key assumptions underlying the design included the following.

- i. An appropriate sample of universities, students and lecturers would be involved as sources of data;
- ii. The literature reviews would provide a sound basis for informing the development and maintenance of the UCoPs, the data collection processes and the development of a teacher leadership capabilities framework;
- iii. The UCoP Facilitators would have, or be able to acquire, the necessary skills to initiate, promote and maintain the UCoPs and to facilitate the collection of sound data;
- iv. The students and lecturers would be sufficiently motivated to engage in UCoP processes and to provide ready access to their views and experiences throughout the course of the project;
- v. The consultant would have the capacity to motivate, train and support the UCoP Facilitators and to assist with the development of the teacher leadership capabilities framework; and
- vi. The UCoP processes would enable sufficient relevant data to be gathered to inform development of the teacher leadership capabilities framework.

To the extent that these assumptions could be met, the project design can be seen as both plausible and feasible. The following section of this report on project implementation enables an examination of the extent to which the assumptions were met in practice.

5.2 Implementation of the project

As noted in section 5.1, ten universities that had postgraduate coursework programs with significant Indigenous enrolments and completions were invited to participate in the project. After some initial difficulties in reaching and receiving responses from the relevant university contact persons, four universities accepted the invitation.

The consultant completed comprehensive literature reviews on university communities of practice and postgraduate teacher leadership capabilities, as intended. These provided a sound basis for the production of a comprehensive set of UCoP Facilitator training and support materials by the consultant, covering a range of conceptual, organizational, promotional and interpersonal dimensions.

UCoP Facilitators were appointed in each of the four universities. The Facilitators came from a variety of roles - Senior Research Officer, Research Project Officer in an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies Unit, Director of an Aboriginal Education Unit, and a Senior Lecturer whose doctoral studies had focused on communities of practice. The consultant visited each Facilitator in February 2012, using the Facilitator training and

support materials to provide initial training on the establishment, processes, timeline, outputs and outcomes of the proposed UCoP. The consultant followed this up in following months with email, Skype and telephone contact as needed and as requested by each Facilitator. The Facilitators also supported each other with a number of cross-university meetings via Skype or teleconferencing. In these they were able not only to share practical issues and ways of addressing these but also to explore deeper questions associated with the project's focus. In interviews with the external evaluator, the Facilitators commended the training and support that they had received, commenting in particular on the comprehensiveness and practicality of the resources and advice, and on the approachability, availability and helpfulness of the consultant.

Some initial difficulties were encountered in setting up the UCoPs. The difficulties varied from site to site but included gaining access to student data to identify potential participants, making initial contact, following up on those who had not responded, and finding common times for meetings. Competing demands for scarce time, for both students and lecturers, and the external mode in which the majority of students were enrolled, exacerbated these difficulties. The commitment and persistence of the UCoP Facilitators, with support from the consultant and additionally from project team members on two of the sites, resulted in four UCoPs being established at three of the participating universities, including two, on different campuses, at one of the universities. The difficulties in attracting UCoP participants at the fourth university, and the subsequent departure of the Facilitator to take up a position elsewhere, led to the withdrawal of that university from the project.

The ways in which the four UCoPs operated varied according to local contexts and opportunities. Each UCoP had a number of meetings in which experiences and issues were discussed. Some of the meetings were face to face, commonly in block attendance times for the external student participants. Other meetings were by teleconference. All participants were invited to complete an online survey and to participate in interviews conducted by the Facilitators.

Responses to the online survey were almost entirely from lecturing staff members of the UCoPs. Accordingly the bulk of the data from students came from the interviews. The staff survey data were supplemented by staff interview data. The interviews were recorded, with the recordings then transcribed. Recorded minutes of UCoP meeting activities provided an additional source of data. The data were subsequently analysed, involving manual coding and cross referencing, to identify themes and issues. A grounded theory approach was used to develop theoretical description and explanation of the data, with this in turn being situated and further explicated in light of the literature, with overall conclusions then being drawn.

To what extent did implementation of the project meet its key design assumptions (as listed in section 5.1), i.e. the assumptions underpinning successful achievement of the project's objective?

- i. The sample of universities, students and lecturers provided a variety of individual and institutional contexts relating to Indigenous postgraduate coursework teaching and learning. Despite one university withdrawing during the project, the proposed minimum number of four UCoPs was met.

