Narragunnawali Research Report #8 – First phase evaluation summary report – December 2017

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Contents

Abstract

The aim of this paper is to provide a summary of the main findings from the first phase of an evaluation of *Narragunnawali: Reconciliation in Schools and Early Learning.* The evaluation took place between early 2015 and December 2017, and considered why certain schools and early learning services are participating and others not, as well as for those who are participating, what is the effect of the program on key reconciliation outcomes. The paper summarises the main evaluation findings, broken into four sections: analysis of administrative data; results from school reflection surveys, interviews and other qualitative data; and analysis of external datasets. The penultimate section of the paper outline a set of proposals for a next phase of the evaluation, commencing in early 2018, with the final section providing some brief concluding comments.

Acknowledgements

1 Introduction and overview

1.1 Reconciliation in Australia

Reconciliation is a concept that has very broad support amongst the Indigenous and non-Indigenous population of Australia. Although it is a number of years ago now, many people will still remember taking part in or seeing the images of the Walk for Reconciliation across Sydney Harbour Bridge in 2000. According to the National Museum of Australia[1], 'The Bridge Walk for Reconciliation and similar events that took place around Australia in the weeks following were collectively the biggest demonstration of public support for a cause that has ever taken place in Australia' and 'The march was a public expression of support for meaningful reconciliation between Australia's Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples.'

What we specifically mean by reconciliation, however, is much more complex. The former Prime Minister John Howard famously focused on improvements in socioeconomic status under his (and his government's) definition of Practical Reconciliation (Altman and Hunter 2003). Patrick Dodson, current Senator for the Labor Party in Western Australia highlights the importance of recognising difference and stated in a recent ANU Reconciliation Lecture[2] that 'reconciliation will come when governments stop trying to make us the same as everyone else. When they desist from constantly demanding we conform to every facet of mainstream society that wants to break down or deny who we are, especially with regard to our unique relationship to our land and community.'

Professor Dodson also stated that 'Reconciliation cannot be taken for granted. It is not a feel-good word that can be bandied around lightly, or be co-opted to obscure the need for restorative justice.' This echoes a statement made by ANU researcher Will Sanders (2002) that Reconciliation 'will be a journey without end, that each generation of Indigenous and settler Australians will have to come to their own understanding of the relationship of each to the other, in both its historical and contemporary socio-economic dimensions.

Reconciliation Australia (RA), states that their 'vision of reconciliation is based on five inter-related dimensions: race relations, equality and equity, unity, institutional integrity and historical acceptance'[3]. RA also argues that these dimensions are affected by wider structural and policy processes and that they are inherently inter-related, stating that 'Australia can only achieve full reconciliation if we progress in all five dimensions, weaving them together to become a whole.'

With such a complicated and in many ways disputed concept, it is always going to be a challenge if not an impossible task to design and evaluate a coherent policy response that

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[1] http://www.nma.gov.au/online_features/defining_moments/featured/walk-for-reconciliation
[2] https://reporter.anu.edu.au/road-reconciliation
[3] https://www.reconciliation.org.au/about/

incorporates all of the definitions and components of reconciliation that are held within the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander population, and the rest of Australian society. It is necessary, therefore, to focus on specific aspects or domains of reconciliation. This is the approach that has been taken by RA since its establishment in 2001. RA has supported the development of Workplace Reconciliation Access Plans (RAPs), with 650 organisations across Australia having developed a RAP since 2006. RA has also been heavily involved in supporting and highlighting Indigenous governance, arguing that strong and effective governance in Indigenous organisations will allow for greater ownership and control of the policy development and service delivery process (Garling, Hunt et al. 2013).

A more recent focus of RA has been on the way in which schools and early learning services across Australia can contribute to the reconciliation process. *Narragunnawali: Reconciliation in Schools and Early Learning* is a national program designed and implemented by RA.[4] *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.

1.2 Evaluation and monitoring of Narragunnawali

Since early 2015, the Australian National University has been involved in the evaluation and monitoring of *Narragunnawali.* One of the principles of the evaluation was a genuine collaboration between the project team and RA. In addition to a collaborative approach, four additional principles were followed as part of the methodology. Specifically, the project aimed to:

- Use a mix of qualitative and quantitative data collection and analytical techniques;
- Provide information to Reconciliation Australia at regular intervals in order to ensure lessons learned can be incorporated as the program is developed;
- Collect information where possible from those who are directly involved in *Narragunnawali*; and
- Make use of available data where possible and data collected as part of the program.

The methodological approach was structured around a set of questions. Given the voluntary nature of the program, there are a set of main questions guiding the analysis:

- **Process:**
  - o Why are certain schools and early learning services participating and others not?
  - o For those who are participating, what are the strengths, weaknesses and suggested improvements for the program?

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[4] https://www.reconciliation.org.au/narragunnawali/

- **Outcomes:**
  - For those who are participating, what is the effect of the program on four main outcomes, namely does *Narragunnawali* lead to:
    - A higher level of understanding of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures and heritage?
    - A higher level of pride in our shared national identity?
    - Increased trust between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and the rest of the Australian population?
    - Reduced prejudice experienced by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students and teachers?

1.3 Overview of paper

The aim of this paper is to provide a summary of the main findings from the first phase of the evaluation, commencing in early 2015 and concluding in December 2017. After this introductory section, the next section of the paper will provide a more detailed description of the program. The sections that follow will summarise the main evaluation findings, broken into four sections: analysis of administrative data; results from school reflection surveys, interviews and other qualitative data; and analysis of external datasets. The penultimate section of the paper will outline a set of proposals for a next phase of the evaluation, commencing in early 2018, with the final section providing some brief concluding comments.

2 Program description

2.1 The case for Narragunnawali

Unlike many programs in Indigenous education, the primary agents of change in *Narragunnawali* are not Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students or their families. Rather, the focus is on teachers and early learning service workers, and through them non-Indigenous students. In the short-term, increasing the confidence and ability of teachers and educators to incorporate Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander histories, cultures, perspectives and contemporary issues into curriculum planning and teaching will make for a much richer educational experience for all students. Taking a cost/benefit approach to school attendance (Prout and Biddle 2016), it may also reduce the social costs of school attendance that many Indigenous Australians face, as well as increase the non-monetary benefits of schooling.

We know from data from the Reconciliation Barometer, as well as the National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Social Survey (NATSISS), that a very substantial minority of Indigenous Australians experienced some form of discrimination or unfair treatment over a 6-12 month period (Biddle, Howlett et al. 2013). For example, the most recent Reconciliation Barometer reported that 46 per cent of Indigenous respondents reported that they had experienced at least one form of racial prejudice in the 6 months preceding the survey.

Therefore, most if not all Indigenous Australians are likely to experience some form of discrimination over their lifetime. This might be in the workplace; by policy or in the criminal justice system; at university; or by the general public.

In the longer term, many of the employers, policy officers, university lecturers, etc. that Indigenous Australians will interact with (and are potentially discriminated by) are current non-Indigenous students in schools or early learning services. *Narragunnawali* has the potential to shape and modify the behaviours and attitudes that lead to such discrimination, leading to a safer and more equitable environment for the future Indigenous population.

2.2 Program overview

Consultation identified that *Narragunnawali* would be most effective if targeted at teachers and educators as the key drivers of reconciliation. Reconciliation Australia aims to engage teachers through the Australian Curriculum (cross-curriculum priority of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander histories and cultures) and the Australian Professional Standards for Teachers (Focus area 2.4). It also aims to engage early childhood educators through the Early Years Learning Framework and the Australian Children's Education and Care Quality Authority National Quality Standards. The existing reconciliation framework of developing *relationships*, showing *respect* and seeking mutual *opportunities* will be applied in schools and early learning services through classroom teaching and learning, the school or early learning service's culture and ethos, and the links with local community through *Narragunnawali's* various components. These are outlined below.

