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Racism, Cultural Taxation and the Role of an Indigenous Teacher in Rural Schools

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Abstract

The underrepresentation of Indigenous teachers within Australian schools was made evident in the most recent More Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Teachers Initiative (MATSITI) project (Johnson, Cherednichenko, & Rose, 2016). The shortfall of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander teachers had been initially identified back in 1975 with the Schools Commission Report (Schools Commission, 1975). The challenge was set by Hughes and Willmot in 1982 to have 1000 trained Indigenous teachers by 1990 within the schooling sector (Hughes & Willmot, 1982). The lack of representation of Indigenous teachers is just one part of the story. In this paper, I share my lived experiences as an Aboriginal classroom teacher in rural schools throughout Queensland. Using a storying approach (Bessarab & Ng'andu, 2010; Blair, 2015; Ober, 2017; Phillips & Bunda, 2018; Qwul'sih'yah'maht & Thomas, 2005), I give insight to the realities of the Indigenous classroom teacher in rural schools. In turn, I address some of the inherent institutionalised racism apparent, the assumptions held by others, and the consequential demands placed on the Indigenous teacher. The stories shared are my own and do not insinuate that all other Indigenous teachers have had the same experience. However, by sharing my story, the purpose of this paper is to open dialogue about the role of Indigenous teachers in rural schools and to make schools aware of how they position these rare commodities they have on staff.

Keywords: Indigenous education, teaching, racism, Indigenous lived experience

Introduction

In 1982, the challenge was set by members of the National Aboriginal Education Committee (Hughes & Willmot, 1982), to have 1000 trained Indigenous teachers in schools by 1990. The intention was to not only increase the number of Indigenous teachers in education but also, to ensure that there was population parity. In contemporary Australia, the lack of representation within schooling systems is evident in the data sets where the number of Indigenous teachers was less than 1.9 per cent in 2014 (Johnson et al., 2016). In 2012, the More Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Teachers Initiative (MATSITI) project sought “to identify key factors that contribute to the number of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people entering and remaining in teaching positions in Australian schools” (Johnson et al., 2016, p. ii). The MATSITI project

found that the retention rates of Indigenous teaching staff within schools are lower than their non-Indigenous colleagues and that, as the data provided before suggests, is falling below population parity (AEEYSOC, National Teaching Workforce Dataset, & MATSITI, 2014). This paper provides some insight as to some of the social conditions I have encountered as a classroom teacher and my reasons for leaving the classroom and school setting.

In this paper, using storying (Bessarab & Ng'andu, 2010; Blair, 2015; Ober, 2017; Phillips & Bunda, 2018; Qwul'sih'yah'maht & Thomas, 2005), I share my lived experiences as an Aboriginal classroom teacher in rural schools throughout Queensland. My stories are my own experiences as a classroom teacher and do not represent the experiences of all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander teachers. The intention of the paper is to make explicit some of the very factors and unconscious decisions made that may affect an Indigenous teacher's experience when teaching in a rural and/or remote location. However, the experiences are not only prominent in rural and remote geolocations.

Over my extensive teaching career of almost 20 years, I taught in rural and remote schools. My stories draw on and amalgamate experiences within each of the locations connecting the recollections. I do this purposively. I do not want the experiences to be considered a 'rural' experience or a 'community' experience. I do not want to perpetuate stereotypes or romanticise the 'experience'. The fact that these instances are rural should not discount the fact that the stories and the positions assumed by the coloniser are exemplification of the dominant social ideologies maintained within general Australia and therefore, could and were also experienced in other locations including town and city. In other words, as is evident within the recent media discourses (Daley, 2018, August 16; "Race Commissioner: Australia is going backwards on racism," 2018, August 7); the stereotypes and racism, assumptions and biases evident are throughout Australia and are not just a rural 'condition'. Much like the sentiments shared recently by Woodhouse (2018, August 1) where she states, "We need tomorrow's leaders, most of whom will be non-Aboriginal people, to have an understanding of our communities, the challenges we face and the journey we have travelled" (para. 4), I share these stories to encourage critical discussions amongst staff, teachers and administrators about the expectations, roles and assumptions held about Indigenous teaching staff and their workplace experiences in schools.

