A CRITICAL ANALYSIS OF CORE ABORIGINAL STUDIES SUBJECTS IN PRIMARY TEACHER EDUCATION COURSES.

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Dedication

This thesis is dedicated to my family:

My wonderful son Brenden who is so patient and caring

My mother Nancy who has always believed in me

My two sisters Noeleen and Kim who are always there for me

My father Ray for his encouragement

Thank you.
Acknowledgements

I acknowledge elders past and present. I am beholden to the Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people who have dedicated their lives to social justice and to contributing towards an understanding and appreciation of Aboriginal people and our culture.

I am indebted to both my supervisors for their patience, careful supervision and encouragement. It has been a privilege and a pleasure working with two amazingly talented and experienced scholars.

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Finally, I extend my gratitude to all of the other amazing friends and individuals who have supported me and contributed to the production of this thesis. I thank them for their advice and encouragement.
STATEMENT OF AUTHENTICATION

The work presented in this thesis is, to the best of my knowledge and belief, original, except as acknowledged in the text. I hereby declare that I have not submitted this material, either in whole or in part, for a degree at this or any other institution.

Janet Mooney

24th March 2011
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Definition of Terms

It is important to firstly identify and acknowledge the term *Aboriginal*, referring to Aboriginal Australian’s in New South Wales (NSW) and used in accordance with the advice of the NSW Aboriginal Education Consultative Group Inc. (AECG) the leading Aboriginal education consultative group in NSW.

The word *Indigenous* is used by governments in Australia and refers to the first people of Australia, including both Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

Throughout the thesis *Aboriginal Studies* is defined as teaching Aboriginal history, culture and values. Aboriginal Studies includes both historical and cultural perspectives of Aboriginal Australia.

The phrase *Aboriginal perspectives* refers to teaching from an Aboriginal standpoint or view of history that is to be included in the curriculum across key learning areas in the primary classroom, therefore addressing the teaching of Aboriginal Studies.
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<td>ABS</td>
<td>Australian Bureau of Statistics</td>
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<tr>
<td>ACE</td>
<td>Australian College of Education</td>
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<td>AECG</td>
<td>Aboriginal Education Consultative Group</td>
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<td>AEP</td>
<td>Aboriginal Education Policy — NSW Department of Education</td>
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<td>AETP</td>
<td>Aboriginal Education and Training Policy</td>
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<tr>
<td>HREOC</td>
<td>Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission</td>
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<tr>
<td>AIC</td>
<td>The Australian Institute of Criminology</td>
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<tr>
<td>ASSPA</td>
<td>Aboriginal Student Support and Parent Awareness Program</td>
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<tr>
<td>ATSIC</td>
<td>Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission</td>
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<tr>
<td>CDEP</td>
<td>Community Development and Employment Projects</td>
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<tr>
<td>CAR</td>
<td>Council for Aboriginal Reconciliation</td>
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<td>COAG</td>
<td>Council of Australian Governments</td>
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<tr>
<td>DEEWR</td>
<td>Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations</td>
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<tr>
<td>DEST</td>
<td>Department of Education, Science, and Training</td>
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<tr>
<td>DETYA</td>
<td>Department Education Training and Youth Affairs</td>
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<tr>
<td>EEO</td>
<td>Equal Employment Opportunity</td>
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<td>FHF</td>
<td>Fred Hollows Foundation</td>
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<tr>
<td>HREOC</td>
<td>Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission</td>
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<tr>
<td>IESIP</td>
<td>Indigenous Education Strategic Initiatives Programme</td>
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<tr>
<td>KLA</td>
<td>Key Learning Area</td>
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<tr>
<td>MCEETYA</td>
<td>(National) Ministerial Council on Education, Employment, Training and Youth Affairs</td>
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<td>Abbreviation</td>
<td>Full Name</td>
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<tr>
<td>NAEC</td>
<td>National Aboriginal Education Committee</td>
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<tr>
<td>NIELNS</td>
<td>National Indigenous English Literacy and Numeracy Strategy</td>
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<tr>
<td>NSW DET</td>
<td>New South Wales Department of Education and Training</td>
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<td>NAIDOC</td>
<td>National Aborigines and Islanders Day Observance Committee</td>
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<tr>
<td>NATSIEP</td>
<td>National Aboriginal and Torres Straits Islander Education Policy</td>
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<td>NATSISS</td>
<td>National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Social Survey</td>
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<td>NRPIET</td>
<td>National Report to Parliament on Indigenous Education and Training</td>
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<td>NIELNS</td>
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<td>NT</td>
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<td>OECD</td>
<td>Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development</td>
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ABSTRACT

Australia has come to a critical point in its identity as a nation, that is, acknowledging its Aboriginal peoples – Australia’s first people – as an intrinsic part of what it is to be Australian. That means respecting Australia’s history which includes Australia’s first people’s histories in our studies, and in the fabric of who we are. It also includes Aboriginal students’ achieving educational outcomes commensurate with their non-Aboriginal peers. The New South Wales Department of Education and Training (NSW DET) Aboriginal education policies, along with the national Aboriginal education policies and a whole host of reports, have identified that for a complexity of reasons, non-Aboriginal Australian’s have nurtured prejudices and out-dated misconceptions about Aboriginal Australians. These reports and policies have therefore recommended that all Australian school students be taught the truth about Australia’s Aboriginal past from colonisation to the present, to learn how the past shaped the present, and to walk together to shape the future.

Teaching Aboriginal Studies and integrating Aboriginal perspectives by incorporating Aboriginal history, culture, and values into the school’s curriculum has been a challenge for NSW DET. Whilst teachers are expected to teach Aboriginal Studies and integrate Aboriginal perspectives, many lack knowledge about Aboriginal history and culture, many have never met an Aboriginal person, and many pre-service teachers have not been taught the knowledge, skills, and understandings to effectively teach Aboriginal Studies and Aboriginal students as a component of their teacher education courses. Of the pre-service teachers who have experienced Aboriginal Studies teacher education core courses, a paucity of research has been conducted to explicate the nature, value, and impact of these courses.

The overarching purpose of this thesis was to assemble an evidence-based rationale, which includes the voices of multiple stakeholders, to test the extent to which core Aboriginal Studies subjects in primary teacher education courses are vital to improving educational outcomes for Aboriginal children, advancing reconciliation, and creating a more socially just society. To address this purpose, the present investigation critically analysed multiple stakeholders’ self-perceptions of the value, nature, success, and impact of core Aboriginal Studies subjects in primary teacher education courses. Participants were drawn from two institutions in New South Wales which taught a core
Aboriginal Studies subject as part of their primary teacher education degree. In each institution, interviews were conducted with the Head of School, the Director of the Aboriginal Education Unit, a teacher educator, and five pre-service teachers who had recently completed the core Aboriginal Studies subject. In addition, a total of 134 final year pre-service teachers from the two institutions completed a questionnaire. The methodology used was informed by Yin’s multiple-case study replication design (Yin, 2003). This replication presents a picture of the perceptions and events which have impacted on the participants in the study. This approach yielded rich detail and real life examples from participants of the values and cultures which contributed to the development and implementation of core Aboriginal Studies subjects and the impact of these subjects on pre-service teachers.

The findings have important implications for theory, research, and practice. The results of this study demonstrate that core Aboriginal Studies subjects in primary teacher education courses can make a positive difference in changing the perceptions of many pre-service teachers about Aboriginal people. Furthermore, undertaking professional training through a core Aboriginal Studies subject builds pre-service teachers’ self-concepts, attitudes, commitment, knowledge and skills, and ability and understandings to teach Aboriginal Studies, incorporate Aboriginal perspectives, and to be committed to effectively teaching Aboriginal students. The findings further support the need for the inclusion of core Aboriginal Studies subjects in all institutions with teacher education courses in New South Wales.
CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

A multitude of policies and reports have emphasised the importance of teaching Aboriginal Studies to combat the socio-economic and educational disadvantage of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students in Australia. One of the more controversial explanations for the low educational outcomes of Indigenous students in Australia has been attributed to the endemic racism of non-Aboriginal Australians towards Aboriginal people. Concern about the pervasive nature of racism in Australia was lamented by Commissioner Johnson (1991) over two decades ago, in the *Aboriginal Deaths in Custody Report*. He concluded: “for a complexity of reasons the non-Aboriginal population has, in the mass, been nurtured on active and passive ideas of racial superiority in relation to Aboriginal people” (p. 10).

To break down this long perceived view of non-Aboriginal Australians, government policy, particularly in the form of the National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Policy (NAEP) 1990 and 1993, states that all school students needed to be taught Aboriginal history and/or studies. Yet despite some 30 years of government policies and reports calling for schools in the states and territories of Australia to introduce Aboriginal Studies, some states have no Aboriginal Studies policy, and not all Australian universities with primary teacher education courses have incorporated Aboriginal Studies as a core subject in their primary teacher education courses.

Teaching Aboriginal Studies and Aboriginal perspectives in schools is considered a factor in the success for Aboriginal students and has been a mandatory policy over the past three decades in New South Wales (NSW), as evidenced by the NSW Aboriginal Education Policy (AEP, NSW Department of Education, 1982; 1997) and the NSW Aboriginal Education and Training Policy (NSW Department of Education and Training, 2008; 2009). Whilst attention has been directed to developing schooling policies, rarely have consideration and research been directed to investigating
whether teachers are adequately prepared to understand and teach Aboriginal Studies effectively.

Recently, the federal Department of Education, Science and Training commissioned two large-scale studies aimed at testing the impact of undertaking core Aboriginal Studies on pre-service teachers in their primary teacher education course. These studies underpin the present investigation. The first (Craven, Halse, Marsh, Mooney & Wilson-Miller, 2005a) was a quantitative study which analysed pre-service teachers’ self-concepts to test their ability to appreciate, understand, and effectively teach Aboriginal Studies and Aboriginal students. The participants were pre-service teachers from sixteen universities which offered either: a core Aboriginal Studies subject; elective Aboriginal Studies subject; or Aboriginal Studies perspectives across the curriculum. This study found that pre-service teachers who had undertaken a core Aboriginal Studies subject had higher self-concepts in multiple domains of Aboriginal Studies teaching self-concept scales and that elective subjects were more effective than perspectives across the curriculum. The study also found that pre-service teachers who had undertaken a core Aboriginal Studies subject in their teacher education course had a significantly higher self-concept of their knowledge and commitment to teach Aboriginal Studies. This study is a seminal work in that it offers a rare empirical demonstration of the benefits of implementing core Indigenous Studies courses in teacher education programs.

The second study (Craven, Halse, Marsh, Mooney, & Wilson-Miller, 2005c) examined the impact of taking a core Aboriginal Studies subject in pre-service training on primary teachers’ ability and commitment to teach Aboriginal Studies. This study utilised similar quantitative instruments to the first, but included a qualitative component. This is the first empirical study to compare the perceived knowledge, skills, and attitudes to Aboriginal Studies of primary classroom teachers who had undertaken a core Aboriginal Studies subject with those of teachers who had not. Craven et al. (2005c) found that teachers who had completed a core Aboriginal Studies course had higher self-concepts across a wide range of subject matter and domains compared with teachers who had not undertaken such subjects. Teachers who had undertaken a core course felt that they knew more about Aboriginal history, current issues and pedagogy.
for teaching Aboriginal Studies and generally felt they were more effective teachers for Aboriginal students.

These studies (Craven et al. 2005a; 2005b) make a valuable contribution to the literature, particularly given the paucity of empirical educational research on “how to get things done” (Bin-Sallik, 1994a; 1994b Mellor & Corrigan, 2004). As well as highlighting the positive effects a core Indigenous studies subject can have on teachers’ self-concepts, motivation, commitment, and innovation, Craven et al. (2005c) concluded that core Aboriginal Studies assist graduate teachers in teaching Aboriginal Studies and Aboriginal students. Their findings suggest that teachers who undertake core or elective Aboriginal Studies courses as a component of their teacher education degree learn more about Aboriginal Studies subject matter, and how to teach Aboriginal Studies and Aboriginal students, compared with teachers who did not undertake such courses.

They also found that teachers undertaking such courses had a higher self-concept, felt more capable of teaching Aboriginal students, and were more likely to enjoy teaching Aboriginal Studies than teachers who did not undertake such courses. Teachers who had been taught Aboriginal Studies were also more likely to go on to undertake postgraduate studies in the area. The teachers in the study also expressed a strong view that Aboriginal Studies should be a mandatory subject in pre-service courses and offered a range of suggestions for improvements.

The study found that the Aboriginal Studies courses currently available to pre-service teachers would benefit from review and refinement. Areas identified as needing improvement in pre-service courses were: development of skills relevant to classroom practice; writing units of work; development of pedagogical skills; understanding departmental requirements; consultation with local Aboriginal communities; and the teaching of comparative Indigenous Studies. Craven et al. (2005a) also drew attention to the lack of rigorous research to identify the key successful pedagogy in current teacher education courses that primarily target non-Aboriginal students.
A further issue is that a number of teacher education institutions have not as yet introduced a core Aboriginal Studies subject, electives are often not conducted in practice, nor are there identified strategies for incorporating Aboriginal perspectives across the teacher education curriculum. Craven et al. (2005a; 2005b; 2005c) established that most core subjects have been introduced only recently, and that there has been very little critical evaluation of the motives, values, and attitudes in institutions incorporating core Aboriginal Studies subjects into the primary teacher education curriculum. This is extremely important. In the words of one teacher: “I think it’s great to see an interest being taken in the teacher education of Aboriginal Studies. So many teachers are currently misinformed and have a bad attitude towards Aboriginal Education. It will be nice to see a change in the future” (Craven et al., 2005c, p. 50).

The impact of Aboriginal Studies subjects on pre-service teachers’ knowledge and attitudes, commitment, and ability to understand and teach Aboriginal Studies to all Australian students also needs to be critically evaluated.

The present investigation aims to contribute to further addressing these issues by building on the Craven et al. studies to analyse further the effectiveness of Aboriginal Studies subjects. Undertaking an in-depth case-study approach to explicate effective practice in primary teacher education core courses in two NSW universities, the present investigation aims to:

Identify and contrast the motives, values and attitudes in relation to the incorporation and the ongoing implementation of core Aboriginal Studies subjects in the primary teacher education curriculum of two metropolitan institutions in NSW;

Elucidate the impact of core Aboriginal Studies subjects in primary teacher education courses from multiple stakeholder perceptions on pre-service teachers’ teaching Aboriginal Studies self-concepts, attitudes, commitment, knowledge and skills, ability and understandings to teach Aboriginal Studies;

Identify from multiple stakeholder perceptions the strengths and limitations of the current core Aboriginal Studies subject; and
Identify the institutional factors, personal experiences, and course characteristics that final year pre-service teachers from two institutions perceive as impacting positively and negatively on their attitudes, commitment, knowledge and skills, and ability and understanding to teach Aboriginal Studies.

In examining these issues, this study further elucidates the experiences, challenges, and incentives of those involved in designing, delivering, and experiencing a core Aboriginal Studies subject in two institutions in NSW. It also investigates the influence of the initial experience of learning Aboriginal Studies and learner self-concept on pre-service teachers’ subsequent approaches to teaching Indigenous Studies.

A key purpose of the present investigation is to capitalise on recent developments in self-concept theory to critically analyse the self-perceptions of the value, nature, success, and impact upon pre-service teachers (N=144), Heads of School (n=2), teacher educators (n=2), and Directors of the Aboriginal Units (n=2) of core Aboriginal Studies subjects and Aboriginal perspectives in primary teacher education courses. Self-concept can be defined as cognitive evaluations (acquiring knowledge by the use of reasoning, intuition, and perception) that people have about themselves, their thoughts, values, and point of view (Hattie, 1992). Hence, self-concept is an array of either positive or negative self-evaluations and self-identifications which are thought to stimulate and structure an individual’s behaviour and aspirations.

The methodology of the study follows Yin’s multiple case-study replication design (Yin, 2003), and is set out in two contexts. The logic underlying this multiple case-study replication was that each case was carefully selected to predict similar results or a literal replication to provide a compelling study. The replication presents an accurate picture of how opinions and events have impacted on the people in the institutions in the study, and how these institutions have changed through time. This approach provides rich detail and real life examples of each of the two institutions in terms of values and cultures which contributed to the development and implementation of core Aboriginal Studies subjects and the impact of these subjects on pre-service teachers. Hence this thesis aims to contribute significant conceptual advances in theory, research, and practice in Aboriginal Studies in the context of a multi-case approach to
elucidate successful practice in relation to teaching core Aboriginal Studies subjects in primary teacher education courses.
CHAPTER 2

A RATIONALE FOR TEACHING ABORIGINAL STUDIES

Introduction

This chapter provides an overview of disadvantage in Aboriginal Australia and reviews the literature on teaching Aboriginal Studies and on why we should teach it. Firstly, the chapter provides an overview of the current and pervasive disadvantage in Aboriginal Australia elucidating those factors that have led to inequality between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal Australia. Secondly, the chapter unpacks: Historical calls for teaching Aboriginal Studies, policy implications thereof, and presents a rationale for teaching Aboriginal Studies. Finally, the implications of the literature review for the present investigation are discussed.

Disadvantage in Aboriginal Australia

This section presents evidence of Aboriginal Australian disadvantage across all facets of health and well-being. This evidence of the gap between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal Australia further demonstrates that health and well-being affects educational outcomes. Finally, this section examines social justice issues to highlight the need to be brutally honesty about our past if we wish to live in a socially just society.

