



AILITEA – FEEDBACK ON CLOSING THE GAP: REFRESH COMMENT ON PUBLIC DISCUSSION PAPER

The Australian Indigenous Lecturers in Initial Teacher Education Association (AILITEA) provides expert advice to the Australian Council of Deans of Education on matters relating to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander education. The AILITEA works to support improved teacher education opportunities and achievements of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander ITE students across Australia. The AILITEA relies heavily on the support and involvement of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities to achieve this.

The AILITEA wishes to provide the following feedback on the *Closing the Gap* Public Discussion Paper:

In reference to Table 1 (on page 2) and the target to “*halve the gap for Indigenous Australians aged 20-24 in Year 12 or equivalent attainment by 2020*” the comment is made in the Report that this is the only target on track. AILITEA representatives observe that in fact, this target has not been met. Rather, it is more a reflection on the duration students attend school as a result of mandatory attendance requirements, rather than the level of attainment. It should be noted here that many students are being directed to undertaking a Year 12 equivalent, which are longer track pathways to university. These students are generally not being encouraged to progress to tertiary study.

There is some skewing and mis-representation of data for this statistic with some states not even reporting on it. A specific case in point is data from Queensland indicating Aboriginal students are completing Year 12, when in fact they are at best finishing with Certificate 1 or 2 work skills.

There is general concern about the quality and use of data and subsequent narratives and perspectives to present a “good news story”, which is not representative of the actual situation. A more accurate representation would be based on measuring the actual completion of Year 12 by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students and their subsequent ability for employability or tertiary entrance. Further relevant data could be obtained by focusing on the development of students from early secondary school (Year 7 and 8) and their subject choices in Year 11/12, gaining apprenticeships, etc

However, the issue extends to the early years and the decreased literacy and numeracy skills attainment for Indigenous children. The existing curriculum is not catering to their needs and it is too late to offer interventions in late secondary school. It is about developing capacity of educators in early childhood settings, as well as in early and middle secondary school, to support Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students with literacy and numeracy problems. If the educational gap is ever to be closed, we need to begin with the teachers. Support is required in this area and this is not reflected in the document.

Further to this specific comment, there is a concern about the lack of consultation with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people into *Closing the Gap* and hence a scepticism about any actual action that

will be taken in response to feedback. Whilst the document refers to such consultation, it is not believed that this is actually taking place.

In more general terms, Education has been marginalised in the *Closing the Gap* conversation. Only one Educationalist (Professor Peter Buckskin) was invited to the breakfast meeting with Minister Simon Birmingham on this topic, which is concerning given that four of the targets relate to Education. Further to this, it is not known who was invited or involved in the round table discussions. However, it is known that there was no representation from the Australian Council of Deans of Education.

This is not reflective of the commitment to work in partnership and consultation with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples to realise these targets. It is proposed that ACDE's AILITEA be invited to participate and contribute to this discussion in light of the wealth and richness of members' experience across various disciplines of Education.

Has any consideration been given to what research is already being undertaken in this space, including Indigenous knowledges in initial teacher education? There is a wealth of knowledge already out there.

There are concerns about the narrative – both in terms of inclusivity and definitions (for example, the word “*prosperity*”).

Thank you for the opportunity to comment.

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