

# Teacher quality and qualities in remote schools: what matters?

12 August 2015



Teacher quality and qualities in remote schools. What matters?  
Remote Education Systems project

Darwin, 12 August 2015

## Abstract

Much of the blame for the apparent failure of remote education is attributed to poor teachers and teaching. Teachers are said to be young inexperienced, they only come to remote places because they can't get a job elsewhere, and they leave after only a short time (the oft quoted time is 7 months). But research conducted by the CRC for Remote Economic Participation's Remote Education Systems project tells a different story. The findings suggest that what matters in remote schools is not as much about the qualifications or experience of the teacher, as it is about the qualities the teacher brings to the context. That is, the data suggest that a non-local teacher's ability to form strong relationships with local educators, other staff, parents and students is critical to their success. Their capacity for creativity, innovation, learning, adaptation, commitment, their dedication and their care for the students they teach, and their willingness to learn a local language all matter a lot to locals. While some of these qualities line up with Australian Professional Standards for Teachers, there is a lot more to a successful remote school teacher than their qualification level and their years of experience.

If this is so, the issues this lecture ultimately addresses, is 1) how universities can best prepare pre-service teachers for remote schools; and 2) how systems can better recruit and retain the kind of quality teachers that are required for the remote context.

## Introduction

- RES lecture series topics 1-5: 1) what is education for? 2) disadvantage and advantage 3) complexity and chaos 4) workforce development 5) successful remote schools
- Focus here is mainly on the qualities required for non-local teaching staff in remote schools



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## Introduction

My aim in this lecture is to present findings from the Cooperative Research Centre for Remote Economic Participation's (CRC-REP) Remote Education Systems (RES) project. This is the sixth in a series of ten lectures. So far in the series topics we have covered include 'What is education for in remote communities?', 'disadvantage and advantage in remote schools', 'complexity and chaos in remote schools', 'workforce development for remote education' and 'successful remote schools: what are they?'. I am happy to share the text of all the lectures we have given so far.

The RES project was designed to uncover ways that could contribute to improving outcomes for remote Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students and their families. The project team gathered data over three years from school, community, university, and government stakeholders. I acknowledge the work of my colleagues, Sam Osborne and Samantha Disbray, and early on in the project, Melodie Bat. When I talk about 'we' in this lecture, I acknowledge the team's contribution to our work.

In this lecture I want to explore the topic of teacher quality for remote teachers. The focus here is more on non-local and non-Indigenous teachers than it is on local teachers or educators. In Lecture 4, my colleague Samantha Disbray discusses our findings in relation to workforce development, and made particular reference to local workforce issues.

## Better teachers means better outcomes

- *the problem is the quality of the schools, particularly the curriculum and the teaching methods.* (Anderson, 2012, p 4)
- *This is the formula upon which our reform in Cape York is premised: Committed Teacher + Effective Instruction = Quality Teaching.* (Pearson, 2011, p 53)
- *the standard expected of teachers in schools in remote Indigenous communities should be higher than for regular schools.* (Mundine, 2014)
- *Put simply, quality teachers create quality outcomes.* (Sarra, 2011, p 161)
- *School failure is the problem.* (Hughes & Hughes, 2012, p 1)



### Rationale: Better teachers/teaching equals better outcomes

Over the four years of this project we have seen dozens of simple solutions to complex problems. Among these are those that see the solution to the perceived problem as a matter of getting quality teachers (whatever they are) who can teach well (whatever that means). These statements come from a variety of sources:

*...the problem is the quality of the schools, particularly the curriculum and the teaching methods.* (Anderson, 2012, p 4)

*This is the formula upon which our reform in Cape York is premised: Committed Teacher + Effective Instruction = Quality Teaching.* (Pearson, 2011, p 53)

*...the standard expected of teachers in schools in remote Indigenous communities should be higher than for regular schools. Disadvantaged communities need the best teachers.* (Mundine, 2014)

*Put simply, quality teachers create quality outcomes.* (Sarra, 2011, p 161)

*School failure is the problem.* (Hughes & Hughes, 2012, p 1)

Hughes and Hughes go on and on about failure, blaming 'quality of instruction' (p. 15) as one of two principal causes. Not far behind in the list of causes though is welfare dependence. Apparently, 'students [failing students in remote schools] attend failing Indigenous schools and live in communities where 100% of the population is welfare-dependent' (p. 17).

## Myths busted

- **The urban legend of 7 month retention**
  - *The position for teachers in remote and very remote schools is almost exactly the same as the system average, at 6.84 years. Despite urban legends about the exceptionally short tenure of teachers in remote and very remote schools, the data show that median tenure is between two and three years. (Wilson 2014, p. 191)*
- **Other myths we've busted for remote education**
  - School attendance programs improve outcomes
  - There are no jobs in remote communities
  - Remote people don't have the necessary English communication skills
  - Lack of aspiration, little motivation for success
  - Remote communities are 'poor', downtrodden and 'disadvantaged'

At the system level, another level of blame often comes out: the 7 month remote teacher turnover myth. From the Remote Indigenous education: Social Justice Report 2008 we read:

*That continuity is basically the pulse of a good remote school. I mean given the average rate in a remote school is seven months, we do very, very well in keeping our teachers here.*<sup>[82]</sup> (Calma, 2009)

As recently as 2012 the myth was promulgated in the House of Representatives Standing Committee on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Affairs Inquiry into language learning in Indigenous communities where it was reported that:

*The retention rate of teachers in remote areas of the Northern Territory has been around six to seven months.*

Fortunately, the Wilson Review has set that one straight!

