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### 'I really want to make a difference for these kids but it's just too hard': one Aboriginal teacher's experiences of moving away, moving on and moving up

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## **‘I really want to make a difference for these kids but it’s just too hard’: one Aboriginal teacher’s experiences of moving away, moving on and moving up**

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This paper draws on longitudinal data to examine the changing professional identity of one beginning teacher over a three-year period. Using a post-structuralist framework and theories of social class and capital, I highlight the complexities, contradictions and impossibilities of new graduate, Luke, sustaining an identity as ‘Aboriginal teacher’ in Australian schools. I trace the shift in his commitment to working with underachieving Aboriginal boys in challenging school contexts at the beginning of his career, to his move into a middle-class white girls’ school towards the end of his third year of teaching. I suggest this was a result of the ongoing stress associated with the expectation that he take sole responsibility for the education of the school’s Aboriginal students, as well as his own upward social class mobility. The paper concludes by raising a number of concerns for education systems, including the retention of Aboriginal teachers in Australian schools.

**Keywords:** social class; Aboriginal teachers; longitudinal research

### **Introduction**

In many places in the world, including Britain, North America and Australia, there have been ongoing calls to diversify the teaching profession and to recruit teachers of ethnic and racial minority (Menter 2002; Basit et al. 2007; Hartsuyker 2007; Frankenberg 2009). In general, reasons for doing so are grounded in social justice, inclusion and equity. Some research suggests that ethnic minority teachers who share similar cultural backgrounds to their students are well positioned to act as role models and thus contribute to raising the educational and career aspirations of minority students (see Abbas 2002; Santoro 2009; Villegas and Lucas 2004). They may have personal understandings of racism, and can act as advocates for ethnic minority students in school settings (Abbas 2002; Carrington and Skelton 2003). Additionally, they are frequently seen as cross-cultural experts due to their diverse cultural experiences (Milner and Hoy 2003; Santoro and Reid 2006; Basit et al. 2007).

In Australia, Indigenous people,<sup>1</sup> who make up 2.5% of the Australian population (Australian Bureau of Statistics [ABS] 2007a), are underrepresented in the teaching profession. Indigenous students are the most disadvantaged group in the

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nation (Australian Bureau of Statistics [ABS] 2007b; Doyle and Hill 2008) and Indigenous teachers may be well positioned to understand their learning needs and the cultural knowledge they bring to the classroom. They are also well positioned to teach Indigenous Studies to non-Indigenous students, a mandatory component of school curriculum in some states in Australia. However, there are very few Indigenous teachers in Australian schools, with less than 1% of teachers in government schools and 0.32% of teachers in Catholic schools, Indigenous (Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations [DEEWR] 2008).

However, despite the significance of recruiting greater numbers of Indigenous teachers, there is little empirical research that has investigated the experiences of those teachers who are working in schools. This paper, drawing on longitudinal data obtained from interviews conducted over a three-year period, examined the experiences of one new graduate, Luke.<sup>2</sup> Drawing on post-structuralist understandings of identity as multifaceted and evolving (Davies 2000; Reay 2001; Watson 2006), I consider the ways in which his professional and Indigenous identities evolve and intersect in complex, and sometimes contradictory ways, to constitute 'the self'. 'Identities are never unified ... [but are] increasingly fragmented and fractured; never singular but multiply constructed across different, often intersecting and antagonistic, discourses, practices, and positions' (Hall 1996, 4).

In what follows, I provide an overview of the study on which this paper draws, present the longitudinal interview data in the form of 'Luke's Biography' and then discuss the changing nature of his professional identity and how he took up and resisted being positioned as 'The Aboriginal<sup>3</sup> teacher'. Finally, implications for teacher education are considered.

### **Overview of the study**

The study on which this paper is based brought together a team of Indigenous and non-Indigenous researchers to explore the experiences and career pathways of Indigenous teachers in Australian schools. The aim of the research is to understand some of the reasons for their underrepresentation in the teaching profession.<sup>4</sup> There are two main components to the project's research design: (a) qualitative case studies of 50 current and former Indigenous teachers who have either remained teaching in classrooms, left teaching to take on administrative roles or other roles in schools or education systems, become teacher educators or left the field of education entirely; and (b) longitudinal case studies of four newly graduated Indigenous teachers who commenced teaching in 2005. The data presented in this paper are from the longitudinal case study.