2.2.1 Reconciliation Action Plans (RAPs)

Schools and early learning services are provided with a model for action using Reconciliation Australia's existing Reconciliation Framework (*Relationships, Respect, Opportunities*), combined with a whole-school and early learning service planning model that incorporates actions *In the Classroom* (teaching, learning, curriculum), *Around the School or early learning service* (the ethos within the gate) and *With the Community* (The links beyond the gate).

RAPs are not compulsory and participation in *Narragunnawali* is entirely voluntary. They are created through an online tool, (RAP developer). The RAP developer incorporates web-based project management and provides whole-school or early learning service actions that are used to build a RAP. For schools and early learning services, the online tool facilitates the development of plans to communicate with relevant local organisations and communities, and provides a suite of actions to choose from. It allows access to resources including teaching materials and links to relevant bodies and organisations.

2.2.2 Curriculum Resources

With the introduction of the Australian Curriculum, and the Early Years Learning Framework, teachers in schools, and educators in early learning services, are required to engage in

meaningful programming focused on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander histories, cultures and contributions. In response to these professional teaching requirements *Narragunnawali* promotes the use of curriculum resources which are integrated into a suite of specific RAP actions that schools and early learning services can select from within the RAP Developer to facilitate reconciliation.

The goal is to support teachers and educators to better engage with the selected RAP actions, by providing quality teaching and learning resources. These resources work to complement the professional learning strategy, and by association, teachers' and educators' engagement with their school or early learning service RAP.

2.2.3 Professional Learning

Reconciliation Australia is developing *Narragunnawali's* professional learning component. It aims to up-skill teachers and educators already taking the lead on reconciliation in their schools and early learning services, to build confidence in celebrating Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander histories, cultures and contributions. The professional learning component aims to assist teachers in meeting the National Quality Framework (element 6.3.4) and the Australian Professional Standards for Teachers (Focus Area 2.4) which calls on teachers and educators to "understand and respect Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people to promote reconciliation between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians".

RAPs are used as a conduit by which to support educators in engaging in meaningful actions. The first stage for professional learning will focus on providing support for the implementation of RAPs in schools and early learning services.

As part of the *Narragunnawali* community, schools and early learning services will have access to online resources and information that links directly to each action in the RAP developer. Resources for professional learning may include detailed case studies, podcasts/video series with discussion guides, and associated online forums for professional conversations. The aim is to provide teachers and educators with a contextual knowledge and deeper understanding around the actions in their Reconciliation Action Plans, which will better enable teachers to meaningfully promote reconciliation in their school or early learning community.

2.3 *Narragunnawali* 2.0 and other changes

in early April 2017 Reconciliation Australia launched an updated version of the *Narragunnawali* platform.[5] The updated version of the platform included a number of new features compared to the additional platform. This included a greatly expanded set of professional learning and curriculum resources to 'support the development and

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[5] https://www.narragunnawali.org.au/about/news/32/introducing-the-updated-narragunnawali-platform

implementation of reconciliation initiatives in the classroom, around the school or early learning service, and with the community.'

Another substantive change, however, is that it is much easier in the new platform for those outside of a participating school or early learning service to access the resources and networks within the platform. According to the new website 'Anyone—staff, students, parents and community members—can freely access the resources and networks within the platform, regardless of whether your school or early learning service has started a Reconciliation Action Plan (RAP).'

Alongside the launch of the new platform, in 2017 RA has been running the inaugural *Narragunnawali* awards. At the time of writing, six finalists had been selected (three schools and three early learning services) for 'showing exceptional commitment to reconciliation in the classroom, around the school or early learning service, and with the community.'[6]

3 Evaluation findings – Analysis of administrative data

Narragunnawali became available to schools and early learning services in 2014, with a gradual uptake from a small number schools and early learning services. Analysis for this project commenced in September 2015 at which time there were 357 schools and early learning services that were recorded as having engaged with a RAP. On April 6th 2017, an updated version of the online platform for *Narragunnawali* was launched (Version 2.0). At that stage there were 1,230 schools and early learning services engaged, whereas by the 7th November when data for this paper was made available, this had increased to 1,825 schools and early learning services (see Figure 1).

This is a very dramatic increase in engagement with RAPs and highlights the high level of support for *Narragunnawali* and reconciliation in general amongst Australian schools and early learning services.

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[6] https://www.narragunnawali.org.au/awards

**Figure 1   Number of schools and early learning services engaged with a RAP –
September 2015 to September 2017**
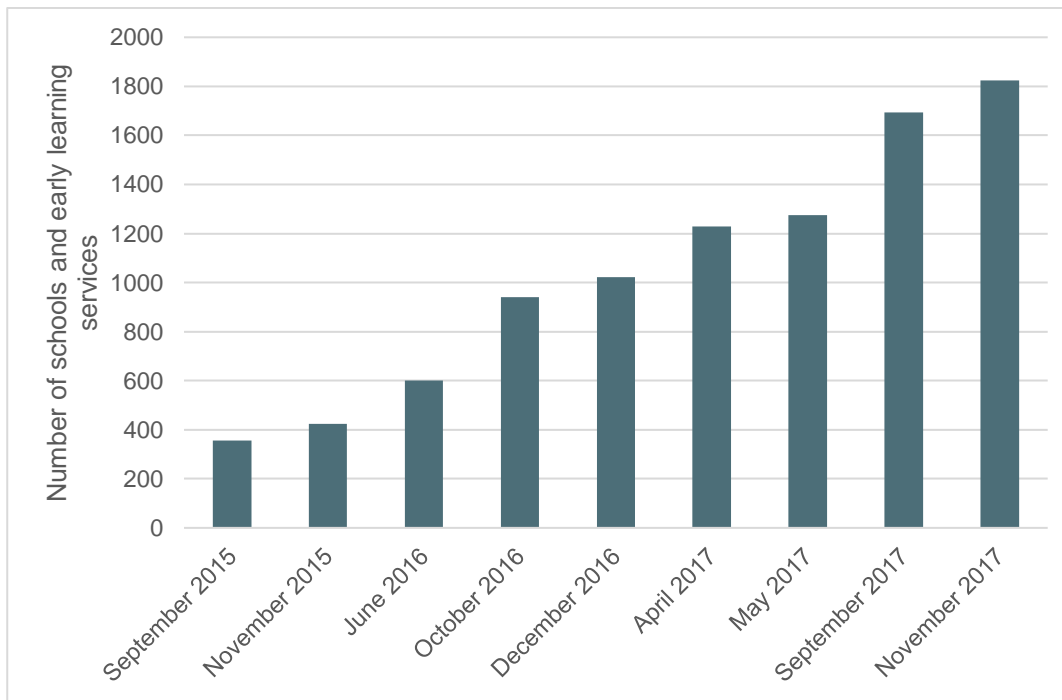
While there is a diversity of schools and early services that have engaged with a RAP since the commencement of the program, participation is not evenly distributed across all types of education institutions and areas in Australia. Using a regression-style analysis, the evaluation team has modelled whether a particular variable is associated or correlated with having a RAP 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 have a RAP than a Government school regardless of whether the school is an Infants/Primary or Secondary one. Similarly, we 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.

The factors associated with participation did not change markedly over the course of the evaluation. We found higher rates of participation amongst: Catholic schools (as opposed to Government Schools); Child care Centres (as opposed to preschools)[7]; Single sex schools; Boarding Schools; those in relatively advantaged areas; and schools and early

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[7] There is some uncertainty around the difference between a preschool and a child care centre, with the distinction often hard to make at an individual early learning service. In general, preschools have a greater focus on the delivery of early learning curricula and tend to deliver services to children in the year or two before full-time schooling. Child care centres tend to provide services to a greater age range of students, over a greater number of hours per day. It should be noted, however, that many child care centres deliver preschool programs for older age children.

learning services in South Australia, the ACT, and Queensland (compared to NSW, Victoria, Tasmania and the NT). There were lower rates of participation amongst special schools; those in outer regional and remote Australia (compared to major cities or inner regional areas); and Western Australia.

