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***Narragunnawali Research Report #2 -
Reconciliation in the classroom,
around the school or early learning
service, and with the community –
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Abstract

Narragunnawali: Reconciliation in Schools and Early Learning is a national program designed and implemented by Reconciliation Australia. The aim of this current paper is to focus on those schools or early learning services that have commenced a Reconciliation Action Plan (a key focus of *Narragunnawali*), and analyse the responses to an initial whole-school or early learning service Reflection Survey (RS). A number of key findings emerged from the analysis. First, there was a considerable degree of uncertainty amongst the Working Group (who filled out the survey) and what is happening within the school or early learning service. One of the aims of *Narragunnawali* should therefore be to help facilitate information gathering and sharing within the school or early learning service. A second major finding was that there was a strong relationship between some of the key measures. For example, those schools or early learning services that display a flag are much more likely to have teachers that have completed cultural competency, proficiency or awareness training and are more likely to Acknowledge Country at events at the school or early learning service. Those schools or early learning services where teachers feel knowledgeable about local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander histories and cultures are more likely to be involved in activities with the local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community. There is strong evidence, in other words, that different aspects of reconciliation in schools and early learning services are reinforcing. The final finding is that there are other characteristics that predict reconciliation activities and outcomes. These point to areas of existing strength, as well as where things can be built on.

Acknowledgements

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Overview of *Narragunnawali* and the survey

Narragunnawali: Reconciliation in Schools and Early Learning is a national program designed and implemented by Reconciliation Australia. *Narragunnawali* (pronounced narra-gunna-wally) is a word from the language of the Ngunnawal people meaning alive, wellbeing, coming together and peace. The program is designed to support all Australian schools and early learning services in developing a higher level of knowledge and pride in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander histories, cultures and contributions. The program is designed to be delivered at the whole-school or early learning service level, with benefits for all students and staff, as well as for the wider community.

In a previous set of analysis (*Narragunnawali Research Report #1 - Factors associated with developing a RAP*), the ANU looked at the factors associated with whether a school or early learning service has commenced a Reconciliation Action Plan (RAP) as of November 19th, 2015. The aim was to identify types of schools and early learning services that may not have engaged at the same rate as other schools or early learning services (all else being equal) and therefore areas where Reconciliation Australia might consider focusing additional attention. Educational institutions that have engaged at a slower rate include Infants/Primary schools, preschools, education institutions outside of major cities, those in areas with high migrant populations or low Indigenous populations and those in relatively disadvantaged areas. There were, however, no differences between Independent schools and Government schools once other characteristics had been controlled for, although both had lower probabilities than Catholic schools.

The aim of this current paper is to focus on those schools or early learning services that have commenced a RAP, and analyse the responses to an initial *whole-school or early learning Service Reflection Survey* (RS). The survey was designed by Reconciliation Australia (with assistance from the ANU) to assist RAP Working Groups¹ (RAPWGs) to reflect on the current state of reconciliation in their school or early learning service as one of the first steps in developing a RAP. The RS looks at the three main spheres of the school or early learning service – in the classroom,

¹ The RAPWG is responsible for setting up and leading the RAP and ensuring that it becomes part of the school and early learning service culture. It must include:

- People from the local Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander community
- Principal/Director or executive-level membership or support
- Teachers and educators
- Parent and wider community representatives

around the school and with the community. There are 24 questions in total. While the survey was designed as a tool for schools and early learning services, it still has significant analytical use. At the time the data was extracted (11th March, 2016), there were 247 schools and early learning services that had completed the survey.

The analysis presented in this paper is structured into three sections. The next section looks at the distribution of responses to the questions. This is followed by an analysis of the relationship between some of the key responses, with the final section of results looking at some of the factors associated with the responses. The final section of the paper provides a summary of the main results.