The longitudinal participants' respective ages are 40, 25, 26 and 28. Three are female and one is male. Invitations calling for volunteer participants were sent to all final-year teacher education students via Indigenous support centres in universities in the Australian state of New South Wales (NSW) at the end of 2004. For logistical reasons, participants were selected from the pool of volunteers on the basis of their anticipated geographic location in 2005 in areas of either NSW or Victoria that were within a day's travelling from the researchers. After being granted ethics approval from the researchers' respective universities and the relevant education authorities, data collection began. It included in-depth, semi-structured interview conversations conducted in the participants' homes after school hours. The interviews, lasting from two to three hours, occurred twice a year for three

years and were conducted by individual members of the research team during 2005–2007. All interviews were audio recorded and transcribed verbatim and returned to interviewees for member checking.

A longitudinal approach enabled the researchers to explore the multiplicities and complexities of the interviewees' identities over an extended period of time, to see continuities and discontinuities in regard to how they performed, understood and took up teacher identities. In referring to her eight-year Australian longitudinal study into young people, McLeod says longitudinal research: 'offers a more substantial and complex basis for writing about identity than does one or two interviews alone. Such approaches to "researching subjectivity" tend to produce a flat, static sense of identity ...' (McLeod 2003, 205). We were interested in exploring not only the events and discourses that shaped the new graduates' transitions to teaching and their early teaching experiences, but also the ways in which these events were understood differently over time and contributed to the construction of, and fluidity of, the concept of "self" over time.

Participants were guided by open-ended questions to narrate aspects of their lives and to engage in storytelling that produced rich 'first-order narratives', that is, 'the stories that individuals tell about themselves and their own experiences' (Elliot 2005, 12). The interview questions were designed to elicit chronological, experiential and evaluative accounts of their schooling, their family backgrounds, their pre-service teacher education, induction into teaching and their experiences as new graduates and professionals, including the nature of their pedagogies, their relationships with students, parents and colleagues, and the professional challenges, successes and disappointments they had encountered. During each interview, the interviewees' attention was drawn to particular events, experiences and perceptions and they were then asked to reflect on them. Each story contained numerous 'mini-narratives of anecdotes and fragments of autobiography' (Mills 2001, 298) and the conversations moved back and forwards between these, the experiences recounted in previous interviews and more recent experiences. McLeod claims that: 'asking prospective and retrospective questions over time about "the self" means that a body of "evidence" from different perspectives is accumulated, and that responses can be "checked", read and compared against each other' (2003, 205). Therefore, the body of data collected from each participant over time became an increasingly complex assembly of intersecting, complementary and/or conflicting vignettes of experience that would 'build over the course of several interviews and traverse temporal and geographical space' (Reissman 2008, 23).

Data for this paper have been drawn from six interviews I conducted over a three-year period with Luke, a new graduate who had been teaching for two months at the time of the first interview. The interviews occurred in his home after school hours and lasted up to three hours, often with a meal break included – the location of the interviews may have contributed to him being positioned more powerfully than he might have been, had the interview been conducted on 'neutral' ground or in a place familiar only to me. Not surprisingly, Luke's narratives became longer and more detailed as our relationship became more familiar and relaxed – he took greater control of the interview as I relinquished control. He often determined the details he provided about particular topics, pursued areas of discussion he deemed relevant and asked questions of me about my thoughts, opinions and experiences. The production of the narratives was dependent on him taking longer turns at talking than might commonly be the case in interviews.

The combination of conducting research over a three-year period, collecting data in locations familiar to participants and using interview techniques that positioned the participants in relatively powerful ways, enabled the participants to produce lengthy, detailed and rich stories of particular life events. While these strategies did not entirely dispel the inequitable power relations that inevitably exist between researcher and researched, they may have contributed to redressing the power imbalance that often characterises research relationships between Indigenous participants and non-Indigenous researchers where research is ‘done to’, and imposed upon, Indigenous communities (Brant Castellano 2004).