One very notable exception in terms of the stability of the explanatory variables is the per cent of the area that identifies as being Indigenous. Between November 2015 and April 2017, the association with this variable was consistently significant (and positive). Schools where the surrounding area had a high Indigenous percentage were more likely to have engaged with *Narragunnawali*. The initial interpretation for this was that schools with a relatively high proportion of students who were Indigenous may have seem the program as being of more relevance to them. More recently, however, the size of the coefficient dramatically reduced, and it is no longer statistically significant, implying that this assumption may no longer be holding.

The fact that the Indigenous status of the area in which the school is located did not have a positive association with participation is a very positive finding. As mentioned in the introductory sections of this paper, it is very important that the focus of Reconciliation programs (especially *Narragunnawali*) is not assumed to be Indigenous students only. It would appear that the efforts of Reconciliation Australia to encourage a diversity of schools and to focus on the role played by non-Indigenous students in the Reconciliation process is having benefits.

4 Evaluation findings – Results from the school reflection surveys

One action as part of participation in a Reconciliation Action Plan is completing and reflecting on a *whole-school or early learning Service Reflection Survey* (RS). There have been two versions of the survey throughout the early life of Narragunnawali, both designed by Reconciliation Australia with assistance from the ANU. The focus of the RS is to assist RAP Working Groups[8] (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, around the school and with the community, with the most recent version of the

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[8] 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

survey having 23 questions in total. While the survey was designed as a tool for schools and early learning services, it still has significant analytical use.

A number of key findings emerged from the initial analysis of the RS (in May 2016). 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. This is particularly the case for what is happening within the classroom. 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 were 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 were 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 from the initial analysis was that there are other characteristics that predict reconciliation activities and outcomes. Teachers in Independent schools were reported to be less likely to be knowledgeable on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander issues. They were also reported to be significantly less likely to Acknowledge Country. 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 were more likely to have undertaken cultural competency, proficiency or awareness training These initial findings pointed to areas of existing strength, as well as where things can be built on.

For this final report, we analysed responses to the latest wave of the RS. These were conducted between the 6th of April and the 2nd of October, 2017. In total, there were 447 responses to the survey, of which 329 were from an Early Learning Service, 106 from a School, 4 from a Cluster of schools or early learning services, and the remaining 8 for which the type of school or early learning service is unknown. We can use this data first as a cross-section of a self selected set of schools currently engaging with *Narragunnawali*. The data shows a very high rate of support for the principles of *Narragunnawali*, with ongoing uncertainty amongst the RAPWGs.

Two very important questions in the survey with regards to teacher confidence are Question 2 related to incorporation of Indigenous histories, cultures and perspectives and Question 12 on discussion of Indigenous issues during staff meetings.[9] For the first of these questions,

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[9] The specific wording for Question 2 is 'How many teachers and educators regularly and confidently incorporate Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander histories, cultures, perspectives and contemporary issues into curriculum planning and teaching?' whereas

the majority of respondents (56.1 per cent) report that in their school or early learning service around 50% or more of their teachers and educators 'regularly and confidently incorporate Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander histories, cultures, perspectives and contemporary issues'. Furthermore, around four-fifths of respondents (79.7 per cent) report that 'Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander histories, cultures and perspectives discussed at staff meetings' at least some of the time.

Given the effect of racism on school and later life outcomes, there is likely to be considerable interest in one of the new questions on the survey that asks – 'Does your school or early learning service have an anti-racism strategy?' It is encouraging that 54.0 per cent of respondents answered that their school or early learning service did have such a strategy. What is somewhat problematic, however, is that 28.2 per cent of respondents were unsure and unable to answer the question. One might assume that an anti-racism strategy is only of use if the majority of teachers and educators are aware of it, so the fact that there is so much uncertainty, even amongst this self-selected group is cause for concern.

While there is considerable knowledge of and confidence in incorporating Indigenous issues within the school, only around a quarter of respondents (25.3 per cent) reported that in the last year 50% or more of teachers and educators 'collaborated with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people to prepare and deliver lessons' and around the same proportion (26.8 per cent) reported that in the last year 'Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community members, businesses or organisations [were] invited to be involved in activities at your school or early learning service' often (3-4 times) or Regularly (5 times or more). *Narragunnawali* has the potential to do much more in facilitating interaction with the community.

As the name suggests the RS is useful for schools and early learning services to reflect on what they are doing well, what they are doing less well, and where there is uncertainty. It is also useful, however, to measure change through time. Specifically, there were 264 schools and early learning services for which we had information on the results from their RS prior to the *Narragunnawali 2.0* refresh, as well as data from the most recent version. By comparing the results across those two waves, it is possible to obtain some information on how comparable outcomes are changing through time. While question ordering matters, as does the exact wording of questions (Groves, Fowler Jr et al. 2011), there are thirteen questions for which it is possible to compare change through time.

A very positive finding from the analysis of this linked-through-time data is that there are very few schools or early learning services that have moved backwards in the key outcome measures. For example, of the 151 schools or early learning services that reported that they were flying the Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander flag when they first filled in the RS,

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the specific wording for Question 12 is 'How often in the last term (approximately 10 weeks) were Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander histories, cultures and perspectives discussed at staff meetings?'

only 11.2 per cent did not report that they were in the second wave. One might hope this percentage would be zero, but around one-in-ten schools is a relatively small share, given the quite large percentage that don't fly the flag across the total school and early learning service disadvantage.

More importantly, in addition to few schools and early services falling backwards, there were a very large per cent of schools and early learning services that changed from not undertaking a particular activity or being unsure in the first round of the survey to undertaking it (at least some of the time) in the second wave. Some of these changes were quite substantial.

In the linked sample, there were 129 schools or early services that reported that none of their 'teachers and educators regularly collaborate with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in preparing and delivering lessons' or who were unsure the first time they filled in the RS. By the second wave (post April 6th), however, only 32.6 per cent of respondents answered none or unsure to the corresponding questions.

Similarly, there were 79 schools or early learning services that reported in the first wave of the survey that none of their staff 'have undertaken some level of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultural competency, proficiency or awareness training' or that they were unsure of how many. Of those, 64.6 per cent reported that at least some of their staff had done so in the subsequent wave.

A final important and very dramatic change through time relates to acknowledgement of country. There were 97 schools or early learning services in the longitudinal sample that in the first wave reported that they 'never Acknowledge Country at regular events' or who were unsure. Of these, only five gave a similarly negative answer in the second wave of data collection.

It is not possible to attribute causality to these findings. There are other changes within education and Australian society broadly that may be increasing collaboration with peoples, participation in cultural competency/proficiency/awareness training, and acknowledgement of country. However, the fact that such a high proportion of schools and early learning services within the program were becoming more likely to undertake such practices is very strong *prima facie* evidence for the effectiveness of the program in these domains.

While not as dramatic, there were also positive change in *Narragunnawali* schools in terms of awareness of the relevant parts of the Australian curriculum; provision for reconciliation initiatives; discussion at staff meetings; welcomes to country; participation in National Reconciliation Week/NAIDOC week activities; and the use of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander advisory groups. Putting this another way, there is very strong evidence that those schools that continue to engage with *Narragunnawali* increase the types of activities that the program is trying to support.

5 Evaluation findings – Interviews and other qualitative findings

While a large focus of the evaluation has been making use of existing administrative and other data, there was also a small amount of primary data collection already undertaken for the project. This included interviews with five schools and early learning services, as well as a Baseline Reconciliation in Schools and Early Learning Services Survey (Baseline RISELSS).

The demography of the survey responses to the Baseline RISELSS reflect (for the most part) the distribution of those working in schools and early learning services. Most people agreed or strongly agreed with statements about Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and cultures, including that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people hold a unique place as the First Australians (93.9), Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures are important to Australia's identity as a nation (93.9 per cent) and I feel proud of our Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures (89.0 per cent).