Reconciliation in the classroom, around the school and with the community – Summary statistics

I begin the analysis of the RS by looking at responses to the questions related to reconciliation initiatives in the classroom.² Seven questions were asked, with four possible substantive responses and an unsure option. Remembering that 247 schools or early learning services had completed the survey, the table gives the per cent of schools and early learning services within each category. There is no weighting of responses based on size or other metrics.

Table 1 Responses to questions on situation in the classroom

	Unsure	None	Only a few	Most	All
Q 1. How many classroom teachers and educators regularly use Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander teaching and learning resources to assist in teaching?	16.6	7.3	48.6	21.9	5.7
Q 2. How many teachers and educators regularly collaborate with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in preparing and delivering lessons?	13.8	38.1	38.5	7.7	2.0
Q 3. How many teachers and educators feel knowledgeable about local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander histories and cultures?	14.6	12.2	59.9	12.6	0.8
Q 4. How many teachers and educators are aware that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander histories and cultures are a priority within the Australian Curriculum and the Early Years Learning Framework?	12.6	0.4	18.2	38.9	30.0
Q 5. How many teachers and educators regularly incorporate Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander	15.8	8.1	49.0	23.1	4.1

² The question wording and response categories have changed slightly over the initial expansion of *Narragunnawali* to be inclusive of early learning services. The wording used in this paper is based on the survey that was available at the time of exporting data. Unfortunately, it isn't possible to tell with the data available what the survey wording was at the time the survey was filled out by the relevant RAPWG. This will be possible, however, with future iterations of the data.

histories and cultures in their teaching?					
Q 6. How many classroom teachers are aware of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander content within the AITSL Australian Professional Standards for Teachers and the Australian Children's Education and Care Quality Authority National Quality Standards?	22.3	9.7	30.4	25.5	12.2
Q 7. How many teachers and educators are actively engaged in increasing their awareness of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander content within the AITSL Australian Professional Standards for Teachers and the Australian Children's Education and Care Quality Authority National Quality Standards?	27.9	10.5	37.3	19.0	5.3

The first point to note from the table is the large number of RAPWGs that were unsure about the situation in the classroom. For all seven questions, more than 1 in 10 respondents reported that they were unsure about the question. However, this was as high as more than 1 in 5 for the last two responses, which were specifically related to the Australian Professional Standards for Teachers and National Quality Standards. In total 106 out of the 247 respondents (42.9 per cent) reported that they were unsure on at least one of the questions. This reinforces the use of the RS and the RAPs in general as a useful tool for increasing knowledge within the school and early learning service on what is currently occurring.

The question with greatest 'none' response related to collaboration with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in preparing and delivering lessons. This is perhaps not surprising given the response in the Australian Reconciliation Barometer that around 70 per cent of the general community never or rarely socialise with someone from an Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander background. Whilst recognising the potential burden on the community in which the school or early learning service is located, this suggests a role for RAPs and the RAPWG as a conduit between teachers and the community.

The question with the greatest 'All' or 'Most' response is on awareness in the classroom Q 4 'that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander histories and cultures are a priority within the Australian Curriculum and the Early Years Learning Framework.' Around 3 out of 10 respondents identified that all of the teachers within that school or early learning service had that awareness, with a further 38.9 per cent being reported as having most of their teachers having that awareness. The difficulty, clearly, is translating that awareness into practice.

The next two questions in the RS (on situation around the school) are about the Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander flags, as well as other permanent, visible symbols. The distribution of responses to these two questions is given in Figures 1 and 2. Of those schools and early learning services who filled in the survey, around 6 out of 10 reported a permanent display of the Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander

flag. The majority of those reported flying both. In addition to this, around 4 out of 10 reported the display of other symbols all or most of the time. There is considerable scope for this to be increased, but it should be noted that it would be from a reasonably high base (for those schools and early learning services with a RAP).

Figure 1 Q 8. Does your school or early learning service fly or display the Aboriginal and the Torres Strait Islander flags permanently?