Aboriginal Educational Disadvantage

Consecutive reports have identified the educational disadvantage of Aboriginal Australian children. For instance, the Commonwealth Government established an Aboriginal Education Policy Task Force 1988 (chaired by an Aboriginal person, Paul Hughes), which was charged with reviewing a number of policies and reports, and correlating the main findings. The report of this committee became known as the Hughes Report. The Hughes Report (1988, p. 1) stated:
Australians take it for granted, as an inalienable right of citizens of this country that their children will receive at least 10 years of education, as well as the benefits of early childhood education. However, these fundamental rights have not been extended to all Aboriginal families. This is clearly demonstrated by the fact that in the compulsory school years, 1 in 8 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children aged 5 to 9 years do not go to school or pre-school, and for those aged 10 to 15 years an appalling 1 in 6 do not have access to appropriate schooling. Moreover, access to and participation in education for Aborigines beyond the age of 15, whether in senior secondary school, technical or further education or higher education, remains at unacceptable low levels – generally at rates some 3 to 5 times lower than for the community as a whole.

The Hughes Report claimed that there were three main barriers to Aboriginal people gaining access to appropriate educational standards: racial discrimination, social and cultural alienation, and economic disadvantage. Further,

The educational opportunities available to many people are not equal to those available to other Australians, despite a number of actions taken by Governments in recent years… This situation signals a crisis in the provision of education to Aborigines. It also reflects the inadequate way in which education systems, schools and other institutions have faced up to their responsibilities to Aboriginal people, including the extent to which Aboriginal communities have been able to participate in the decisions about education and the nature of the services provided (p. 7).

Examination of a selection of historical policy documents and reports highlights that Aboriginal students, despite the best efforts by the Commonwealth and NSW State Government, remain the most educationally disadvantaged group in Australia. For example, statistics provided in the National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Policy (NATSIEP) (Commonwealth of Australia, 1993, p. 3) showed that “10 per cent of all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people aged 15 years and over
have post-school educational qualifications, compared with a national proportion of 31 per cent”. In 1995, the National Review of Education for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander People found that: “Indigenous people remain the most educationally disadvantaged group in Australia. From preschool to higher education, Aboriginal and Torres Strait people still participate and attend significantly less in education than the rest of the population” (Commonwealth of Australia, 1995, point 18). So severe is this problem that all governments in 1995 agreed that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people remained the most disadvantaged group in Australia (Commonwealth of Australia, 1995, point 77). The Commonwealth Government’s response to the Review of Education for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples (1995), in regard to employment and life opportunities, noted that “education was a means of alleviating disadvantage”. In 1997, the NSW Department of Education and Training acknowledged the “urgent and compelling need to improve educational outcomes for Aboriginal students” (p. 2). This situation was particularly pronounced in the Northern Territory where in 1999 the Northern Territory Department of Education review, Learning lessons: An Independent Review of Indigenous Education in the Northern Territory (1999), found that the educational outcomes for Aboriginal children were in fact declining.

Across Australia during the past decade there have been some improvements in educational outcomes for Aboriginal Australians. For example, the National Report to Parliament on Indigenous Education and Training, 2006 and the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) website (http://www.abs.gov.au/AUSSTATS/abs@.nsf/lookup/4704.0Chapter218Oct+2010, accessed 01.01.11) shows that in 2006, just over half (51 per cent) of 15–19-year-old Aboriginal students were in school, a small improvement over previous years. There was also an increase in students in the 20–24-year-old age group attending post-secondary education, to 13 per cent overall, and 23 per cent of Aboriginal people held a Certificate or Advanced Diploma. The proportion holding a Bachelor degree or above, though low at 6 per cent, was more than double the figure of ten years ago. Gains in the education sector also reflect technological change in society whereby in 2006 half of the Aboriginal people living in major cities had internet access in their homes. However, as the Ministerial Council on Education, Employment,
Training and Youth Affairs (MCEETYA), (Commonwealth of Australia, 2006, p. 4) report shows:

despite some gains, Indigenous Australians are yet to achieve equitable outcomes. Many Indigenous students continue to ‘drop out’ at or before Year 10 and far too few remain at school to complete Year 11 and Year 12, or its vocational equivalent. Of those who do complete Year 12, few obtain the scores needed to gain entry into university. Most Indigenous students, regardless of their completion year, leave school poorly prepared relative to their non-Indigenous counterparts. These outcomes limit the post-school options and life choices of Indigenous students, perpetuating intergenerational cycles of social and economic disadvantage. (Also see National Report to Parliament on Indigenous Education and Training, Commonwealth of Australia, 2006; Report of the Review of Aboriginal Education NSW AECG and NSW DET, 2004)

The socio-economic situation of Aboriginal people today demonstrates that many Aboriginal people continue to exist in a state of powerlessness and poverty. The ongoing legacy of colonisation and governmental policies has led to slow progress of Aboriginal people on every social indicator – health, education, housing, imprisonment, life expectancy – and the continuing position of the most disadvantaged group in Australia (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2006; Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission, Social Justice Report, 2004; pp. 18–20; Mooney in Austin-Broos & MacDonald, 2005, p. 66; National Report to Parliament on Indigenous Education and Training, Commonwealth of Australia, 2006). As early as 1988, the Hughes Report demonstrated that there is a clear link between educational qualifications and employment (1988, p. 15). This claim was again substantiated by MCEETYA (Commonwealth of Australia 2006), which showed that there is a strong relation between educational attainment and income in later years. These historical claims are also supported by international studies that indicate social disadvantage impacts on life choices. For example Michin (2006, Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development http://www.oecd.org/dataoecd/13/60/36165298.pdf (OECD website, (accessed 5.12.08) concluded:
Social disadvantage also matters for the phase of post-compulsory education where it is evident that educational inequalities linked to family background tend to persist and become larger (Fienstein, 2004). The likelihood of staying on after the compulsory school-leaving age is linked to family background and social disadvantage in many countries. Since participation in higher education enhances life chances and success as an adult, this compounds the already wide inequalities linked to social disadvantage that arise in early childhood years, (pp. 11–12).

Another factor affecting the educational success of Aboriginal students is shown by Pedersen and Walker (2000, p. 193) who found in their study of urban Aboriginal-Australian and Anglo-Australian children “that certain aspects of Aboriginality are seen negatively and seemingly stereotypically”. They concluded:

It would appear that the problems faced by Aboriginal children are only likely to be alleviated by structural change, as cultural oppressions are perpetuated by social rules. A good place to start is within the school system itself, which in some respects reflects the societal system at large, (p. 195).

Pedersen and Walker’s findings reiterate the importance of breaking down stereotypes and prejudices to create a more just Australian society. What it also suggests is without adequate pre-service teacher training, teachers cannot be expected to foster the appropriate knowledge, skills and attitudes to teach Aboriginal students effectively. Nor can they assist all Australian students to understand and appreciate Aboriginal history and culture and the importance of reconciliation.

**Disadvantage in Australia’s Aboriginal Population**

To understand the nature of Aboriginal educational disadvantage we need to gain a broader picture of the Aboriginal population of Australia. The Australian Bureau of Statistics (http://www.abs.gov.au/AUSSTATS/abs@.nsf/lookup/4704.0 Chapter230Oct+2010, ABS website, accessed 04.01.11) reported that Aboriginal Australians made up around 517,200 or 2.5 per cent of the total Australian population,
with Torres Strait Islanders comprising 11 per cent of the Aboriginal population of Australia. Sixty per cent of the Aboriginal population lives in two states: New South Wales (148,200) and Queensland (146,400). Over 26 per cent of Aboriginal people live in remote or very remote areas (ABS, 2006). The statistics also show that the life expectancy of an Aboriginal man is estimated to be 67.2 years, 11.5 years less than life expectancy at birth for non-Indigenous males (78.7 year). Longevity is better for the female Aboriginal population and is estimated to be 72.9 years, 9.7 years less than life expectancy at birth for non-Indigenous females (82.6 years). As Tom Calma, former Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Social Justice Commissioner, comments:

There is no greater challenge to the Australian values of decency, fairness and egalitarianism than the inequality in health status between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and the non-Indigenous population. It is a well known fact that a large gap in health equality exists in Australia. The gap in life expectation between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and the non-Indigenous population is estimated to be 17 years. (Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Social Justice Commission, 2005–2006)

Figure 2.1 shows the proportion of the Aboriginal population of New South Wales under 15 years of age was 40.1 per cent, compared to 20.8 per cent of the total New South Wales population (New South Wales Department of Education and Training, 2003b). Figure 2.1 also shows that over half of the Aboriginal population in NSW is 24 years of age or younger.
Aboriginal population and total population of New South Wales in 2001, by age group


With such a young population and such a short life expectancy, most Aboriginal families are in a constant state of mourning for family and friends. This constant grieving can be seen to impact on the health and well-being of Aboriginal Australians and accounts for the high stress rate in Aboriginal Australian communities. For example, the National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Social Survey (NATSISS), 2002 the Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2006 (http://www.abs.gov.au/AUSSTATS/abs@.nsf/Lookup/4714.m0Main+Features12002website, accessed 20.03.06) noted that 82 per cent of Aboriginal Australians reported some sort of stress over a 12-month period, with 46 per cent citing the death of a family member or a close friend. Although the NATSISS 2008 survey (ABS, http://www.abs.gov.au/ausstats/abs@.nsf/mf/4714.0,
accessed. 02.01.11) did not include an overall stress rate regarding death, it did show that Aboriginal people and Torres Strait Islander adults suffered high levels of psychological distress. Thirty-one per cent identified feelings of depression and anxiety, with this rate particularly high among victims of violence. Violence and loss can therefore be seen to impact on mental well-being of Aboriginal people. This was noted by Wanganeen, in Purdie, Dudgeon, and Walker (2010, p. 268), who argued, “that high levels of loss, traumatic and premature mortality and family break-up contribute to the present high levels of stress experienced by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people”. The Australian Bureau of Statistics Adult (2006, http://www.abs.gov.au/AUSSTATS/abs@.nsf/Lookup/4704.0Chapter100Oct+2010#) also shows that more than one-quarter (27 per cent) of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people aged 15 years and over had experienced discrimination in the last 12 months. One in ten (11 per cent) Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children aged 4–14 years reported being bullied at school because of their Indigenous origin (cat. no. 4704.0). The Australian Institute of Criminology, (AIC) Australian Crime: Facts and Figures 2008 (http://www.aic.gov.au/publications/current%20series/facts/1-20/2009/6%20corrections.aspx) show that at the 30 June 2008, the Aboriginal imprisonment rate was (2,195 per 100,000) which is over 17 times high than the non-Indigenous population. Aboriginal prisoners comprised 24 per cent of the total prisoner population in 2008, in comparison with 14 per cent in 1992. The incarceration rate for juveniles is equally disturbing, AIC (2009) shows the detention rate per 100,000 of Aboriginal juveniles was 446, more than 26 times high than that of non-Aboriginal juveniles. The AIC (2009) also shows there has been a 64 per cent increase in the rate per 100,000 of Aboriginal juveniles in detention since a low of 272 recorded in December 2000. In addition, the Australian Human Rights Commission, Social Justice Report (2009, p. 32) noted that Aboriginal youth make up approximately 50 per cent of juveniles in detention in NSW. The Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2006, Labour force status – Employed, http://www.abs.gov.au/AUSSTATS/abs@.nsf/Lookup/1301.0Feature+Article9012009-10 (accessed 9.1.11) show that in 2008, the total proportion of Aboriginal people in the labour force is around 58 per cent, a small increase since 2002. But figures also show the unemployment rate for the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander population was more than three times that of the non-Indigenous population (17 per cent and 5 per cent, respectively) in
The large number of Aboriginal people subject to stress and trauma, and their high imprisonment rates affect employment. Social disadvantage also affects learning experiences which, in turn, affect household income. Hence, educational disadvantage over the course of an individual’s life may lead to greater inter-generational persistence of poverty and inequality of opportunities.

**Health and Education**

As indicated by numerous reports (e.g., Commonwealth of Australia, NRPIET, 2006 and 2001; The Fred Hollows Foundation, 2004; the ABS NATSISS 2008), the health status of Aboriginal Australians is drastically below that of the rest of the Australian population. These reports have also identified the connection between health and education. Aboriginal people suffer higher rates of diabetes, respiratory diseases, cancer, and therefore hospitalisation than the non-Aboriginal population. In some communities there is a high rate of alcohol consumption, which can lead to family violence and community dysfunction. Meanwhile, low birth weight of Aboriginal Australian babies has increased to double that of the non-Aboriginal population (Maushart, 2009). These statistics are compounded when we also take into account teen maternity. Teen maternity in the Australian population is “16 per thousand but among the nation’s Aboriginal teens, it’s 70 per thousand – the highest of any developed nation in the world” (Maushart, 2009). Schwab and Sutherland (2004, pp. 10–11) indicate an increased body of research purporting that “biological processes occurring before birth” can affect brain development, which may impact on a child’s ability to learn. Low birth weight, infant malnutrition, chronic infections such as Otitis Media, neglect, and child abuse are also identified as impacting on a child’s capacity to learn in later years. In addition, other health factors such as the health of the parents, poor hygiene, and inadequate or non-existent health infrastructure, particularly in rural and remote communities, have lifelong adverse affects on children’s ability to learn, thereby impacting adversely on educational outcomes.
Social Justice and Education

Linda Burney in her 2003 inaugural speech to the NSW Parliament (the first Aboriginal person to serve in that legislature) spoke about being an Aboriginal person and the importance of social justice in the context of education: “Education is the pillar, the cornerstone of social justice. It is what equals us out… It is education that can bring about equity – equity of outcomes. Many people have said, ‘What got you to this place?’ It’s simple: I could read” (Burney in Fullilove, 2005, p. 178). Social justice can mean many things to many people (Elliot & Hatton, 1994; Hatton & Elliot, 1994 in Hatton (Ed), 1994) but for the purposes of the current investigation, social justice is the provision of an education system which provides educational access, participation, and positive life outcomes to all students in Australian schools. No Aboriginal Australian student, regardless of gender, socio-economic status, location or cultural background, should be disadvantaged. To understand and tackle these social factors and to create a just society requires a commitment from education institutions such as universities, departments of education, and schools as well as administrators, teachers, parents, and communities. Furthermore, consideration needs to be given to why this commitment to social justice is not embraced readily by the broader society and its political leadership. As Mick Dodson (1993), the former Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Social Justice Commissioner stated that:

Social Justice is what faces you when you get up in the morning. It is awakening in a house with adequate water supply, cooking facilities and sanitation. It is the ability to nourish your children and send them to a school where their education not only equips them for employment but reinforces their knowledge and appreciation of their cultural inheritance. It is the prospect of genuine employment and good health: a life of choices and opportunity free from discrimination (p. 8).

In Australia, schooling is compulsory. It is therefore imperative that education providers identify and acknowledge difference and eliminate barriers to learning outcomes. This may take the form of “positive discrimination”, for example, the employment of Aboriginal Education Workers in Schools or Equal Employment
Opportunity (EEO) principles of employment to ensure that there are role models in the school, or core Aboriginal Studies subjects in primary teacher education courses. Social justice involves identifying differences and disadvantage, providing an inclusive curriculum, and a clear understanding of pedagogy which recognises that teaching includes not only an understanding of subject knowledge and curriculum content, but an understanding of the location, socio-economic status, and cultural background of Aboriginal Australian communities. It also means careful and rigorous evaluation of subjects, disciplines, and curricula to evaluate wider cultural realities. The main philosophical and ethical basis for social justice is to redress past injustices and inadequacies within public education for Aboriginal people, and make a positive difference now and into the future.

Teaching Aboriginal Studies involves addressing reconciliation, political reformation and the recognition of collective rights. In short, it is about social justice. If these objectives are to be achieved, all Australian children need to be taught Aboriginal Studies. It also involves Australians’ accepting the authenticity of Aboriginal Australia; providing Aboriginal children with appropriate curriculum which recognises their culture; and providing not only Aboriginal children but all children with a relevant educational experience. The exclusion of core Aboriginal Studies in primary teacher education courses sends a clear message that devalues a shared history and can be seen as part of the “hidden curriculum”. Insufficient knowledge, skills, and attitudes of pre-service teachers need redress. Institutions may argue that there are already too many subjects to be covered, but as Giroux (1980) emphasises, what is omitted from the formal curriculum can be significant. As Fowell (1988) asserts, “Aboriginal history is Australian history it belongs to us all... Kooris do not want to constantly rehash some of the ugliest scenes from the past, or engage in an endless diatribe against white people, but we do want the truth acknowledged then we can all move on together.” Similarly, Dr Alex Boraine, Vice-President of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission in South Africa, emphasised at the Australian Reconciliation Convention: “Truth telling rejects denial and helps to come clean in order to build and to heal. It is not a mere romantic excursion into our past history; it is a deliberate attempt to come to terms with what happened and to be quite brutally honest about it. Not in order to stop there, but that we can begin to build on that kind of foundation, that healing can come to a very damaged
country” (Council for Aboriginal Reconciliation, 1997, p. 36). Teaching Aboriginal Studies to all Australian students is therefore a vital element in aiding an understanding between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people.

