

*“Australian education systems were never designed for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students”  
(AITSL, 2020).*

Equity research as an opportunity to drive social change.

Faculty of Arts & Society  
Dr Tracy Woodroffe

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Charles Darwin University acknowledges all First Nations people across the lands on which we live and work, and we pay our respects to Elders both past and present.

# Identity

- I am Warumungu Luritja.
- This means that my Aboriginal family are from Tennant Creek and Finkel River.
- I identify as Aboriginal.



Section of <https://aiatsis.gov.au/explore/map-indigenous-australia>

# Researcher positioning

- I am a Senior Lecturer and Researcher in the Faculty of Arts and Society.
- I came to the university with **my cultural knowledge** and a **wealth of practical knowledge about teaching and learning**.
- **I use that knowledge** to reflect on and enhance how I **lecture and research**.
- I engage regularly in **Research and Scholarship of Teaching and Learning** by **investigating the inclusion of Aboriginal cultural knowledge embedded in content and pedagogy**.
- My approach combines **Indigenous knowledge through relationality and a transformative learning model**. Most of my students are non-Aboriginal.
- My Aboriginal **Know, Being and Doing permeate my research and teaching strategies**, foundational to my Aboriginal standpoint.

# Equity research projects – CDU HEP PP

## VETDSS Pathways to study Teaching at CDU 2022 -2023

Will address issues of enrolment and completion for First Nations students by adding knowledge about pathways into Higher Education from VETDSS courses.

This will be achieved by investigating current CDU pathways de-identified data, as well as policy documents.

Online surveys will be conducted with NT Department of Education staff, school based VETDSS/Career coordinators, CDU VET lecturers in Education Support and CDU HE Teacher Education lecturers. Semi-structured interviews will be conducted to collect further information. Consideration of culture for Indigenous engagement will be built into the project through the types of questions asked about perceived successes and barriers as they may apply to Indigenous cultural inclusion or Indigenous knowledges.

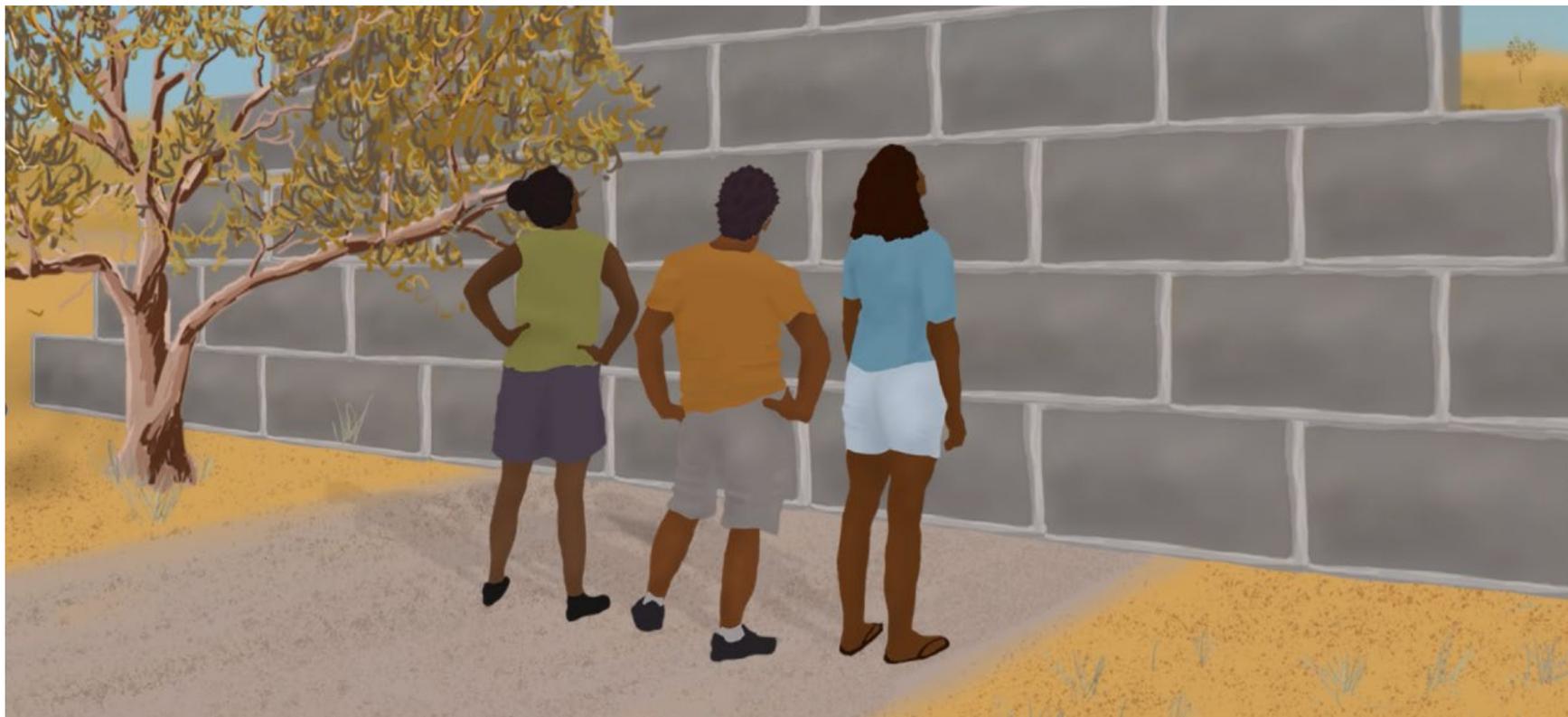
Pathways will be mapped.