Drawing on the notion of Lawrence's (2008) new institutionalism, schools are identified as social institutions and therefore, institutions of power. That is, schools shape individuals as 'ideal citizens' and in turn, privilege dominant social norms demonstrating their assimilatory properties (Hogarth, 2017b). Institutionalised racism is "racism that is embedded in a society's institutions – for example, in the political, economic, educational, and criminal justice systems – in a subtle form that allows the dominant group to systematically exploit and dehumanize the subordinate group" (Richards-Ekeh, 2009, p. 393). Here, Richard-Ekeh highlights how power and privilege informs and forms dominant ideologies, biases and taken for granted assumptions about the Other, those perceived as different to the dominant norm. To speak back to the dominant ideologies, there is a need to share the stories of those silenced.

Therefore, in this paper I begin by explicating the tug-of-war that occurs as an Aboriginal teacher to build relationships and act as an advocate for community whilst fulfilling the role of the

classroom teacher and representative of the schooling agenda. Emphasis on the role of the school leader to sustain School-Community Partnership Agreements is shared. In turn, the stories make explicit the inherent institutionalised racism apparent and how this positions Indigenous classroom teachers. The importance of the Indigenous teacher as a role model and the relationships developed with the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students in their classroom is made explicit. Finally, the demands placed on the Indigenous teacher as the embodied Aboriginal within the school is explored.

Methodological Approach

In this paper, storying (see, for example: Bessarab & Ng'andu, 2010; Blair, 2015; Ober, 2017; Phillips & Bunda, 2018; Qwul'sih'yah'maht & Thomas, 2005) has been used as a methodological approach. Storying, as Bessarab and Ng'andu (2010) states, allows “people to talk to each other to convey information or to receive information, which once received and processed can lead to different understandings of the subject matter at hand” (p. 38). As an Aboriginal researcher and educator, storying enacts Indigenous ways of knowing, being and doing (Ober, 2017). As a critical discourse analyst, I see storying as a means to shift power as it narrates the social conditions of society as a whole including the historical, political, cultural and social contextual factors (Hogarth, 2017c). It becomes an act of resistance and an illustration of resilience informed and formed by my understandings and knowledge of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander histories, cultures, languages and values. As a result, Indigenous theoretical frameworks are drawn on. That is, when I recount my stories, I am also articulating my standpoint and my position which are informed and formed by my axiologies, ontologies and epistemologies. Building on Nakata's Indigenous Standpoint Theory (Nakata, 2007b) and Moreton-Robinson's genderised Indigenous Women's Standpoint Theory (Moreton-Robinson, 2013) whereby our standpoint and position proffer varied interpretations and understandings of texts, social interactions and activities, I see storying as a means to privilege Indigenous voice and story *from* and *through* an Indigenous lens (Phillips & Bunda, 2018).

It is important to note, as Kovach (2005) stresses, we as Indigenous peoples are a politicised body – our absence, our presence, and “by merely walking through (or out of) mainstream doors, we tend to make spaces alive with a politicality that creates both tension and possibility” (p. 20). Our stories, that is the stories of Indigenous peoples, are discursively constituted; that is, they are from our perspectives and our worldview. The notion of superiority is implicitly enacted by the coloniser, the individuals in positions of power within schools – principals, teachers, teachers and students. Here, the distinction of binaries enables Indigenous peoples to take a position of power and knowing; recognising how our stories and interpretations of social events are informed and formed through our own lenses and views of the world. By telling our stories, we are privileging Indigenous voice (Rigney, 1999) and providing insight to our experiences within the cultural interface (Nakata, 2007a). Therefore, implicit within the storying approach is also my standpoint and position.

Storying provides avenues to retell the social activity in a more conversational style of writing (Bessarab & Ng'andu, 2010; Blair, 2015; Ober, 2017; Phillips & Bunda, 2018; Qwul'sih'yah'maht & Thomas, 2005). I invite you to see my experiences through my lens. In telling my stories, the

schools have been given pseudonym names. I attempt to remove technical jargon often found in academic papers to bring the stories to those at the ‘coal face’ – the principals, the teachers, the parents and the communities; to encourage critical reflection of one’s own position, beliefs and assumptions but to consider how those everyday conversations and hidden responsibilities not mentioned in the job description can be perceived and interpreted.