An important step to achieving the stated aims of reconciliation is appropriate core Aboriginal Studies subjects for pre-service teachers in primary teacher education courses. If Australians want to live in a socially just society, it is important for pre-service teachers to comprehend and acknowledge the legacies of colonisation, and that racism continues in Australia and in educational institutions today. It is equally important that we teach pre-service teachers the history of Australia from an Aboriginal perspective. In this way, pre-service teachers will be better able to develop pedagogies that challenge an ethnocentric curriculum and enable them to teach about Australia’s diverse history. Through the process of learning about and deconstructing assimilationist ideologies, pre-service teachers are better equipped to help Aboriginal Australian children develop knowledge and appreciation of their own cultural inheritance. To address the appalling statistics on Aboriginal education in Australia and to operate effectively in this challenging environment, teachers need to know and understand the principles of reconciliation, equity, and social justice. Teachers have a critical role to serve in this challenging process.

**Why Teach Aboriginal Studies?**

*Introduction*

This section poses the question “What is Aboriginal Studies?” It reviews policies and reports at the Commonwealth level and, in particular, developments at the New South Wales (NSW) state level that have identified Aboriginal disadvantage and mandated an Aboriginal education policy. It shows that both Commonwealth and NSW State policies advocate teaching Aboriginal Studies as a way to achieve educational parity for Aboriginal students and as a means of educating Australian students about Aboriginal Australia.
The section goes on to present a rationale for teaching Aboriginal Studies, beginning with historical calls for its introduction. It then demonstrates the importance of teaching Aboriginal history, especially in the light of the longstanding misinformation about Aboriginal Australia, and it reflects on historical issues which have led to the need for educational reform. This is followed by a discussion of the concept of reconciliation, the formation of the Reconciliation Council and changes to the reconciliation agenda over time. Finally, the section shows a change in government direction regarding Aboriginal affairs with the apology to the stolen generations and the incoming Labor government’s commitment to closing the gap between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal Australians.

*Aboriginal Education and Aboriginal Studies*

Defining Aboriginal Studies and distinguishing it from Aboriginal education is important in the framework of teaching pre-service teachers. Aboriginal education refers to the need to improve the education outcomes for Aboriginal students at all levels of education. It pertains to policies and educational institutions that are responsible for applying these policies and undertaking strategic development to engage and support Aboriginal students. Aboriginal Studies involves teaching all Australian students Aboriginal history and culture in order to break down stereotypes and create a more cohesive and socially just Australia. It is also the vehicle used to teach students the history of Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal relations in Australia. It provides an understanding of the diversity of Aboriginal cultures. In essence, it refers to studies about Aboriginal people’s cultures and histories, while creating a pedagogical learning environment for Aboriginal students in the school sector. Through learning about Aboriginal history and culture – pre-colonisation to contemporary issues – it is hoped that Australian citizens will acknowledge the damage to Aboriginal societies from the consequences of past practices and prejudices, and develop a commitment to shaping a better future.

For NSW teachers, Aboriginal Studies has been a mandatory requirement for many years (see for example Aboriginal Education Policy [AEP] NSW DET, 1982; 1996 and NSW DET’s Aboriginal Education and Training Policy, 2008; 2009).
In particular, the 2008 DET Aboriginal Education and Training Policy (AETP) emphasises that through the study of Aboriginal Studies and perspectives, all students will develop positive attitudes towards Aboriginal cultures and histories. It is also implicit in the AETP that reconciliation between Aboriginal Australians and all Australians will occur through increased understanding and knowledge about Aboriginal Australia amongst all Australians. Hence, the NSW DET calls for all teachers to teach Aboriginal studies and/or integrate Aboriginal perspectives into the primary and secondary school curriculum. For example, the NSW Higher School Certificate Aboriginal Studies Stage 6 Syllabus, http://www.boardofstudies.nsw.edu.au/syllabus_hsc/pdf_doc/aboriginal-studies-st6-syl-from2010.pdf (Board of Studies NSW website, accessed 23.2.10) is designed to:

foster intellectual, social and moral development by enabling students to think critically about the historical and contemporary experiences of Aboriginal peoples. Through this study students will develop a keen understanding and appreciation of the concepts of social justice and shared histories, and will critically examine their role as active and informed citizens. Aboriginal history and culture are fundamental to the development of Australian identity. Aboriginal Studies acknowledges the contribution of Aboriginal cultures and communities to Australian society (p. 6)

From this quote we see that the outcome of learning Aboriginal Studies in the senior syllabus is to foster understanding and appreciation of the historical and contemporary culture and histories of Aboriginal people among all students undertaking the subject.

For the primary school sector in NSW there is no Aboriginal Studies syllabus per se but teachers are expected to integrate Aboriginal perspective into the primary school curriculum. The Board of Studies NSW Consultation Paper, Defining Mandatory Outcomes in the K–6 Curriculum 2004, http://k6.boardofstudies.nsw.edu.au/files/curriculum/mand_ocomes_consult.pdf (Board of Studies NSW website, accessed 23.2.10), states:
mandatory outcomes provides opportunities for students to develop knowledge, essential understanding and skills in Aboriginal and Indigenous education, Australian history and geography, civics and citizenship, environmental education and multiculturalism. (7.3 Human Society and Its Environment)

The Board of Studies NSW provides, via their website, examples of integrated Aboriginal perspective across years K–6 which are designed to promote innovative teaching practices for Aboriginal Studies using the primary curriculum. Aboriginal Studies therefore can be defined as teaching Australian school students about Aboriginal cultures and histories, prior to and following the colonisation of Australia. By contrast, Aboriginal Education can be defined as developing learning and teaching pedagogical practices which meet the needs of Aboriginal students.

The next segment of this section examines some policies and reports which have called for the introduction of Aboriginal Studies.

**Policies and Reports**

*Historical developments in Commonwealth Aboriginal Education policy*

Teaching Aboriginal Studies is not confined to NSW but is a policy of the Australian Commonwealth Government. In response to the acknowledged inequalities in education experienced by Aboriginal people, Commonwealth Governments have sponsored numerous reports. The most significant of these and the first of its kind, the Hughes Report (1988), had as its main themes access to and participation in education, equity of educational outcomes. It set targets for Aboriginal people in all sectors of education. Aboriginal Australians saw the development of a National Aboriginal Education policy as the “cornerstone” of self-determination through the involvement and control of education for Aboriginal people in achieving equity and participation (Hughes, 1988, p. 41). The Report also recommended that “there should be at least one compulsory component of Aboriginal Studies/Aboriginal education in every pre-service teacher education course, and in general all in-service courses” (Hughes Report, 1988,
p. 28). The Commonwealth Government’s response to the Hughes Report led to an all State and Territory governments’ meeting in 1989, to discuss the draft implementation of a National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Policy, commonly known as the National Aboriginal Education Policy (NAEP, 1990).

The NAEP (1990) was endorsed in 1989 by States and Territory governments, and came into effect nationally in 1990. This policy is important as it brought together all States and Territories in a unified commitment to national goals for Aboriginal education. It set benchmarks for achieving these goals and anticipated that there would be a noticeable increase in Aboriginal participation by the year 2000. The policy also facilitated new initiatives in Aboriginal education, raised the profile of Aboriginal Studies in schools and highlighted the critical nature of key issues in Aboriginal education. The National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Policy was reviewed in 1993. The purpose of The National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Policy (NATSIEP), (Commonwealth of Australia, 1993), was to build on the 1989 National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Policy by identifying successful initiatives. The 1993 policy reiterated the State and Territory governments’ commitment to the 21 long-term policy goals and restated the goals of enabling Aboriginal students at all levels of education to have an appreciation of their history, culture, and identity (20); and providing all Australian students with an understanding and respect for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander traditional and contemporary culture (21).

In 1995 the National Ministerial Council on Education, Employment, Training and Youth Affairs (MCEETYA) was formed to develop a national strategic plan to implement the AEP (Commonwealth of Australia, 1995). The MCEETYA Taskforce “took the discussion and recommendations of the Review and cross-referenced them to systems and institutional plans to arrive at a national strategic plan achievable through to the year 2002” (Commonwealth of Australia, 1995, ii). Both the NAEP and Adelaide Declaration (MCEETYA, Commonwealth of Australia, 1999) goals concentrated on improving outcomes for Aboriginal students, and also identified the need for all students in the primary and secondary school education sector to understand and respect Aboriginal traditional and contemporary culture. This was reaffirmed in the Melbourne
Declaration on Educational Goals for Young Australians (MCEETYA, Commonwealth of Australia 2008, p. 9) which states that students should:

[U]nderstand and acknowledge the value of Indigenous cultures, and possess the knowledge, skills and understanding to contribute to, and benefit from, reconciliation between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians.

**National Indigenous English Literacy and Numeracy Strategy.** In response to the low literacy and numeracy rates of Aboriginal Australian students, the Prime Minister launched the National Indigenous English Literacy and Numeracy Strategy (NIELNS) 2000–2004 (Commonwealth of Australia, 2000). The NIELNS was a four-year strategy which required that from 2002, the Commonwealth minister responsible for Education report Aboriginal literacy and numeracy rates to Parliament annually. The National Report to Parliament on Indigenous Education and Training 2004, (Commonwealth of Australia, 2006, p. 25) shows that in 2004, there were 130,483 Aboriginal students – 4.48 per cent of all primary students, 3.14 per cent of all secondary students and 3.92 per cent of the total school enrolments in Australia. NIELNS has been collecting data now for the six years from 1999 to 2006 and it noted that “there are more Aboriginal students participating in school however, there has been little improvement during the quadrennium” (p. xxiv). The national Report to Parliament on Indigenous Education and Training shows that while a great deal of effort and money has gone into special programs to assist Aboriginal students, and while Aboriginal education attainments have improved significantly in the last decade or so following the introduction of a range of special programs, Aboriginal education attainment remains significantly below those of the non-Aboriginal community.

**NSW Aboriginal Education policy**

The New South Wales Aboriginal Education Policy (1982a) was designed in consultation with Aboriginal people to implement Aboriginal Studies and incorporate Aboriginal perspectives in all subject areas in NSW schools. It was expected that the implementation of this policy would build the self-esteem of Aboriginal students by sharing culture, and heighten the awareness and understanding of non-Aboriginal
students. This policy was introduced in 1982 and became mandatory in 1987, with support material created in partnership with the NSW Directorate of Special Programs. The support material included:

- Aboriginal education policy: Support Document 1 (1982a);
- Guidelines for teaching Aboriginal studies: Support Document 2 (1982b);
- Aboriginal Australia: A preliminary chronology: Support Document 3 (1982c);
- The effects of culture contact on Aboriginal Australia: Support Document 4 (1982d);
- Strategies for teaching Aboriginal children: Support Document 5 (1982e);

The NSW DET revised the NSW Aboriginal Education Policy in 1996 and developed an Aboriginal Education Policy training package. Its implementation was backed with financial support to ensure NSW Department of Education and Training staff (at all levels) had appropriate in-service training on the implementation of this policy (NSW Department of School Education, 1997). Again, support materials were developed as part of the implementation of the AEP. These support materials were distributed to all Department of Education Training staff when they undertook staff development. As a response to the Report of the Review of Aboriginal Education, NSW AECG & NSW DET (2004), in 2008 NSW DET developed a new document known as the Aboriginal Education and Training Policy: An Introductory Guide (2008; updated in 2009). The policy highlights the need for all staff to focus on three guiding elements for its effective implementation: relationships; engagement; and ongoing learning.

This new policy prioritises Aboriginal education and training as the core business of all Departmental staff, increasing cultural competencies in Aboriginal cultures for all staff, and an acceleration and maintenance of the Department’s progress in achieving its goal that by 2012, Aboriginal student outcomes will match or better
outcomes of the broader student population. These guidelines are particularly relevant as they tie in with the Two Ways Together, which is the NSW Government’s 10-year plan (2003–2012) to improve the lives of Aboriginal people and their communities (Aboriginal Affairs Plan, Two Ways Together, accessed 27.2.10). At both Commonwealth and NSW state levels there has been significant policy development over the past decade. In terms of outcomes in training, much remains to be achieved in order for policies aimed at pre-service teachers to be realised in terms of equality of outcomes for Aboriginal students.

Report of the Review of Aboriginal Education. The Report of the Review of Aboriginal Education: Yanigurra Muya: Ganggurrinyma Yaari Guurulaw Yirringin.gurray Freeing the Spirit: Dreaming an Equal Future (NSW AECG & NSW DET, 2004, p. 11), states that “Despite the many educational initiatives implemented by the Commonwealth and NSW Governments over the past 20 years, Aboriginal students continue to be the most educationally disadvantaged students in Australia”. The Review (RAE, 2004) was charged with examining “current approaches to attendance, retention rates and academic performance” and “working with Aboriginal Communities to guide the development of a comprehensive state-wide approach to improving outcomes for Aboriginal students” (p. 12). The Report identified that the problems inherent in Aboriginal student educational disadvantage within the NSW education system was also due to broader social justice issues which include social, cultural, environmental, economic, and health factors.

In the past, policies, and practices directed at Aboriginal people have in many ways disempowered them and denied them equal status in Australian society. Riley-Mundine (1988, pp. 154–166) likened past policy statements relating to Aboriginal Education as “an active form of bias against Aborigines enforcing institutional racism”. She argued that “the policies on Aboriginal Education are no more than statements of concern, rather than policies in the truest sense”. Riley-Mundine et al. also emphasise that “policy is only useful when it can be understood, it is clear and can be implemented” (p. 155). Aboriginal people need to be involved not only in the making of policies but their implementation. The implementation of Aboriginal Studies in schools is best done in partnership with teachers and the local Aboriginal people (NSW AECG
But to date not all pre-service teachers are being taught the importance of teaching Aboriginal Studies or how to interact with Aboriginal communities (Craven, 2005a). There is a danger that the implementation of any Aboriginal Studies curriculum can become meaningless to individual teachers and schools.

Over past decades numerous reports (Hughes Report, 1988; National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Policy, 1993; Commonwealth of Australia, 1995; NSW Department of Education and Training, Aboriginal Education Policy, 1997; Adelaide Declaration on Educational Goals for Young Australians, 1999; Reports to Parliament on Indigenous education and training in Australia, 2006; Melbourne Declaration on Educational Goals for Young Australians, 2008) attest to the low literacy and numeracy achievements of Aboriginal students. Teaching all children about Aboriginal history and culture is also espoused as an important element in the classroom to help breakdown stereotypes and give Aboriginal students a safe learning environment in which their culture and heritage are respected. As Craven (1999b) noted, schools are much more than a place where you learn to read and write. They are places where children “learn their location in the social world. The school and the teacher play a major part in formation of identity and self-esteem… The messages that they receive from teachers are vital” (p. 20). Craven argues it is impossible for teachers to effectively teach Aboriginal Studies without effective teacher training. Therefore, if we seek a more equitable society, and plan for this to happen, it is crucial for Australian school children to learn about Aboriginal history. An important condition for achieving this outcome is to teach the teachers how to teach Aboriginal Studies. The importance of adequately preparing pre-service teachers to teach Aboriginal Studies is fundamental in attaining this objective.

Commonwealth and NSW Aboriginal Education policies can be viewed as a plan for teachers which reflect the government and community’s desire for change. The documents are written with the objective that teachers and schools will instigate the changes they recommend. For example, the new NSW Aboriginal Education and Training Policy (2009) is a guide for teachers and schools on how and why they should implement the policy and signal the Department’s efforts to incorporate Aboriginal
content into NSW school curriculum. However, it is not possible to implement change without effective teacher education and despite calls to do so, this goal remains elusive as the following section demonstrates.

**Calls for Teaching Teachers Aboriginal Studies**

Pre-service teacher education has long been recognised as a key area to redress Aboriginal educational disadvantage. From as early as 1975, the Aboriginal Education Consultative Group Report to the Commonwealth Government, recommendation 22 stated “all teacher trainees in Australia should study courses related to Aboriginal society” (p. 26). Again, in 1986, the National Aboriginal Education Committee (NAEC) recommended “there should be at least one compulsory component of Aboriginal Studies/Aboriginal education in every pre-service teacher education course” (Commonwealth of Australia, 1986, p. 28). The Report of the Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody, recommendation 295, states “all teacher training courses include courses which will enable student teachers to understand that Australia has an Aboriginal history and Aboriginal viewpoints on social, cultural and historical matters”. In response to the Report of the Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody, the Commonwealth Government established the Council for Reconciliation. A key role of the Council was “to bring about through education, a greater awareness of Aboriginal history, cultures, dispossession, continuing disadvantage and the need to redress that disadvantage” (Tickner, 1991, p. 5). The Project of National Significance report, Teacher Education Pre-service: Preparing teachers to Work with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Students (Bourke, Dow, and Lucas, 1994, p. 20) recommended that “the Commonwealth and the States/Territories ensure that strategies to implement the National Aboriginal Education Policy including opportunity to undertake teacher training with a specific emphasis on the education of Aboriginal children”. Furthermore, in reference to the wider importance of education, Senator Herron stated that “Genuine self-empowerment can only come from education and learning of management skills. It is the key to unlock the vicious cycle of unemployment, lack of self-esteem and hopelessness. We must make education more accessible to Indigenous Australians if we are to achieve the goal of social and economic equality of opportunity” (Senator Herron, Joe and Enid Lyons Memorial Lecture, 1996,
Hence, a wide range of stakeholders have identified the need for all teachers to learn about Australia’s Aboriginal history.