## First Nations student experience at CDU 2022-2024

An investigation of engagement of undergraduate First Nations students in Higher Education(HE) at CDU. Appropriate and positive engagement of First Nations students in HE in regional settings is paramount to completion of their studies. The project will deliver mutually informed lessons for CDU staff and First Nations students.

Provide evidence of First Nations student experiences, evidence to support ways to increase both lecturer and institutional cultural competency to support improved First Nations experiences with HE at CDU and produce a 'good practice' guides.

Methods include analysis of de-identified CDU statistical data and a Qualtrics online survey, as well as semi-structured interviews with CDU lecturing staff (identified in the survey), CDU First Nations student support staff, and focus groups with CDU lecturing and professional staff.



# Exploring a First Nations pathway from VET in Schools to a Bachelor of Education at Charles Darwin University.

# The rest of the research team

- Associate Professor Payi Linda Ford
- Dr Johanna Funk
- Associate Researcher Pawinee Yuhun
- Northern Institute HEPPP Advisory Group – (Associate Professor Payi Linda Ford), Professor Michael Christie, Dr Michaela Spencer, Dr Anne Lowell.

# The Australian teacher workforce

- Is characterised by a distinct lack of parity between First Nations teacher numbers and non-First Nations counterparts.
- Increasing First Nations teacher numbers could contribute to increased First Nations educational expertise, increased First Nations student engagement, application of more First Nations pedagogical approaches, and teachers as role models of First Nations educational success.



[https://www.cdu.edu.au/files/styles/landscape\\_450x300/public/2022-04/RATE%20program%20CDU.jpg?h=51a72048&itok=LJY\\_yyT\\_](https://www.cdu.edu.au/files/styles/landscape_450x300/public/2022-04/RATE%20program%20CDU.jpg?h=51a72048&itok=LJY_yyT_)

# Research questions

1. Is there a clear pathway from VETDSS to a Bachelor of Education at CDU?
2. What are the enablers for the success of such a pathway?
3. How are Indigenous students successful in this pathway?
4. Are there improvements to be made to engage more Indigenous students?

## Review of literature (NT-specific)

NT Department of Education's ***NT Education Engagement Strategy 2022-2031***.