While a very large percentage (82.9 per cent) either agreed or strongly agreed that 'Racial discrimination towards Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people is a problem in Australia', only 13.4 per cent agreed or strongly agreed that 'Racial discrimination towards Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people is a problem in my school or early learning service'. There was a fairly high self-reported level of knowledge about the 'History of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in Australia' and 'Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures.' Interestingly, there wasn't that much difference in confidence in teaching about these two topics compared to knowledge, with responses of 61.7 per cent and 53.1 per cent respectively.

One of the main findings from the qualitative interviews is that the process and outcomes from participation in Narragunnawali are unique to each school and early learning service. However, across the case studies (and the interviews with educational institutions) there was a generally and genuinely positive view towards Narragunnawali and RAPs. It was felt that they either provided a framework to embed and expand on existing activities, or as an impetus to undertake activities that had been seen as important, but for which those involved in the school or early learning service did not know how to get started. There was also a sense of making activities that were infrequent or irregular a more integral part of the school or early learning service.

There were, however, a number of barriers to a more successful engagement with Narragunnawali that were identified as part of the interviews. The most common of these were no knowledge of Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander families that were attending the school or ELS; difficulty in bringing together a committee with staff buy-in needed; personal beliefs of individual staff members, with some seeing RAPs as 'another thing' they have to do; not knowing how they can embed Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures and

histories throughout the curriculum, and a repeated fear of getting it wrong, or not doing it respectfully; and a lack of time to develop the RAP.

In addition to this primary data collection, the evaluation team undertook an analysis of the vision statements that were provided as part of the development of RAPs. One of the actions within Narragunnawali is for the RAPWGs to draft a Vision for Reconciliation statement. At the time the analysis was undertaken, we had Vision Statements for 633 schools and early learning services, which contained a total of around 64,500 words. Not surprisingly, the most commonly used words in the Vision Statements were Aboriginal, Torres Strait Islander, and Reconciliation. Other common words that were identified were more instructive. This includes community/communities (595 times), people (450), children (436), culture (403) and respect (322). Perhaps what is most interesting is that the verb with the most common response is 'will' (appearing 363 times) and 'can' (156 times), indicating a strong confidence in the ability of the school or early learning service to achieve its aims.

Despite these common themes, the Vision statements were heterogeneous in terms of length, structure, and content (themes, specificity, etc.). We undertook detailed analysis using a subset of statements (randomly identified from the complete population) to identify themes and variation. Within this subset, there were a number of themes that occurred frequently, others that occurred sometimes, and some themes that did not occur as much as we might expect.

Some of the themes that occurred frequently were: Respect and recognition; Partnerships and relationships; and Learning about Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander histories and cultures. An example quote that captures this is:

> *"Our vision for Reconciliation is built on striving for a culture of respect, friendship and trust. We aim to achieve this by encouraging students and staff to actively embrace diversity. We recognise the special place and culture of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples within Australia."*

Those themes that occurred less frequently, but that were nonetheless quite important are: Definitions/conceptualisations of reconciliation; References to past and present injustices/harm; Acknowledgement of Country, Traditional Owners/Custodians; Diversity and multiculturalism; and Broad commitments to action. An example quote that captures the commitment to Diversity and Multiculturalism is:

> *"Our school vision for reconciliation is to create a school that nurtures and strengthens students, where diversity is acknowledged and students are encouraged to be the best they can be."*

With regards to broad commitments to action, one of the Vision Statements stated that:

> *"We at <school or early learning service> plan on embarking on a journey to embed an Aboriginal perspective into our Early Childhood curriculum"*

The final categories that the analysis identified as rarely appearing in the Vision Statements are Concrete actions to implement the RAP; and Review processes. That is not to say that there weren't schools and early services that included these concepts in their Vision Statements. For example, one institution stated that:

> *"Every Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander student at <school or early learning service> is being supported to match or better the outcomes of their fellow students, demonstrated through data and evaluations of effective personalised learning programs that use best practice in literacy, numeracy and other critical aspects of learning."*

Another stated that:

> "This RAP will be attached to and implemented alongside the weekly planning to eventually form part of our Quality Improvement Plan."

In general though, the use of such specific statements was rare. It may be that schools and early services feel that Vision Statements aren't the appropriate avenue to articulate specific actions or how progress will be assessed. It is also true that the RAP itself documents a number of specific actions that the school or early learning service signs up to. However, the power of the Vision Statements is that they are one aspect of *Narragunnawali* that allows individual schools and early learning services to use their own words and individual circumstances to articulate what is unique about their institution. it is worth considering whether there are other avenues that might allow for such expression.

6 Evaluation findings – Analysis of external datasets

As was made very clear at the start of this paper, Indigenous students aren't the sole, or even the main focus of *Narragunnawali*. It is true that there is an expectation that Indigenous students would benefit substantially from a curriculum that incorporates Indigenous knowledge and content; that increased trust and reduced prejudice and discrimination are vital to Indigenous students feeling comfortable attending school and seeing it as being of benefit; and that as future adult citizens of Australia, current Indigenous students will benefit in the workforce and in accessing services from a program like *Narragunnawali* if it proves to be successful. However, many of these benefits are leveraged through the peers and educators of Indigenous students.

It is possible to obtain some information on this through a dataset that ostensibly has very little to do with *Narragunnawali* – the *Longitudinal Study of Indigenous Children* (LSIC), also known as *Footprints in Time.* LSIC commenced in 2008 and data is collected annually from approximately 1,500 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and their families.

Primarily quantitative data is collected about:

- the children—their physical and mental health, how they develop socially and cognitively, their place in their family and community, and significant events in their life;
- the children's families and households—their health, work, lifestyle, and family and community connectedness;
- the children's communities—facilities, services, and social and community issues; and
- services—child care, education, health and other services used by the child's family.

LSIC has two cohorts: B, who were 6 months to 2 years old at Wave 1, and K, who were 3.5 – 5 years old in Wave 1. The 11 sites used in the study were selected to cover the range of socioeconomic and community environments where Australian Indigenous children live, so is not nationally representative.

For late waves of data (including that used in this paper), interviews are carried out with three main subjects:

- Primary carer—the parent or carer who knows the study child best. In most cases this is the child's biological mother. Research Administration Officers (RAOs) undertake an extensive interview with the primary carer of every study child, asking questions about the study child, the primary carer and the household. It is a face-to-face interview.
- Study child—the main focus of the study. Data is collected through direct assessments such as vocabulary assessments, practical exercises (Who am I, the

Progressive Achievement Test-Reading and the Matrix Reasoning Test) and child height and weight. The children also answer face-to-face interview questions.

- Teachers and child care workers—complete written or online questionnaires that include their observations of the study children.

The fieldwork is conducted by Department of Social Services Research Administration Officers (RAOs) who are all Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islanders. Ideally, participants are interviewed at 12-month intervals.[10]

Release 8.0 is the latest publicly released version of the LSIC data available, and the one that is used for this report. Interviews were carried out in 2015, and the survey contains information on 756 children from the B cohort, and 499 children from the K cohort. The average age for children in the B cohort at the time of interview was roughly 8 years and 1 month, whereas the average age for the K cohort at the time of interview was almost exactly 11 years.

The main question of relevance for this project was asked of 414 responding teachers across both cohorts. Amongst a set of other questions, teachers were asked whether the school had a Reconciliation Action Plan (dsv8_12), with possible responses of [1] Currently doing; [2] Working on; and [3] Not doing. There was also an option for Don't know. The proportion of respondents in each of these categories is summarized in Figure 2 below.