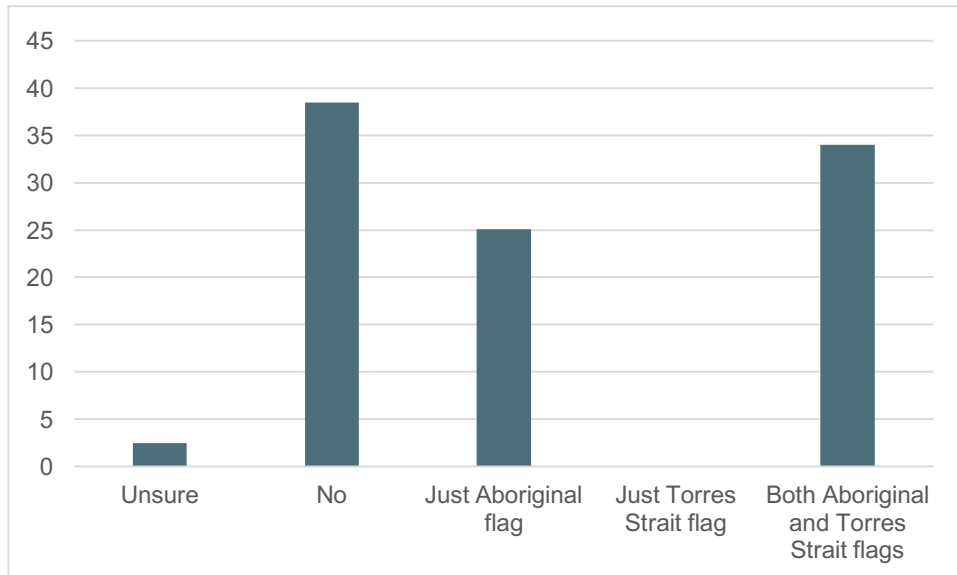
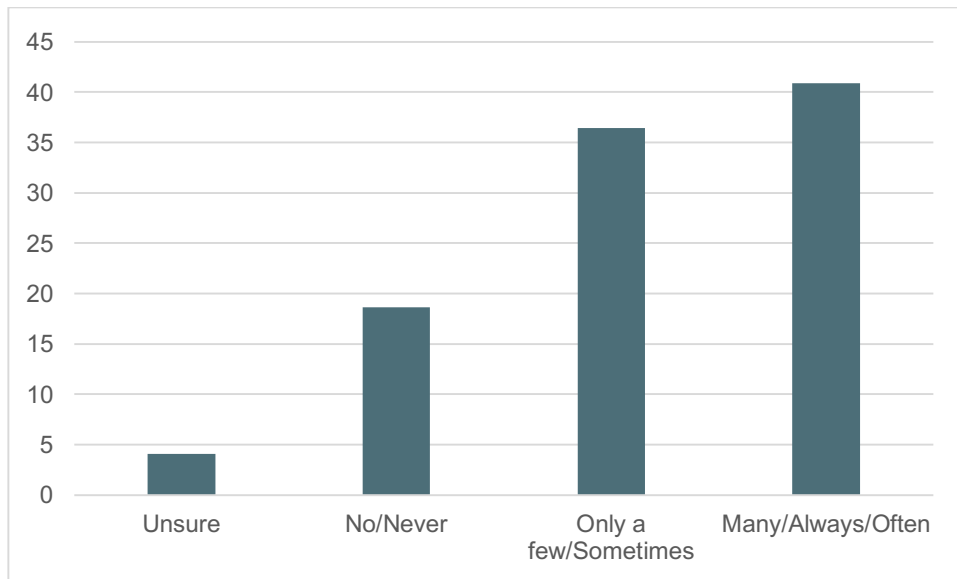


Figure 2 Aside from flags, does your school demonstrate pride in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander histories and cultures with other permanent, visible symbols? (playground markings, signs, artwork, sculptures etc)³

³ This question is not available in all versions of the RS. However, it has been included in the analysis as schools and early learning services had responded as part of the initial data collection.