- Goal two to *Employ the right people - Accelerate and expand programs, development opportunities and pathways that attract, retain and promote Aboriginal educators.*

NT Department of Education's ***Education NT Strategy 2021–2025***

- seven system priorities including workforce development, improved cultural responsiveness, and supporting transitions beyond school.

***A Share in the Future: Review of the Indigenous Education in the Northern Territory***

(also known as the Wilson Review)

- stated that 'Secondary education is the key to future options for young people'.
- need for an Employment Pathways program (a VET approach) to be trialed and evaluated at urban schools and remote schools to encourage student aspirations.

# Review of literature (other)

## Education Council's (2020) report ***Looking to the Future - Report of the review of senior secondary pathways into work, further education and training***

- not commonly understood that the ATAR alone is not the basis on which most students gain access to university.
- VETDSS can be challenging to navigate and is not well integrated into senior secondary studies,
- secondary students should be provided with clear pathways to further learning and encouraged to undertake career education and workplace learning.

## ***The Review of higher education access and outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people: Final report*** (Behrendt et al., 2012)

- suggests that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people be supported to enter the higher education system through other pathways, particularly the workforce and VET system.

# Review of literature (other)

## ***The More Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Teachers Initiative: Final report***

(Buckskin, 2016)

- recommendations include promoting and marketing teaching as a career of choice for First Nations peoples.

## The Education Council's (2015) ***National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Strategy***

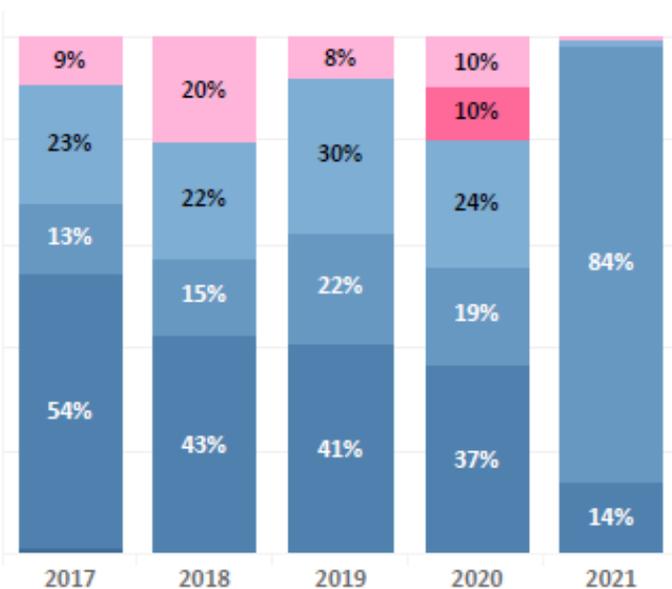
- Priority five, *Transition points including pathways to post-school options.*
- National collaborative actions for this priority includes supporting the engagement of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students' pathways to tertiary education through high-quality vocational learning and vocational education and training (VET), including preparing students for work, work experience and structured work placements.

## CDU STATISTICS AND DATA

- CDU data shows that in **2022 there were 8 Indigenous students enrolled in the Cert III in Education Support/ Cert III in School Based Education Support courses**, representing 32% of the total students. There were **21 Indigenous students enrolled in the Cert IV in Education Support/ Cert IV in School Based Education Support courses**, represented 23% of the total students. There were **3 students enrolled in Cert III in Education Support/ Cert III in School Based Education Support through VETDSS, 2 of these students identified as Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander.**
- **Under-20s represented a minority of the age group** who studied in the VET education support discipline. Students who undertook VET education support courses between 2017-2021 were **mostly domestic students**. There were **more apprentices/ traineeship students than VET Delivered to Secondary Students.**