Figure 2   Responses to presence of RAP from the LSIC
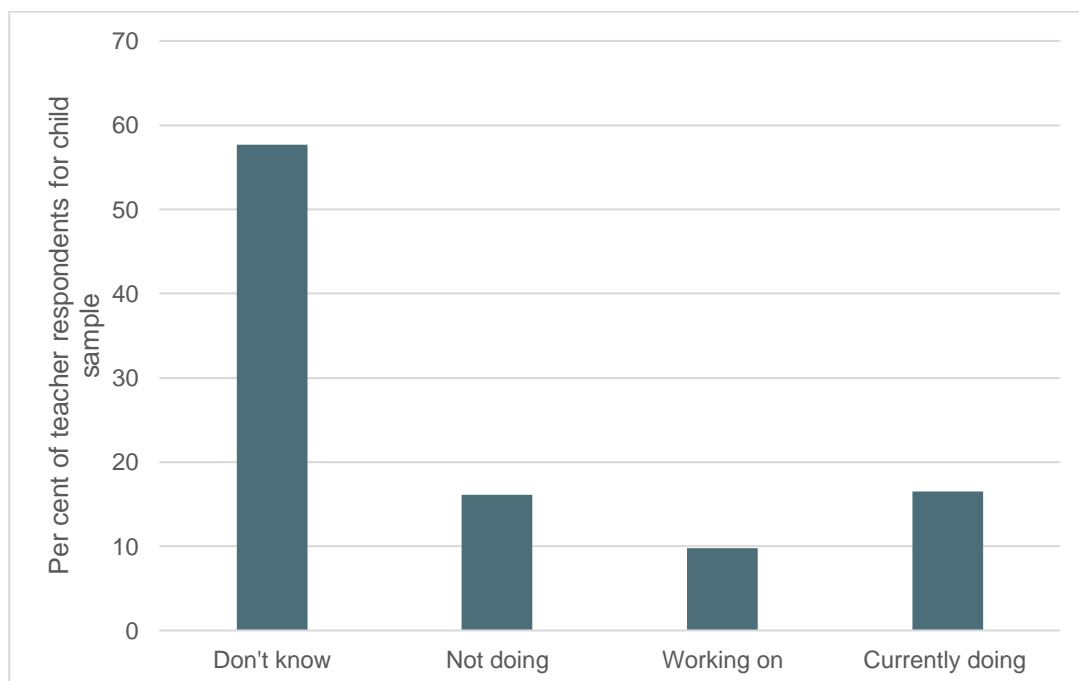
Results from the LSIC show that the vast majority of teachers of Indigenous children (who were in the LSIC sample) in 2015 did not know whether their school had a RAP (57.6 per


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https://www.dss.gov.au/sites/default/files/documents/08_2014/footprints_in_time_wave4.pdf

cent). Of those that did know, there was a higher percentage of teachers who were either Working on/Currently doing a RAP (26.3 per cent) compared to those who were 'Not doing' (16.1 per cent). While it should be kept in mind that this data comes from 2015 when *Narragunnawali* was at a much earlier stage with less publicity and fewer resources available, the results from the LSIC do nonetheless show that there is a large degree of uncertainty amongst teachers within the schools of mid-late primary school students. If these patterns continue for later waves of the LSIC, then it would be worth considering bolstering the extent to which *Narragunnawali* provides resources, practices and advice for dissemination of knowledge within schools.

When discussing the school reflection survey, it was noted that there was significant variation in the types of activities that were being conducted within the schools and early learning services that had a RAP. By definition, this tells us very little about the extent to which those activities vary between those with and without a RAP. Figure 3 provides a partial answer to that question, keeping in mind that we are conditioning on the sample of teachers of students from within the LSIC. Coding the responses to a range of questions on Indigenous-specific activities in the classroom to Yes (Working on/Doing) and No (Don't know/Not doing), the figure gives the proportion of 'Yes' responses by whether or not the school has a RAP (coded in a similar way to the above).

Figure 3   Indigenous education aspects of school by whether or not the school has a RAP
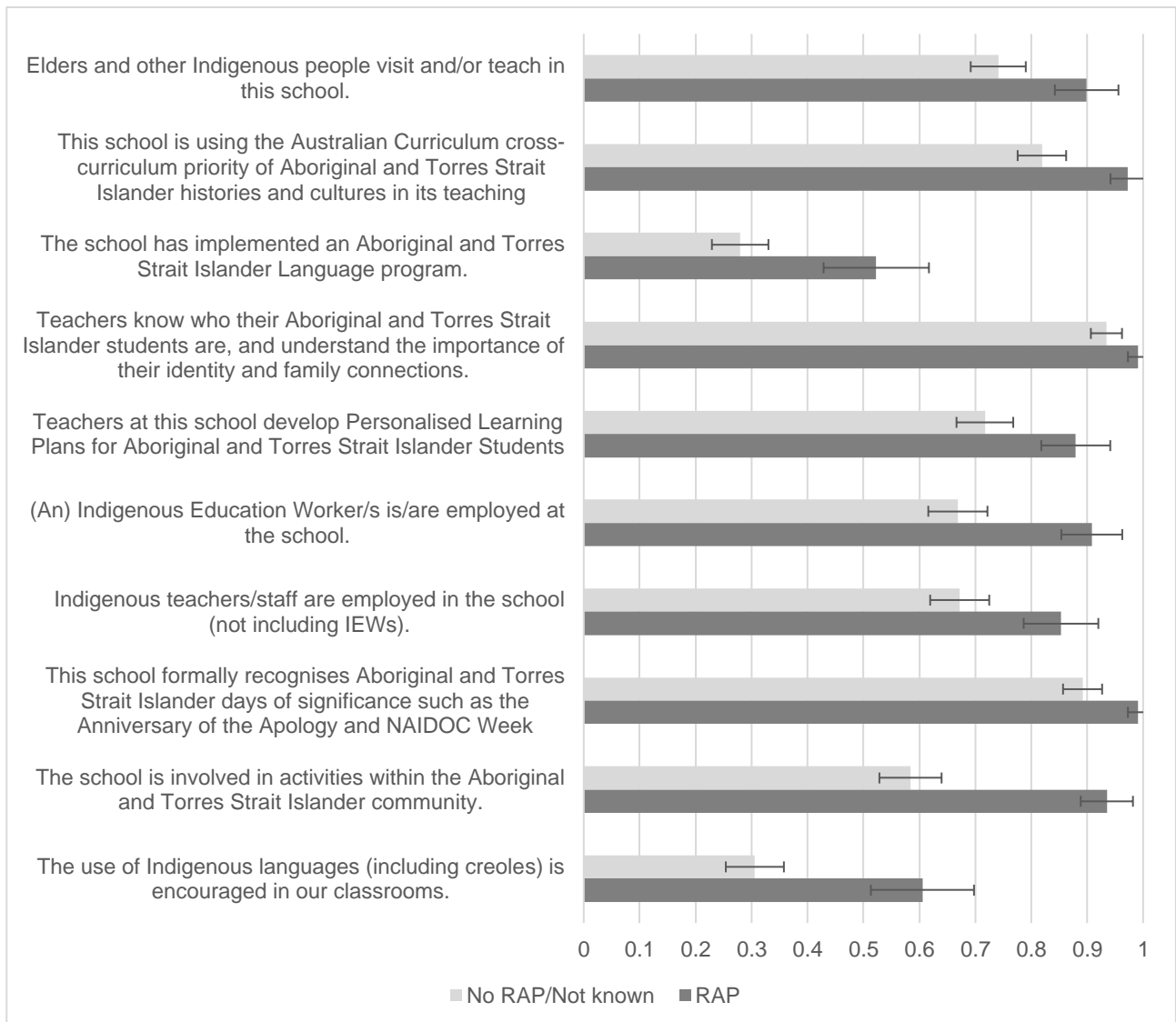

It is very important not to assume causality from the cross-sectional LSIC results. While it might be the case that the presence of a RAP has a direct effect on the above outcomes, it is also possible that the causality runs in the opposite direction. Nonetheless, the results presented in Figure 3 give very strong evidence that those schools with a RAP are much more active in other aspects of Indigenous education. There are none of the outcome variables for which the 'whiskers' around the estimates overlap, meaning that all of the differences are statistically significant. Furthermore, many of the differences are qualitatively very large. For example, schools with a RAP (or who are working on one) are much more likely to be involved in activities within the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Community than those without (including those who don't know). There is also a very large difference in encouraging the use of Indigenous languages, having an Indigenous Education Worker, and implementing an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Language program.