In the following sections, I share some insights to my recollections of various incidents and events that I experienced as an Aboriginal classroom teacher in rural and remote locations. Illustrations of the demands of the Aboriginal teacher as the ‘knower of all things Indigenous’ occur. The need for school leaders to support and model community engagement as well as attend to staff attaining local cultural knowledge is discussed. Finally, an example of racism is provided. As previously mentioned, I share these stories to encourage critical discussions and reflection by school leaders and teachers to consider how Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff are positioned within the workplace; to consider the alternative lens and in turn, become the agents of change needed in schools.

Tug of War: My Experience

In this section, I share my experiences as a classroom teacher in a number of schools in rural locations throughout Queensland and the demands on my time, knowledge and Aboriginality. In other research, I have spoken about the role of how our production and interpretations of social activities are informed by our lived experiences; our ways of knowing, being and doing, and therefore, the lens through which these stories are told is my own (Hogarth, 2015, 2017a, 2017b, 2017c, 2018). It should not be assumed to be the shared experience of Indigenous teachers. The other social actors may have interpreted the interactions very differently but it is important to share these interpretations if only to provide an alternative lens. Critical reflection of how power and privilege is asserted, maintained and sustained in what could be considered trivial daily social interactions highlights just how readily dominant social norms can be detrimental to the other social actors.

Policy encourages the formation of partnerships, building relationships and engaging with community (Education Council, 2015). That is, schools should work with community to build a two-way means of communication and partnership (MCEECDYA, 2011). However, what became infinitely clear when I arrived at a school as an Aboriginal teacher was that I was seen as the ‘answer’; that somehow I would be able to address the chasm between the school gate and the classroom (Nugent, 1975).

It is now, in retrospect, that I recognise that I found that schools and policy fail to acknowledge the historical, political, cultural and social contextual factors that have created the chasm (Hogarth, 2018). They ignore the detrimental effects of past policy and reform. They do not speak about the exclusionary practices of the past that enabled Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students to be excluded or marginalised from the Western classroom up to the mid-1970s. They do not reflect on their own positions of authority and the relics of colonial Australia still maintained within society (Pratt, Louie, Hanson, & Ottman, 2018). They do not do this because it is not their lived experience.

I felt there was a presupposition that as I was Aboriginal, I knew all things about Aboriginality. Problems with Indigenous students? – “send them to Melitta”. Parents not engaging in the school? – “complain to Melitta”. Have a question about Indigenous history? – “ask Melitta”. The assumptions were held by all; from fellow teachers to the principals of the schools. I found that schools assumed I embodied the Aboriginal.

Being the only Aboriginal teacher within a school is hard. There is a constant tug of war as one builds relationships within the school and community. I found myself often conflicted within my role as a school representative and a quasi-Liaison officer between the school and the community. The community saw my role as a voice within the school to bring forward their concerns. The school saw my role as a voice of the school to report to parents the actions and strategies being put in place to encourage engagement.

The internal conflict for me that occurred was constant. It was Padilla (1994) who first coined the notion of cultural taxation. Exemplification of cultural taxation includes the expectations laden on peoples of colour within institutions as mentors as well as representatives on committees in addition to their appointed responsibilities. The embodied Aboriginal is indeed the very aspect that makes us attractive to institutions and yet, hidden responsibilities and roles within our job descriptions are further burdens we are expected to accept; to meet the expectations of the employer.

Are non-Indigenous educators expected to carry out these ‘extra’ duties? Are schools and school leaders even aware of the demands of an Indigenous teacher? It is also noteworthy to acknowledge how schools also place ‘extra’ duties on Indigenous teachers through celebrations, Acknowledgement of Country, and so forth. Every year when NAIDOC Week came around, it was also assumed that the Indigenous teacher aide and I would take responsibility to put together the programme. It was our responsibility to ensure that an Elder was in attendance to provide an Acknowledgement of Country at school events. In turn, we felt further pressure to ensure student behaviour was exemplary when we had Elders visiting to ensure they were afforded the respect they deserved. The tug-of-war as a classroom teacher but also, a member of community was tiring and demanding.

The tug of war was further exacerbated whenever Elders entered the school. Often, it was because the Elders needed assistance with paperwork such as a brochure for an upcoming event within the community or a request for me to put together a newsletter for family members incarcerated, to keep them up-to-date on what was happening in the community. Others wanted help to document and put together family trees and for others still, it involved being the minute taker for Native Title groups and so forth. While a lot of these activities occurred after school hours, there were occasions when my lunch hours ‘disappeared’.