## Qualification Level

Achieved AHC % of Total

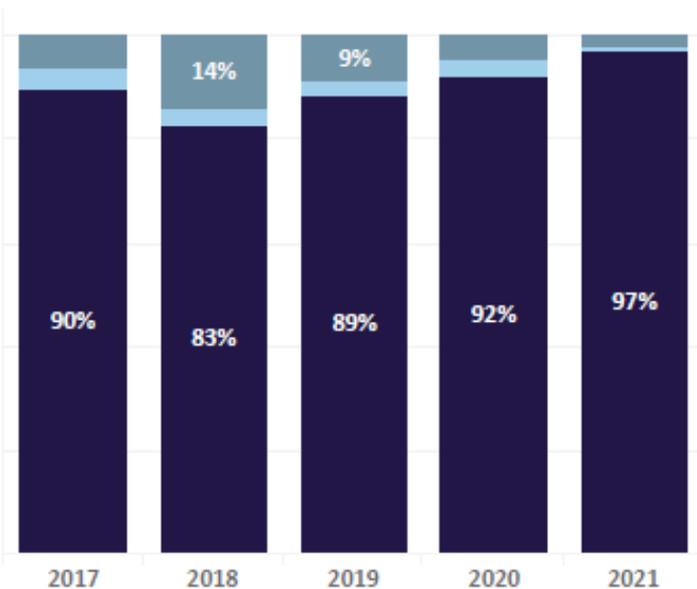


Course Level Description	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021
CERTIFICATE II	16				
CERTIFICATE III	217	218	214	213	19
CERTIFICATE IV	58	80	98	110	54
DIPLOMA	80	94	96	91	4
STATEMENT OF ATTAINME..	138	246	175	221	1
OTHER NON-AWARD COUR..				83	

- STATEMENT OF ATTAINMENT NOT IDENTIFIABLE BY LEVEL
- OTHER NON-AWARD COURSES
- DIPLOMA
- CERTIFICATE IV
- CERTIFICATE III
- CERTIFICATE II

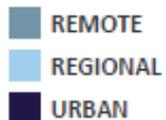
## Delivery Remoteness

Achieved AHC % of Total



Unit Delivery  
Location  
Remoteness

	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021
URBAN	306	302	331	432	71
REGIONAL	31	22	24	14	1
REMOTE	33	66	50	41	6



Except for 2021, more students have undertaken Certificate III courses than any other course level. In 2021 more students have undertaken Certificate IV courses. The **VET courses/units were delivered mainly in urban** rather than remote or regional settings.

	2017-18	2018-19	2019-20	2020-21
Retained & completed	13	25	41	54
Not retained	7	14	16	18
Total	20	39	57	72

The table shows the **number of Indigenous students who remained and completed** their undergraduate courses in education discipline at CDU as opposed to those who left CDU, between 2017 to 2021. Since 2018, the **percentages of students retained and completed their course have increased and percentages of those who left have declined.**

\*Data obtained from CDU statistics – calculations and graph by author.

## CERT III IN EDUCATION SUPPORT/ SCHOOL BASED EDUCATION SUPPORT AND ALTERNATIVE PATHWAYS

- Upon reviewing several Cert III in Education Support/ School Based Education Support offerings at various institutions, it was observed that not many promoted/recommended it as a pathway to a Bachelor of Education, more so, a pathway to a career as a teacher's aide.
- *The report 'Equity implications of non-ATAR pathways: Participation, academic outcomes, and student experience' found that alternative pathways such as Vocational Education and Training (VET) courses, access schemes and enabling programs were increasingly being used by students to gain admission to university. ("More students opt for non-ATAR", 2022, February 17)*
- At Charles Darwin University, additional pathways for First Nations students include the Tertiary Enabling Program (TEP) which is an entry pathway open to all students, as well as the First Nations Pathways to University Programs which are pathway courses to help First Nations students get ready for university, with support and guidance from First Nations mentors and lecturers.

# Participants and approvals

- Ethics approval and NT Department of Education approval to conduct research.
- The participant group included people who were thought to know about the pathway in question – VET DoE office-based staff, VETDSS coordinators, Career education teachers, the Student Engagement team, NT Teacher Registration Board staff, CDU teacher education lecturers, CDU VET lecturers, CDU student support staff, and professional staff.