The following table looks more broadly at activities and resources around the school or early learning service. For these questions, there is a range of potential response categories depending on the nature of the question. To keep the results comparable, the results are collapsed into three categories – unsure; no or never; and at least sometimes.

Table 2 Responses to questions on situation around the school (or early learning service)

	Unsure	No/ Never	Yes/ Sometimes or more
Q 9. How often does your school or early learning service Acknowledge Country at regular events?	10.9	25.9	63.2
Q 10. How often do staff and students visit local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander sites and/or attend significant local events in the community?	13.8	23.5	62.8
Q 11. Even though it often falls outside term dates, does your school or early learning service celebrate and promote NAIDOC Week?	8.5	19.0	72.5
Q 12. Does your school or early learning service participate in National Reconciliation Week (NRW) by holding, or attending, community activities?	9.7	17.4	72.9
Q 15. How often does your school or early learning service invite local Elders to talk to staff, children and students about local histories and cultures?	7.7	30.0	62.3
Q 16. How often are Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander topics an item on your staff meeting agenda?	8.5	29.6	61.9
Q 17. Does your school or early learning service have an existing staff or student led reconciliation-focused group or committee?	8.5	64.0	27.5
Q 18. Does your school or early learning service have an existing Indigenous advisory group?	14.6	59.5	25.9
Q 19. Does your school or early learning service budget include specific provision for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander activities?	17.0	35.6	47.4

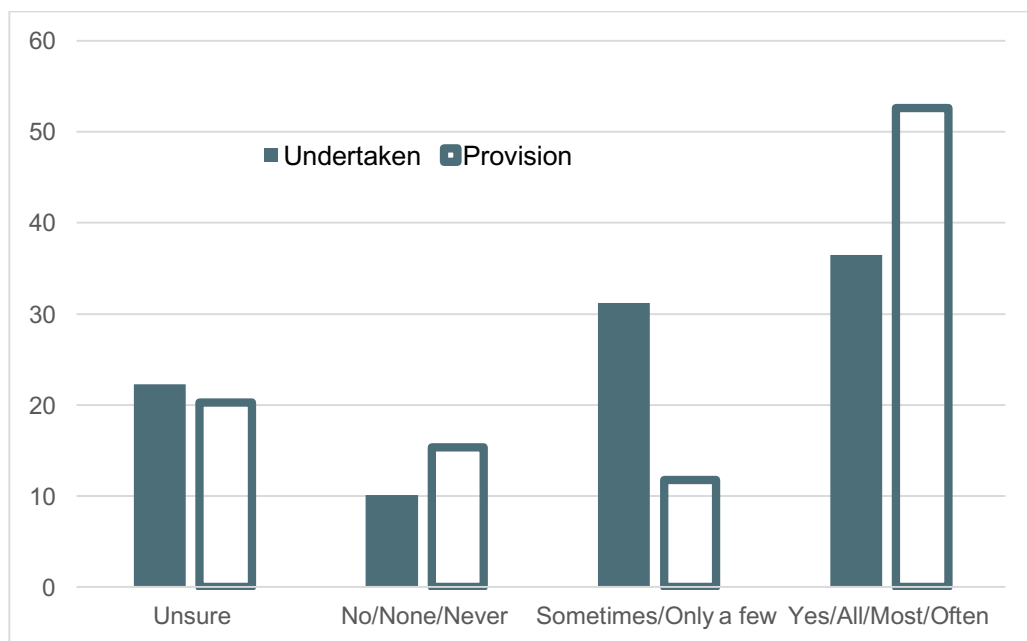
The results from Table 2 suggest that relative to what is going on within the classroom, there is less uncertainty about what is going on within the school or early learning service. The main exception to this is knowledge around the school budget, and to a lesser extent the existence of an advisory board. This uncertainty may be due to the fact that many of the respondents to the ESR won't necessarily be on the school executive.