Data from each interview were analysed using situational analysis, an extension of grounded theory that seeks to: ‘analyse a particular situation of interest through the specification, re-representation, and subsequent examinations of the most salient elements in that situation and their relations’ (Clarke 2005, 29). Over the three years of data collection, the ‘situations of interest’ to me changed, depending on the particular stage of Luke’s life and career. My interest in his perceptions of his teacher education course and his transition into teaching gave way to an interest in his pedagogies, his professional knowledge development, his move to Sydney and his shift from teaching Aboriginal students to teaching non-Aboriginal students at a non-government girls’ school. Each data-set was interrogated using questions such as, ‘Who and what are in this situation? Who and what matters in this situation? What elements “make a difference” in this situation?’ (Clarke 2005, 87). Situational maps were hand-drawn in which human and non-human contextual factors important to the situation such as geographical location, significant people, policies, teaching practices and so on, were highlighted. Each was then considered in relation to the other via more complex diagrams that mapped, overlaid and connected important factors. After all the data had been collected, each of these six relational maps was then considered and more complex connections were made that revealed the complexities and the intersections of Luke’s teaching identities with his Aboriginality and his social class. In this way, I became ‘not only analyst and bricoleur but also a cartographer of sorts’ (Clarke 2005, 37).

What I asked during the interviews, what I regarded as a ‘situation of interest’ and how I analysed the data were shaped by my positioning as a non-Indigenous woman with 10 years’ experience as a secondary school teacher, and 18 years’ experience as a teacher educator and researcher. It is also shaped by my positioning as a professional with a working-class background whose upward social class mobility can be attributed to the economic, cultural and social capitals (Bourdieu 1987) that are accrued through education. Clarke (2005, 85), referring to the importance of the researcher’s positioning in shaping the research direction, says:

Beginning even before a research topic is decided upon, we notice and store information, impressions, and images about topic areas and issues. Not only are there no *tabula rasa* researchers, but we also come with a lot of baggage. Such ideas and pre-conceptions become intellectual wallpaper of sorts, background tacit assumptions sometimes operating as it were, behind our backs in the research process.

In this paper, I present the biography I have constructed from the multitude of smaller stories Luke told me during the course of our six interviews and the contextual features, as recorded on the situational maps. These ‘mini narratives’ were not always narrated in a chronological fashion, but were told at various times, and

sometimes provided a context to other events. The biography covers the years before Luke became a teacher up until the last interview in year three. It is *my* narration of Luke's narratives, written in the third person and taking into account the words, the tone, the humour, the despair and the context of the stories he told during our interviews. I am both a 'narrative-finder', that is, a researcher looking for narratives contained in the data, and a 'narrative-creator' (Kvale 1996, 201), a researcher (re)presenting those narratives. The events in Luke's life, his feelings, reactions and perspectives that are represented here are those that I consider the most salient.

### **Luke's biography**

Luke is a Wiradjuri<sup>5</sup> man who grew up in a small town of approximately 5000 people located several hundreds of kilometres from Sydney. His father was brought up on a nearby church mission and had limited formal education, having left school at the age of 10. His mother's family were farm workers and she too, had limited formal education. Luke, the youngest of their three children, attended the local government primary and secondary school where the student population was about 80% Aboriginal. His academic results were only just satisfactory – he says he did the bare minimum at school. But he was a good sportsman, and in particular, a good rugby player. After he finished secondary school, he moved to Sydney to play with a major football team for three years. His girlfriend Tracey, who is not Aboriginal, went with him. Although he enjoyed playing semi-professional football and was mostly successful, a number of injuries prompted him to look elsewhere for a long-term career. He had always wanted to be a Physical Education teacher and he thought it would enable him to do something he loved, as well as provide a secure and stable income.

In 2001, when he was 21, Luke applied for, and was accepted into a Bachelor of Teaching, specialising in Health and Physical Education. He was one of the few in his family to complete secondary school and the first to obtain a university education. While he was studying he volunteered in his spare time to develop and conduct special out-of-school programmes for Aboriginal children at a local community centre, including cultural programmes and a programme about careers in sport. He was conscious that due to past assimilation policies and practices, many Aboriginal people had been unable to pass cultural knowledge on to their children.