- ii. The literature reviews were comprehensive and focused, providing clear and detailed foundations and direction for developing and maintaining the UCoPs, collecting data and developing ways forward in the light of the data analysis.
- iii. The UCoP Facilitators were provided with sound training and continuing support to undertake their role. The timeline for establishing the UCoPs and drawing data from their operation was very tight. Ideally, a longer period would have been preferable, enabling more time for the Facilitators to develop deeper understandings and skills associated with the role. The wide range and quality of the data collected are however testament to the Facilitators' capacities, underpinned by their dedication and commitment to the project's objective and by the strong and skilful support provided by the consultant.
- iv. Motivation of students and lecturers to engage in UCoP processes proved to be a challenge. Scarcity of time was an issue for both students and staff, and accessibility was a particular issue for the mostly external mode students. Once they were involved, the participants provided access to their views and experiences but again with limitations as exemplified by the non-response by students to the online survey. Part of the difficulty here seemed to lie in the UCoPs and their focus being predetermined and initiated by the project rather than by the students and lecturers as a self-determined response to their individual needs.
- v. The capacity of the consultant to motivate, train and support the UCoP Facilitators and to assist with the development of the teacher leadership capabilities framework, or as it turned out, an alternative output, was clearly demonstrated in the project's processes and products, and attested to by the Facilitators and project team.
- vi. The UCoP processes enabled the gathering of rich data that was well used, in conjunction with the literature, to inform development of an alternative to the initially envisaged teacher leadership capabilities framework. Ideally a larger number of participants would have enabled interrogation of a more extensive data collection but the engagement of large numbers was always going to be problematic, given the relatively small enrolments of Indigenous postgraduate coursework students and the nature of the external mode in which many of them were enrolled.

5.3 Assessment of project processes and outcomes

The major intended output of the project was a teacher leadership capabilities framework, to be developed in accordance with findings from the data analysis within the context of findings from the literature.

As previously noted, a grounded theory approach was used in the project to develop theoretical description and explanation of the data that had been gathered. In the course of this process, the team reached the following positions.

- a. the value of UCOP in forming an intercultural space in which the process of teaching and learning is the focus;
- b. that intercultural capabilities are required by both teachers and students to engage fully with the cultural interface of teaching and learning;

- c. that this requires intercultural sensitivity; and,
- d. that relationships are key to intercultural exchanges and building intercultural sensitivity.” (Final Project Report)

The output focus accordingly shifted from a teacher leadership framework to measures to promote intercultural development, involving student/teacher encounters enabled through the establishment of UCoPs, with a Blueprint for Intercultural Capabilities being produced to provide the basis for the functioning of such UCoPs. The Blueprint covers a number of elements including attitudes, knowledge, skills, and internal and external outcomes.

This type of output may be seen as paving the way for the project’s intended outcome - strengthened teacher leadership capabilities of lecturers involved in the teaching of Indigenous postgraduate coursework students. The key actual outcome of the project may be seen as a realisation and initial demonstration of the value of UCoPs in providing an intercultural space in which student/teacher encounters and relationships may be developed. Such relationships need time to be fostered and grow. A start has been made by the UCoP members in this project through their initial meetings and activities. This has already generated rich dialogue and understandings, as evidenced in the data gathered for the project. Continuation of this process is needed for these beginnings to be reinforced and built upon, and to be reflected in changing and strengthened teaching leadership capabilities.

The intended longer term impact of the project is improved teacher leadership practices across higher education institutions in Australia serving Indigenous postgraduate coursework students. Strengthening teacher leadership capabilities is an important and necessary contributory component in improving teacher leadership practices. The project report’s recommendation to establish more UCoPs provides an opportunity to extend the capabilities strengthening effect across the sector.

For this recommendation to have intended ultimate effects on teacher leadership capabilities and practices, additional associated resource and support provisions will be needed. These include, for example, changes in timetabling and time allocations to staff to facilitate UCoP operations, provision of professional learning opportunities focusing on intercultural sensitivity and capabilities and on UCoP establishment and facilitation, and endorsement of the approach by senior university personnel with responsibility for learning and teaching, accompanied by endorsement in internal policy and practice documents. At a more fundamental level, the project findings suggest that there may well be a need for some universities to examine the extent to which their structures, policies and procedures are consistent with an interculturally sensitive approach appropriate to the mix of students that they enrol.

Dissemination of the project findings will also play an important role in developing awareness of the potential offered by UCoPs across the sector. The dissemination process has begun, with a paper on the project being delivered in December 2012 at the International Higher Education Curriculum Design and Academic Leadership Symposia in New Zealand. The project team is also planning to conduct a symposium on the outcomes of the project at an Australian university in 2013.