There is significant variation in the responses to the questions. The majority of schools do not have an existing staff or student led reconciliation-focused group or committee, nor do they have an existing Indigenous advisory group. Once again, the process of commencing a RAP has the potential to help fill this gap, and it will be particularly important to track how responses to this question varies through time. On the other hand, engagement with NAIDOC week and NRW is quite high, with many schools at least occasionally acknowledging country and visiting local sites and events. This is not universal though, and even schools that are 'early adopters' to RAPs have considerable scope for improvement in these areas.

The final set of data on the situation within schools is summarised in Figure 3. This figure gives responses to two questions:

- Q 13. How many of your staff members have undertaken some level of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultural competency, proficiency or awareness training? (Labelled as Undertaken)
- Q 14. Does your school or early learning service make provision (for example, leave and financial reimbursement) for staff to undertake cultural competency, proficiency or awareness training? (Labelled as Provision)

Figure 3 Provision and usage of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultural competency, proficiency or awareness training?



Responses to the above two questions demonstrate a higher level of uncertainty than the other questions on the situation within the school or early learning service. For both of the questions, more than 1 in 5 respondents were unsure. For those schools or early learning services that did have a response, there was a much higher provision of training than there is usage. More than half of the respondents reported that there was provision, whereas only 36.4 per cent reported that all or most of the staff had undertaken the training. If schools or early learning services wish to increase the cultural competency, proficiency or awareness, then it would appear that more support is required.

The final set of results presented in this section looks at interaction between the school or early learning service and the community. Table 3 summarises results to the five questions on this interaction, with the per cent of respondents who are unsure presented first, followed by the four potential substantive responses.

Table 3

Responses to questions on interaction with the community

	Unsure	Never	Sometimes	Often	Always
Q 20. How often does your school or early learning service invite Traditional Owners to perform a Welcome to Country at significant events?	6.9	42.1	38.1	8.1	4.9
Q 21. How often is your school or early learning service involved in activities with your local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community?	13.0	32.8	45.8	6.9	1.6
Q 22. How often are Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander topics items on your Parents and Citizens (or equivalent) meeting agenda?	26.3	37.7	27.5	6.1	2.4
Q 23. How often does your school or early learning service provide information to staff, children, students and parents on local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander histories, cultures and/or events?	15.8	18.2	42.1	15.0	8.9
Q 24. How often does your school or early learning service encourage Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people to apply for teaching and non-teaching positions?	36.3	13.2	13.7	13.2	23.6

Apart from the question on Traditional Owners giving a Welcome to Country, the level of uncertainty for the community variables is quite high. More than one-third of respondents did not know how often the 'school or early learning service specifically encourage[s] Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people to apply for teaching and non-teaching positions'. More than one-quarter of respondents did not know how often 'Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander topics items [are on the] Parents and Citizens (or equivalent) meeting agenda.'

While there is considerable uncertainty around the encouragement of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander applicants to apply for teaching and non-teaching positions (36.3 per cent of respondents were unsure), it is also the question with the highest 'Always' response. Specifically, nearly a quarter of respondents (23.6 per cent) reported that their school or early learning service always specifically encourages such applicants, with a further 13.2 per cent saying that it often did. On the other hand though, only 8.5 per cent of respondents reported that they often or always were involved in activities with the local community. Once again, the demand on the local community needs to be taken into account. However, the response to the survey gives a strong indication that there is much greater scope for this interaction.

Relationship between responses

One of the benefits of a survey like the RS is the relationship between variables. It is one thing to know how many teachers have had cultural competency, proficiency or

awareness training (for example), it is even more powerful to see whether a school or early learning service where a significant proportion of teachers has had diversity training is more or less likely to display the Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander flag. The results presented in this section look at the relationship between six key variables. These variables were chosen so as to be representative of in classroom, around school and with community issues. To make them comparable, they have been converted into a set of binary variables, with a value of one representing the all, most, or often category or categories, and a value of zero representing the unsure, no, or sometimes categories. Full details are given in Table 4, with Table 5 looking at the bivariate correlation between the variables. These correlations are bounded by -1 (as one variable goes up, the other goes down) and +1 (as one variable goes up, the other also goes up). A value of 0 for the correlations means that there is no observed relationship between the variables.