Luke's first position in 2005 after graduation was an ongoing permanent position at a secondary school in a small country town not far from Sydney. Crosthwaite High had some Aboriginal students but he was the only Aboriginal teacher. He was given a year nine boys-only class, a group consisting of 15 students, most of whom were Aboriginal. They had low academic outcomes and significant social problems. The principal thought that having the students all in the one class would enable the teachers to address their needs more effectively. It was considered the most challenging class in the school.

Luke modified curriculum for them, took them on excursions and camps, taught them life skills, taught them about Aboriginal culture, played sport with them at lunchtime and visited their families. He enjoyed his work and found the contact with the boys difficult, but rewarding. He planned for the National Aboriginal and Islander Day of Celebrations (NAIDOC), helped establish a branch of the Aborigi-

nal Education Consultative Group in the region and a few weeks after he began at the school, became the Physical Education coordinator.

In November of the same year, Tracey was offered a lucrative job in Sydney that was too good to turn down, given the high salary and the apartment provided by her employer in a desirable area of Sydney. Although he loved Crosthwaite High and would have liked to have stayed, Luke asked the Department of Education for a transfer to Sydney for the following year. He was prepared to go to any school in Sydney that was within reasonable travelling time from his home if it had Aboriginal students, because he wanted to use his skills and knowledge to help his own people. However, there were no ongoing positions available so Luke took leave of absence and put his name on a central list of teachers who were available for casual relief teaching.

Luke and Tracey got engaged in December 2006.

During March 2007, Luke was offered relief teaching at Boundary High, a school with a high population of Aboriginal students. When the principal found out he was Aboriginal he asked Luke to run a special programme three days a week for a small withdrawal class of year eight Aboriginal boys with social and academic problems. Luke was keen to help. He modified curriculum materials across disciplines for them, taught them life skills, organised guest speakers, ran anger management sessions, tried to develop the boys' pride in their Aboriginality, counselled and mentored them. He also team-taught with colleagues in a support role and helped them understand the needs of Aboriginal students. It was challenging and hard work: many times he had to physically intervene in fights between students in class. For the other two days of the week, he took classes in any subject area for teachers who were on leave. Sometimes they left a programme for him to follow – sometimes they did not.

In October, after having registered his interest for relief teaching at another school, Rosedale Secondary College, a short distance from home, he was contacted and asked to do relief teaching for the first two days of the week, every week. He continued part-time with the boys' programme at Boundary High but went to Rosedale for the remainder of the week. In comparison to Boundary High, his work there was easy. It was a non-government middle-class girls' school, the academic standards were high, discipline problems were non-existent, the girls always brought pens and paper to class, and there were never any fights in class. The regular teachers always left Luke a programme to follow when he filled in for them when they took leave. Tracey commented on him being less tired and less stressed when he came home from school on the two days he was at Rosedale.

There were no Aboriginal students at Rosedale. No-one knew Luke was Aboriginal – he did not tell anyone. While Luke is not fair skinned he is not very dark, nor does he have stereotypical Aboriginal features. People who do not know him well, do not assume he is Aboriginal. Some people have asked him if he is Italian. At Rosedale, he was 'just one of the teachers'.

During January 2007, Luke and Tracey were married in lavish style in Sydney. To their parents' annoyance, they decided not to have their wedding in their home town because there was nowhere nice to have the reception. Their family and friends all travelled down to Sydney. They had their honeymoon in Thailand before Luke started back at Boundary High to run similar programmes to those he had conducted the year before. But he still did not have an ongoing position. The year eight boys were now in year nine and there was a new cohort of year



eight boys that took their place. They had similar problems. Luke worked with them in the same ways as he had with the others, but he felt his energy and enthusiasm waning. In September, the staffing coordinator at Rosedale High offered him work for the rest of the school year, covering for a teacher who was on maternity leave. He decided to accept it. He says teaching is a lot easier there than at Boundary – the girls are ‘a dream’ to teach. Tracey thinks it was the best decision he made.