*Average length of service of department employees was 7.4 years, up from 7.0 the previous year, but slightly lower for teachers (6.9 years) and assistant teachers (5.7 years). The position for teachers in remote and very remote schools is almost exactly the same as the system average, at 6.84 years. Despite urban legends about the exceptionally short tenure of teachers in remote and very remote schools, the data show that median tenure is between two and three years. While more than a quarter of teachers are in their first year in the school, this is not an unusual proportion. (Wilson, 2014, p 191)*

My point here is that a lot of claims are made about remote education that are little more than myth without a shred of evidence. That's why our research is important. We are clearly able to provide evidence about the nature of teaching and learning and what we've found is quite different to the urban legends that Wilson described. We've busted a few myths over the last four years: like the one about attendance leading to better outcomes. We've challenged notions of success and aspiration from the perspectives of remote community members and we've exposed the myth of no jobs in remote community.

## What defines teacher quality and quality teaching?

**What defines teacher quality and quality teaching**

- In 2008 \$444million was committed to improving teacher quality (COAG 2008)
- Designed to address Indigenous disadvantage
- Lots of outcomes but no definition of what quality actually is.
- But the outputs give it away:
  - 'Standards', 'Frameworks', 'Accreditation', 'Consistency', 'Mobility', 'Performance Management'

**NATIONAL PARTNERSHIP AGREEMENT ON IMPROVING TEACHER QUALITY**

Council of Australian Governments

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Let me start from a policy perspective before considering the issue of teacher quality and quality teaching from perhaps an academic perspective. Then we'll have a look at some considerations for remote teachers.

In 2008, the Council of Australian Governments (COAG) committed \$444million to improving teacher quality (Council of Australian Governments, 2008). The rationales for this National Partnership Agreement were many and varied:

*The Parties are committed to addressing the issue of social inclusion, including responding to Indigenous disadvantage (p. 3)*

*This Agreement supports ambitious, nationally-significant reforms ...provide the platform for raising student performance and build the foundation necessary to underpin other school reforms endorsed by COAG. (p. 6)*

*The outcomes it sought to achieve were many and varied too (p. 7):*

*(a) attracting the best entrants to teaching, including mid-career entrants;*

*(b) more effectively training principals, teachers and school leaders for their roles and the school environment;*

*(c) placing teachers and principals to minimise skill shortages and enhance retention ;*

*(d) developing teachers and school leaders to enhance their skills and knowledge throughout their careers;*

*(e) retaining and rewarding quality principals, teachers and school leaders; and*

*(f) improving the quality and availability of teacher workforce data.*

All this sounds well and good, even laudable. But nowhere in the document is 'quality teaching' or a 'quality teacher' defined. We are left to deduce the meaning from the outputs prescribed by the Agreement. These outputs, which presumably lead to quality teachers, include:

The Agreement will contribute to the following outputs:

- (a) New professional standards to underpin national reforms;*
- (b) Recognition and reward for quality teaching;*
- (c) A framework to guide professional learning for principals, teachers and school leaders;*
- (d) National accreditation of pre-service teacher education courses;*
- (e) National consistency in teacher registration;*
- (f) National consistency in accreditation/certification of Accomplished and Leading Teachers;*
- (g) Improved mobility of the Australian teaching workforce;*
- (h) Joint engagement with higher education to provide improved pre-service teacher education; new pathways into teaching; and data collection to inform continuing reform action and workforce planning.*
- (i) Improved performance management in schools for teachers and school leaders; and*
- (j) Enhanced school-based teacher quality reforms.*

In short, a quality teacher conforms to standards, registration requirements, frameworks and benchmarks, accreditation standards, are mobile and are retained. While the standards referred to do include references to what is taught (curriculum) and teacher training addresses how it is taught (pedagogy), the language used is overwhelmingly managerial.

To this end, an important outcome from the National Partnership on Quality Teaching was the development of a set of Australian Professional Standards for Teachers (Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership, 2012), developed by the Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership, or AITSL. I do acknowledge that these standards can and do play an important role in ensuring that knowledge and skills required for good teaching practice are clearly articulated and available to teachers and school leaders.

But in the standards, there is nothing there about innovation, creativity, or classroom practice. It is all about conformance. There are standards there about community and parent engagement, but these are given relatively little weight compared to the other standards. Overall, the standards reflect the priority of knowledge and skills over character and values. My point here is that the standards as they are do not address the particular requirements of remote teachers.

## Rationales for improving teacher quality

- Improving learning outcomes for Indigenous Students (SCRGSP, 2014)
- 30% of learning outcomes attributed to teachers and teaching (Hattie 2003, 2009)
- Schools Workforce Report, no definition (Productivity Commission 2012)
- Would it help if we parachute quality teachers from elite schools into remote communities?
  - the “attract, develop, recognise and retain” mantra, recycles concepts of what it means to be a teacher in imaginaries that originate in the metropolis’ (Shore et al., 2014, p 10).
- Several attempts to contextualise standards for rural and remote schools (SPERA 2012, Lock 2008, Lock et al 2009, Santori et al 2011)

### National Professional Standards for Teachers

Focus	Graduate	Graduate Professional Knowledge for Rural, Regional and Remote Contexts
<b>STANDARD 1: KNOW STUDENTS AND HOW THEY LEARN</b>		
1.1	Understand and understand the intellectual development and characteristics of students	Knowledge of theoretical and practical approaches to student development and their impact on development, including socio-economic disadvantage (e.g. SES, health, social, ethnic, impairment), rural, remote, indigenous, and/or diverse Familiarity with forms of knowledge, recognising the socio-cultural and linguistic diversity of communities Recognition of the diversity of family structures and types of caregiver relationships
1.2	Understand how students learn	Knowledge of measurement, assessment, diagnostic and formative assessment Ability to assess, monitor, professional development and evaluate teaching and learning from SPRA, SPRL and SPRT
1.3	Respond with appropriate pedagogical practices that are responsive to the learning demands of the students	Knowledge of the learning culture, conditions for indigenous and other cultural groups, English as a Second Language (EASL) and language and literacy skills for indigenous and other cultural groups that English as a Second Language (EASL) and language and literacy skills for indigenous and other cultural groups

