

# Improving teaching in Indigenous education

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Bernadette Atkinson, Dr Zane Ma Rhea and Peter Anderson

Teachers' professional development in understanding Indigenous cultures and teaching Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students needs to be improved greatly to meet new government standards, according to new research.

The study, by Monash University researchers Dr Zane Ma Rhea, Peter Anderson and Bernadette Atkinson from the Faculty of [Education](#), was recently presented to the Australian Institute of Teaching and School Leadership.

It looked into the current and future provision of teacher professional

development in the field of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander education when related to the National Professional Standards for [Teachers](#) Standard 1.4 and 2.4.

"We found even though there was extensive policy framework regarding the provision of education services to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians, there has been no research into professional development of teachers with respect to Indigenous education," Dr Ma Rhea said.

The researchers reviewed similar system-wide, school reform change management programs, especially involving a [workforce development](#) approach, in order to understand the scope of the change envisaged with the Federal Government's implementation of the National Professional Standards for Teachers through the Australian Teacher Performance and Development Framework and the Australian Charter for the Professional Learning of Teachers and School Leaders.

It was found there was little Indigenous involvement in decision making in the education system, no recognised professional standard by which to train teachers or support them in their on-going professional development, and no policy regime that supported teachers to bring standards-based training to progressive classroom methods.

"Many teachers have either no knowledge of Indigenous culture or experience of teaching Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander students so feel less inclined to undertake professional development in these important areas," Dr Ma Rhea said.

"It became quite clear through our review of the literature that our education system needs to provide more reliable information on Indigenous subjects and the successful teaching of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students," Dr Ma Rhea said.

"Education administrators need to look at ways to address this issue by involving Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander education experts in the development of professional development programs, and encourage teachers to undertake training."

The report found teachers have fear and resistance about these particular standards. The researchers recommend that the [Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous People](#) be adopted as the guiding framework for the development of a rights-based approach to teacher professional development and that a reliable knowledge base be developed for teachers with respect to the skills and knowledge that they will need in order to account for Standards 1.4 and 2.4.

"We hope the findings of this research provide guidance to policy makers and teacher [professional development](#) providers in Indigenous Education," Dr Ma Rhea said.

Provided by Monash University

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