Luke hopes that an ongoing permanent position will become available at Rosedale in 2008. But even if it does not, he will stay on as a relief teacher and wait for something to come up. He enjoys working there – a lot. But he says he feels guilty. He also says he will go back to teaching Aboriginal students – one day.

## **Discussion**

The way teachers teach is not only because of the skills that they have learned through teacher education or ‘on the job’, but it is also their biographies, hopes and aspirations that shape their work (Maguire and Dillon 2001, 8). Luke’s biography including his own schooling experiences, his cultural knowledge and his connections with Aboriginal communities may have contributed to his commitment to improving the educational outcomes of the next generation of Aboriginal people, and therefore, their life chances. This was certainly true of the other teachers in the larger case study component of the research on which this paper reports (see Santoro 2010). Their main motivation for becoming teachers was to use their cultural capital in order to help other Aboriginal people. Similarly, Luke’s desire to help his own people was realised through his decision to become a teacher, and reflected in his commitment and dedication to his work during the first two years of his career. He took up the responsibility to be a ‘cultural expert’, a ‘bridge’ between Aboriginal and school communities and a role model for Aboriginal students. He was actively involved in the pastoral care of Aboriginal students and during his first two years of teaching, he took responsibility for the implementation of Aboriginal education strategies, ran extracurricular activities such as camps and anger management workshops, and coached sports teams after school and on the weekend. He sat on school committees and external committees concerned with Aboriginal education. Luke often took on the role of advisor to his non-Indigenous colleagues who looked to him for advice. They, like many non-Indigenous teachers, were ill-prepared and struggled to address the needs of Aboriginal students (Partington 2003). He counselled them about pedagogies that would be likely to be successful with Aboriginal students, advised them about the cultural knowledge and practices of Aboriginal people and how they might shape students’ learning and responses to schooling.

The schools where Luke taught (with the exception of Rosedale), were what are commonly regarded as ‘hard-to-staff’ schools, that is, schools characterised by large numbers of students of low socio-economic status, culturally diverse students for whom English is a second language and students with special learning needs. While none of these categories is a determinant of student ability, teaching in such schools presents considerable challenges because students can require additional time and assistance, pastoral care and/or specially designed pedagogies. According to Chin, Young, and Floyd (2004, 21):

Poverty does not represent schools with just a single problem; poverty multiples its impact on schools in a variety of ways in the need for increased service for students, in the lack of communities that schools and teachers rely upon in educating children.

Because many teachers simply do not know enough about how to work effectively in such contexts and how to plan for, and address students' needs (Frankenberg 2006), teaching can be stressful and there is often a high turnover of staff and often a disproportionate number of new graduates with little experience in these schools (Cochran-Smith 2004). This was certainly the case for Luke, where many of his colleagues were themselves young and inexperienced and unable to provide professional support for him. Rather than being mentored by experienced staff, as is usually the case for teachers in the early years of their careers, Luke was often responsible for mentoring others.

Luke's positioning by colleagues and school administrators during the first two years of his career, as first and foremost, an 'Aboriginal teacher', was a position he willingly took up. It may have provided him with significant levels of professional and personal fulfilment, appreciation from his colleagues as well as recognition and kudos from the Aboriginal communities where the schools were located. However, it was this subject position that also contributed to a shift in how he wanted to identify professionally and the nature of the teaching he wanted to do. The responsibilities he took on were far in excess of what might normally have been expected of a novice teacher. It seems on many occasions that Luke was responsible, single-handedly, for all 'things Indigenous' in the school. Not surprisingly, this was unsustainable. The extra workload and responsibilities Luke shouldered would most likely have added to the pressures and challenges of being an early-career teacher who was gaining experience, competence and confidence. There was a risk that such pressures could have led to burnout, that is, 'a chronic state of physical, mental and emotional exhaustion that arises in personnel from the cumulative demands of their work' (Goddard and Goddard 2006, 857). His shift to Rosedale can be seen in part, as a strategy of self-preservation – it may have enabled him to continue working as a teacher rather than risk burnout. There were few, if no behaviour management problems there and he did not need to be involved in a myriad of extracurricular duties, including providing students with intensive pastoral care and academic support. His work was less demanding and less stressful than it had been at Boundary High and Crossthaite High schools.