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Not only is the definition of a quality teacher difficult to pin down but the data to support the goal of having better quality teachers is almost non-existent. The key message to come out of the latest Overcoming Indigenous Disadvantage report (Steering Committee for the Review of Government Service Provision, 2014) was that:

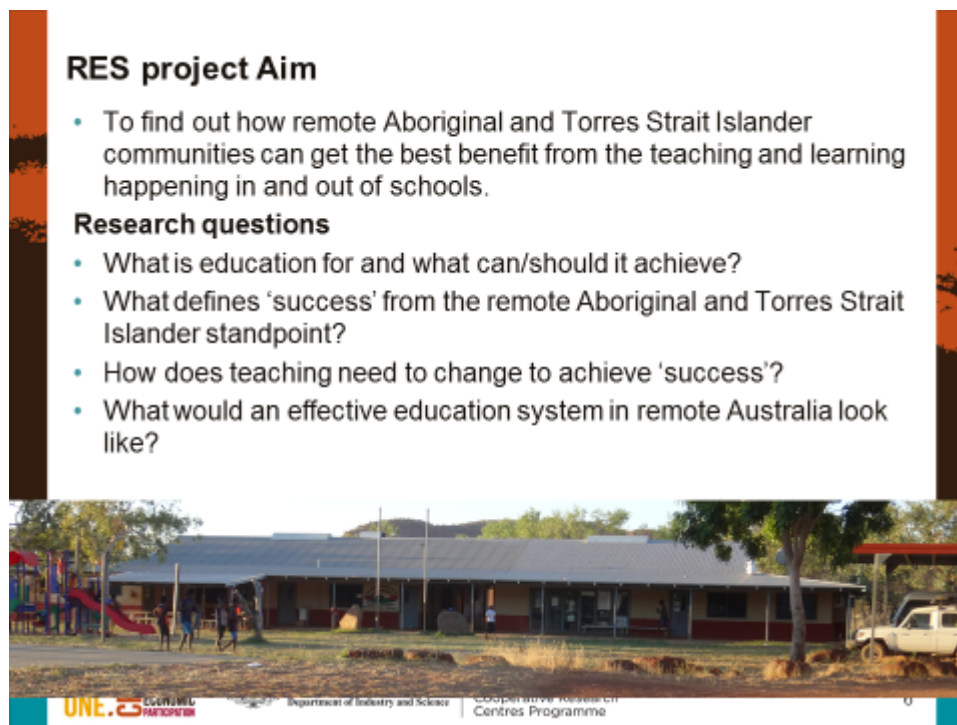
*Teacher quality is considered the most important in-school factor in improving learning outcomes for Indigenous students. COAG has agreed to a National Partnership on Improving Teacher Quality, but no data were available for this report.*

This assertion is in part attributed to research which demonstrates that teaching contributes as much as 30 per cent to student outcomes in schools (Hattie, 2003, 2009). The Productivity Commission’s *Schools Workforce* report (Productivity Commission, 2012) skirted around definitions by focusing on precursors and outcomes. It sees the precursors related to entry standards, professional development and mentoring and the outcomes related to student performance. But it does not define what quality actually is. Further the *Schools Workforce* report, like other reports, mixes and matches concepts associated with teacher quality (or effectiveness) and quality (effective) teaching as if they were part and parcel of the same thing (Darling-Hammond & Rothman, 2011).

Is there any difference between teacher effectiveness in a high performing system and a low performing system, which is effectively what we are told remote education is? It is probably not earth-shattering, but sometimes the bleeding obvious needs to be stated: that ‘the “attract, develop, recognise and retain” mantra, recycles concepts of what it means to be a teacher in imaginaries that originate in the metropolis’ (Shore et al., 2014, p 10). And indeed there has been quite a bit of work done since the development of the Australian Professional Standards which seeks to contextualise the Standards for rural and remote contexts (Society for the Provision of Education for Rural Australia, 2012), based on some solid research into what matters in these contexts (Lock, 2008; Lock et al., 2009; Santoro et al., 2011). Much of this research points to the need for a contextually responsive approach to teaching where the qualities required for teachers and graduates are identified outside the Professional Standards.

## Methodology

The data I will present here comes from three years of qualitative data gathering from educational stakeholders in very remote Australia. Our research questions drove the direction of our data collection.



**RES project Aim**

- To find out how remote Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities can get the best benefit from the teaching and learning happening in and out of schools.

**Research questions**

- What is education for and what can/should it achieve?
- What defines 'success' from the remote Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander standpoint?
- How does teaching need to change to achieve 'success'?
- What would an effective education system in remote Australia look like?

The slide features a background image of a school building in a remote area. At the bottom of the slide, there is a logo for 'ONE.3' and text that reads 'Department of Industry and Science' and 'Cooperatives Research Centres Programme'.

I should also point out that while overall, our research is concerned about Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander standpoints (from remote communities), the data I will present about teacher qualities comes mainly from non-remote stakeholders, some of who were also either Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islanders.

RQ1	What is education for in remote Australia and what can/should it achieve?
RQ2	What defines 'successful' educational outcomes from the remote Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander standpoint?
RQ3	How does teaching need to change in order to achieve 'success' as defined by the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander standpoint?
RQ4	What would an effective education system in remote Australia look like?