The Australian Council of Deans of Education produced the 1998 report Preparing a Profession, which covered national standards and guidelines for initial teacher education. Their report stated that in regard to pre-service subjects and the curriculum, “Graduates should have developed the knowledge, understandings, capabilities and dispositions to teach all Aboriginal students and to teach all students about Indigenous issues” (Australian Council of Deans of Education, 1998, p. 11). In 1999, a forum on Aboriginal education, coordinated by the Australian College of Education (ACE) and funded by the Department of Education Training and Youth Affairs (DETYA), was held in Alice Springs. Of the 26 strategies developed, 8 were directly related to strengthening teacher education. For example, strategy 17 states that “Systems will require a mandatory Aboriginal Studies as a prerequisite for employment of all teachers” and Strategy 22 recommends “that pre-service education programs become the platform for better trained and prepared teachers” (ACE, 1999).

The New South Wales Department of Education Report, Review of Aboriginal Education, (NSW DET and NSW AECG, 2004, p. 712) acknowledges that “education systems around the nation have been unable to deliver the same level of success for Aboriginal students as they have for other students. The gap persists despite the efforts of educators in schools… There is reason to believe that what we are doing is not working. Put simply, it is time for a new approach.” The report highlights the disparity in outcomes for Aboriginal students in NSW while recognising that over the past 20 years the NSW government has invested a considerable amount of time and money on initiatives to bridge the educational gap. This report again called for core Aboriginal Studies as a compulsory unit of study in teacher education. For example, recommendation 9.15 (pp. 190–193) states:

That the government, through DET and the Teacher Education Council (Deans of Education), ensure that universities include Aboriginal education as a mandatory component in education courses. It would be advantageous if Aboriginal units within each university were involved in this process.
Indeed, numerous reports have identified a need for universities to introduce core Aboriginal Studies subjects into teacher education courses, not only for the advancement of Aboriginal students but for all Australian children to gain a better understanding and appreciation of Australia. Yet today in NSW there are institutions that do not have core Aboriginal Studies subjects, and the dilemma for new teachers is considerable, as the following extract of an email received by the researcher from a first year out teacher confused about teaching Aboriginal Studies shows:

I am very keen to teach students of all backgrounds in a fair and equitable manner, my dilemma is that I have no experience whatsoever in indigenous culture. My understanding of indigenous life and people is very limited and I am really anxious about teaching people with respect and sensitivity when I have very little knowledge. None of my degree had compulsory units to cover this area and as our subject choices were limited I was unable to choose any indigenous units. I have read the aboriginal education policy but I am finding it difficult to understand altogether. The recommendations that teachers teach in a certain way are almost impossible to fulfil with little or no training and whilst I applaud the efforts of those concerned to improve the educational outcomes for indigenous students I feel quite inadequate in being able to do so appropriately. I feel very pressured as I do not wish to be one of those teachers who just educates from a Eurocentric perspective. Unfortunately my own training has been very Eurocentric, something which I have had no control over. Could you please give some insight into what the aboriginal education policy actually expects and who most benefits from its implementation? I am not sure if it is a good thing for indigenous students or not. Any information would be greatly appreciated. (new teacher, personal communication, 10 January, 2007).

Although some teacher education courses do have Aboriginal Studies electives in their teacher education courses, this is problematic as we are not sure what percentage of the students elect to undertake an elective Aboriginal Studies subject, or whether elective courses that are offered are actually taken up each year by students. This problem is evident from the email discussion from the graduated student cited
above, who had elective Aboriginal Studies but did not undertake the elective
Aboriginal Studies subject:

In my degree structure I had to choose subjects from each of the key
learning areas with maths and English being compulsory. Each KLA had to
have a minimum of 12 credit points with a 24 credit point minor and a 12
credit point major. I chose English as my major. In the HSIE strand there
were ten areas which we could choose from to study in a major, minor or
just as part of the degree but we were only allowed to choose one subject
area. Aboriginal studies was available but I personally felt at the time that to
minor in sociology would give me a broader understanding of people and
students in general, this effectively shut me out of any indigenous studies. I
think it is a very disappointing thing an as I said before I feel very uneasy
about teaching in an area that I do not understand. I feel that it is difficult
even to implement teaching strategies from any perspective in all subject
areas as a beginning teacher let alone teaching from and indigenous
perspective. I also wonder how many busy classroom teachers have even
read the policy. I know of one at least who admits to never having read it or
any other policies for that matter. From my experience in schools with very
few indigenous students I have only ever seen token attempts to include
aboriginal perspectives. Lip service is given to reconciliation day and the
like with students usually doing nothing more than some dot painting,
boomerang throwing and Johnny cake cooking. I do not blame the teachers
as they like me have little experience and knowledge and perhaps even the
time to include an aboriginal perspective in all of the subject areas. My real
question is does this policy really benefit the indigenous students, whose
interests are best served or are they ultimately disadvantaged by it and its
ideals? What really are the problems it identifies and addresses besides the
good old literacy and numeracy? What does the policy NOT say in reality? I
am concerned about these issues because I feel that past injustices and
misunderstandings can and will be perpetuated inadvertently by teachers
such as myself. I am sorry now that I was not able to get a better
understanding through my own education and training of how to deal with
such issues not only in regard to indigenous students but also with consideration for other students from other backgrounds. This is a fascinating subject and it would be great to be able to sit and discuss it in depth with others who feel the same way. Good luck with your PhD. (new teacher, personal communication, 10 January, 2007)

It can be seen from the email communication above that if pre-service teachers are not taught a core of Aboriginal Studies they are not being adequately equipped with the knowledge, skills, and attitudes to teach either Aboriginal Studies or Aboriginal students. This lack of knowledge and skills means that many teachers will continue to be denied appropriate teacher education and many Aboriginal students will continue to fail. As Craven (1996a, p. 5) stressed, “It is vital that that the next generation of Australian teachers are equipped with the knowledge and skills to understand and teach Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies effectively... to present to all Australian children a more accurate history of Australia, with an understanding of Indigenous Australian issues, and thereby contribute to overcoming endemic racism in Australian society. This aim can be achieved by introducing a core Indigenous Australian Studies subject in all pre-service teacher education curricula”.

It is obvious from historical reports and the personal communication above that while there is a sound basis for calling for the introduction of a core Aboriginal Studies subject in primary teacher education courses, there is a general lack of implementation in teacher education institutions. This is unfortunate as a wealth of historical reports have noted the importance of teaching Australian people the shared history of Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal Australia, the subject of the following section.

**Teaching Aboriginal History**

The invasion and colonisation of Australia devastated Aboriginal people and culture and, whether intentionally or not, resulted in the devaluing Aboriginal people and the emergence of two separate histories. Colonisation and imperialism justified the imperial nations’ subjugating other lands with ideologies which supported those acquisitions. As Said (1994, p. 8) noted, “the vocabulary of classic nineteenth-century
imperial culture is plentiful with such words and concepts as ‘inferior’ or ‘subject races’, ‘subordinate people’, ‘dependency, and ‘authority’”, and these terms quietly slipped into the mindsets of non-Aboriginal Australians. As a consequence, a dominant history emerged in Australia from the perspective of the colonisers, that of settler pioneers conquering a brave new world in the face of hardship. The rationale for the taking of land on the basis that the lands were unused or empty, the premise of terra nullius dehumanised Aboriginal people and relegated them to the status of flora and fauna (Phillips & Lambert, 2005). Aboriginal history, the other history of dispossession, massacres, confinement of people to missions and reserves, and the Stolen Generations, were censored as ‘black history’ and largely ignored. The impact of colonisation on the psyche of many Australians cannot be underestimated. As Said recognised, although colonialism has ended, “imperialism… lingers where it has always been, in a kind of general cultural sphere as well as in specific political, ideological, economic, and social practices” (p. 8). For many non-Aboriginal people, there is a collective amnesia of the events of the past which have shaped this nation.

It can be argued that Australia has historical roots in being a racially intolerant society. For example, Alfred Deakin’s ‘A White Australia’ speech in Melbourne on 12 September, 1901 (Fullilove, 2005, pp. 130–135), advocated an immigration restriction bill which called for the exclusion of non-Europeans, thinly veiled with the ideology of difference, and the creation of a national identity based on non-conflicting views from an Australian ‘white perspective’. Consequently, non-Aboriginal Australians have been nurtured on government policies and practices based on ethnocentric views of white Australia’s cultural superiority and assumptions that Aboriginal people were innately inferior.

History therefore impacts on culture and plays a large part in who we are, and how we perceive this nation to have evolved. Non-Aboriginal Australian culture has evolved from the narratives told to them at home, celebrated through events, learnt from books, in the media, and from school. Aboriginal people found little to celebrate in these dominant histories, excluded from history books, castigated by the media with a virtual absence of Aboriginal cultural elements in the curriculum of schools.
Investigation of these differing histories and different ways of knowing the world is the basis for teaching a core Aboriginal Studies subject. Employing holistic critical thinking involves first perceiving the whole of Australia’s shared histories and the context in which they exist. Only then can teachers analyse the facts by their constituent parts. For it is from these understandings that teachers can contextualise and teach Aboriginal Studies/perspectives and competently teach Aboriginal children in the classroom.

In 1991, the Royal Commission into Black Deaths in Custody emphasised the importance of history, education and self-determination as the basis for addressing social injustice in Australia. Commissioner Johnson (Commonwealth of Australia, 1991, Vol. 1, p. 10) noted in relation to history, policy and the Australian psyche that “for a complexity of reasons the non-Aboriginal population has, in the mass, been nurtured on active and passive ideas of racial superiority in relation to Aboriginal people and which sit well with the policies of the domination and control that have been applied”.

Over the past decade prominent Australians have begun to identify the problem inherent in omitting Aboriginal people’s story from Australia’s history. In 1991 the Hon. Robert Tickner, then Federal Minister for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Affairs, stated that:

Rejecting and belittling Aboriginal culture and antiquity has deprived Australians of a rich source of meaning in defining what it is to be an Australian spiritually and culturally. Most Australians are indeed poorer for being alien to an Indigenous culture uniquely shaped by this continent and for being ignorant of the greater part of Australia’s… history. (Tickner, 1991 p. 3)

Tickner’s belief that Australians would benefit both spiritually culturally by learning about and sharing Aboriginal history was echoed by the first statement by an Australian Prime Minister to acknowledge the consequences of past practices,
ignorance about and prejudice towards Aboriginal Australians. This took place in 1992 when Prime Minister Paul Keating made his historic Redfern Park Statement:

It might help if we non-Aboriginal Australians imagined ourselves dispossessed of land we lived on for fifty thousand years – and imagined ourselves told it had never been ours.

Imagine if ours was the oldest culture in the world and we were told it was worthless.

Imagine if we had resisted this settlement, suffered and died in the defence of our land, and then were told in history books that we had given up without a fight.

Imagine if non-Aboriginal Australians had served their country in peace and war and were ignored in history books.

Imagine if our feats on the sporting field had inspired admiration and patriotism and yet did nothing to diminish prejudice.

Imagine if our spiritual life was denied and ridiculed.

Imagine if we had suffered the injustice and then were blamed for it…

It was our ignorance and our prejudice. And our failure to imagine these things being done to us. With some noble exceptions, we failed to make the most basic human response and enter into their hearts and minds. We failed to ask – how would I feel if this were done to me? As a consequence, we failed to see that what we were doing degraded all of us. (Keating, 1993, p. 6)

Clearly, Keating considers that knowledge of our history will break down ignorance and prejudice on the part of Australians towards Aboriginal Australians. Only by learning and sharing our history can we address the past policies and practices that
placed horrific restrictions on Aboriginal Australian people’s rights as citizens. Importantly, the Redfern Park Statement shows the need for education and the underlying belief that through teaching Aboriginal Studies to all Australians, we can move forward to create a more just society for all Australians. As noted Aboriginal historian James Wilson-Miller maintained at the annual lecture of the History Council of NSW in 1997:

Australia’s past Aboriginal history can be avoided no longer. Both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people today have inherited that history. However, it is not up to the present generation of Australians to feel guilty about that history, but more importantly, develop an understanding of, and work to positively address, the many legacies still evident today, which reflect the past treatments of Australia’s Indigenous peoples. If we, the present generations of Australians can do this, then we will make this country a great country, not because we avoided the past, but because we confronted it and overcame it. (Wilson-Miller, 1997, p. 2)

Wilson-Miller shows us the importance of learning Aboriginal history on the basis that it is a shared history and belongs to all Australians. Views of the past continue to be re-interpreted and are a significant force in shaping the way Australian history is beginning to be viewed today. New interpretations of the ways the past and its influences should be regarded have been argued by authors such as Lippman (1981), Rowley (1983), Reynolds (1999), Behrendt (2003), Attwood (2005), Moses (2005) and Nakata (2007). They have addressed the omission of the Aboriginal struggle in Australia by putting forward revisionist arguments. As Reynolds (1999, p. 245) so eloquently noted, they are righting “the history distorted by several generations of nationalist and self-congratulatory writing, which has banished the Aborigines from text to melancholy footnote and thereby expurgated most of the violence and much of the injustice”.

During the 1970s, 1980s and 1990s, enormous changes impacted on Aboriginal people largely due to the new policy direction of government but also due to their own agitation and initiatives from their courageous supporters. For instance, in 1982
Aboriginal people were active in producing the NSW Department of Education’s Aboriginal Education Policy, which recognised the importance of the inclusion of Aboriginal Studies in the school curriculum. The policy was written by Aboriginal people, and was designed to share culture and break down ignorance and misunderstandings. It was also concerned with destroying the stereotypes that contribute to racist attitudes and behaviour. Aboriginal Studies has been a mandatory policy in NSW primary schools since 1982. This was achieved partly through statements by prominent supporters such as the one made by Johnston (1991) in recommendation 295 in the Report of the Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody 1991:

that all teacher training courses include courses which will enable student teachers to understand that Australia has an Aboriginal history and Aboriginal viewpoints on social, cultural and historical matters, and to teach the curriculum which reflects those matters. (Johnston, 1991, p. 96)

There is a strong case for the teaching of Aboriginal Studies. There is an even stronger case for including Aboriginal Studies at the tertiary level. Australian schools and educational institutions have in the past largely ignored Aboriginal history and it is important in teacher training courses in particular to teach pre-service teachers how to teach Aboriginal students and Aboriginal history if we wish to progress reconciliation.

In the past very few Australians had the opportunity to learn that Australia’s history is firmly rooted in Aboriginal culture. Pre-service teachers in particular have had very little opportunity to undertake an Aboriginal Studies subject or course that took into account the shared history of Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal Australia. Hence, their knowledge of the past is limited. Teaching Aboriginal history and Aboriginal perspectives within the curriculum is a mandatory policy for NSW teachers. We cannot expect teachers to teach Aboriginal Studies if they themselves have not learned Aboriginal Studies or how to include Aboriginal perspectives across the curriculum. Clearly, teachers need to undertake a core Aboriginal Studies subject in their primary teacher education courses. The next segment will give an overview of reconciliation in order show that changes in governments impacted on the reconciliation agenda over
time. It will also reveal the current federal Labor government’s push towards partnerships between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people.

Reconciliation

Poor educational outcomes impact on the employment prospects for Aboriginal Australians have led to the appalling statistics in housing, health, and the criminal justice system we see today. With the horrifying statistics outlined above in mind, along with the recommendations of the Report of the Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody (Johnston, 1991), and the fact that Australia had no formal reconciliation agreement, the Commonwealth government set up the Council for Reconciliation Act 1991 (Council for Reconciliation, 1997). The Council for Reconciliation (Council) was charged with leading a decade-long process which would create a better understanding of Australia’s shared history.

It is important that all Australians recognise that we, as a nation, have a shared history. To share history involves changing the way the story of Australia is told and understood. It involves people from the wider community identifying with aspects of indigenous peoples’ cultures and histories. It also involves indigenous people sharing their knowledge and perspective of history with their non-indigenous fellow citizens. (Council for Reconciliation, Reconciliation Information Sheet 6, 1997)

Central to reconciliation is social justice, equity, and the recognition and inclusion of Aboriginal rights within Australian society. Paul Keating’s 1992 ‘The Redfern Park Statement’ statement acknowledged this:

The starting point might be to recognise that the problem starts with us non-Aboriginal Australians. It begins, I think, with that act of recognition. Recognition that it was us who did the dispossessing. We took the traditional lands and smashed the traditional way of life. We brought the disease. The alcohol. We committed the murders. We took the children from their mothers. We practise discrimination and exclusion. It was our ignorance
and our prejudices. And our failure to imagine these things being done to us. (Keating, in Fullilove, 2005, pp. 158)

A formal process of reconciliation was undertaken by the Labor government in 1991 when all members of the Commonwealth Parliament voted to establish the Council for Aboriginal Reconciliation Act 1991. In setting up the Council, the Parliament recognised that there had been no previous procedure, and that it was “most desirable that there be such reconciliation” process on the centenary of Federation in 2001” (Council, 2001). The Council was formulated to “steer a decade-long process aimed at building bridges between Aboriginal and other Australians” (Council p. 4). To do this, the Council was charged with promoting “leadership, education and discussion – a deeper understanding by all Australians of the history, cultures, past dispossession and continuing disadvantage of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people” (Council, p. 4). The Council for Reconciliation was set up to undertake extensive community consultation. It was hoped that by sharing history and telling the truth about the past that Australians would come to understand the consequences to Aboriginal people of these past injustices and that we as a nation could all move on together. At no time was it thought that reconciliation would be achieved in one decade. In 2001 Reconciliation Australia, a private organisation, was set up to continue the reconciliation process. At the launch of the University of Sydney’s Reconciliation Statement on the 1 June 2006, Phil Glendenning, Director of the Edmond Rice Centre and the President of Australians for Native Title and Reconciliation, spoke about reconciliation being a people’s movement (see Glendenning, 2006). He had recently returned from the reconciliation day in London 2006, where some 600 young Australians participated. He expressed the idea that reconciliation is achievable through education of Australia’s young people. During the decade that covered the Reconciliation Act there was a change in government from Labor to Liberal and the philosophy/commitment to reconciliation changed direction. To show the change in direction from one government to the next, the following section highlights advancement in Aboriginal governance and the response by the then Liberal government.