# Findings discussion

- The **research findings supported the need for the articulation of clear pathways** for students and teachers, parents, and lecturers.
- There was **agreement that participants had not seen an existing visual representation of a pathway** from VETDSS to enrolment in a Bachelor of Education degree at CDU for First Nations students.
- However, the research findings revealed that **a visual pathway is not the only component needed** to promote such a pathway for potential First Nations teachers.to articulate

- Using the pathway to increase the number of First Nations teachers will **require system, process and practice change** and improvements.
- **The key to this will be a coordinated approach** to promoting the pathway and the management, by a specialist team, to better support students as people to contact with enquiries and knowledge.
- The complication is **a lack of awareness and support for students moving from one system into the other**; from VETDSS into study at CDU. Use of a student's Unique Student Identifier (USI) to track and support students across systems could be a starting point.

- There are **transition points** that could better support First Nations students to become teachers, beginning with **greater awareness of student career choices**. The data revealed **an inconsistency of knowledge**. The CDU Future Student Engagement Officers visit schools and provide information about career pathways to CDU. The complication for the team is that they rely on Faculties to inform what they deliver to schools. The team could be requested to promote the VETDSS pathway to schools.
- **Literacy and numeracy requirements** should be clarified for students. support needs can be started sooner rather than later. Participants suggested that associated **courses be designed to include literacy and numeracy learning**.

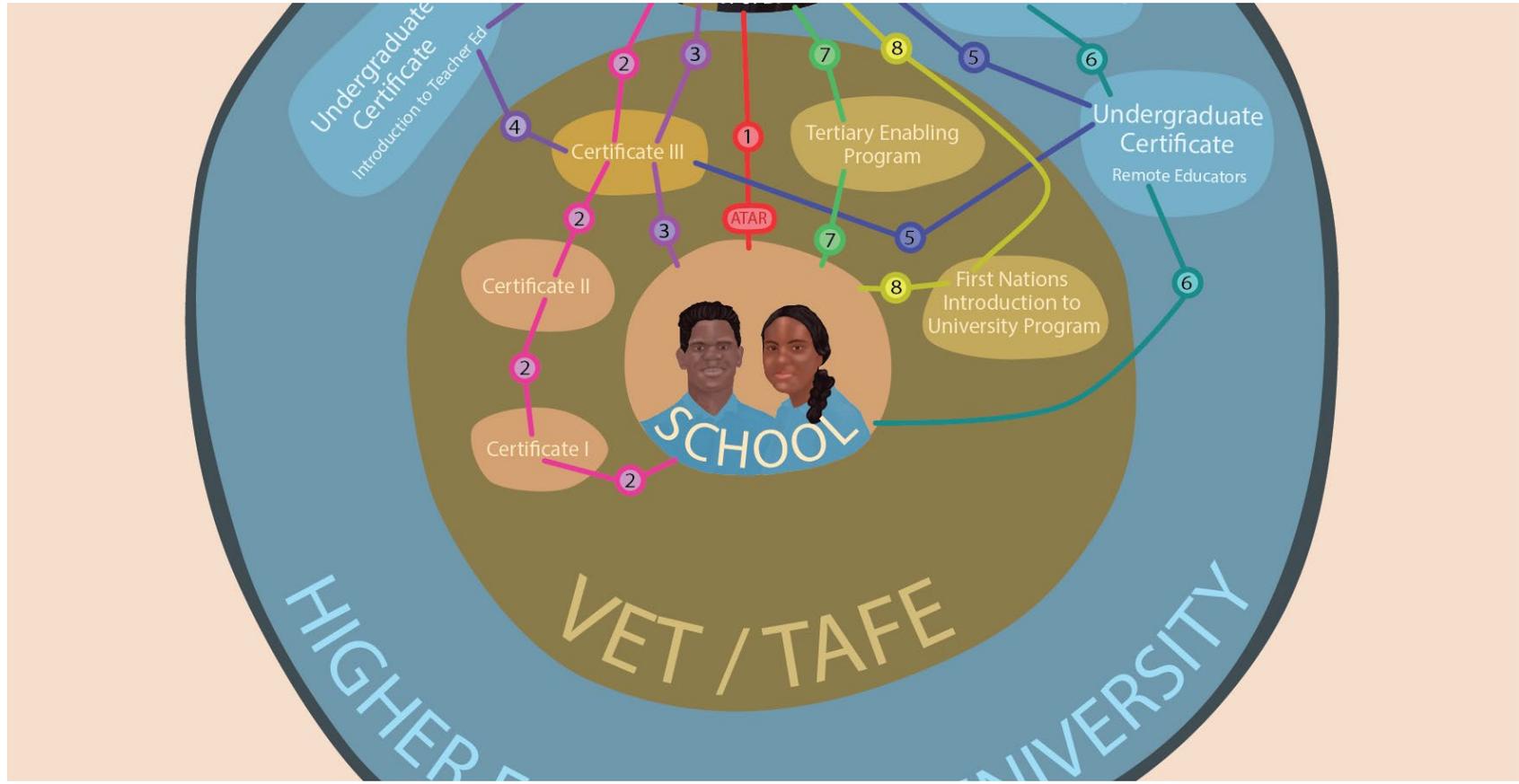
## And...