## RES Project data sources



- Publicly available datasets (my school and Census)
- Community surveys in 10 remote communities
- Observations from site visits in 3 jurisdictions (WA, SA, NT)
- Engagement of over 200 remote education stakeholders in research processes (20 Thinking Outside The Tank sessions)
- Dare to Lead Snapshots in 31 Very Remote schools
- Reading of the relevant research literature
- 6 Post-graduate research projects in progress



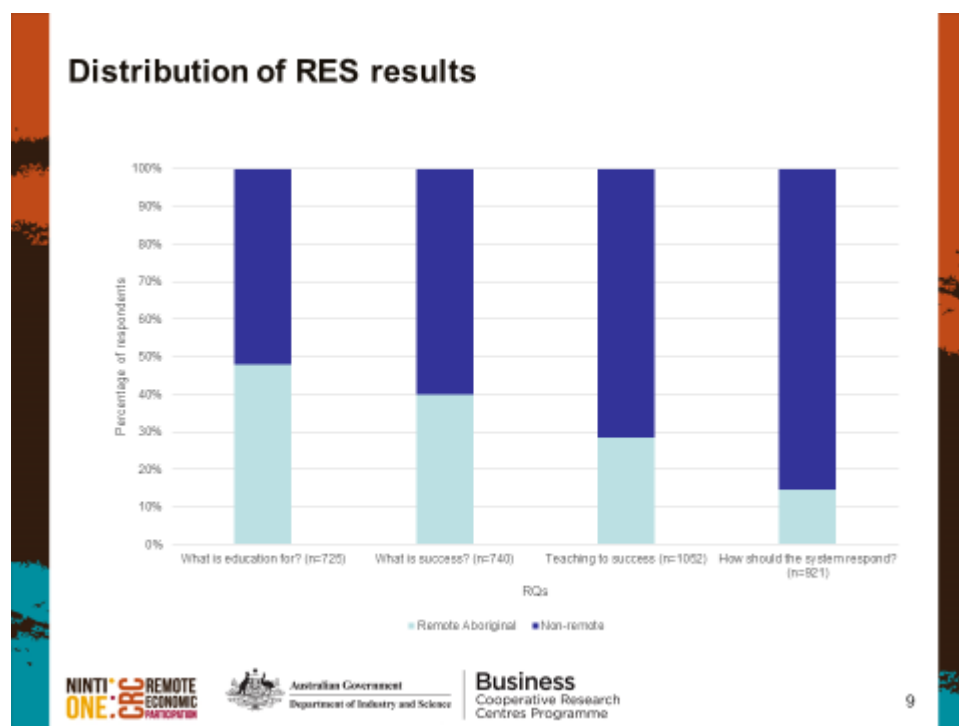
Our research draws on both qualitative and quantitative sources. These include:

- Publicly available datasets (my school and Census);
- Community surveys in 10 remote communities;
- Observations from site visits in 3 jurisdictions (WA, SA, NT);
- Engagement of over 200 remote education stakeholders in formal qualitative research processes (20 Thinking Outside The Tank sessions);
- Dare to Lead Snapshots in 31 Very Remote schools ; and
- Reading of the relevant research literature
- 6 post-grad research projects covering topics related to boarding schools, technology, SACE completions, culturally inclusive curriculum, school readiness and health and wellbeing.

The qualitative data I refer to in this lecture comes from community surveys, observations, thinking outside the tank sessions, interviews and *Dare To Lead* Collegial Snapshots.

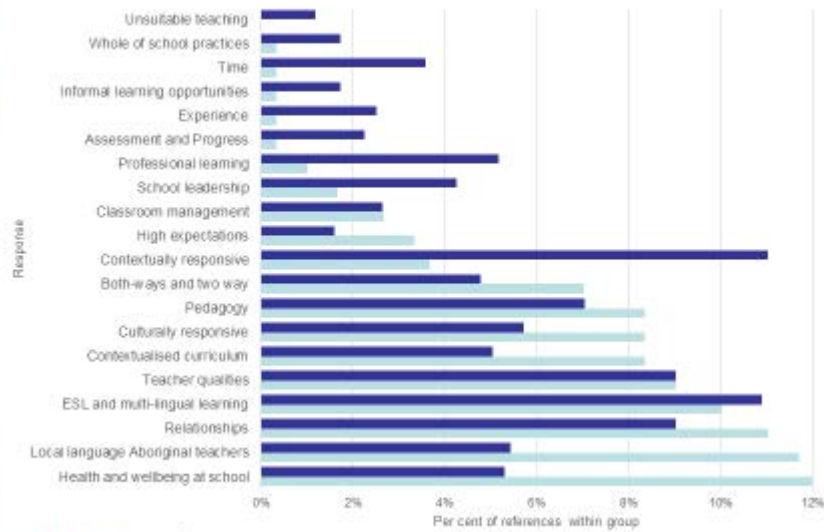
In analysing our data, we are of course subject to our own biases, which I acknowledge. The RES team analysed the data together through a process of critical interpretation.

## Distribution of results



The next figure presents the findings in terms of references coded for each RQ. The largest number of references (1052) were coded to RQ3. Note, however, that proportionally, the responses from remote Aboriginal stakeholders decreased with each RQ, from nearly 50% at RQ1 to about 15% at RQ4. What these differences in response rates may suggest is that remote Aboriginal respondents are more concerned about the deeper philosophical questions about why education matters than they are concerned about how kids should be taught or how policy should respond to remote communities' education needs. The difference could also be explained by a lack of awareness of what happens in schools, and even more so what happens in relation to policy. It could also mean that remote Aboriginal respondents are disenfranchised from school and policy processes. Regardless it points to an important engagement gap that, if reduced would allow local people to have greater ownership of school and educational strategic directions.

## Teaching to success



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The focus of this lecture is about quality teachers or teacher qualities, more precisely. This is an issue for RQ3, so before we examine what quality remote teachers look like, let's look at this in the context of teaching to success. **Teacher qualities** (3<sup>rd</sup> in order of frequency overall) are not as high on the list of factors that contribute to successful teaching, at least according to our respondents, as other factors such as **relationships** and the importance of **ESL approaches**. Nevertheless, given the recent focus on the importance of teacher quality and the lack of clarity around that idea, it is perhaps time to take note of what those in remote schools and communities actually say it is.

