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Australian Institute of Aboriginal
and Torres Strait Islander Studies

MEDIA RELEASE

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Successful Maori education initiative the focus of lunch-time address

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The creator of a remarkable New Zealand teaching program that has seen dramatic improvement in Maori students school performance – a program the Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies (AIATSIS) research fellows are evaluating for possible piloting in Australia – will talk about the program in Canberra this week.

The program's creator, foundation Professor of Maori Education in the School of Education at the University of Waikato, Professor Russell Bishop, will deliver this week's lecture [12.30 pm Friday, March 11] as part of the AIATSIS regular lunch-time lecture series.

Professor Bishop will describe how the unique New Zealand program, *Te Kotahitanga*, became a New Zealand Ministry of Education funded research/professional development project after teachers in the pilot program area underwent professional development which changed teaching methods and classroom attitudes, resulting in Maori students' markedly improved school attendance and academic achievement.

Te Kotahitanga now involves nearly 400 teachers and more than 10,000 secondary school students and is being adopted by some Canadian schools.

Persistent and disproportionately high under-achievement experienced by Maori students in schools throughout New Zealand has long been a national imperative and one of international interest because of the low level engagement by disadvantaged families and communities is a common problem experienced in other developed societies – including Australia.

AIATSIS' Chairperson, Professor Mick Dodson AM, expressed his own heartfelt concerns about some of the causes of the appalling statistical outcomes in education for Indigenous Australians.

“Within Indigenous families there is a living memory of education as an instrument of disempowerment: dismantling languages, cultures and traditions - a place generally that fostered a culture of low expectations of their kids.”

“Put quite simply, the experience of education for too many Indigenous Australians is negative. It remains a place for the formal assessment of how far you fall short. “

“The measurable gap in educational outcomes is preceded and produced by subtle, subjective factors – attitudes and beliefs and expectations feeding off and reinforcing low levels of self esteem.”

“Too many educators and education administrators have low expectations of our kids. Through subtle racial stereotyping they don’t think we are capable of any great achievement in education.”

“This attitude has to go,” Professor Dodson concluded.

One of the two AIATSIS Indigenous Research Fellows investigating the adaptability of the NZ Maori program for piloting in four Australian schools, Dr Lawrence Bamblett, has also shown how educational outcomes for Indigenous children can be improved in a remarkable way.

Together with the elders of the Aboriginal community at the Erambie Mission near Cowra in NSW, where Dr Bamblett still lives, he introduced the *Deadly ReadAthon Program* for Koori primary and secondary aged students..

The Program encouraged parents, teachers and the school children to work together to encourage young Koori kids to read a book. One hundred and sixty three children participated, 127 completed the program and in the first year read over 4,100 books.

“Without the support of the Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations (DEEWR) who fund the *Deadly ReadAthon Program* and the support of school principals, teachers and the community – the program would never have begun,” Dr Bamblett said.

“The potential exists for this type of program to be adapted for the benefit of Indigenous children throughout Australia.”

Further information about Professor Bishop’s lecture please contact Ms Jeanine Leane at jeanine.lean@aiatsis.gov.au or on 62614227.

Professor Bishop’s lecture, entitled “Sustaining a Culturally Responsive pedagogy of Relations” will be webcast via <http://www.aiatsis.gov.au/research/SeminarWebcasts.html>