

# Inspired into education



Alec Warner, who is studying for a Bachelor of Primary Education degree at the University of Queensland.

**T**WO “very big role models” inspired Alec Warner to move from singing and acting into studying for a Bachelor of Primary Education degree at the University of Queensland. Mr Warner’s mother, who is a teacher, and his grandmother who supported Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander education, both made a difference.

“I wanted to make a difference as well,” he says.

However, Mr Warner, a Kuku Yalanji man from Mossman, didn’t foresee how the university experience would dramatically change his sense of self. As part of his teacher education, Mr Warner joined the ‘Being, Becoming and Belonging’ Indigenous mentoring program. He wasn’t sure having a mentor would help: he just thought it would provide him with additional classroom teaching experience.

Now, he says, “my sense of identity as an Indigenous person has grown enormously because they (staff at the University of Queensland) took pride in the fact that I was Indigenous to complete the mentoring

program in the first place”.

Mr Warner thinks mentoring is the closest thing in Western education to the way in which students and children grow up in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities.

“There’s a lot of back-and-forth knowledge between the Elders and the students, and mentoring is very much the same thing,” he said.

Mr Warner had a strong relationship with his mentor, who provided resources and practical

“So it was small things that really made a big difference in the end.”

Becoming a primary teacher was Mr Warner’s initial goal. But now he also wants to increase the prominence of Indigenous education.

“It’s very important, as Australians, that we acknowledge what happened in the past and that we move forward as a growing culture together,” he says. “You know people talk about racism and that sort of stuff, but I think it comes down to misunderstandings and a lack of education, and the way to move past that is to become informed and remain informed.”

Mr Warner maintains it is up to each individual. He asks: “Do they want to be caught as part of a stigma or do they want to make a difference and change for themselves?”

The Australian Council of Deans of Education (ACDE) works with the More Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Teachers Initiative (MATSI) project team to support the commitment of universities to increase graduate numbers.

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advice about teaching in the classroom.

“I would ask her, ‘how would you go about this? What are some things I could do?’” he said. “She gave me really good feedback like, ‘if you’ve got a Year 3 classroom so you really think they’ll be waiting to focus on this for so long?’ or ‘this activity might be a bit too hard.’”

In 2012, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Teachers comprised



At the same time, Indigenous students formed



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Image courtesy NSW Department of Education & Communities