- March 1990 saw the establishment of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission (ATSIC). It replaced the former Department of Aboriginal Affairs at the federal level. It was divided into 35 Regional Councils elected by Aboriginal people, giving the decision making process back to the people. The seventeen federal commissioners of ATSIC were elected by the regions’ councillors to develop policies and programs, and administer the ATSIC budget.

- ATSIC was disbanded on 30 June 2004. In its place the government transferred ATSIC programs to mainstream agencies. A new Ministerial Task Force on Aboriginal Affairs was created; members included the Minister for Immigration and other Ministers with relevant Aboriginal portfolios.

- The judgment of the High Court of Australia, June 1992 Mabo Case. This case was a turning point in the acknowledgement of Aboriginal people’s right to native title. The plaintiff, Eddie Mabo sought native title to Miriam Island in the Torres Straits. The High Court ruled in favour of the original owners. This ruling overturned the premise of terra nullius – land belonging to no-one – henceforth recognising the Aboriginal population as prior owners of the land.

- Under the Liberal government, changes were made to the Native Title Act. These changes addressed concerns from farmers, miners, and other groups who perceived that their interests were being threatened by the original legislation. Thus the co-existence of native access and economic development was maintained.

- The 2000 ‘Bridge Walks’, the first of these being some 350,000 people walking for reconciliation across the Sydney Harbour Bridge, there followed walks in Melbourne, then all other capital cities and country towns. Symbolically, this was a ‘people’s walk’: A show of commitment and acknowledgement of Aboriginal history and a desire for reconciliation.
• The then Prime Minister was an advocate of walking, and was often seen on television in his tracksuit on his morning walk. He did not participate in the symbolic act of ‘building a bridge between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal Australians’ by walking across a bridge for reconciliation.

• The 1997 HREOC Report ‘Bringing Them Home: National Inquiry into the Separation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children from their Families’ illustrated the considerable suffering of Aboriginal families resulting from the inhuman policy of removing Aboriginal children from their parents and placing them in institutions. The report also brought to light the devastating consequences of these heartless separations. Community and other groups’ responses to the report were commendable. More than one million people signed ‘Sorry Books’ which had been distributed by the newly formed Reconciliation Australia.

• A call for an apology arose from the tabling of this report. All states, territories, and local councils made the symbolic gesture and gave an apology. The federal government did not. The reasons given, as noted by Behrendt (2003), were that the then Prime Minister indeed believed that Australians are not responsible for the deeds of the past. This symbolic apology was watered down to a statement of ‘regret’. As a symbolic gesture, it could be seen as not leading the Australian people in the reconciliation process. What an example this could have been and what a difference it could have made to the thousands of Aboriginal people who had been affected by this past policy.


The then Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Social Justice Commissioner criticised the limited approach by the government to reconciliation in his Social Justice reports 2000–2002 (HREOC Report No. 2/2004 & No1/2005). However, whilst the
government made significant changes within the education and governance portfolios in relation to Aboriginal affairs, the criticisms and concerns raised by Social Justice Commissioner were not addressed during the liberal government’s term of office.

In 2007 there was a change of government in Australia. The new Prime Minister declared as part of his platform that if elected he would undertake to give a national apology to Aboriginal people of the stolen generation. To the delight of the population, both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal, Prime Minister Rudd made a National Apology on the 13 February, 2008. This apology was telecast to thousands of people both nationally and internationally. In his historic speech he stated:

there comes a time in the history of nations when their peoples must become fully reconciled to their past if they are to go forward with confidence to embrace their future. Our nation, Australia, has reached such a time. That is why the parliament is today here assembled: to deal with this unfinished business of the nation, to remove a great stain from the nation’s soul and, in a true spirit of reconciliation, to open a new chapter in the history of this great land, Australia. Last year I made a commitment to the Australian people that if we formed the next government of the Commonwealth we would in parliament say sorry to the stolen generations. Today I honour that commitment. (http://www.aph.gov.au/house/Rudd_Speech.pdf, Accessed 28.2.10)

The National Apology was seen as a first step in building trust and faith in the commitment of the government to work in partnership with Aboriginal people. It is now almost three years since that apology and the government continues to affirm its commitment to engaging in a partnership with Australia’s Aboriginal people. Commonwealth, State, and Territory Governments in Australia have also jointly committed A$4.6 billion in targeted initiatives for Aboriginal Australians to drive reform in areas including early childhood development, health, housing, economic development, and remote service delivery. In the years since the Prime Minister delivered the National Apology, the Australian Government has made a commitment to ‘Closing the Gap’.
In the Closing the Gap Report (Commonwealth Government, 2008), the Prime Minister set clear and measurable targets to improve the investment in basic health, education, and other services needed to put Aboriginal Australians on an equal footing with other Australians. For the first time, the Australian Government, together with the states and territories through Council of Australian Governments, has set specific and ambitious targets to address Aboriginal disadvantage. The six key targets that form the Closing the Gap objectives are to:

1. Close the life expectancy gap within a generation;
2. Halve the gap in mortality rates for Indigenous children under five within a decade;
3. Ensure access to early childhood education for all Indigenous four-year-olds in remote communities within five years;
4. Halve the gap in reading, writing, and numeracy achievements for children within a decade;
5. Halve the gap for Indigenous students in Year 12 attainment or equivalent attainment rates by 2020, and

These agreed measures will form the baseline for measuring progress and reforms each year (Closing the Gap website, http://www.fahcsia.gov.au/sa/indigenous/pubs/general/Documents/closing_the_gap/foreward.htm, accessed 7.3.10). The Closing the Gap report illustrates progress each year, and sets out the government’s priorities for the future. As the report states, “Closing the Gap is fundamentally important to building a fairer Australia” (Commonwealth Government, p. 1).

**Implications for the Present Investigation**

noted that “the distressing, but inescapable, response to the question of why the existing policies and substantial funding are not generating a greater improvement in Indigenous learning outcomes is that we really do not know” (p. 51). While this may be the case we must continue to try and find ways to assist change to take place. Having a positive self-concept has been identified by numerous scholars (Shaveson, Hubner, & Stanton, 1976; Shavelson & Bolus, 1981; Marsh, Byrne, & Shavelson, 1988; Marsh, 2002; Marsh & Craven, 1997; 2006; Craven & Parente, 2003; Craven, Halse, Marsh, Mooney, and Wilson-Miller, 2005a; 2005c) as impacting positively on an individual’s education outcomes. It was also acknowledged by Mellor and Corrigan et al.:

A positive self-identity has been identified as one of the factors necessary for individual educational success. While this might be considered an individual difference factor and not related at all to teacher quality, we would argue to the contrary. Individuals differ on the extent to which they have a positive sense of self; however, teachers directly influence the extent to which an individual develops a positive sense of self as a student, especially in the early years (p. 23).

Hence, Mellor and Corrigan et al. proposed that in order for students to do well at school, they need to be taught a positive sense of self. Teachers therefore have an enormous influence on Aboriginal student’s identity. The problem encountered in relationship to teachers’ teaching Aboriginal Studies and perspective to their students, it can be argued, is that without adequate teacher training they themselves will not have the historical knowledge and understanding therefore self-efficacy to teach it effectively. This present research positions itself within pre-service teacher education, an area under-researched in Aboriginal education research literature, to ascertain whether undertaking a core Aboriginal Studies subject acts positively on pre-service teachers’ attitudes, commitment, knowledge and skills, ability and understandings to teach Aboriginal Studies and Aboriginal students.
Summary

This chapter presented a rationale for teaching Aboriginal Studies. The first section outlined Aboriginal disadvantage from an educational perspective and more generally. It pointed out the interrelationship between health, employment, rates of incarceration, inter-generational persistence of poverty and inequality of opportunities of Aboriginal people compared with non-Aboriginal Australians. An important way of redressing these social justice issues is through the process of reconciliation, hence pre-service teachers need to know and understand the principles of reconciliation, equity, and social justice. By teaching pre-service teacher education core Aboriginal Studies subjects they will be able to teach both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal Australian children and help them develop knowledge and appreciation of their own cultural inheritance.

The second section of this chapter differentiated between Aboriginal Studies and Aboriginal education. It provided an overview of policy and reports which acknowledge Aboriginal Australian disadvantage and the call for Aboriginal Studies and Aboriginal perspectives to be incorporated into the school curriculum and presented a rationale for incorporation of these elements into the curriculum. It outlined a plethora of policies and the directions they provide for state and territory education providers, and discussed the research that informs these policies. An overview of reconciliation was outlined to show changes in the government’s reconciliation agenda over time and the current government’s push towards partnerships. It also pointed to the overwhelming support for reconciliation by a great number of non-Aboriginal people in this nation. It is hoped that these policy changes will have long-term consequences for the improvement in relations between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal Australians with a corresponding impact on Aboriginal education.
CHAPTER 3

THEORETICAL UNDERPINNINGS OF THE PRESENT INVESTIGATION

Introduction

This chapter illustrates the significance of self-concept as an educational theory to examine Heads of School, teacher educators, Directors of Aboriginal Units, and pre-service teachers’ self-perceptions of Aboriginal Studies subjects in two institutions with primary teacher education courses. Self-concept theory and research is also used to contextualise the value, nature, success, and impact of core Aboriginal Studies subjects in primary teacher education courses on pre-service teachers.

The chapter provides the theoretical and empirical foundation for the present investigation. It presents a historical overview of self-concept research, and an understanding of the multi-dimensional model of self-concept. In addition, the chapter presents an overview of: Attribution theory, self-efficacy theory, and expectancy-value theory. These theories are investigated in a framework of self-concept theory as key drivers of academic achievement, motivation, and learning outcomes.

The chapter also provides an overview of selected research in Aboriginal Studies. It provides an overview of the project Teaching the Teachers (Craven 1996a; 2005a; 2005b; 2005c), which attempted to address the shortcomings of teaching Aboriginal Studies in primary teacher education institutions, and investigates the impact of a core Aboriginal Studies teacher education subject on teachers’ self-concept. In addition, it offers an overview of the significance of self-concept constructs and the significance of motivational research on pre-service teachers learning core Aboriginal Studies. This is done to identify how the present research capitalises on and extends recent advances in self-concept theory and research in relation to teaching pre-service teachers Aboriginal Studies. Finally, the implications for the present study are presented.
Overview of Self-Concept Research

Theoretical Overview

Historically, terms such as self-esteem, self-worth, self-acceptance, self-efficacy, and self-concept have been used interchangeably to describe how people perceive themselves. For instance Strein (1993) asserted that there are some 15 different descriptors of “self” which can be found in the literature pertaining to “self research”. The use of the word self implies a conscious consideration of one’s character or one’s identity as separate from other people and the environment. In essence, then, it can be perceived as the human reflection of one’s inner self. Huit (2009) contends there is “a variety of ways to think about the self”. He asserts that self-esteem is the “affective or emotional aspect of self” (p. 1). This is how we feel about our self-esteem, which is but a component of self-concept, whereas self-concept is the “cognitive or thinking” component which relates to one’s image of oneself (p. 1). Self-concept, then, can be perceived as the intellectual process by which knowledge is gained from our perception or learning beliefs or as Purkey (1988, p. 1) contended, self-concept is “the totality of a complex, organized, and dynamic system of learned beliefs, attitudes and opinions that each person holds to be true about his or her personal existence”.

Psychologists and therapists have conducted research into self-concept for many years. Sigmund Freud’s theories of self-concept gave us a better understanding of people’s inner mental impression of themselves (Purkey, 1988). In the field of education, there has been a surge in self-concept research as the importance of enhancing self-concept has become a widely valued education goal. It has come to be regarded as a mediating variable which aids in the achievement of important educational outcomes such as academic achievement. There are varying descriptions of self-concept but in broad terms, Shaveson, Hubner, and Stanton (1976, p. 411) stated that:

Self-concept is a person’s perception of himself. These perceptions are formed through his experience with the environment… and are influenced especially by environmental reinforcement and significant others. We do not
claim an entity within a person called “self-concept”. Rather, we claim that
the construct is potentially important and useful in explaining and predicting
how one acts. One’s perceptions of himself are thought to influence the
ways in which he acts, and his acts in turn influence the ways in which he
perceives himself. … Seven features can be identified as critical to the
construct definition. Self-concept may be described as: organized,
multifaceted, hierarchical, stable, developmental, evaluative, and
differentiable.

The Significance of the Self-Concept

In the past, researchers considered self-concept as a uni-dimensional construct,
for example, concentrating on self-esteem or self-worth as one item in a survey.
Research has now demonstrated that self-concept is a multi-dimensional construct
(Shaveson, Hubner, & Stanton, 1976; Shavelson & Bolus, 1981; Marsh, Byrne, &
Shavelson, 1988; Marsh & Craven, 1997; Craven & Parente, 2003; Marsh & Cra
ven, 2006). Shavelson, Hubner and Stanton (1976) in their seminal study reviewed
theoretical and empirical research and developed a theorised model of the possible
structure of the self-concept construct. Their model proposed that self-concept is
hierarchical and that it can be divided into two separate streams: Academic and non-
academic. Due to the unavailability of suitable measurement instruments at the time,
Shavelson et al. were unable to test this theory.

Marsh and Shavelson (1985) re-evaluated the Shavelson et al. hierarchical
model and although their findings generally supported Shavelson et al.’s conclusions,
they established that it was more complicated than first thought. Marsh, in his 1990
study, subsequently demonstrated that in relation to school achievement, self-concept is
very specific. Marsh et al. showed that general self-concept and the non-academic
characteristics of self-concept are not related to academic work. The study illustrated
that general academic achievement measures are related moderately to academic
success but specific measures of subject-related self-concepts are highly related to
success in specific content areas. Marsh et al. (1990) postulated that the two streams can
be further subdivided. For example, academic self-concept can be broken down even
further to become even more subject-specific (e.g. reading, mathematics, science); the 
non-academic self-concept can then be divided into physical elements (e.g. physical 
appearance, emotional, and physical ability). According to this model, academic self-
concept, or one’s knowledge and perceptions about one’s academic ability, can be 
considered as one of the principal components of self-concept. As such the promotion 
of a positive academic self-concept can be viewed as an important educational goal in 
itsself (Marsh & Craven, 2006).

Other Motivational Theories

Attribution theory, self-efficacy theory, and expectancy-value theory are 
investigated as a framework within self-concept and self-perceptions as key indicators 
of academic achievement, motivation, and learning outcomes. There is an abundance of 
motivational theories which could be explored, including goal theory, self-
determination theory, and self-worth theory. For the purposes of this study, they are 
acknowledged but not described in depth.

Attribution Theory

Self-attribution studies have been used to show the perceived causality of 
students who have a high self-concept of a task to be undertaken (Weiner, 1985). 
Attribution theory is concerned with academic motivation. Simply put, the more we feel 
we are in control the more motivated we feel. Conversely, if we feel that we have less 
control we are less motivated. Weiner’s work in attribution theory spans some 30 years 
of study (Weiner, 1985; 2010) and has undergone some refinement but the basic 
premise remains the same. That is, learners are strongly motivated by the outcome of 
feeling good about oneself. According to Weiner, Frieze, Kula, Reed, Rest, and 
Rosenbaum (in Weiner 1985, p. 551), the most dominant causes of an individual’s 
achievement-attributes are: “ability, effort, task difficulty, and luck, within a 2x2 
categorization scheme”. In this model there are four attributes: Ability was internal and 
stable, effort was effort as internal and unstable, difficulty was external and stable, and 
luck was external and unstable.
Weiner et al. later realised there were shortcomings in this categorisation (1985; p. 551), as follows: “ability may be perceived as unstable if learning is possible; effort is perceived as a stable trait, captured with the labels of lazy and industrious; tasks can be changed to be less difficult; and luck may be thought of as a property of a person (lucky or unlucky)”. Therefore the model was changed to reflect the third dimensionality of causality called controllability (Weiner, 1979; 1985), which was introduced into the taxonomy – locus (internal/external, stability [stable/unstable], and controllable/uncontrollable). Therefore, ability can be internal and stable, task difficulty can be external and stable, effort can be internal and unstable, and luck can be external and unstable. In attribution theory individuals assign attributes to explain success or failure. They will interpret their environment to ensure that they maintain a positive self-image, and their expectancies of success or failure will determine the amount of effort they will use on a specific task in the future (see Weiner, 2010 for a comprehensive understanding of the development of attribution-base theory). Finally, as Vockell (2001, p. 2) shows:

Students will most be persistent at academic tasks under the following circumstances:

1. if they attribute their success to either:
   - internal, unstable, factors over which they have control (e.g. effort) or
   - internal, stable, factors over which they have little control but which may sometimes be disrupted by other factors (e.g. ability disrupted by occasional bad luck); and
2. if they attribute their failure to internal, unstable factors over which they have control (e.g. effort).

