

**See Me, Hear Me: From Teacher Belief and Pedagogy to  
Classroom Practice for Indigenous Students.**

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**2010**

Being a report of an investigation submitted in fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Education at Murdoch University I declare that this dissertation is my own account of my research and contains as its main content work which has not previously been submitted for a degree at any institution.

Signed .....

## ***See Me, Hear Me: From Teacher Belief and Pedagogy to Classroom Practice for Indigenous Students.***

### Abstract

This research examines the links between teachers' understandings, professional learning and government policy with regard to improving literacy outcomes for students of Indigenous descent in a metropolitan school in the southern suburbs of Perth Western Australia. This particular school has had a ten percent Indigenous cohort since it was founded and has an Aboriginal Education policy in place. While the focus on Indigenous education has been on *closing the gap* for students of Indigenous descent, research has tended to focus on the students rather than investigating the knowledge base of teachers. In this study, the specific focus is on a group of metropolitan teachers and the system rather than the students themselves. This study critiques what research and policy deem to be good practice for the time period between 2003 and 2006 then goes on to investigate if these programs and strategies are actually being utilised in professional learning and classroom practice.

Carspecken's (1996) five stages of a Critical Ethnographic Case Study provide the platform from which to critique and observe the culture of the school. The teachers at the school agreed to be part of an in-depth investigation of their beliefs, knowledge base and classroom practices. Twenty-six teachers completed the study questionnaire, with five teachers participating in the follow-up interview. Using themes developed from the questionnaires and interviews, classroom observations were utilised to support or interrogate teacher perceptions. Analysis of the data gave a voice to these teachers, putting forward the changes they thought needed to be developed at a school and systems level to help them improve opportunities for their Aboriginal students.

This research indicates that the Case Study teachers believed there were ways to improve their access to professional learning and knowledge of programs and cultural aspects that would help improve the literacy opportunities for their Aboriginal students. They felt that the links between major professional learning strategies, such as *Getting It Right Literacy*, and the programs highlighted as good practice by the *Creating a Vision* document (2001-2004) needed to be made clearer. They commented on the number of programs that came into the school professional reading section of the library without professional learning strategies. Giving these teachers a voice draws attention to their needs and concerns. Moreover, through this thesis, their combined voices provide an alternate perspective to the issue of improving literacy outcomes for Aboriginal students.

One of the most important messages this study gives to the system is that the Case Study teachers do not believe they have acquired enough information or professional learning to adequately assist Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students with literacy in their metropolitan classrooms. Neither funding nor the ability of Aboriginal students to learn were seen as key issues. Rather it was the distinct lack of articulation among policy, funding and professional learning, in addition to the failure to make Aboriginal Education part of *core business*, that is highlighted by these metropolitan teachers.

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## **Acknowledgements**

I wish to acknowledge the encouragement, support and tutelage of my supervisors Nado Aveling and Cal Durrant during my postgraduate study at Murdoch University. As active researchers themselves they provided constructive comments, challenged my thinking and were generous in their support and encouragement.

I would also like to acknowledge the support I had from Ron Gidjup who willingly discussed issues relating to the Noongar people especially those involving education. He has helped increase my knowledge and understanding inspiring me to take my learning journey further.

I am very grateful to the teachers in the Case Study group who gave their time willingly. Their openness, co-operation and honesty have made the process more fascinating, challenging and rewarding than I could have hoped.

Finally I would like to thank my close friends for their support and encouragement over the last seven years.