The moral of the story is that Indigenous teachers have a full schedule not only within school but also, outside the school. Discussions need to be had with the teacher because if not for the Indigenous teacher aide who was from community who obviously had connections with community, I would not have been able to achieve what was achieved. It should not be assumed that connections and engagement with community is instantaneous simply because the teacher is Indigenous. Much like the relationships classroom teachers or school leaders are expected to build, the non-local Indigenous teacher has to build these relationships too.

The Ultimate Betrayal

This section offers a particular example from Jumping Jacks School when the school undertook the process of developing a School-Community Partnership Agreement (SCPA). The importance of the school leader to be actively engaged and seen as proactive in building, maintaining and sustaining those relationships within community cannot be stressed enough. The Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Action Plan 2010-2014 called for all Focus Schools¹ to develop SCPAs (MCEECDYA, 2011). While the school was not a Focus School, owing to the high Indigenous student population, the school was encouraged to partake in the SCPA process.

The process undertaken at Jumping Jacks School to develop the SCPA was extensive involving an external consultant. Discussions with community about the needs of the community, their desires and wishes of what they wanted for their students were collated. Teaching staff and professional staff reviewed and reflected on current practices to consider innovative new ways in which to engage students and community into the schooling environment. The whole process took over 3 months to complete. It took less time for the SCPA to become redundant.

I will give you my interpretation of the SCPA production process. The school leader did not make the adequate time to meet with the consultant. He commented that he felt he was being avoided as his consultation with community found some very disgruntled parents, grandparents and community members. The disengagement of the school leader from the community, his lack of motivation and sincerity was quickly 'read' by the community and was detrimental. Despite staff in the initial phase after the 'release' of the SCPA enacting the actions and strategies set, without the support or motivation of the school leader, it was less than 2 months before staff became despondent.

I share this story to encourage school leaders to acknowledge their position and their role to lead. I cannot stress enough that initiatives, strategies and actions need to be led and modelled from the top. It cannot be the responsibility of the staff to act without the support of the leadership. The school leadership needs to lead, to motivate and to share the load. The failure of the SCPA was felt by the Indigenous staff members of the school who had heavily invested in the process.

For example: soon after the release of the SCPA, community members were asking 'What was the point? When will we be involved in the decision making about what happens in the school?' It was quickly assumed by community that the school was not dedicated to the SCPA because of the deafening silence. The principal never mentioned the SCPA nor advocated its benefits in staff meetings after the initial release. It was not mandatory nor encouraged and as a result, staff could either enact the strategies and commitments or simply, dismiss them. Some lone staff members, both Indigenous and non-Indigenous, did in fact work very hard to meet those commitments but the lack of a whole staff action, the motivation to adhere while others did not caused turmoil. Those staff members who did not engage saw the need to engage with

¹ Introduced with the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Action Plan 2010-2014, "Focus schools are those schools with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students with the greatest need and where effort should be focused to make the greatest difference" (Ministerial Council for Education Early Childhood Development and Youth Affairs, 2011, p. 5).

community as an addition to their roles and responsibilities; something they ‘were not paid to do’. It was the ultimate betrayal – not just to the staff but the community and all those involved in the process. Relations between the school and the community grew further apart.

Stereotypes, Language and Inherent Racism

The culture adapted and maintained within the school setting is also influenced and formed by the head of school. The role of the school leader in forming the relationships, attitudes and beliefs between schools extends beyond the school gates as well. The stories shared in this section illustrate how stereotypes, language and in turn, inherent racism were experienced by me in rural schools. It is important for all staff to be aware of how they position themselves and in turn, interact with Indigenous staff so as to be inclusive but also, feel valued within the workplace.

Stereotypes

It is difficult to escape stereotypes. The assumption that Aboriginal people have dark skin is constantly perpetuated in Western ideals (Messing, Jabon, & Plaut, 2016). The notion of Aboriginality and fair-skinned Aboriginals such as myself being questioned because we don’t ‘fit’ the stereotype was a common experience for me at schools. Again, in hindsight, I have learnt how the societal constructs that are maintained in the dominant public sphere of what it ‘means’ to be Aboriginal are not aligned with my own understandings of my Aboriginality (Hogarth, 2015).