While there is very strong evidence from the LSIC that participation in a RAP is positively correlated with a number of initiatives that are likely to benefit Indigenous children, there is

very little evidence that *Narragunnawali* is having that impact yet. When parents were asked whether their child was bullied at school because they were Indigenous or whether the child looked forward to go to school each day, there was very little difference between those in a school with and without a RAP. There is some weak evidence that the proportion of Indigenous children who do not want to go to school on a given day is lower for those in a school with a RAP than those without. Specifically, 22.3 per cent of parents in non-RAP schools reported that their child did not want to go at least some of the time, compared to 16.8 per cent in RAP schools. While this difference is not statistically significant (the p-value is 0.11), it does give some support for RAP schools being a more welcoming environment for Indigenous students.

Figure 4 gives the proportion of students in the K cohort who responded 'Yes, always' to a series of questions about the class and the school. Unlike in Figure 3, there were no outcomes for which those children whose teacher responded that there is a RAP in the school had a higher probability than those whose teachers did not. This may be because the sample sizes are relatively small (between 158 and 169 students answered the questions). Nonetheless the results suggest that it will take some time before the presence of a RAP in the school will impact on the outcomes of students.

Figure 4   Student views on school by whether or not the school has a RAP
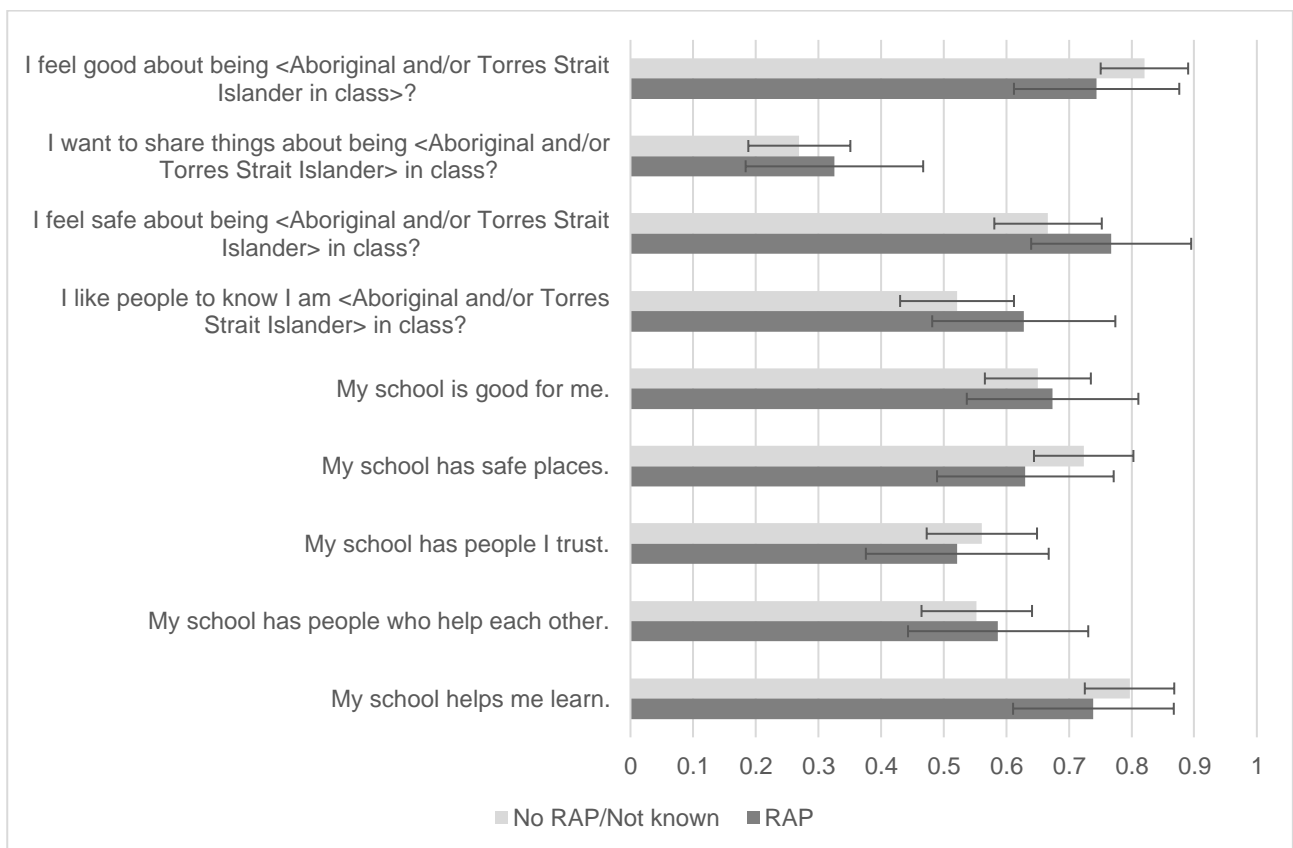
While the effect of *Narragunnawali* on Indigenous child outcomes is likely to take some time, the effect on teacher outcomes is likely to be more immediate and direct. Keeping in mind again the difficulty in making causal inference about a program that is not part of a

randomized trial, the results presented in Figure 5 give some evidence that teachers in schools with a RAP are much more likely to have had 'cultural experiences' than those schools without a RAP. Teachers are asked to 'Please indicate the number of times (including 0 times) in the last 6 months' that they have had a set of experiences, with Figure 5 giving the averages for the teachers in the Rap and No Rap schools.

Figure 5   Teacher experiences by whether or not the school has a RAP
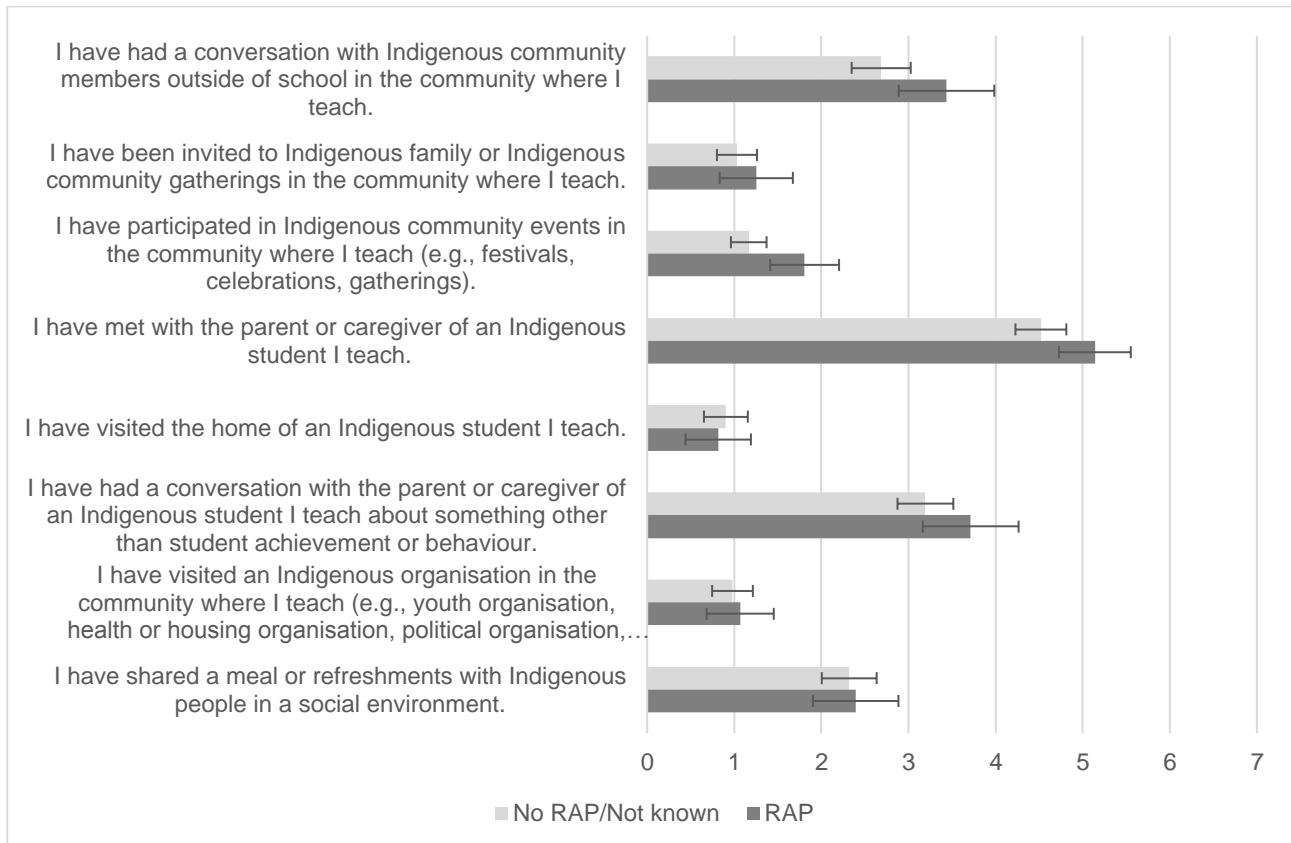
Given the small sample sizes, the averages in Figure 5 are estimated with a fair degree of imprecision. Nonetheless, there is a significant difference in the average number of times teachers have participated in Indigenous community events in the community where I teach at the 5% level of significance, and a significant difference at the 10% level of significance for two additional variables (I have had a conversation with Indigenous community members outside of school in the community where I teach; and I have met with the parent or caregiver of an Indigenous student I teach). Furthermore, there are no variables where those teachers in a non-RAP school have a higher value that is close to being statistically significant.

