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Supporting
best teaching
of mathematics
for Aboriginal
learners

Professional Learning

Professional learning about Aboriginal students and mathematics is mostly confined to individual projects and some system initiatives, and is unfamiliar territory for many teachers. This area of professional learning is important, not least because the focus on literacy in recent years has sometimes been at the expense of numeracy. Turnover of staff in schools can lead to a lack of continuity of knowledge and experience, including that developed through professional learning, so it is vital that educators are continually given opportunities for development in this specific area.

There is a clear appetite for effective professional learning for teachers, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander education officers, and leaders to increase their knowledge, understanding and skills. Many educators are specifically eager for professional learning in mathematics content and pedagogical content knowledge and/or in working effectively with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students, parents, families and communities.

Professional learning communities can be an effective instrument in this regard. They can be vehicles for:

- Professional learning;
- Mentoring people new to the school; and
- Peer to peer support.

Professional learning communities can be formed in a variety of ways, providing flexibility in the ways they function. Their foci can support effective pedagogy, community engagement and/or school change to support mathematics. They can incorporate educators from different systems, sectors and locations. As such, they are one method of bridging the divide that can exist between primary and secondary sectors in relation to how and what mathematics is taught, which can create or exacerbate transition issues for students. Remote locations can incorporate a clustering approach for professional learning through the use of technology, capitalising on the increasing availability of high speed internet connections.

All professional learning approaches require sustained commitment to the known principles for effective professional learning (for example, closely related to the classroom; ongoing; support from systems and leaders; peer to peer support). In the face of the complexity of issues faced by many teachers and schools, professional learning must have a focus on putting the learn-

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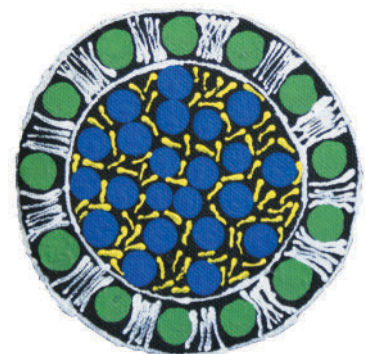
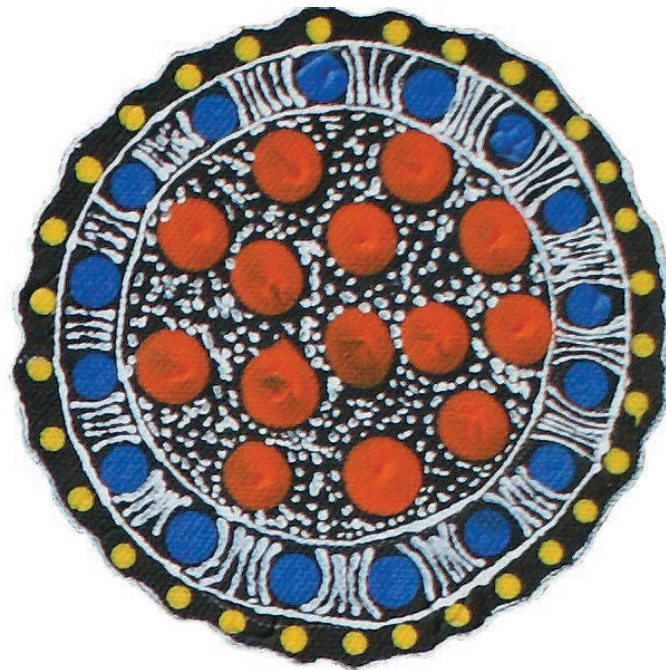
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ing into practice, supported by time for appropriate follow-up and reflection by those involved. There is also the need to build excitement about improved mathematics outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students through sharing approaches and celebrating successes.

Professional learning should be expanded to include purposeful engagement of and with parents and community around mathematics, including strategies for learning about Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students, families and communities.

Questions for discussion at a school community level

1. What are the professional learning needs of educators in our school in mathematics and numeracy education for Aboriginal learners? What resources are available and how well are they used?
2. What are the possibilities in establishing or joining a community of practice that is specifically focussed on improving mathematics outcomes for Aboriginal learners? Who can help?
3. How can we collaborate with other schools close by or further afield, for example through the use of technology?



Contact

Caty Morris
National Manager
Indigenous Programs
m: 0432 277 654
e: cmorris@aamt.edu.au