However, how he negotiated and renegotiated his positioning as 'Aboriginal teacher' in a working-class school to simply a teacher unmarked by Aboriginality, in a non-government middle-class girls school, also illustrates how identities are evolving and complex, and how professional and ethnic identities intersect. Luke's renegotiation of his positioning as an 'Aboriginal teacher' was possible, in part, because of his appearance. Although it is a commonly held view in Australia that all Aboriginal people are dark skinned and have particular physical features, Luke is not particularly dark skinned and does not have what Paradies calls 'the pernicious fantasy of the "Indigenous look"' (2006, 359). In the absence of information about his cultural background, his colleagues at Rosedale did not assume him to be Aboriginal. Furthermore, this positioning might also be attributed to him taking up a classed habitus that is different from that stereotypically associated with Aboriginal people:

The habitus is a set of dispositions, reflexes and forms of behaviour people acquire through acting in society. It reflects the different positions people have in society, for example, whether they are brought up in a middle-class environment or in a working-class suburb. (Bourdieu 2000, 19)

Dispositions are ways of being and interacting in the world that ‘literally mould the body and become second nature’ (Thompson 1991, 12). Thus, they become embodied. The habitus people acquire early in life is usually durable and stable. However, an individual’s habitus can be dynamic and changeable, and shaped by different and changing social environments and contexts (Savage 2003). The social conditions and contexts that enabled Luke to take up a middle-class habitus were those that in turn, had been shaped by his access over time to what Bourdieu has termed social, economic and cultural capitals (1987). ‘*Who*’ one knows (social capital), ‘*what*’ one knows (cultural capital) and what *material resources* one owns (economic capital), are interchangeable or interconnected. They have, what Skeggs has called, ‘exchange-value’ or ‘use-value’ (Skeggs 2004, 17). The volume and composition of the capitals that individuals possess, position them in ‘social space’ (Bourdieu 1987, 4) to take up particular discourses of privilege or otherwise. Prior to leaving home and attending university, Luke, like many of his family members and home town peers, accessed limited economic, social and cultural capitals. His home town, similar to many rural Australian communities, was characterised by high levels of unemployment, low levels of education, low per capita income and relative geographical isolation. However, his completion of secondary school and then a university degree enabled him to access different and increased capitals from those of his family and peers. His education provided him with cultural capital; that is, a credential and qualification that not only meant he had acquired particular types of valuable knowledge about how to ‘succeed’ in life, but he had acquired monetary assets (economic capital) as well as access to powerful social capital, that is, resources gained through membership of professional networks and related social relationships. In turn, economic capital provided him with choices and options about where he lived, the lifestyle he had and the personal relationships and networks he developed.

Increasingly, scholars espouse a broad notion of class, incorporating lifestyle, occupation, taste and material wealth. According to Lubrano (2003, 5), social class:

... is a script, map, and guide. It tells us how to talk, how to dress [...] and how to socialize. It affects whom we marry; where we live; the friends we choose; the jobs we have; the vacations we take; the books we read; the movies we see; the restaurants we pick; how we decide to buy houses, carpets, furniture and cars; where our kids are educated; what we tell our children at the dinner table.

For Luke, who is developing his own understanding of middle-class mores, such a script is not fixed but ‘written’ anew each time he takes up and/or resists the discourses made available to him. By the time he took up a position at Rosedale, he was living in an expensive area of town, had married a successful professional white woman and was dressing in trendy designer labels. It was these markers of social class that may have contributed to him being judged as middle class and therefore ‘white’, by the teachers and students at Rosedale. Despite the fact that there is a growing Indigenous middle class in Australia (Australian Bureau of Statistics in Paradies 2006, 358), ‘there is a prevailing misconception that “If you’re

middle class you can't be Aboriginal” (Boladeras in Paradies 2006, 358). Paradies stresses the complexities and multiplicities of Indigenous identities as well as the stereotypes that shape commonly held views of Indigeneity when he says: ‘It must be recognized that Indigenous people do not require particular phenotypical traits, certain forms of cultural alterity, specific ethico-moral beliefs/actions or a certain level of social disadvantage in order to be Indigenous’ (2006, 363).