What are quality remote teachers (or what qualities do they have)?

## Quality remote teachers

Characteristics of quality teachers	includes:	Non-remote	Remote Aboriginal	All sources
Teacher traits	Being loving and kind, not growling, respectful, patient, listening, commitment, passion, right attitude, rubrically dedicated, humour, caring, support, friendly, encouraging, persistence, energetic, wise	23	15	38
Relational qualities	Being part of the community, talking to and listening to community, use language, introducing themselves, communication	14	7	21
Use two way approaches	Working together, roles for community members as teachers	4	3	7
Understands students	Concerns for the needs of individuals	3	2	5
Conflict management skills	Dealing with difficult behaviours	0	1	1
Helping kids be strong	Strengthening identities	1	1	2
Having high expectations	Of achievement	0	1	1
Being organised	Planning	1	1	2
Using culturally sensitive ways	Using language, understanding families and aspirations	11	0	11
Experienced, well prepared teachers	Specialised EALD skills, professional development, vs. inexperience	13	0	13
Using networks with employers	Giving students work experiences	1	0	1
Not frightened to break rules	Adapting to local contexts, innovative and creative	4	0	4
Prepared to stay	As opposed to high rates of staff turnover	2	0	2
The teacher as learner	Being open and adaptable	12	0	12
Teaching basic skills	Helping young people be prepared for life	1	0	1
Youth can be an advantage	As opposed to experience	1	0	1
		91	31	122

So what does the data tell us about the qualities that are required for successful teaching in remote schools? The table here shows what we found in relation to the qualities that respondents felt were important for teachers. Note firstly that a lot more non-remote responses identified teacher qualities than remote Aboriginal responses. However, the top two responses were the same for both remote Aboriginal respondents and for non-remote respondents. First and foremost respondents identified a number of personal traits or qualities: being loving, caring and kind, being passionate, persistent and 'ruthlessly dedicated', among others. The second set of qualities were about being relational: being part of the community, talking and listening to community, using local languages and communicating with community.

As you can see too, non-remote respondents identified a number of qualities that were not discussed at all by remote Aboriginal respondents. Three main qualities were discussed frequently: 1) teachers being well experienced; 2) the teacher as a learner; and 3) teachers using culturally sensitive ways. Before we make too much of these differences, bear in mind that overall, our data for research question 3, came predominantly from non-remote respondents, many of who were teachers, as I showed in the chart earlier on. The point is that what matters to teachers or non remote stakeholders is not necessarily the same as what matters for locals.

Characteristics of quality teachers	Includes:	Non-remote	Remote Aboriginal	All sources
Teacher traits	Being loving and kind, not growling, respectful, patient, listening, commitment, passion, right attitude, ruthlessly dedicated, humour, caring, support, friendly, encouraging, persistence, energetic, wise	23	15	38
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I want to focus though for a moment on the two most frequently identified qualities and share a few direct quotes that represent the categorisations I have made in the table. In terms of the first point here are a few quotes from teachers and school leaders:

## School teachers and leaders say...

*She's extremely respectful, very patient, very giving and she listens to them. She also teaches them. It's a really gentle atmosphere, very skilful.*

*To be a quality teacher, to take in and provide quality learning you have to have the passion.*

*I don't want a teacher who wants to come and sit at the base of Uluru with their little group of crystals looking for their own spirituality. I don't want someone who is running away from life or illnesses. I want someone who is confident in their own skin. I don't want people coming out who say I'm going to become Anangu and go to some ceremonies, get painted up. I want people who want to come and teach who are absolutely ruthlessly dedicated to doing the best for our kids and who absolutely want to do the best.*

*She's extremely respectful, very patient, very giving and she listens to them. She also teaches them. It's a really gentle atmosphere, very skilful.*

*To be a quality teacher, to take in and provide quality learning you have to have the passion.*

*I don't want a teacher who wants to come and sit at the base of Uluru with their little group of crystals looking for their own spirituality. I don't want someone who is running away from life or illnesses. I want someone who is confident in their own skin. I don't want people coming out who say I'm going to become Anangu and go to some ceremonies, get painted up. I want people who want to come and teach who are absolutely ruthlessly dedicated to doing the best for our kids and who absolutely want to do the best.*

And from community members:

## On character, locals say...

*They need to talk in encouraging ways; the way they use their voice in encouraging is important.*

*Teachers need to take their work seriously and whole-heartedly*

*The teachers need to teach properly and to really care for the students.*



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*Teachers need to take their work seriously and whole-heartedly*

*The teachers need to teach properly and to really care for the students.*

With regard to the second point on relational qualities, here are some comments from teachers and school leaders:

## On relational qualities, teachers say...

*We have a teacher at one of our schools, new this year but in a very short time developed amazing relationships with the community and made the school a very welcoming place.*

*That attitude makes the difference. It's whether they're there to get a permanent job in the future or to develop relationships, become a part of community, link it all in together and want to be there.*

*[Conversely the bad teachers] are sequestered away behind their fences and inside their houses and then they go.*



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*[Conversely the bad teachers] are sequestered away behind their fences and inside their houses and then they go.*

And from locals

**On relational qualities, locals say**

*When I was younger, you had these flower people. She was one of them with the guitar, she was one of those teachers in the 1970s. She seemed to blend with us. She was like a child, like a small kid. She would laugh and everything like that. I had a really strong feeling about oh, she's not different to me. I could relate to her, you know? She was almost like another mother.*

*One thing for sure... [if] they [had been] taking notice of me, it would be different.*

*They walk around in the community in the morning, all morning, saying hallo to all the families.*