On balance, the LSIC is a useful dataset that has information on schools that do **and** do not have a RAP. The data shows that there are large differences in activities for those schools with a RAP, and those teachers in those schools are for the most part more likely to engage in positive activities within the community. There is, however, still significant uncertainty around the presence of RAPs within the schools, and there is no evidence yet that having a RAP is correlated with student outcomes. These last two areas should be monitored and

evaluated as the program matures and as schools begin to have had RAPs for much longer periods of time than was the case in 2015.

7 The next phase of the evaluation

7.1 Updated aims and objectives

The evaluation of *Narragunnawali* summarized in this paper has focused on a number of important aspects of a program that is in its infancy. We have focused on growth in the program and whether particular schools or early learning services are more or less likely to engage in the program, and how that is changing through time. We have also looked at the extent to which progression through the stages of a RAP are occurring, and whether certain schools or early learning services progress at faster or slower rates than others.

Based on the principle of making use of as much existing data as possible, we have looked at how the RAPWGs feel about the activities that are happening in schools (and how that changes through time), the content of Vision Statements, and what external datasets like the LSIC can tell us about the outcomes of teachers of Indigenous children, as well as the children themselves. Finally, we have collected a limited and targeted amount of primary data to supplement the existing datasets. As the program continues, this style of analysis and these questions will continue to be important. However, as *Narragunnawali* matures as a program, it will be important to expand the range of questions asked, and the range of data analysed.

A subsequent phase of evaluation will need to take into account the changing focus of *Narragunnawali* itself. In the 2017-2022 Project Proposal prepared by Reconciliation Australia, it was proposed that there be a continuation of existing – as well as the introduction of additional – program components. These were summarized as follows:

- Reconciliation Action Plans (RAPs) – plans for whole school change, facilitated through a powerful online platform;
- Professional Learning – teacher-led resources, webinars and presentations at existing face-to-face conferences;
- Curriculum Resources – lessons and units of work, aligned to existing school and early learning frameworks;
- National Awards – recognising and celebrating excellence and innovation in reconciliation actions;
- Evaluation and Research – independent program evaluation to inform efficacy as well as to ensure sustainability;
- Communications and Marketing – wide promotion of program and dissemination of policy positions and messages of societal change;
- Initial Teacher Education – within their degrees, teachers and educators learn about reconciliation;
- RAPs in education jurisdictions – Government, Catholic and Independent school sectors formally committed to reconciliation;
- Increase data capture –attitudinal surveys from teachers and educators, students and children, parents and carers as well as community representatives; and
- Annual symposiums – reconciliation-themed and centred around change in early learning, primary and secondary schools.

This updated proposal was designed to support a revised set of aims and objectives. According to Reconciliation Australia, the aim of *Narragunnawali* is 'for Australian schools and early learning services to foster a higher level of knowledge and pride in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander histories, cultures and contributions'. To support this aim, the stated objectives are to:

- Support schools and early learning services to:
  - o develop and/or strengthen links with local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities (Outcome 1.0)
  - o to engage in meaningful, symbolic and practical actions of reconciliation (Outcome 2.0)
- Empower and support teachers and educators to:
  - o develop their own awareness of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander histories and cultures (Outcome 3.0)
  - o be confident and competent to support reconciliation in their schools and classrooms and with their students and their students' families (Outcome 4.0).

These objectives are underpinned by:

- o Monitoring and Evaluation (Outcome 5.0)
- o Communications and Policy (Outcome 6.0).

The aim and objectives are also supported by the five dimensions of reconciliation identified in The State of Reconciliation in Australia report (2016)[11], all of which are summarised in Figure 6 below.

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[11] The State of Reconciliation in Australia: Our history, our story, our future (2016) https://www.reconciliation.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2016/02/The-State-of-Reconciliation-report_FULL_WR.pdf

Figure 6   *Narragunnawali* **outputs, outcomes, areas of action and vision**
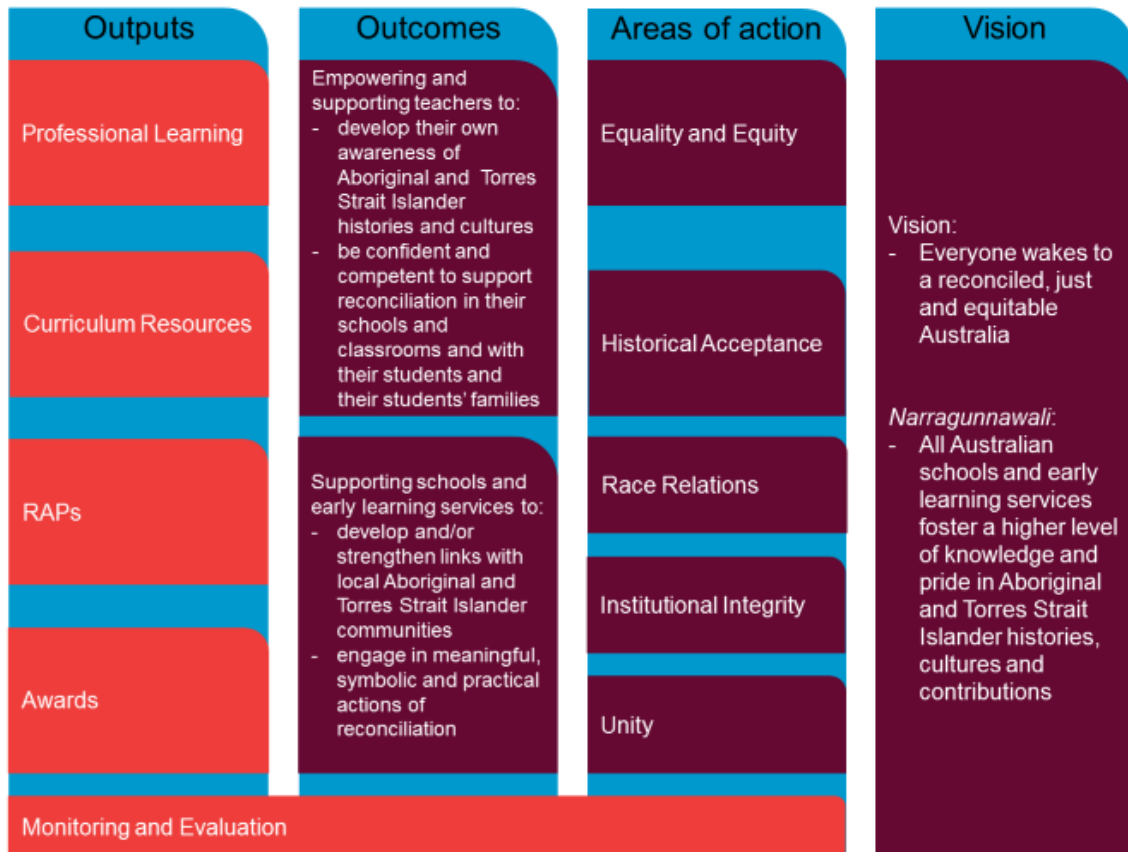
7.2 Evaluation questions