Attribution theory has implications for motivation and incorporates variation as it puts emphasis on the way that learners are strongly motivated by positive outcome, or how good a person feels about themselves. Attribution theory also has a strong correlation to self-concept, as Marsh (1990) shows in his study designed to measure attributions of success and failure using specific reading and maths scores. He surmised
that the scores “demonstrated a predictable and consistent pattern of relations between the multidimensional self-concept and multidimensional attributions of causes of academic success and failure, and between these self-report measures and academic achievement indicators” (p. 115). Self-concept and attribution theory are closely linked to other motivational research such as, self-efficacy theory which is discussed in the following section.

**Self-Efficacy Theory**

Bandura’s seminal work (1977) asserts that attributions convey information about one’s self-efficacy. For example, people who attempt a task they feel they have mastery over feel good about doing the task (high efficacy), but people who have self-doubt about a task are said to have (low efficacy), and are less likely to attempt the task. Hence, self-efficacy involves the individuals’ self-perception of how well they succeeded on a task and hence how they will approach that task in the future. Self-efficacy or the belief that they can perform a specific task is the best predictor for success on that task. It is also aligned with how learners perceive their capability of producing successful outcomes (Bandura, 1977; 1982; 1993; 1986; also see Bong & Clark, 1999; Sanders & Sanders, 2006; Pajares, 2007). Bandura (1986) identified self-efficacy as, “people’s judgement of their capacity to organize and execute courses of action required to attaining designated types of performance” (p. 391). Bandura (1982) postulated that a person’s efficacy judgements, whether “accurate or faulty”, are acquired from four primary sources of information: performance attainment; vicarious experience of observing the performance of others; verbal persuasion and allied types of social influence that one possesses certain capacities; and physiological states from which people partly judge their capacity, strength, and vulnerability (p. 126). Of these four sources of information people use to judge their self-efficacy, performance attainment or mastery is thought to be the most influential source of efficacy. For example, a person who has repeated success at a task is thought to have heightened perceived efficacy, while someone who fails a task in general, has a lower self-efficacy. Efficacy is slightly more complex as Bandura et al. hypothesised, since once a person has had repeated success and has formed a strong self-efficacy, an occasional failure is
not likely to reduce their sense of self-efficacy. Also, efficacy failure will differ whether or not the failure comes early or later in the mastery experience (Bandura, 1982).

The second source of information is derived from vicarious experience of observing the performance (success or failure) of others. Vicarious experience (observing others) is thought to generate models of success. Hence when a person sees models of success which are similar to that person’s self-view, they perceive that they can attain their goal through persistence and effort. However, observing others fail despite persistent effort can lower the observer’s judgement of their own capacity to succeed. Vicarious experience may not be as reliable as performance attainment or mastery as it relies on social comparison and modelling. It is therefore a less reliable source of information about a person’s own capability. Or, as Bandura et al. (1982) stated when testing vicarious experience, “In vicarious influences observers have to rely solely on what they see in forming generalized perceptions of their coping capacity” (p. 126).

Verbal persuasion and other allied types of social influence are generally used to bolster a person’s perception that they possess certain capacities to achieve a desired outcome. Verbal persuasion is often used in classroom settings by teachers or coaches to persuade students to persist at a task, therefore encouraging students to try harder to acquire mastery of the set task. Bandura et al. (1982) notes: “Although social persuasion alone may be limited in its power to create enduring increase in self-efficacy, it can contribute to successful performance if the heightened appraisal is within realistic bounds” (p. 127). Put simply, being told you can achieve an outcome by hard work implies that the student being persuaded possesses the efficaciousness to do so. Hence, by saying “within realistic bounds”, Bandura is cautioning that over-appraisal can be ineffectual, particularly if the person being persuaded ultimately fails. This failure can lower the person’s self-efficacy and damage their faith in their persuader (Bandura, 1982; 1993).

The final sources of information which people use to judge their capacity are partly formed from their physiological state. When a person becomes stressed or anxious about performing a task, their heart rate increases and they may perceive this as
a sign of vulnerability, which can affect their efficaciousness to do well even when they know what to do. As Bandura (1982) noted, “high arousal usually debilitates performance, people are inclined to expect success when they are not beset by aversive arousal than if they are tense and viscerally agitated” (p. 127).

The information people use to judge their own capacity to perform well, whether it is performance attainment, vicarious experience, verbal persuasion, or physiological arousal, is not intrinsically informative on its own. It is the cues that a person learns to use (cognitive processes) which are indicators of their self-efficacy. Like self-concept theory, self-efficacy theory is domain-specific. By this reasoning, high efficacy in one domain does not necessarily translate to another domain. For example, proficiency in a reading exercise does not necessarily translate to proficiency in a maths domain (Bandura, 1982; 1993; Bong & Clark, 1999; Saunder & Saunders, 2006; Pajares, 2007). Self-efficacy therefore has four major processes: Cognitive, motivational, affective, and selective. Hence, self-efficacy theory is not only about an individual’s perception of their capacity to complete a task, but their ability, the value they attach to the task, and their commitment to do it well (Bandura, 1993; Sander & Sanders, 2006).

**Expectancy-Value Theory**


expectancy-value theory, behaviour is a function of the expectancies one has and the value of the goal toward which one is working [expressed as B = f (E × V)]. Such an approach predicts that, when more than one behaviour is possible, the behaviour chosen will be the one with the largest combination of expected success and value. Expectancy-value theory has proved useful in the explanation of social behaviours, achievement motivation, and work motivation. Examination of its use in achievement motivation can serve to represent the various types of expectancy-value motivations.
As we can ascertain from the statement above, expectancy-value theory crosses many fields of human endeavour linking achievement behaviour. In particular, expectancy-value theory is not only about the belief a person has on how they will perform a specific task but also the value that a person puts on that task, and hence the incentive for performing the task.

Eccles and Wigfield’s modern expectancy-value theory is based on Atkinson’s (1957) view of motivation in relation the individual’s apparent probability of success and the motivating value of success (Eccles & Wigfield, 2002; Martin & Dowson, 2009). Eccles and Wigfield (2002) refined the components of expectancy and value in Atkinson’s theory by extending them to include a greater range of “psychological and social/cultural determinants… expectations and values are assumed to be positively related to each other” (p. 7). Eccles and Wigfield (2002) liken their framework to task-specific beliefs of achievement, persistence, and an individual’s preference related to that person’s task-value, and hence choices. Therefore one’s expectancy-values are influenced by perceptions of other people’s attitudes (what those people expect of them). They are also aligned with the person’s emotional memory (what they have previously achieved), and the person’s interpretation of outcomes (how much they value the task).

Eccles, in her expectancy-value model of achievement (see Appendix 2 for model), outlined four achievement components of task-value which are interconnected, and also draws on identity and self-schema theories (Eccles & Wigfield, 2002). These four components of task-value are: Attainment value, intrinsic value, utility value, and cost. Attainment value refers to the value an individual places on doing well on a given task. Eccles et al. liken this to self-schemata. Self-schemata refer to a person’s cognitive generalisations about oneself. It is thought that self-schemata are derived from past experience, and that these past experiences organise and guide the progression of self-related information contained in a person’s social experience. Hence, Eccles et al. assert that expectancy-value is connected to psychological and social/cultural determinants. Intrinsic value is connected to enjoyment and interest of the individual towards the task involved. Utility value is seen as how the task or subject taken by an individual relates to their current or future goals. For instance, Eccles et al. suggest that students will take
classes that they do not particularly enjoy if it suits their long-term goal. Eccles et al. use the example of a student taking a maths class because the student’s end goal is a science degree. The subject undertaken (maths) is linked to the individual’s short-term and long-term goal (Eccles & Wigfield, 2002, p. 8; also see Eccles, 2009; Martin & Dowson, 2009; Wigfield & Eccles, 2000; Wigfield, 1994). Cost is the final component of Eccles et al.’s four task-value components. Although Eccles attributes value to cost, she also likened cost to “anxiety and fear of both success and failure” (p. 8). This is similar to Weiner’s attribution theory which suggests that individuals assign attributes to explain success or failure. In addition, this component is intrinsic to Bandura’s fourth source of information which people use to judge their capacity, their physiological state. Individuals who are stressed or anxious about performing a task assign to their physiological state a sign of vulnerability. Eccles et al. extended Bandura’s theory by also recognising that cost has choice value. This choice value affects an individual’s choice of subject (an individual may need to take a subject to fulfil a goal that is timetabled against another subject which is of great interest to them), hence choice is related to cost. Cost also impacts on other aspects of the individual’s life choices; time with family, friends, and other activities in an individual’s life (see Eccles, 2009; Martin & Dowson, 2009; Eccles & Wigfield, 2002; Wigfield, 1994, for a comprehensive discussion of similarities and differences deriving from Atkinson, Weiner, Bandura, and Eccles as integrated frameworks of motivation theory).

**Implications**

If we examine both attribution and self-efficacy theories, we see that the variables posited as the relation between self-efficacy and attributions do not imply that one causes the other, which in turn brings about performance. These variables are suggested as being associated with enhancement of outcomes. The variables in Eccles’s expectancy-value model, while positing a relation to self-efficacy and attributions, have likewise shown that ability self-concepts and expectancies also predict an individual’s performance, for example in maths or English. Although its value component shows expectancy plus value can predict career choice, self-concept has also been associated with performance and outcomes. Therefore, it is prudent to acknowledge that the relation between attribution, self-efficacy, expectancy-value, self-concept, and
achievement outcomes may in fact be a network of reciprocal relations whereby change in one variable may result in a change in the others.

**The Significance of Self-Concept Constructs for Pre-service Teachers**

**Overview of the Australian Education System**

There is sufficient literature to demonstrate that part of the reason for the failure of Indigenous students in NSW schools to progress through the education system is due to social factors (Reynolds & Skelbeck, 1976, Connell, Ashenden, Kessler, & Dowsett, 1982; Partington, 1998; 2003; also see Chapter 2). These factors include a curriculum which assumes a different cultural background and set of experiences; conflict between home life and school; cultural differences in the students’ home language; teacher expectation; prejudice from teachers and classmates; poor self-concept; low teacher expectations; and lack of employment prospects (The Report of the Review of Aboriginal Education NSW AECG & NSW DET, 2004; Mellor & Corrigan, 2004).

Educational institutions in Australian society reflect and maintain the beliefs and value of the dominant social group – in other words, the most economically and socially powerful group.

The education system by its very nature reproduces variations according the schooling sector (e.g. public, Catholic, and other private schools), some of which are extremely expensive and exclusive. The education system recreates the inequalities of society and is an important means of reinforcing “the criteria laid down by the dominant group” (Harker & McConnachie, 1985, p. 30). Students in Australia are not competing under equal conditions as some schools can be seen to be biased against minority groups (see Brennan, in Partington 1998, pp. 147–170). Schools embody the culture of the ruling class, and some pre-service teachers have been unconsciously socialised into understanding the behaviours required to succeed in the school system, because they are white and middle class.

Just as there is variation in schooling systems, there are variations in the level of ability and commitment to teaching Aboriginal students and Aboriginal Studies on the
part of classroom teachers. In Australia, many educators assume that the education system is just and equitable, since they have thrived within an education institution that supported their own cultural traditions and values. Some teachers and educators continue to support and uphold the education institution in which they have succeeded. The poor educational outcomes of Aboriginal children (see Chapter 2) are seen by some educators only in terms of something lacking in the children’s home life, their culture, or the children themselves. Thus, the children are seen as the problem, not the education system. Strategies to remedy poor performance are generally compensatory in approach and designed to change the children to fit the system, rather than to more effectively meet the needs of the children.

In Australia it is compulsory for all children to attend school. Therefore it is imperative that teacher education courses prepare pre-service teachers to identify and acknowledge difference and eliminate barriers to learning outcomes. Learning to teach Aboriginal Studies is complex, challenging, and threatening (Radermacher, 2006). As most non-Aboriginal pre-service teachers have had very little, if any contact with Aboriginal Australians, it is extremely hard for them to include an Aboriginal perspective into their curriculum without adequate training. Some teachers are unaware that there is an unexplored gap between their own culture and the cultural values of their students, or they may see their own value system as more appropriate or of greater value than those of minority groups. Thus pre-service teacher education training institutions must confront the issue that teaching Aboriginal Studies is about addressing reconciliation, political reformation, and the recognition of collective rights. In short, it is about equity and social justice. Equity in educational and social justice terms involves equity of access, equity of participation (not just involvement), and equity of outcomes (successful and effective completions), leading to access to employment, quality health, and well-being as the norm in this society. If these objectives are to be achieved, all Australian pre-service teachers and school children need to be taught Aboriginal Studies. The need is for Australians to accept the authenticity of Aboriginal Australia and equally provide Indigenous children with appropriate curricula, which recognise their culture, and to provide not only Aboriginal children, but all Australian children, with a relevant and meaningful educational experience.
Although the federal and state governments have mandated that Aboriginal perspectives be integrated throughout the curriculum, not all pre-service teacher education courses have a compulsory Aboriginal Studies subject. The exclusion of core Aboriginal Studies in primary teacher education courses sends a clear message that devalues a shared history. This can be seen as part of the ‘hidden curriculum’. Insufficient knowledge, skills, and attitudes of pre-service teachers need to be addressed. Without proper training, it is difficult for pre-service teachers to grasp appropriate pedagogies and therefore be prepared for the responsibility of teaching Australia’s shared history, let alone an anti-racist pedagogy. Institutions may argue that they cannot introduce a core Aboriginal Studies subject as there are already too many subjects to be covered, but as but as Connell (1977) and Apple (1979;1982) emphasise, what is omitted from the formal curriculum can be significant.

Some teacher education courses offer an Aboriginal Studies subject elective. This, however, is problematic as we are not sure what percentage of the students opt to undertake an elective Aboriginal Studies subject, or whether the elective subjects that are offered are taken up each year by students. This is evident from the email discussion from the graduated student (see Chapter 2, personal email, 2007) who had access to elective Aboriginal studies but did not take it due to timetable conflict. When institutions do not have a core Aboriginal Studies subject, the dilemma for new teachers is considerable. If pre-service teachers are not taught Aboriginal Studies, they are likely to have a low self-concept of their ability to teach Aboriginal Studies and incorporate Aboriginal perspectives. Therefore, they are unlikely to feel that they have been adequately equipped with the knowledge, skills, and attitudes to teach either Aboriginal Studies or Aboriginal students. This lack of knowledge, skills, and attitudes means that many teachers will continue to be denied appropriate teacher education and many Aboriginal students will continue to fail. As Craven (Ed., 1996a, p. 5) stressed, “It is vital that the next generation of Australian teachers are equipped with the knowledge and skills to understand and teach Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies effectively… to present to all Australian children a more accurate history of Australia, with an understanding of Indigenous Australian issues, and thereby contribute to overcoming endemic racism in Australian society. This aim can be achieved by
introducing a core Indigenous Australian Studies subject in all pre-service teacher education curricula.”

Pre-service Teachers and Aboriginal Studies

This section examines research which has been undertaken into the development of Aboriginal Studies in institutions with teacher education courses. It presents an overview of the Teaching the Teachers Project of National Significance (Craven, 1996a; 1996b; 1996c; 1996d) which was undertaken to provide a national model for institutions to incorporate an Aboriginal Studies subject into their primary teacher education courses. It also gives a comprehensive overview of research examining the impact of the Teaching the Teachers Aboriginal Studies project (Craven, Halse, Marsh, Mooney & Wilson-Miller, 2005a; 2005b; 2005c).

Bourke, Dow, and Lucas (1993). The first notable study of Aboriginal Studies teacher education research was undertaken by Bourke, Dow, and Lucas (1993), who examined the ways that teacher education institutions were preparing pre-service teachers to teach Aboriginal students and about Aboriginal issues. They found that there was a “smorgasbord approach” (p. 1) to training pre-service teachers which was dependent on whether there was academic training interest and if there were staff with adequate knowledge in the area. The report, Teacher Education Pre-service: Preparing teachers to work with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students, recommended “that the Commonwealth and the States/Territories ensure that strategies to implement the National Aboriginal Education Policy include opportunities to ensure that Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people be given the opportunity to undertake teacher training with a specific emphasis on the education of Aboriginal children” (p. 20). This is yet another recommendation, and it is discouraging to note that Bourke et al. found that although most teacher education courses include Social Sciences, Human Society and/or Social Studies units, “very few specify Aboriginal Studies as a core component of the course” (p. 31). In essence, Bourke et al. found that the training of pre-service teaches to teach Indigenous Studies and students remained a marginal activity (p. 8).
Bin-Sallik, Blomeley, Flowers, and Hughes (1994a; 1994b). In 1994 Aboriginal researchers Bin-Sallik, Blomeley, Flowers, and Hughes undertook a significant review of Australian Aboriginal educational research. They noted that much of the literature which they reviewed was “by and large descriptive” (1994a, p. 36) and their investigation identified that there was “a noticeable absence in the current literature, of analysis of how ‘to get things done’” (1994b; p. 19). The Bin-Sallik et al. study questioned whether Aboriginal educational research thus far has improved learning outcomes for Aboriginal students. A focus of much of the research was identified to have been related to Aboriginal programs rather than changing systems.