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*One thing for sure...if I didn't take notice of them--they taking notice of me, it would be different.*

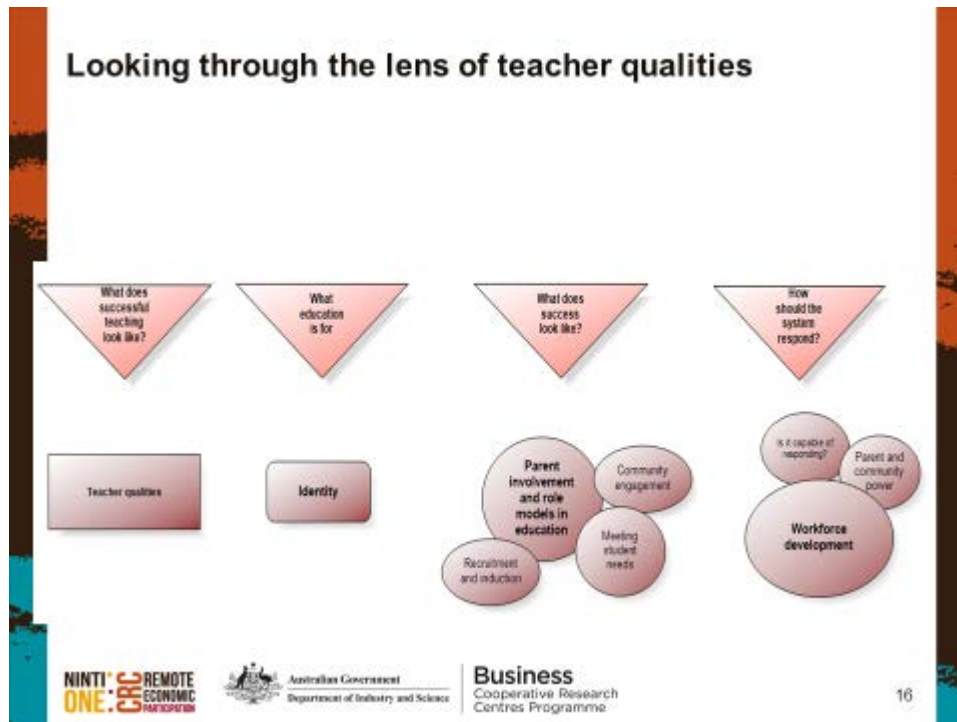
*They walk around in the community in the morning, all morning, saying hallo to all the families.*

In both cases, there might be differences in the way the ideas are expressed, but the ideas are the same. Character is important. Relationships are important.

These findings don't suggest that standards are not important—and clearly, knowledge and skills (particularly ESL skills) are important for successful teaching in remote schools. We might ask though, why does this focus on teacher qualities matter? Here again, our analysis of what stakeholders say sheds light on this question. Part of our analysis has looked at what else shows up when people talk about what successful teaching looks like, in terms of what education is for, what success looks like and how the wider system should respond.



## Looking through the lens of teacher qualities



I've represented that analysis for teacher qualities in the model shown here. I'll explain it like this. If respondents commented on teacher qualities as 'teaching to success', they also talked about the purpose of education being to support and strengthen student identity. At the same time they talked about success defined primarily in terms of parent involvement and role models in education and to a lesser extent about recruitment and induction, meeting student needs and community engagement. And at the same time they also talked about workforce development, and to a lesser extent about parent and community power, as appropriate system responses to this.

What does this mean? It means that teachers who have the right qualities for remote education will support local aspirations for education, and the primary vehicle for improving teacher qualities is through workforce development and community empowerment strategies. Workforce development strategies will do two things in this regard. They will identify teachers with the necessary qualities to make a difference, and they will underpin the importance of these qualities through professional learning processes, and teacher preparation that nurtures these qualities and/or filters out those who do not have these qualities.

This is quite a different approach than an approach that seeks to recruit and promote on the basis of skills and knowledge criteria, which prevail in the Professional Standards and subsequently in selection criteria or competency based professional development.

## How can universities better prepare pre-service teachers for remote schools

**The role of universities**

- The right mix of skills and knowledge is important e.g. EAL/D
- Options for targeted learning, e.g. CDU's Indigenous Knowledge streams
- Placement options, e.g. Deakin University's *Northern Territory Global Experience Program (NTGEP)*
- Both ways approaches: e.g. BIITE
- Mindfulness, e.g. Flinders University

*This topic will provide a space for deep scholarly and personal reflection on the role and place of mindfulness in education from the early years to higher education. It will explore the experience of students and teachers, connections to the research literature, the translation of Eastern concepts and practices to the West, mindfulness programs, teacher preparedness in terms of training and personal mindfulness practice, mindfulness activities...*



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I want to focus here not so much on skills and knowledge, which are well catered for in university pre-service teacher courses, but on character and values. Skills and knowledge are important though, and an important finding from our research points to the need for better trained EAL/D teachers at the pre-service and post-graduate level. Pedagogy is also important, though the concern of many respondents wasn't so much on formalised programs for teaching and learning. Rather, the focus was on contextually responsive approaches to teaching and learning which adapt to the needs of students and their communities.

The experiences that pre-service teachers have in university can make a huge difference to their preparedness for a remote context. We have seen many examples of universities that do this well. By way of example, I'd point here to **CDU's Indigenous Knowledge Systems streams**—particularly units on Yolngu language and culture-- within the Bachelor of Teaching as a way of allowing learners to enter into a learning experience that helps them understand themselves, be tutored by Yolngu and be exposed to Yolngu language and culture.