Table 4 Key binary variables

Name	Question	Yes categories	Yes %	No categories
Regularly use	Q 1. How many teachers and educators regularly use Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander teaching and learning resources to assist in teaching?	All, Most	25.6	Only a few, None, Unsure
Knowledgeable	Q 3. How many teachers and educators feel knowledgeable about local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander histories and cultures?	All, Most	13.9	Only a few, None, Unsure
Flag	Q 8. Does your school or early learning service fly or display the Aboriginal and the Torres Strait Islander flags permanently?	Both Aboriginal and Torres Strait flags, Just Aboriginal flag	61.9	No, Unsure
Acknowledge	Q 9. How often does your school or early learning service Acknowledge Country at regular events?	Always, often	29.1	Sometimes, Never, Unsure
Competency	Q 13. How many of your staff members have undertaken some level of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultural competency, proficiency or awareness training?	All, most, yes	38.1	No, None, Only a few, Unsure
Activities	Q 21. How often is your school or early learning service involved in activities with your local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community?	Always, often	11.2	Sometimes, Never, Unsure

Table 5 Correlations between key variables

	Regularly use	Knowledgeable	Flag	Acknowledge	Competency
Knowledgeable	0.2908				
Flag	0.1070	0.2056			
Acknowledge	0.1515	0.1338	0.2854		
Competency	0.1925	0.0983	0.3559	0.2297	
Activities	0.2346	0.3069	0.0764	0.2967	0.0708

The first thing to note from Table 5 is that all correlations are greater than 0. In other words, schools or early learning services that respond yes to one of the questions are no less likely to respond yes to the other questions. There are, however, correlations that have a stronger association than others, and these are highlighted in the table.

Those schools or early learning services that display a flag are much more likely to have teachers that have completed cultural competency, proficiency or awareness training and are more likely to Acknowledge Country at events at the school or early learning service. Those schools and early learning services where teachers feel knowledgeable about local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander histories and cultures are more likely to be involved in activities with the local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community. Knowledge was also associated with the regular use of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander teaching and learning resources to assist in classroom teaching.

The correlations presented in Table 5 do not imply causality. We don't know whether one of the variables is directly influencing the other, or whether the effect runs in the opposite direction. There may also be a third (unobserved) factor that influences them both. However, it is important to recognise that all schools or early learning services in the sample had commenced a RAP. We can assume, therefore, that at least to a certain degree all of the institutions have made a conscious commitment towards reconciliation. The fact that there are large positive relationships between some of the variables (and no negative relationships) gives strong *prima facie* evidence that different aspects of reconciliation are mutually supportive.

Factors associated with responses

In the first report for this project (*Narragunnawali Research Report #1 - Factors associated with developing an action plan*), a set of characteristics were compared against the probability of a school or early learning service having commenced a RAP. In the final section of this paper, I use some of the same characteristics to look at what is associated with the key binary variables summarised in Table 4 and 5. Given the much smaller sample size (222 schools in total that could be matched with the external data), a more parsimonious specification is used.

In order to analyse the factors associated with the survey response, a regression-style analysis is used. Specifically, we consider whether a particular variable is associated or correlated with answering yes to that question whilst holding constant or abstracting from all other variables in the model. For example, we know that Catholic or Independent schools are more likely to be Secondary schools than Infants/Primary schools. In our analysis, we look at whether Catholic or Independent schools are more likely to regularly use Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander resources (for example) than a Government school regardless of whether the school is an Infants/Primary or Secondary one. Similarly, I look at the association between the Indigenous share of the area and having a RAP for a given level of remoteness. This is not quite a causal relationship, as there are other unobserved characteristics that aren't in the model. But it is getting closer to a direct association.