Mellor and Corrigan (2004). Some ten years after Bin-Sallik et al. (1994a; 1994b), Mellor et al. again reviewed contemporary Australian Aboriginal educational research. Their research emphasised the “discontinuity between research and policy” (p. ii); stressed the lack of “how to get things done”; and noted that “policy initiatives are funding ‘top-ups’ to basically funding programs aimed at achieving social justice, with each provider left to workout how to do this” (p. i). They also identified that the research methodology employed to study advances in Aboriginal education thus far had generally been: Testing without context; using small case studies; limited to specific subsets of the population; and had been to some extent isolated from the broader discourse over teacher quality and ongoing professional development (p. 46).

Bin-Sallik et al. (1994a; 1994b) and Mellor et al. (2004) have acknowledged that researchers have identified key barriers to Aboriginal students’ educational outcomes. Policy makers have put guidelines firmly in position for the achievement of desired educational outcomes. Nevertheless, the implementation process has proven to be a major challenge, with schools left to implement Aboriginal Education policy (Crawford, 1992). This has meant that most of the programs introduced at the school level have been compensatory (concentrating on basic skills). While this approach has had some success, there has been very little progress in building on these programs in mainstream education (Malezer & Simms, 2002). Hence there is a critical need to develop new strategies which underpin teacher education to teach pre-service teachers to teach Aboriginal Studies and Aboriginal students.
Craven (1996a; 1996b; 1996c; 1996d). To address the short comings identified above and “to get things done” the *Teaching the Teachers: Indigenous Australian Studies* Project of National Significance funded by the Commonwealth Department of Education and Training (Craven, ed., 1996a; 1996b) was developed over four years from 1992 to 1996. The outcome of this project was a model core Aboriginal Australian Studies teacher education subject and support resources. Due to the diversity of Aboriginal cultures and it being a national document, it was not possible for the project team to develop strict guidelines for all teacher educators. Therefore they developed an example model subject, and a number of resources to help universities start developing their own subject material and resources relevant to their own region. The project was innovative in that the project development was led by a Steering Committee comprising Aboriginal Elders, representatives of Aboriginal organisations including the National Federation of Aboriginal Education Consultative Groups, teacher educators, and professional associations. The project was endorsed by the National Federation of Aboriginal Education Consultative Groups and the teaching package was distributed nationally to all teacher education institutions by the Council of Reconciliation.

Resources developed included:

- A framework statement that provided guidelines to institutions with teacher education course on how to design an Australian Studies subject (Craven, 1996c);
- A model core subject manual with example lecture and tutorial notes (Craven, 1996a; 1996b);
- A terminology list (Craven, 1996d) to assist teacher educators to use appropriate terminology;
- Four teacher-oriented videotapes
- ‘Munyarl Mythology’ which is useful for introducing students to the facts that debunk some of the myths about Aboriginal Australia;
1. ‘Six Ways – Teaching Our Way: Successful Aboriginal Studies and Torres Strait Islander Studies Activities for the Classroom’;
2. ‘Inviting Culture Educators: The Benefits’;
3. ‘Why Teach Aboriginal Studies?’; and

The success of the project can be seen in the universities which have taken up the challenge to teach Aboriginal Studies in their teacher education courses. As shown in Craven, Halse, Marsh, Mooney, and Wilson-Miller, (2005a, p. 22) study which shows that in 2001 approximately 48 per cent of institutions in Australia now offer compulsory Aboriginal Studies component in their primary teacher education courses. Therefore, given that most institutions have only recently introduced Aboriginal Studies, most as a direct result of Teaching the Teachers: Aboriginal Australian Studies project, it is important to review how pre-service teachers have understood the subject.

**The Teaching the Teachers Project of National Significance**

*Introduction*

To date there has only been one major study using self-concept which has attempted to explore teachers’ attitudes to the introduction of a core Aboriginal Studies subject. The results comprise three separate volumes (Craven, Halse, Marsh, Mooney & Wilson-Miller, 2005a; 2005b; 2005c): Volume 1 *Teaching the teachers Aboriginal Studies: Recent successful strategies* (Craven et al., 2005a); Volume 2 *Teaching the teachers Aboriginal Studies: Case studies of exemplary practice in pre-service teacher education* (Craven et al., 2005b); and Volume 3 *Teaching the teachers Aboriginal Studies: Impact on teaching* (Craven et al., 2005c). The study was commissioned by the then Department of Education, Science and Training (DEST) under its Indigenous Education Strategic Initiatives Programme (IESIP), and published on the DEST website in 2005. These studies utilised a blend of quantitative and qualitative research methods to examine views of primary pre-service teachers and teachers from across Australia of
their experiences and self-perceptions about teaching Aboriginal Studies and Aboriginal students.

*Volume I Teaching the Teachers Aboriginal Studies: Recent Successful Strategies*

The study employed a blend of quantitative (53-item survey) and qualitative methods (telephone interviews, written open-ended responses as part of the quantitative survey), and three case studies of institutions which have successfully introduced a core Aboriginal Studies subject into their degree. The aim of this component of the study was to:

1. Critically evaluate the impact of mandatory Aboriginal Studies subjects on pre-service primary teachers’ perceived abilities to appreciate, understand, and effectively teach Aboriginal Studies and Aboriginal students in Australian schools in order to test the effectiveness of this delivery mode;
2. Identify key content being addressed in mandatory Aboriginal Studies subjects in order to provide other institutions with examples of subject matter;
3. Identify successful strategies utilised by teacher education institutions to introduce mandatory Aboriginal Studies subjects in order to disseminate successful strategies to other educational institutions;
4. Elucidate barriers to and difficulties encountered in introducing such subjects to illuminate potential pitfalls;
5. Provide case studies of the development, implementation, and evaluation of successful core subjects to provide models to teacher education institutions to enable subsequent application; and
6. Identify potential new strategic directions and provide an impetus for teacher education institutions to enable adoption of recent advances in order to strengthen the teaching of Aboriginal Studies in teacher education courses (p. xii).

In the qualitative component, a total of 18 teachers who had undertaken an Aboriginal Studies subject (either a core or elective teacher education subject) participated in the telephone interviews, 16 were from New South Wales. The sample
included 13 schools in rural, regional, and city locations, which represented a diversity of experience and school settings. Of the teachers participating in the interviews, the majority were non-Indigenous. In addition, an analysis was undertaken of open-ended survey questions that were included with the quantitative survey.

In the quantitative component 797 pre-service teachers from 16 universities participated in the surveys. This sample size represented approximately half of Australia’s primary teacher education subjects. The surveys were constructed to: investigate the impact of core Aboriginal Studies and elective subjects on pre-service teachers self-perceptions of their ability to teach Aboriginal Studies and Aboriginal students effectively; gain insights into Aboriginal Studies content which is valued by the participants; and to investigate delivery approaches which could potentially be included in future Aboriginal Studies subjects.

**Impact on Pre-service Teachers**

The Craven et al. (2005a; 2005c) studies showed a strong correlation between self-concept and achievement in teachers’ perceived ability to teach Aboriginal Studies and Aboriginal students. The qualitative data supported the findings in the quantitative surveys. The studies found that pre-service teachers who had undertaken a core or elective subject perceived that they had learned more about Aboriginal Studies subject matter and had a higher self-concept compared with those who had undertaken elective and perspective courses. Undertaking a mandatory Aboriginal Studies subject also resulted in higher self-concepts in relation to knowledge and understanding of Aboriginal Studies; perceived ability to teach Aboriginal students; and overall Aboriginal Studies teaching self-concept. The interview data demonstrated a positive correlation with the quantitative data which show that there is a stronger self-concept among pre-service teachers who have undertaken an Aboriginal Studies subject in their teacher education degree. In addition pre-service teachers considered it important that core Aboriginal Subjects include content on how to teach Aboriginal Studies and Aboriginal children. Additionally, pre-service teachers who had undertaken a mandatory subject identified the need for including pedagogical and contemporary content into the curriculum compared to their peers who had not undertaken such a subject. Heads of School, directors of education, and teacher educators agreed strongly
that Aboriginal Studies is an essential component of the primary teacher education course. They also believed that it was highly relevant to the primary teacher education curriculum as it cultivated reconciliation in the institution, schools, and the community.

Some weaknesses identified in the teacher education subjects undertaken by participants were also identified in relation to enhancing teachers’ affective components of self-concept; values in relation to teaching Aboriginal Studies and Aboriginal students; community consultation self-concept; and knowledge of departmental requirements. Areas identified as needing improvement in pre-service courses were: Development of skills relevant to classroom practice; writing units of work; development of pedagogical skills; understanding departmental requirements; and consultation with local Aboriginal communities.

**Volume 2 Teaching the Teachers Aboriginal Studies: Case Studies of Exemplary Practice**

In the case studies of exemplary practice in pre-service teacher education, after competitive submissions, three institutions with mandatory Aboriginal Studies subject in their primary teaching courses were commissioned to write an in-depth case study describing the process involved in introducing a mandatory subject. To ensure consistency across the cases and to facilitate cross-case analysis, the case studies were guided by the following instructions (Craven, 2005b):

A description of the context of the case study to illuminate the local/regional context and the demographic profile of students and staff at each institution; the historical factors influencing the introduction of mandatory Aboriginal Studies subjects in teacher education programmes; and the processes, barriers and successful strategies identified for establishing Aboriginal Studies as a mandatory subject in the primary teacher education courses;

A global picture of the operation of core Aboriginal Studies in each institution including staffing and modes of delivery; and
A detailed picture of the teaching of core Aboriginal Studies institution based on empirical qualitative and quantitative evidence, documenting useful and effective teaching methods/approaches/strategies and teaching resources, exemplars of effective assessment and evaluation, and student evaluations of their learning. (p. 2)

The findings show that introducing a mandatory subject is complex, with issues that include decisions on appropriate content, and hiring and maintaining qualified staff. Dealing with staff and student resistance and ensuring that the subject was adequately funded were further challenges. It was agreed that for successful inclusion, there needed to be collaboration with the Faculty of Education, the Aboriginal unit within the institutions, and with Aboriginal people. Finally, the evaluations from the students of the mandatory subjects were extremely positive.

**Volume 3 Teaching the teachers Aboriginal Studies: Impact on teaching**

The study involved 392 teachers from 201 primary schools. Among them were 129 teachers who had undertaken a core subject, 69 teachers who had undertaken an elective subject, 190 teachers who had not undertaken a core or elective subject in their degree, and four who did not indicate what subjects were undertaken. The aim of this component was to:

Critically evaluate the impact of pre-service primary teacher education Aboriginal Studies subjects on participating, practising teachers’ self-perceived abilities to appreciate, understand and effectively teach Aboriginal Studies, Aboriginal perspectives and Aboriginal children in Australian schools;

compare and contrast the self-perceptions of participating teachers who had Undertaken a core or elective subject in Aboriginal Studies in their teacher education course with the self-perceptions of participating teachers who had not undertaken such a subject as a component of their initial teacher
education course, in relation to their perceived ability and commitment to teaching Aboriginal Studies and Aboriginal students;

Characterise participating teachers’ initial teacher education subjects in relation to Aboriginal Studies content; and

Identify participating teachers’ perceptions of useful structure and content to consider for inclusion in future teacher education courses to strengthen pre-service teachers’ perceived ability to teach Aboriginal Studies and teach Aboriginal students (Craven, 2005c, p. 6).

Primary teachers who had undertaken either a core or an elective Aboriginal Studies subject as a component of their initial teacher education degree were invited to participate in the research project. These participants were known as the experimental group comprising 198 teachers. Participating primary teachers were invited to give an envelope containing another copy of the survey and information about the study to a colleague who taught in the same school but who did not complete either a core or elective Aboriginal Studies subject as a component of their initial teacher education degree. These participants served as the control group and there were 190 teachers in this group. All of the primary teachers involved in the study completed the survey which was designed to: Typify participants’ teacher education courses, clarify teachers’ self-perceptions of their ability to teach Aboriginal Studies and Aboriginal students effectively, and gather insights in relation to desirable Aboriginal Studies content and delivery approaches that could be emulated by other teacher education institutions who wished to introduce a core Aboriginal Studies subject into their teacher education courses in the future.

**Impacts on Teachers**

The results from the survey showed that participating teachers who had undertaken a core or elective subject as a component of their degree maintained that they had learnt more about Aboriginal Studies subject matter and how to teach Aboriginal Studies compared with teachers who had not undertaken any Aboriginal
Studies subjects. Undertaking Aboriginal Studies subjects resulted in higher teacher self-concepts in relation to their knowledge and understanding of Aboriginal Studies subject matter; their believed ability to teach Aboriginal students; and their overall Aboriginal Studies teaching self-concept compared with teachers who did not undertake an Aboriginal Studies subjects. Participating teachers who had undertaken an Aboriginal Studies subjects in their teacher training degree also perceived that they felt more able to teach Aboriginal students and were more likely to enjoy doing so compared with participants in the control group who had not undertaken an Aboriginal Studies subject within their degree.

The study also showed that pre-service training in Aboriginal Studies was considered as laying the groundwork and an important starting point for teachers in schools. The study revealed that ethnicity of the school community also played a part in influencing the way teachers thought about teaching Aboriginal Studies. Hence, teachers in schools with a high proportion of Aboriginal students tended to place a greater emphasis on teaching Aboriginal Studies, either as a separate subject or in terms of overall perspectives. They also indicated that they had more support from within the school and the Department of Education in terms of resources and community involvement, and assistance from Aboriginal Education workers. On the whole, teachers in schools with few or no Aboriginal students had a significantly lower emphasis on teaching Aboriginal Studies. This lack of commitment by teachers indicates that Aboriginal Studies is a part of the curriculum that is often forgotten or given superficial attention when there is not a substantial Aboriginal student population or active Aboriginal community in the school. The findings draw attention to the cultural problems confronted by non-Aboriginal teachers teaching Aboriginal Studies in isolation, and the need for support from upper management for its successful implementation within the school. Leadership by senior staff is essential if we want to effectively implement Aboriginal Studies in schools. The training profile of senior teachers is a cause for concern as evidenced by a significant disparity in the sample in the study. Recently trained teachers were more likely to have completed some form of Aboriginal Studies in their degree compared with their longer-serving counterparts.
Limitations

A number of participants across the studies felt that their pre-service training did not adequately equip them to teach Aboriginal Studies in schools or to teach Aboriginal students. In general, pre-service teachers indicated that the content of Aboriginal Studies in their pre-service courses was too heavily weighted towards Aboriginal history and that there was a greater need to teach pedagogical skills that enable teachers to translate knowledge and content into effective teaching practice and student outcomes. In particular, teachers need a greater emphasis on being taught to understand and implement the mandatory Aboriginal Education policy. Respondents also highlighted the need for Aboriginal Studies subjects to be delivered in more sensitive ways by academic staff familiar with the requirements of pre-service teachers and the educational tools they need in their professional practice. These findings indicate the need for further critical evaluation of Aboriginal Studies courses in primary pre-service teacher education. They also highlight the urgent need for pre-service institutions to develop courses that address the areas of concern identified by teachers in the study.

Summary. What is clear from the findings is that Aboriginal Studies subjects in teacher education courses do make a difference in ensuring that teachers feel capable and confident in achieving the goal of teaching Australian students about Aboriginal Studies and teaching Aboriginal students effectively. The results from the open-ended survey replies suggest that many teachers who had not been provided with Aboriginal Studies teacher education subjects feel ill-equipped to teach Aboriginal Studies and Aboriginal students, and that they lack the knowledge, skills and self-confidence to do so. The findings also highlight that although Aboriginal Studies is a mandatory policy (in NSW), a significant number of students in Australian schools are not being taught Aboriginal Studies as their teachers have not been trained to do so.

This section has shown that there has been very little research into the teaching of Aboriginal Studies or its effect on the self-concept of pre-service teachers. Two projects by Craven et al. (1996; 2005) which deal with implementation have been well received and have led to more institutions introducing an Aboriginal subject. It is important that we continue to review and revise Aboriginal Studies and the ways
Aboriginal perspectives are implemented to ensure that pre-service teachers are properly prepared when they take up their profession.