I'd also point here to learning on country experiences or community-based pre-service practicums. A number of universities do this well. **Deakin University**, for example, has a *Northern Territory Global Experience Program (NTGEP)* that takes students from Victoria and gives them a month's experience on country in the Katherine region. This is an opportunity for students about to graduate to learn from people on country and engage with community members before they apply for a position. Other universities do similar things. These programs cost a lot of money, in the Deakin case, between \$2300 and \$3500 per student. The way around that is to ask student who want this kind of experience, to contribute to that cost. And they do.

It would be remiss of me not to make note of the **Batchelor Institute's** both-ways learning philosophy and practice. While BIITE primarily targets Indigenous students, the opportunities that

Batchelor courses offer to non-Indigenous students using the both-ways learning approach are tremendous.

**Flinders University**, in the last year of a teaching degree or as part of a post-graduate degree, deliberately teach a unit called 'Mindfulness and the Inner World of Teaching and Learning'.

*This topic will provide a space for deep scholarly and personal reflection on the role and place of mindfulness in education from the early years to higher education. It will explore the experience of students and teachers, connections to the research literature, the translation of Eastern concepts and practices to the West, mindfulness programs, teacher preparedness in terms of training and personal mindfulness practice, mindfulness activities, suitability for all students at all developmental levels, ethical issues, limitations, sustainability and other cultural and contextual factors.*


<http://www.flinders.edu.au/webapps/stusys/index.cfm/topic/main?numb=9709&subj=EDUC&year=2015&fees=Y>



Some may ask, how will this 'fluffy airy fairy stuff' help in teaching literacy and numeracy to Aboriginal kids in a remote classroom. The reality is that teachers who are not self-aware are likely to burn out faster than those who are. This kind of preparation then, can make a difference to remote teacher quality by teaching practices that feed directly into the teacher's sense of self, their relationships with others and their ability to cope with the change they experience in a remote context.

How can systems can better recruit and retain the kind of quality teachers that are required for the remote context.

**The role of systems**

- Attraction incentives in almost every state and territory, but do they work?
- Applying the SPERA framework could help
- Promoting 'culturally responsive schools' and 'culturally responsive teachers'
- A process of 'reverse credentialing'



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It is one thing for universities to offer great preparation courses, perhaps a bigger issue is the need for systems to demand them. All jurisdictions offer incentives to attract staff to remote schools. These incentives have traditionally included:

- Transfer points (generally more points depending on remoteness)
- Extended summer vacation (NSW only)
- Additional professional development days (NSW and NT)
- 4-5 Additional personal leave days (NSW, QLD, WA, NT)
- Medical reimbursements (NSW)
- Motor vehicle and depreciation allowances (NSW, WA)
- Vacation travel subsidies (NSW, WA, NT)
- Relocation subsidies (VIC, NSW, WA)
- Travel assistance for family members (NT)
- Utility connection payment (WA)
- Housing incentives or subsidies

These strategies, which translate often into a significant financial benefits in the order of several thousands of dollars per year, do well to attract staff to remote school locations. Some states offer a retention benefit for longer service.

The risk with these kind of incentives is that they attract a wide range of people, not necessarily people that are suited for remote teaching service. Of course, recruitment and selection processes can filter those people out who aren't suitable, and the standards developed by SPERA (2012) for rural and remote teachers (which I mentioned earlier) could be helpful here, but staff turnover and recruitment remain key issues for systems (Lock et al., 2012), regardless of the '7 month urban legend'.

One approach currently in development by the WA Department of Education involves the creation of standards for culturally responsive schools and culturally responsive teachers. While I caution the development of another set of competencies based on skills and knowledge, this approach could make a difference as a guide for both recruitment and professional development and school leadership accountability. On its own it is now magic bullet though.

We have previously suggested the idea of 'reverse credentialing' as a means of addressing the skills and knowledge gaps for anyone working in remote communities. We are constantly told that the reason why Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders in remote communities don't have jobs is their 'lack' of skills and qualifications. Unfortunately this assertion doesn't really stack up, as some of our analysis of census data shows (Guenther, 2013). It turns out that about one-third of all non-indigenous workers in remote places have either no qualifications or no more than year 10 schooling. The real problem in remote communities is the lack of skills that non-locals have—that is that lack of understanding of language, local culture and environment, relationships and protocols—and we believe that a good induction and professional development approach would allow local people to do the training for non-locals. The kind of credential that non-locals would get wouldn't necessarily be a Certificate IV in cultural competency. Rather it would be about providing a locally driven process that ensures non-locals have what they need to work effectively in the remote space.

## What about boarding schools?

### The role of boarding schools

- Boarding schools are not remote schools, but they play an important role in educating remote kids
- Same set of teacher qualities are required for teachers who work with remote kids
- Importance of community and parent engagement
- Beware of 'best practice' formulas.



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The increasing significance of boarding schools as an option for remote students means we need to think more carefully about the skills, knowledge and traits that staff bring to boarding schools. Boarding schools are not remote schools. And often (if not mostly) they bring remote students into an environment that is totally foreign to them.

In order for teachers to be successful in boarding schools (where remote kids are taught) I would argue that teachers need the same set skills and traits (i.e. qualities) that a remote teacher needs. That is they need to passionate about their job, be kind and caring, relational, operate in culturally sensitive ways, be prepared to learn from their students, and ideally be well prepared with appropriate EAL/D skills.

Boarding schools have a particular set of challenges though, particularly with regard to communicating with parents and being aware of the diverse set of social, community, environmental and language backgrounds that students come from. Schools need to give staff opportunity to engage with communities (e.g. by teachers visiting communities, and allowing parents/family members to engage with the school when they are in town). Many boarding schools do this well. For example, the Worowa School, based in Healesville Victoria pays parents to accompany their children to the school. While this is not necessarily going to guarantee that students will stay the distance, it does give teachers and parents the opportunity to establish some kind of relationship.