Although it is separate from Bourdieu’s theory of capital, Putnam’s work on social capital is also useful in this paper in that it addresses the, ‘connections among individuals – social networks and the norms of reciprocity and trustworthiness that arise from them’ (2000, 19). Putnam presents two types of social capital, bonding and bridging capital. Bonding capital is ‘a social “glue” that sticks like people together’ (Brough et al. 2006, 407). It is gained from participating in local social networks that are most often homogenous and supportive and provide a sense of belonging. Bridging capital on the other hand, is the capital gained from social networks that are heterogeneous, less familiar and more ‘risky’. It is ‘a social lubricant [...] for allowing different kinds of people to mix together freely’ (Brough et al. 2006, 407). During the early part of his career, Luke moved further away from his home town, from the Aboriginal community and from the Aboriginal professional networks with which he was familiar. This would have meant that the bonding capital on which he might have drawn for support, was reduced. However, his membership of new and expanded networks beyond those with which he was familiar, enabled him to generate ‘bridging capital’, a type of social capital that some scholars argue is more valuable than bonding capital (Woolcock and Narayan in Brough et al. 2006) because it offers the potential for individuals to develop membership of more powerful networks. Indigenous participants in a study by Brough et al. who accessed bridging and bonding capitals and moved between old and new social networks were ‘caught between two worlds’ (2006, 401) as they tried to negotiate the: ‘tension between displaying a strong Aboriginal identity but also trying to “fit in” to dominant non-Indigenous social spaces. [...] In part, this was due to the complex effort required to “manage” aspects of self on a daily basis’ (2006, 402). Unlike these participants, it is not clear that Luke was, or will ever be, ‘caught between two worlds’. His uptake of bridging capital and the shifts in his apparent allegiance to old networks do not necessarily signify disloyalty to his Aboriginal heritage or community – nor does breaking free of the obligation to be ‘the Aboriginal teacher’ necessarily mean he was trying to turn his back on being Aboriginal. Paradies, who identifies as an Aboriginal-Anglo-Asian, questions the commonly held view that one of the ‘prerequisites of Indigeneity’ is a commitment to easing the disadvantage suffered by other Indigenous people. He claims it constructs Indigenous people as ‘intrinsically virtuous’ (2006, 360), a characteristic he argues is inappropriate, given it is no more relevant to Indigenous people than it is to members of any other racial or ethnic group. Furthermore, the expectation that all Indigenous people will work towards and should work towards alleviating disadvantage among the Indigenous community is not one that is necessarily imposed on members of other ethnic groups. Nevertheless, Luke’s reported feelings of guilt and his resolve to ‘go back to teaching Aboriginal kids – one day’, cannot be ignored. It suggests he feels some ambivalence about his decision to take up a position at Rosedale and that he may face challenges ‘managing self’ in the transition from bonding to bridging communities.

## Conclusions

This article adds to the existing literature that seeks to problematise the notion of Australian Indigenous identities as singular and unified (Brough et al. 2006; Paradies 2006; Reid et al. 2009). Indigenous teachers, like all teachers, take up different ways of being and performing ‘self’ at different times and in different contexts. Identity, ‘takes the form of a “metamorphosis”, being a process involving constant negotiation among different parts of the self, among different times of the self, and among different settings or systems to which each of us belongs’ (Melucci 1996, 49). The use of longitudinal research methodology enabled the ‘metamorphosis’ that Luke underwent, to be revealed. Such a metamorphosis involved ‘negotiations among different parts of self’ such as his Aboriginality and his social class at ‘different times of the self’ including as a teacher, as a husband, as an Aboriginal and within the settings of different schools and Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal communities. A singular one-hour interview would not have revealed the complex interplay of Luke’s life events over time.