The transition between VET courses and Higher Education was a concern with there being a leap in academic skills required. This should be looked at in more detail for education courses to support student success.

# Conclusion

The research answered the research questions.

There is a **potential pathway** for First Nations senior secondary students, but it is not clearly articulated or widely known. **Enablers for the success** of such a pathway are the encouragement and knowledge of school staff and the support and sharing of relevant pathway knowledge by CDU staff. **Literacy and numeracy skills** of students need to be at the required levels or students are supported to improve these. This will **make it easier for students to transition** from VET to Higher Education. **Role models and mentors** also play a large role in student success, with **cultural inclusion and responsiveness built into the development of teacher education courses and delivery strategies**. No students are recorded as completing a VETDSS to B.Ed. at CDU pathway yet, but this also says something about **the type of data collected**. This is an incomplete list of improvements, but this list could be better informed through **future research that includes VETDSS student participation and voice**.



# 2024 ACSES First Nations Fellowship Increasing the number of Aboriginal Teachers in the NT: Planning for the Future

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## Congratulations! 2024 First Nations Fellows Announced

The National Centre for Student Equity in Higher Education (NCSEHE) at Curtin University today announced First Nations Fellowships for 2024 have been awarded to Dr Tracy Woodroffe at Charles Darwin University, Dr Darren Garvey at The University of Queensland, and Professor Peter Anderson at Griffith University.

Dr Tracy Woodroffe's project, ***Increasing the number of Aboriginal teachers in the Northern Territory: Planning for the future***, will focus on understanding the aspirations of Aboriginal high school students to become teachers, and assist

# Project summary

The low number of Aboriginal school teachers is a critical issue in the Northern Territory (NT), which has the highest percentage of Aboriginal students in Australia. Many Aboriginal students are reported to achieve below expected standards, yet evidence suggests increasing the number of Aboriginal teachers may improve educational success for these students. This project will take a two-part approach to investigate teaching as a career of choice for Aboriginal people in the NT; first, by understanding the aspirations of Aboriginal senior secondary students to become teachers, and second, by utilising the recommendations of current Aboriginal teachers about how to promote teaching to other Aboriginal Territorians. This aligns with the Federal Government's 'Be That Teacher' campaign, which showcases the value and importance of teachers and encourages Australians to consider a teaching career. This research can assist providers in empowering Australian First Nations people to become teachers and improve educational outcomes for First Nations students, changing Australian deficit discourse about Indigenous education.

**Research focus:** First Nations teachers, Initial teacher education, First Nations students, access and enrolment, Senior Secondary aspirations.

**Educational issues to be addressed:** First Nations engagement, First Nations teacher shortage, deficit thinking, First Nations academic underachievement, First Nations success

Thank you!

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