Let me be clear though, there is no single 'best practice' (Australian Indigenous Education Foundation, 2015) in relation to boarding schools and the way they work with students . Good schools will adapt to the needs of their student cohort in a way that suits them. Similarly, quality teachers will adapt the way they teach and relate to the students according to the students they have and the communities they come from. Let me also be clear, that students who go to an 'elite' boarding school may not get the quality education they need. Elite schools have a role to play of course, but the challenges they face in supporting remote students are tremendous. However,

resources do make a difference and to the extent that those schools are able to equip teachers to be the best they can for their students, then their work is critically important.

## Conclusion

### Conclusions

- Qualifications, standards and outcomes do matter, BUT
- We know that parachuting a successful teacher from Peppermint Grove into Lajamanu just won't work!
- The difference between an ordinary and great remote teacher has little to do with their position within the Professional Standards. RATHER
- It has a lot to do with the qualities they bring to the job, and more than that the relational capacity they have to work with students, parents and the community.



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I hope I haven't left you with a feeling that a quality education, academic outcomes or a strong focus on pedagogy, curriculum or teacher qualifications don't matter. They do. But in terms of quality teachers, taking a successful teacher out of an elite private school where NAPLAN results are well above the national standard will not make them equally successful in a remote community school. The skills and knowledge that a quality teacher need to teach at Cottesloe Primary School, Peppermint Grove in Perth, Shelford Girls Grammar in Caulfield, Victoria, Rose Bay Public School in Sydney or St Joseph's Primary School in Newcastle - -where NAPLAN results are as high as anywhere in Australia—are going to be quite different than those required by a teacher at Muludja School in the Kimberley, or Amata Anangu School in the APY Lands, Arlparra School in Utopia, or Numbulwar School on the shores of the Gulf.

Having visited these and lots of other remote schools in the last four years I have seen some great teachers. I have seen some ordinary ones too. And the difference between the ordinary and the great isn't about the level of qualification they have, or their length of teaching experience or whether they are a Graduate, Proficient or Highly Accomplished according to the Professional Standards. A great teacher brings particular qualities to their job. Those qualities which I have seen and which are confirmed by our data are about their passion, commitment, persistence and the care they have for the students they teach. They are about how they relate to their students, how they relate to parents and fit in with the community. It is about how they work together with community members and local school staff to meet the learning needs of their students as they themselves become learners. And of course remote teachers need appropriate qualifications and in particular they will likely need to have EAL/D skills and knowledge.

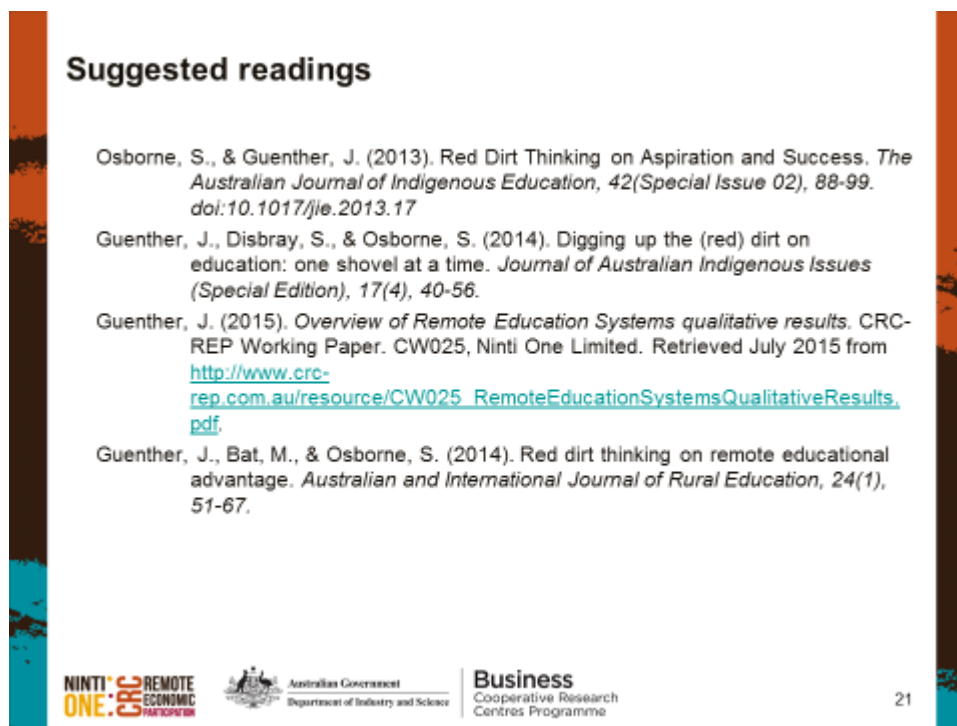
I have suggested here that universities have a role to play in preparing these great teachers. The learning opportunities they can give pre-service and post-grad teachers are vitally important. And there are plenty of good examples of courses that students can tap into (including those here at CDU) that will equip them to become great teachers. However, we can't rely on one unit of 'Indigenous culture 101' to adequately cater for remote students' learning needs and expect them to have a 'quality education'.

I've also suggested that the broader systems can play an important role in building capacity of teachers and encourage new recruits and existing staff to engage in some deep learning to become more culturally responsive. The range of remote service incentives available now will not do much more than attract an array of teachers with a scatter-gun approach. I've suggested a process of reverse credentialing could be helpful in building teacher qualities that are important for remote schools.

Finally, I recognise the important role that boarding schools play. Teachers in boarding schools are in a unique position to provide remote kids with a great education. But regardless of the school's status or its location in an urban context, teachers still need a different set of qualities that I listed earlier.

What I hope I have done is help us to clarify what we mean by teacher quality and teacher qualities for remote schools.

Thank you.



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Australian Government  
Department of Industry and Science

Business  
Cooperative Research  
Centres Programme

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