The findings of the research also highlight areas of concern for schooling and education systems. Teaching professionals who also happen to be Indigenous experience the world in ways other than through their Indigeneity. Policy-makers, teachers and other members of school communities need to rethink assumptions that Indigenous teachers will, simply by virtue of being Indigenous, aspire to work only in the area of Indigenous education and/or to work only with Indigenous students. There is a risk that schools will prematurely lose Indigenous teachers, especially new graduates, if they are expected to be responsible for the school’s Indigenous students, their education and their welfare *and* to be responsible for training their non-Indigenous colleagues. More often than not, an Indigenous teacher will be the only Indigenous teacher in a school or district and as Luke’s story has confirmed, there is the potential for them to become overwhelmed by the amount of work they face. Principals must consider that even if a new graduate like Luke is willing to take greater responsibility for the education of Indigenous students, their workload and responsibilities must be monitored and they must be provided with the same opportunities for mentoring and assistance as any other novice teacher.

Addressing the gaps in the provision of education to Indigenous students is the responsibility of all teachers. The expectation that Indigenous teachers are committed to helping their own people and will work *exclusively* to achieve this end can simply alleviate non-Indigenous teachers’ responsibility to address the needs of *all* students, including Indigenous students. Teachers must be adequately prepared to work effectively with Indigenous students, to understand the cultural knowledge they bring with them to school and to be able to develop pedagogies that address Indigenous students’ needs. In the interests of equity and social justice, it is important that teachers work towards the same fundamental educational outcomes for Indigenous students as for non-Indigenous students. In some Australian states, Indigenous Studies is a mandated component of teacher education courses. It seeks to both educate non-Indigenous pre-service teachers about Indigenous histories as well as prepare them for teaching Indigenous students. However, this is by no means a standard requirement of teacher education in general and the vast majority of teachers lack the confidence and pedagogical skills to teach Indigenous students. Many are reliant on Indigenous colleagues to do this work on their behalf.

This article has drawn on the data from only one teacher and therefore, I do not want to generalise to other teachers. However, Luke's story may hold resonance for other teachers and/or professionals of ethnic and cultural minority where there is a risk that they may be 'ghettoised' within particular professional settings, simply by virtue of their ethnicity. Some scholars suggest that teachers who are of ethnic minority and/or have experienced marginalisation are likely to be committed to the education of students who are similarly disadvantaged (Santoro 2009). Pearce et al. (2008, 267), researching the experiences of working-class students in Australian universities, say that their participants have a: desire to use their "middle-class" qualifications and professional status, not just as tickets to a better life for themselves, but also through newly acquired power as a means to offer a better life for others like them'.

As classrooms become increasingly diverse, it is important for reasons of social equity, that Australian education systems recruit a greater number of Indigenous teachers and ethnic minority teachers. It is they who are likely to have the cultural knowledge necessary to address the needs of students who are not from the dominant cultural majority. However, it is also just as important that the identities of such teachers are not made simple, that it is not assumed that they will aspire to nothing other than 'helping their own' and that they are not regarded as representing the beliefs and values of all members of their ethnic group. There needs to be greater recognition of the pressure associated with being a teacher from a minority group and strategies put in place to ensure they are maintained in the education system.

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### **Notes**

1. Indigenous Australians are First Nations people from mainland Australia and the Torres Straits, an island territory north of Australia. They have a history predating European settlement in Australia by more than 40,000 years.
2. In order to protect the participants' privacy, pseudonyms have been used for all people and places.
3. Many Indigenous people do not use the term 'Indigenous' when identifying themselves and their communities and prefer to use 'Aboriginal'. Throughout this article, 'Aboriginal' is used from this point on whenever I refer to the participants who prefer this practice, when I refer to their experiences or when I quote them.
4. This research is funded by the Australian Research Council Discovery Programme (N. Santoro, J.-A. Reid, and C. McConaghy, and includes Indigenous researchers, Laurie Crawford and Lee Simpson).
5. The Wiradjuri nation extends over much of the Australian state of New South Wales and has one of the largest populations of Indigenous people in Australia. Wiradjuri people, like all Indigenous peoples, have a distinct language and culture.

### **Notes on contributor**

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