In order to support these aims and objectives, it is proposed that an updated set of evaluation and monitoring questions be identified and pursued. A preliminary set of questions around 7 themes or areas are outlined below:

1. Growth, uptake and usage
   a. To what extent are new schools and early learning services engaging with *Narragunnawali*?
   b. Are existing schools and early learning services continuing to engage after the initial implementation of a RAP?
   c. What is the depth of engagement of schools and early learning services?
   d. How does the above vary by the type of school and early learning service?
2. Information sharing and within-institution knowledge
   a. Can participation in *Narragunnwali* increase the level of knowledge within schools and early learning services about the types of activities being undertaken?
   b. Can participation in *Narragunnwali* increase the level of knowledge within schools and early learning services about the experience of students and teachers?

    c. Can participation in *Narragunnwali* increase the level of knowledge within schools and early learning services about the attitudes and behaviours of students and teachers?

3. Effectiveness of resources
    a. Which resources and what type of resources within *Narragunnawali* are being utilized and engaged with?
    b. What is the effect of specific 'exemplar' resources on the attitudes and behaviours of those that view them?
    c. Are there gaps in the availability of resources that could be filled by new resources developed for, or acquired by Reconciliation Australia?

4. Teacher knowledge and confidence
    a. Does participation in *Narragunnawali* impact on the attitudes of educators within schools and early learning services?
    b. Does participation in in *Narragunnawali* impact on the level of confidence of educators within schools and early learning services?
    c. Does participation in *Narragunnawali* impact on the teaching methods used by educators within schools and early learning services?

5. Community interaction and engagement
    a. What is the level of knowledge of parents/carers about *Narragunnawali* and its components?
    b. What is the usage of components of *Narragunnawali* by parents/carers?
    c. What is the attitude of parents/carers towards *Narragunnawali*?
    d. What is the level of knowledge of Indigenous community members about *Narragunnawali* and its components?
    e. What is the usage of components of *Narragunnawali* by Indigenous community members?
    f. What is the attitude of Indigenous community members towards *Narragunnawali*?
    g. What is the level of knowledge of other community members about *Narragunnawali* and its components?
    h. What is the usage of components of *Narragunnawali* by other community members?
    i. What is the attitude other community members towards *Narragunnawali*?

6. Student experience
    a. What is the level of knowledge of Indigenous/non-Indigenous students about *Narragunnawali* and its components?
    b. What is the attitude of Indigenous/non-Indigenous students towards *Narragunnawali*?
    c. What is the effect of Narragunnawali on Indigenous/non-Indigenous whilst they are in schools or early learning services?

d. What is the effect of Narragunnawali on Indigenous/non-Indigenous after they have left schools or early learning services?

7. Expansion of *Narragunnawali*
    a. To what extent has *Narragunnawali* and workplace RAPs been able to embed themselves into university or vocational education and training, with a particular focus on teacher and early childhood worker education?
    b. To what extent has *Narragunnawali* and workplace RAPs been able to embed themselves into education jurisdictions?

7.3 Evaluation methodology

Once the evaluation questions for a future phase of the evaluation have been finalized, it will be necessary to design a revised evaluation methodology. This methodology is likely to follow an updated set of principles from the first evaluation, with the following seven principles proposed:

1. A collaborative approach with regular engagement between the evaluation team, Reconciliation Australia and additional statkeholders
2. Use a mix of qualitative, observational and experimental data collection and analytical techniques;
3. Provide information to Reconciliation Australia at regular intervals in order to ensure lessons learned can be incorporated as the program is developed;
4. Present findings to the public in accessible documents, and engage with policy makers and practitioners outside of Reconciliation Australia;
5. Publish findings from the evaluation in relevant academic journals, ensuring rigour and peer review;
6. Collect information where possible from those who are directly involved in *Narragunnawali*; and
7. Make use of available data where possible and data collected as part of the program.

The methodological approaches that have been used in Phase 1 of the evaluation are likely to be continued into Phase 2. However, it is proposed that a number of new approaches be considered and trialed. These include:

- The provision of a self-reporting mechanism (and accompanying data visualization) allowing local level assessment of impact;
- Longitudinal qualitative and quantitative analysis, following individual teachers and educators through time;
- Analysis of individual users of *Narragunnawali*;
- Interviews with students, parents/carers and community members;
- Experimental approaches to assess learning resources; and
- The development, piloting, and implementation of a *Schools Barometer* that measures the attitudes of teachers and educations, as well as students.

8 Concluding comments

Since the commencement of *Narragunnawali* in 2014, it has been a remarkably successful program. The number and diversity of schools and early learning services that are engaged with the program has increased dramatically such that by the end of 2017, nearly 1 out of every 10 schools and early learning services have commenced or completed a RAP. This is an extraordinarily high proportion for a program that is not compulsory and that is largely made available through an online portal that schools and early learning services need to opt into.

The program has continued to improve and adapt since its inception. New resources and an updated online platform are now available, and the first round of awards were announced and celebrated in late November.[12]

The evaluation has also provided very strong evidence for the program to be having an effect on schools, early learning services and teachers. Looking at the Reflection Survey, there are very few schools and early learning services who are engaging with the program that reduce the number of activities that they engage in through time. Even more positively, those RAP Working Groups that had reported that they were not sure or were not undertaking an activity in the initial surveys had a very high probability that they were undertaking that activity in a later follow-up. To put it another way, those schools and early learning services engaged with *Narragunnawali* maintain the activities that they are already doing, an increase the activities through time.

There is even strong evidence for the positive effects of *Narragunnawali* from the Longitudinal Study of Indigenous Children (LSIC). Those teachers of Indigenous students who are in schools with a RAP are much more likely to feel that their school is engaging in a range of positive activities than those teachers in other schools. The teachers themselves are also more likely to be engaging in a range of positive activities.

The evaluation has, however, identified two areas of potential focus as *Narragunnawali* continues to expand and mature. The first of these is the lack of knowledge within schools and early learning services of teachers about whether their school does or does not have a RAP, as well as knowledge about the types of activities that are undertaken. Teachers and educators obviously have very busy schedules with lesson preparation, assessment and activities outside of the classroom. However, it is vitally important that all teachers and education are aware of what is going on with regards to Reconciliation within their school or early learning service.

The second caveat on the otherwise very positive evaluation is that there is limited evidence so far that there is any effect of the program on Indigenous children themselves. This is in many ways not surprising. Change in the measures analysed is likely to take significant time.

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[12] https://www.narragunnawali.org.au/awards

And, the target of the policy is as much non-Indigenous students as Indigenous students. However, as the program and evaluation continues, it will be important to continue to monitor more closely the effect on students whilst they are in the school or early learning service and once they have left.

In summary, however, Reconciliation Australia should be commended for the open approach that they have taken to the evaluation of *Narragunnawali*, the responsiveness to interim findings and adjustments to the program, as well as a commitment to continue to work with schools and early services to improve the lives of Indigenous students, and enable non-Indigenous students to learn about the history, culture, language and special place of Australia's first peoples.

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