In one of the first schools in which I taught there was a substantial number of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students. I felt that my presence in the school would be welcomed by the school leader. That is, that I had taken advantage of education and was embodying the benefits of gaining an education and therefore, a role model. I was young and eager to take on those ‘hidden’ responsibilities; to work with community and to address those gaps. Instead, I found that my Aboriginality was instantly questioned. Upon meeting with the principal and informing him of my Aboriginality, I was subject to him looking at me from head to toe and an amused grin coming across his face. This action was then followed by a short and abrupt “Really?” and hence, began my inherent racism experiences within the school setting.

The attitudes held by the principal towards my Aboriginality set the school’s agenda and was quickly usurped by the rest of the non-Indigenous school staff. I learnt that regular staff barbecues were held in which I was not invited. My colleagues distanced themselves from me and essentially, isolated me. My regular interaction with the local Indigenous community became an issue raised by the school’s P&C whereby it was seen as a negative and below the station of a school teacher. Needless to say, the values, attitudes and beliefs held by the schooling environment were also experienced by the Indigenous students. The lack of cultural understanding saw strategies being implemented within the school that encouraged the suspensions of Indigenous students for extended lengths of time. The racism experienced was both implicit and explicit and not just inherent to the one workplace as will be shared.

Language

I recall sitting in a school meeting at Riverbank School part way through the year as part of professional development for all staff. Certain teaching staff members were wishing to address the unacceptable language being used by students and in particular, the Indigenous students. The previous principal had rectified the situation by working with students to ‘come up with’ an alternative that they substituted rather than using the derogatory term. With the new principal and teaching staff, despite the fact that the students were code-making and it had previously been negotiated as acceptable, it appeared an issue. So much so that the discussion continued for over an hour with non-Indigenous staff unhappy with the previous decision.

I found the whole discussion quite amusing considering the teachers were offended by the substitute words but made no mention of the Indigenous language used by the students which was far more offensive. When the principal finally asked for my opinions on the situation, I let slip that it was interesting that the teachers were not offended by the ‘lingo’ being used as opposed to the substitute word negotiated previously. Naturally, the staff then wanted to know what language I was referring to and how did I know the meaning of such words which I did not share. Yes, the teachers and principal were so disengaged from community and knowing the students that they weren’t aware nor even know the meaning of the offensive Aboriginal language words the students were using.

My reasoning for refraining from informing my colleagues was two-fold. Firstly, the fact that I had already shared with both the principal and my peers about my Aboriginality and yet, the fact that my understandings and connections with the community were dismissed left me feeling quite offended and belittled. The second reason was more based on the hegemonic position being assumed by the teaching staff. While diminishing the Indigenous languages being used, there was emphasis being placed on the English ‘substitute’ – a phrase that without the context had no meaning. It was simply because the staff knew its hidden meaning that they were offended. Perhaps if they had chosen to engage with community or even bothered to listen to the actual sentence structure, they could have ‘worked out’ the meaning of the Indigenous words used. But then again, perhaps their language skills weren’t as developed as the students to code switch so readily.

Inherent Racism

Another school and yet another example of the pressures experienced by myself within the school setting. Once again, this is a story based around my Aboriginality but unlike the dismissal that occurred in the previous school, this time there was inherent racism at play. Furthermore, it is another story that involves the school leader and in this case, the resulting circumstances led to me leaving the school with an objective to work towards challenging the dominant norms (Hogarth, 2015, 2018).

I need to also note that my motivations for entering the tertiary sector was due to the challenge set by the students in my classroom. They had continuously asked me over the school year why the teachers who came to Jumping Jacks School did not ‘get them’ and they didn’t know how to teach them. They told me I needed to ‘go wherever it was they taught the teachers to teach and tell them how to do it’! The students were constantly frustrated by the gap in the cultural understanding of the teachers coming to the community.

However, never was the lack of understanding more apparent than the interaction one day with the principal of the school. I had been teaching at the school for some time (two or three years) when this incident happened and my familial connections with community had been established. I had tirelessly worked to build rapport with Elders and parents, having engaged them in the school setting. My Aboriginality was not questioned until that fateful day.

One afternoon while sitting on the steps of the school house, the principal proceeded to place her arm across my own and then turned to me and asked 'Are you sure you are Indigenous?' I was lost for words at the time. Here was the principal who had been working within this community for several years working with our kids and yet, she was still questioning my Aboriginality based on the colour of my skin.

Now, there are many ways to interpret this instance. I could have chosen to react instantly and accuse the principal of being blatantly racist. However, no one else was present. This was not a position I wanted to take. Prior to this interaction, we had a strong working relationship and so I did not want to cause trouble despite the fact that the interaction constantly played on my mind. I decided to take the interaction as a warning and I began distancing myself but also, running a critical eye over the various things said and done thereafter.