A number of factors may be seen to have assisted and hindered achievement of the project’s outputs and outcomes. The key assisting factors included:

- *the cooperative and flexible operation of the project team.* Members demonstrated a willingness to share roles and responsibilities, to listen to concerns, and to be open to alternatives. Their wealth of experience and expertise served the project well, along with their willingness to seek additional expertise as required. Two roles in particular were noted in the interviews of team members as having a very positive impact – the role of the project leader in coordinating activities and pulling the project together and the role of the Chair in facilitating team meetings.
- *appointment of the consultant.* The consultant provided a soundly researched basis for the UCoP-related strategies, along with comprehensive materials, training and guidance for UCoP Facilitators. His skilful and proactive support at site level was of particular importance to UCoP operations.
- *the work of the UCoP Facilitators* in driving the project at site level. The strong commitment of the Facilitators proved to be a critical factor in attracting UCoP participants and ensuring their active involvement in the project.
- *good project management and organisation.* Regular communication among team members, supported by a high standard of paperwork, helped to keep everyone in touch and up-to-date with issues and progress. The creation of an electronic dropbox assisted in providing a readily accessible repository of key documents.
- *operation of the project's Reference Group.* This group provided a very useful initial sounding board for the project team, supplying valuable feedback and advice on proposed procedures and directions, as well as points of contact for development of the UCoPs.

There were also some hindering factors. These included:

- *project time constraints.* The change to a UCoP-based approach during the first year of the project pushed out the timeline for recruiting participating universities by about six months. It also had follow-on effects in terms of requiring additional processes – approval of a revised ethics application plus UCoP Facilitator recruitment and training. This effectively pushed the commencement of data collection back to around March 2012. The positive balancing factor here was the potential benefit of more direct engagement of participants in discussion of key issues and promotion of improved teaching and learning that the UCoP-based approach enabled.
- *working with a limited number of participants.* The key issue here was the relatively small number of Indigenous students enrolled in postgraduate coursework programs on which the project could draw.
- *initiating and maintaining contact with students* mostly enrolled in external study mode. This essentially restricted the meetings to periods of block residential teaching times.

6.0 Conclusions

The project at the centre of this evaluation report was characterized by a change in its fundamental approach during the first year of operation and the production of a different kind of major output than that originally intended. These changes were seen by the project team to provide a better fit to the project's overall objective and intended outcome.

The evaluation examined the plausibility and feasibility of the project design developed to implement the revised approach. This involved identifying the key design assumptions on which successful implementation would rest, i.e. implementation that would achieve the project's objective. It is contended that the project design was both plausible and feasible, to the extent that the assumptions could be met in practice.

In turn, the extent to which the assumptions were met in the project's implementation was examined. This found that the assumptions were met in large part, subject to some limitations. Ideally, more time would have been available for the UCoP Facilitators to prepare for their role, a larger number of participants would have been involved, and the students would have provided online survey data. The net result however was a study that a) drew on a variety of individual and institutional contexts, b) was soundly based and guided by the literature, c) was well served by soundly trained and supported Facilitators and a highly skilled and committed consultant, and d) tapped into a rich source of views and experiences that were well used in conjunction with the literature to inform the project's conclusions and recommendations.

Analysis of the data led the team towards an alternative to the initially intended teacher leadership framework output, in the form of measures to promote intercultural development. The proposed measures involve the establishment of UCoPs to enable ongoing student/teacher encounters, with the functioning of the UCoPs to be guided by the project's Blueprint for Intercultural Capabilities.

These measures may be seen as paving the way for the project's intended outcome, namely strengthened teacher leadership capabilities of lecturers involved in the teaching of Indigenous postgraduate coursework students, and in turn for the intended longer term impact, namely improved teacher leadership practice. It has been noted in this report that a range of supporting changes may also be needed at the institutional level for these outcomes and impact to be realised.

The project team has commenced a dissemination process that should assist in developing wider awareness of the potential offered by UCoPs that has been revealed in the project's findings.

The project has provided significant insights and ways forward in regards to achievement of its objective. This has in no small part been due to the willingness and capacity of the project team to identify and consider alternative approaches and to make adjustments to their planning as needed. The net result is arguably a more dynamic and inclusive response that should involve key players – students, staff and institutions – in addressing the central issues within specific institutional contexts. The key challenges now lie in disseminating the results of the project and promoting commitment to its proposed actions at both individual and institutional levels.