I present the results in Table 6 as marginal effects or the difference in probability of responding yes compared to a school or early learning service with the base case characteristics. The base case characteristics are in essence a school or early learning service with the reference category characteristics from Table 1 in the previously cited paper for the binary variable and mean characteristics for the continuous variables. For example, the base case against which Catholic or Independent schools are compared is a Government school.

The marginal effects for the binary variables are then expressed as the difference between a school or early learning service with that characteristic and a school or early learning service with the base case characteristics whilst holding all else constant. The marginal effects for the continuous variables are expressed as the difference in probability from a one-unit change in that variable.

Following on from the previous example, the probability of a government school reporting all or most teachers and educators feel knowledgeable about local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander histories and cultures was 0.127 (found in the last row of the second column of results). By contrast, an Independent school in the sample with an otherwise identical set of characteristics had a probability of 0.019. The estimated marginal effect (or difference) is therefore estimated to be -0.108. Those variables that are statistically significant at the 10% level at least are marked with a *.

Table 6 Factors associated with key binary variables

Explanatory variables	Regularly use	Knowledgeable	Flag	Acknowledge	Competency	Activities
Catholic school	0.078	0.015	-0.022	-0.083	0.005	-0.098
Independent school	-0.029	-0.108*	-0.087	-0.304*	0.038	-0.118
Early learning centre	-0.012	-0.054	-0.093	-0.052*	-0.082	0.134
Secondary or combined school	-0.147*	0.062	0.146*	0.238*	0.155*	0.248*
Single sex school	-0.095	-0.022	-0.044	-0.206	0.129	-0.119
Boarding school	0.007	0.102	-0.018	0.311	-0.222	0.298
School in regional or remote area	0.018	0.099	-0.031	-0.044	-0.105	-0.040
Per cent of area identified as being Indigenous	-0.001	0.001	0.015	0.001	0.038*	-0.005
Per cent of area born overseas	0.000	0.003	0.003	-0.002	-0.001	-0.004
SEIFA advantage/disadvantage percentile of area	0.000	0.000	-0.003*	-0.002	-0.001	-0.002
Predicted probability for base case	0.335	0.127	0.682	0.393	0.395	0.141

The main finding from the table is that there is no consistency for a given explanatory variable across the various dependent variables. For example, secondary or combined schools had a negative association with using Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander resources, but a large positive association with four of the remaining five variables.

Looking at the other statistically significant variables, teachers in Independent schools were reported to be less likely to be knowledgeable on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander issues (as mentioned earlier). They were also reported to be significantly less likely to Acknowledge Country. These schools may need extra support and/or encouragement to change from this baseline. Schools or early learning services in relatively disadvantaged areas were less likely to display an Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander flag. This may be a resourcing issue. Finally, teachers in schools or early learning services in areas with a high Indigenous usual resident population are more likely to have undertaken cultural competency, proficiency or awareness training. On the one hand, this may reflect the perceived greater need in these areas. On the other hand though it highlights a role for *Narragunnawali* and RA to encourage those schools and early learning services in other areas to support such training (as long as it is from a strong evidence-based provider).

Concluding comments

As mentioned earlier, the aim of this paper is to focus on those schools or early learning services that have commenced a RAP, and analyse the responses to an initial whole-schools and early learning *Reflection Survey* (RS). Whilst this survey is mainly designed to

support schools and early learning services, the analysis presented here has hopefully demonstrated that the survey has significant analytical merit.

The tool is useful for schools and early learning services to compare how they have changed through time, at least for those questions that haven't changed. However, the analysis presented in this paper can also be used by educational institutions to place themselves in context. There were no schools or early learning services that reported the maximum value for all questions. There were also no schools or early learning services that reported the minimum value for all questions. There is therefore scope for all RAPWG members to work with their own staff and community to build on their existing strengths, and identify areas of improvement and potential gain.