What Did I Learn?

I grew up in a small country town attending school at the local high school so the implicit and explicit racism shared within the stories shared were of no surprise to me. The attitudes and stereotypes merely perpetuated dominant social norms and showed how much Australia as a whole still has to go to be the multicultural and fair country it espouses to be. In hindsight, I am amazed that I stayed within the teaching workforce as long as I did. The stories shared here are but a few examples of where my Aboriginality was questioned. However, now as I work in the higher education system teaching the teachers who will be working with our children, I feel invigorated. While I do not fool myself to think that I can change the attitudes, beliefs and values that are engrained in Australian society, I challenge myself each semester to have these pre-service teachers reflect on their position as a classroom teacher. I reconcile that even if I have just one non-Indigenous graduate teacher consider their position and reflect on their attitudes, beliefs and values when addressing the needs of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students then it is one more than there was last year. It is a slow process but we are a patient mob.

I also learnt that the saying 'Pick your fights' is so true. While I experienced both implicit and explicit racism and consistently had my Aboriginality questioned by those in power, I also had strong Aboriginal Elders surrounding me who shared their horror stories of the past and my experiences seemed small in comparison. This is not to minimise the impact of racism in the present context, of course. But through the Elders' guidance, I realised that certain issues could be addressed through extending my own learning; to position myself in a place where change could occur.

Conclusion

Hidden within the stories is my passion for education. I see education as a means to change one's perceived station in life. If Indigenous teachers are given the opportunity to share their

motivations, their reasons for gaining an education and the benefits of studying, there is opportunity for them to be true role models rather than silenced or marginalised within the predominantly White school and staff.

There is a need for school leaders and teachers to ensure that the school is an inclusive space not just for students but also, Indigenous staff. Much like the students in their care, they should not assume that the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff member knows about all things Indigenous. The idea that the Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander classroom teacher is the 'knower' is a falsehood. My identity as an Aboriginal teacher was not static and consistently needed to be realigned and established whenever changing schools or moving to a new community. My knowledge of local cultural knowledges was minimal and much like my non-Indigenous counterparts, I was having to make contacts and engage with community to build relationships. My Indigeneity did not make this easier nor unnecessary. As stated previously, one person cannot be the embodied Aboriginal. There are just as many processes and procedures that an Indigenous teacher must enact to build connections with the community.

School leaders also need to be aware of all the other business that Indigenous staff are being required to do within the community as well as the marking, planning, teaching and learning. There are also the expectations of the school on the Indigenous teacher as the embodied Aboriginal. Cultural taxation builds an Indigenous teacher's work responsibilities. School leaders need to be conscious of these expectations and consider ways in which they can allievate these. Simple measures such as recognising that an Acknowledgement of Country can be given by anyone can reduce the expectations on Indigenous teachers and remove the expectation of the embodied Aboriginal.

It is important that there are open discussions and clear expectations between and with Indigenous staff members. The underrepresentation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander teachers within the education system may be addressed if schools and staff begin to reflect on how they position Indigenous staff. That is, when a school is fortunate enough to gain an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander teacher within their teaching workforce, school leaders and teachers need to consider how they can make the best use of this rare commodity within their school.

Furthermore, there is a need to consider the sustainability of the relationships developed with the community. If partnerships are developed with the community, the school leader needs to ensure that that relationship is maintained and lead by example. There is also need for future proofing those relationships, as the education system with its transfers in and out of community acts to disrupt those relationships formed. Therefore, school staff as a whole is accountable in ensuring that a succession plan is enabled.

Finally, there is a need for constant reflection. As educators, we are constantly having to reflect on our planning and teaching but there is also a need to reflect on position and the stereotypes, biases and assumptions held about Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. My story regarding the principal and her inherent racism whereby Indigeneity was the subject of one's skin colour was not an isolated incident. While all these stories were based within a rural school setting, the dominant ideology of the past whereby skin colour determined one's Indigeneity is still strong within the Australian psyche. If systems and schools are to increase the number of

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander teachers within the classroom setting, there is a need to be aware of such incidents and to question the mundane interactions that are taken for granted and often, not seen from a different lens. Schools need to be inclusive not just for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students but also for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander teachers.

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