**Implications for the Present Study**

The studies by Craven et al. (2005a; 2005; 2005c) showed that it is imperative that we evaluate the way Aboriginal Studies subjects are being received and understood in New South Wales by pre-service teachers. It is equally important to test and critically evaluate the impact of core Aboriginal Studies subjects on pre-service teachers’ values and attitudes, commitment, and ability to understand and teach Aboriginal Studies to all Australian students. In addition, we need to investigate how faculties of education are addressing the implementation of these subjects across the curriculum. We know that more and more pre-service teachers are being taught Aboriginal Studies but we still need to understand the barriers preventing teachers from taking up the challenge and successfully implementing Aboriginal Studies and perspectives. The research design of the present study incorporates and builds on the above study, but analyses further the effectiveness of Aboriginal Studies subjects. This study aims to increase understanding of the key strengths and limitations in relation to core Aboriginal Studies teacher education subjects. This is done to further elucidate the experiences and challenges need to develop and introduce a core Aboriginal Subject. It also investigates the influence of the initial experience of learning Aboriginal Studies and learner self-concepts on pre-service teachers’ appreciation and understanding of why they are required to learn Aboriginal Studies. It examines multiple stakeholder perceptions of pre-service teachers’ teaching Aboriginal Studies attitudes, commitment, knowledge and skills, ability and understandings to teach Aboriginal Studies and teach Aboriginal students. To rigorously test how the subject matter impacts on the learning outcomes of pre-service teachers, this study further highlights the motives, values, and attitudes of institutions involved in designing, delivering, and experiencing a core Aboriginal Studies subject in two institutions in NSW. The study also aims to illuminate the substantial learning benefits of incorporating a core Aboriginal Studies subject into primary teacher education courses and to inform government institutions such as the NSW Institute of Teachers, the NSW Department of Education, and the NSW Board of Studies.
Summary

The chapter demonstrated that this research project is underpinned by a strong and appropriate educational theory. It provided an overview of the significance of the self-concept construct as a valuable educational theory to successfully investigate the aims of the present investigation. The chapter provided the theoretical and empirical foundation for the present investigation and provided an historical overview of self-concept research as well as a synopsis of research into the teaching of Aboriginal Studies. This review of the research showed that to date there has been little research on pre-service teachers’ self-concepts in relation to their ability to appreciate, understand, and effectively teach Aboriginal Studies to all students and effectively teach Aboriginal students. Finally, the implications for the present study were presented. The chapter that follows presents the overarching aims; the nature of the problem being addressed; a statement of the specific research questions; and the rationale for the research questions posed in the context of extant theory, research, and practice.
CHAPTER 4

AIMS, RESEARCH QUESTIONS AND THEIR RATIONALE

Introduction

The present investigation capitalises on recent developments in self-concept theory to critically analyse multiple stakeholder perceptions of the value, nature, success and impact upon pre-service teachers of core Aboriginal Studies teacher education courses. It presents two in-depth case studies based on Yin’s (2003) multiple-case-study replication design. The purpose of this chapter is to present: the nature of the problem being addressed; overarching aims; a statement of the specific research questions; and the rationale for the research questions posed in the context of extant theory, research, and practice. Each research question has been numbered so that the aim it relates to within the study can be clearly identified. Similarly, the rationale is presented clearly under each question so that it too may be easily linked to its corresponding aim and research question.

The Problem

Over recent decades policies and reports (see Chapter 2 for an overview) both in New South Wales (NSW) and nationally have called for the introduction of Aboriginal Studies and perspectives into the school curriculum. There are two major goals common to NSW and national policies: the need for Aboriginal Australian students to have equitable access and opportunities at school, and the crucial need for all Australian students to acquire knowledge and understanding of Aboriginal Australian history and cultures. Consistent with these goals, the Closing the Gap Report (Commonwealth of Australia 2008, p. 1) states “as a nation Australia values the central role of education in building a democratic, equitable and just society – a society that is prosperous, cohesive and culturally diverse, and that values Australia’s Indigenous cultures as a key part of the nation’s history, present and future”.

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Although the national AEP (Commonwealth of Australia, 1990; 1999) and the National Goals (Commonwealth of Australia, 2008) have called for the introduction of Aboriginal Studies and perspectives into the Australian school curriculum, not all Australian States and territories have introduced an Aboriginal education policy. This is not the case in NSW where it has been mandatory for teachers to teach Aboriginal Studies and perspectives for the past two decades (see Aboriginal Education Policy NSW Department of Education and Training, 1982; 1997; 2008; 2009). However, teachers cannot be expected to fulfil these goals, which are designed to create understanding and reconciliation, if they are not effectively taught how to teach Aboriginal Studies and perspectives in their pre-service teacher education courses. Yet it is only recently that teacher education institutions have introduced a core Aboriginal Studies subject into their teacher education courses. It is therefore timely that the present investigation undertakes an in-depth study to investigate the impact of core Aboriginal Studies subjects and Aboriginal perspectives in primary teacher education courses on pre-service teachers’ values and attitudes, knowledge, skills, and commitment to understand and teach Aboriginal Studies and perspectives to all Australian students and to effectively teach Aboriginal students.

**Aims**

The overarching aims were to contribute to significant conceptual advances in theory, research and practice in teaching core Aboriginal Studies in primary teacher education courses in the context of a multi-case approach that builds on previous research to uncover best practice in relation to teaching core Aboriginal Studies subjects in primary teacher education courses. More specifically, the study aims to:

- Identify and contrast the motives, values and attitudes in relation to the incorporation and the ongoing implementation of core Aboriginal Studies subjects in the primary teacher education curriculum of two metropolitan institutions in NSW;

- Elucidate the impact of core Aboriginal Studies subjects in primary teacher education courses from multiple stakeholder perceptions on pre-service teachers’ teaching Aboriginal Studies self-concepts, attitudes,
commitment, knowledge and skills, ability and understandings to teach Aboriginal Studies;

- Identify from multiple stakeholder perceptions the strengths and limitations of the current core Aboriginal Studies subject; and
- Identify the institutional factors, personal experiences and course characteristics that final year pre-service teachers from two institutions perceive as impacting positively and negatively on their attitudes, commitment, knowledge and skills, and ability to understanding to teach Aboriginal Studies.

In examining these issues, this study further elucidates the experiences, challenges, and incentives of those involved in designing, delivering, and experiencing a core Aboriginal Studies subject in two institutions in NSW. It also investigates the influence of the initial experience of learning Aboriginal Studies and learner self-concept on pre-service teachers’ subsequent approaches to teaching Indigenous Studies.

**Statement of the Research Questions and the Rationale**

Research questions were framed to help gain insights into institutional and course characteristics that could be emulated by other institutions to contribute to the successful implementation of core Aboriginal Studies teacher education subjects in Australian institutions with primary teacher education courses. In addition, the questions were formulated to gauge the impact of the core Aboriginal Studies subjects in teacher education courses on pre-service teachers’ teaching self-concepts, perceived attitudes, knowledge, skills, and commitment to understand and teach Aboriginal Studies and perspectives to all Australian students and to effectively teach Aboriginal students. Given that researchers have only recently begun to investigate this area, it was not possible to formulate hypotheses predicting the directionality of effects based on a body of previous literature. Rather, research questions were formulated to specifically address the aims of the study and to allow for in-depth analysis of a rich data set based on multiple case studies.
Research Question 1.1: Institutional Motives, Values, and Attitudes

What do multiple stakeholder perceive as the institutions’ motives, values, and attitudes in relation to incorporating and ongoing implementation of core Aboriginal Studies subjects in their primary teacher education course?

Rationale for Research Question 1.1. Over the past decade a major historical educational transformation has taken place in pre-service teacher education courses in some Australian universities (see Chapters 2 & 3). A number of institutions that teach primary teacher education courses in New South Wales have included a core Aboriginal Studies subject as a mandatory component of initial degrees. As yet, few research studies have been undertaken to elucidate institutional characteristics that facilitate the successful development and implementation of such subjects, yet the identification of such factors could assist other institutions to emulate successful strategies. Hence, research question 1 was posed in order to identify features of institutional motives, values, and attitudes that contribute to the rationale, development and successful ongoing implementation of core Aboriginal Studies subjects.

Research question 2.1: Impact of core Aboriginal Studies Subjects on pre-service teachers

What do multiple stakeholders perceive as the impact of core Aboriginal Studies subjects on pre-service teachers’ self-concept, attitudes, commitment, knowledge and skills, and ability to understand and teach Aboriginal Studies?

Rationale for Research Question 2.1. The impact of core Aboriginal Studies teacher education subjects on pre-service teachers’ ability and commitment to incorporate Aboriginal perspectives across the curriculum and teach Aboriginal Studies in the classroom has only recently begun to be rigorously evaluated by research (Craven, Halse, Marsh, Mooney & Wilson-Miller 2005a; 2005b; 2005). Recently, case studies of successful practice have been reported by Craven et al. (2005a; 2005b; 2005). Their case studies were designed to give an overview of the impact of core Aboriginal subjects on the self-perceived abilities of pre-service primary teachers and to elucidate
successful features of existing courses. The current study differs from the previous study in that it utilises in-depth interviews with Heads of School, Directors of Aboriginal Units, teacher educators, and pre-service teachers who have recently completed the core Aboriginal Studies subject and pre-service teachers in their final year in the two institutions in the context of a multiple case study. The present study builds upon the Craven et al. studies to delve deeper to critically examine the impact of the implementation of an Aboriginal Studies core subject from the perceptions of multiple stakeholders in order to identify the impact of successful core Aboriginal Studies subjects. The in-depth interviews also aim to explore self-concept theory in order to test the usefulness of this theoretical approach in critically analysing the self-concept, attitudes, commitment, knowledge and skills, and ability to understand and teach Aboriginal Studies of individuals who had recently completed a core Aboriginal Studies subject.

Research Question 3.1: Identify from the perceptions of multiple stakeholders the strengths and limitations of the current core Aboriginal Studies subject

What do multiple stakeholders perceive as the strengths and limitations of the current core Aboriginal Studies subject?

Rationale for Research Question 3.1. Recent research undertaken by Craven, et al. (2005a; 2005b; 2005c) was designed to “evaluate the impact of pre-service primary teacher education courses on practicing teachers’ self-perceived abilities to effectively teach Aboriginal Studies and Aboriginal students in primary schools” Craven et al. (2005c, p. 6). They concluded that core Aboriginal Studies courses do assist graduate teachers to teach Aboriginal Studies and Aboriginal students more effectively. Craven et al. also recommended that the Aboriginal Studies courses currently available to pre-service teachers would benefit from review and refinement (see Chapter 3). Areas identified as needing improvement in pre-service courses were: development of skills relevant to classroom practice; writing of work units; development of pedagogical skills; understanding of departmental requirements; consultation with local Aboriginal communities; and the teaching of comparative Indigenous Studies. This research attempts to validate the factors previously identified,
and build upon the Craven et al. studies by further elucidating a broader range of strengths and limitations that multiple stakeholders believe impact upon the success of core Aboriginal Studies subjects.

**Research question 4.1: Final year pre-service teachers’ perceptions of institutional factors and course characteristics**

What are the institutional factors and course characteristics from the perspectives of final year students that have impacted positively and negatively on their self-concept, attitudes, commitment, knowledge and skills and ability to understand and teach Aboriginal Studies?

**Rationale for Research Question 4.1.** By testing what institutions espouse and what final year pre-service teachers have comprehended, we are better able to ascertain what is learnt and how deeply the core Aboriginal Studies subject has been understood. Interviews and open-ended questions were analysed to identify the institutional factors and course characteristics identified by Heads of School, Directors of Aboriginal Units, and teacher educators to further elucidate the experiences of pre-service teachers who had completed a core Aboriginal Studies subject as part of their undergraduate degree. To accomplish this outcome it was also essential to investigate whether final year pre-service teachers’ understanding of the Aboriginal Studies subject went beyond surface learning to deep learning. Ramsden (2003, p. 6) asserts that we can improve our teaching, and student learning “by listening to and learning from our students”. Ramsden also suggests that “institutions should be able to change the way in which learners understand, or experience or conceptualise the world around them” (p. 6).

The above questions were posed in the context of a multi-case approach to build on previous theory and research to uncover best practice in relation to teaching core Aboriginal Studies subjects in primary teacher education courses. Self-concept theory (see Chapter 3) was deemed the most appropriate theory to test the intention for introducing a core Aboriginal Studies subject into the primary teacher education courses under examination and the consequences thereof on pre-service teachers undertaking the courses. This theoretical perspective is fundamental to identifying
factors that contribute to best practice when developing and implementing successful Aboriginal Studies subjects.

**Summary**

The research problems addressed herein underscore the fact that there is very little pragmatic research in this area. Given this, the present research is significant and will make an important contribution to theory, research, and practice in the field of Aboriginal Studies. In particular, the study investigates the nature, success and impact of core Aboriginal Studies subjects in primary teacher education courses in two NSW institutions. This chapter presented the statement of the problem, aims, research questions and their rationale. The subsequent chapter describes the methodology that was designed to rigorously test the aims of the study and research questions posed.
CHAPTER 5

METHODOLOGY

Introduction

This chapter outlines the methodology used to identify institutional characteristics and features of core Aboriginal Studies primary teacher education courses. The primary study purpose is to ascertain those elements that could be emulated by other institutions to contribute to the successful implementation of core Aboriginal Studies primary teacher education subjects. To fulfil this purpose, the present investigation utilises a multiple-case-study approach that presents the reader with illustrations and examples of key factors that have led to the successful implementation of core Aboriginal Studies courses in two metropolitan universities. The methodology for each of the two case studies is based upon a descriptive analysis of:

- Heads of School, Directors of Aboriginal Education Units and teacher educators’ perceptions on how their institution facilitated the introduction of a core Aboriginal Studies subject into their primary teacher education course;

- The place of core Aboriginal Studies within the teacher education course, and the content and pedagogy employed to deliver the institution’s core Aboriginal Studies teacher education course; and

- Results from in-depth semi-structured interviews with Heads of School, Directors of Aboriginal Education Units, teacher educators and pre-service teachers, and results of analyses of open-ended questionnaires with final year pre-service teachers to identify their perceptions of the nature and impact of the Aboriginal Studies subject undertaken.

This chapter provides a comprehensive presentation of the methodology designed to successfully investigate the specific research questions posed in Chapter 4, in the framework described above. A detailed description of the characteristics of the
participants, measures employed, the administration procedures and research design for
distinct components of each case study are discussed. This chapter demonstrates that a
strong and appropriate methodology has been employed to successfully address the
research questions and identify the research findings. In addition, procedures employed
are described in sufficient detail to enable other researchers to duplicate the
methodology employed in this research.

Participants

Two metropolitan universities were selected to be approached to participate in
the study. This sample selection procedure was designed to strengthen the internal
validity of the study by ensuring comparisons between institutions were based on
institutions from a similar geographic region that attracted students from similar socio-
economic groups and urban backgrounds. The Heads of School from the primary
teacher education faculties from both metropolitan universities in New South Wales
who had incorporated a core Aboriginal Studies subject in their primary teacher
education courses agreed to their institution participating in the study.

From each of the participating institutions, one Heads of Schools from each
institution were interviewed (both female, both non-Aboriginal), likewise one Directors
of Aboriginal Education Units in each institution (one male, one female, both
Aboriginal) and one teacher educators (both male, both Aboriginal) from each
institution were interview. One participating teacher educator had four years’
experience teaching Aboriginal Studies, another had ten years’ experience, whilst all
other participants had considerably more experience, (20–30 years).

From each institution, five in-depth interviews were held with pre-service
teachers from each institution with a total of ten participating over all (two male, eight
female, all non-Aboriginal) who had recently completed the core Aboriginal Studies
subject were identified by their teacher educator as a representative group of students in
regard to ability were approached by telephone and agreed to participate. The Heads of
School, Directors of Aboriginal Education Units, teacher educators and pre-service
teachers were invited to contribute to the study by participating in an in-depth, one-to-
one interview of a half-hour to one and a half-hour’s duration conducted by the researcher. All of the participants were contacted via letters that explained the study and included a copy of the interview schedule (Appendix 1 - 8) and their voluntary participation in the study and written agreement to participate was sought. Final year primary pre-service teachers in the participating institutions were also invited to contribute to the study by completing an open-ended questionnaire (see Appendix 2). This resulted in participation in this component of the study by 134 final pre-service teachers (11 male, 122 female, one Aboriginal female).

The Research Design

Case Study Approach

A multi-case-study approach was selected for the investigation in order to:

- ensure that literal replication was carried out across the universities;
- show sufficient replication to convince the reader of the general phenomenon; and
- illustrate theoretical replication across the institutions.

Self-Concept theory (see Chapter 3) guided the framing of the research questions, within the methodological framework, namely the multi-case-study approach. Yin (1981; 1984; 2003) noted that the case study approach has been used for more than 50 years in research in a wide range of disciplines as diverse as the study of an individual, organisation, process, program, neighbourhood, institution and event. Although in the past, the case study has been viewed as a lesser form of enquiry than experiments and surveys, Yin (1984, p. 13) extols the usefulness of using case studies to “investigate a contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context”. Yin et al. (1984) and Marshall and Rossman (1999) commend the contribution of case studies in institutional and organisational research and program evaluation. Yin (1984; 2003) also presents evidence of how case studies have enhanced understanding of educational practice in areas such as student learning and curricula. The study makes use of the case
study approach utilising in-depth semi-structured interviews and open-ended questionnaires, and concentrates on an interpretative approach to data (Brizuela, Stewart, Carrillo & Berger, 2000), which recognises the importance of information generated in the experience and understanding of the participants. Hence this study utilises a case study modelled on Yin’s (2003, pp. 46–53) multi-case-study replication design.

**Case Study Design**

The multi-case study design was employed so that multiple sources of data could be used on the basis that this methodology is suited to dealing with a wide range of evidence. The case studies allowed the researcher to investigate the broader historical values and culture, and the impact of implementing a core Aboriginal Studies subject. The literature (e.g. Feagin, Orum, Sjoberg & Denzin 1991; Brizuela, Stewart, Carrillo & Berger, 2000; Yin, 1984; Yin, 2003; Conrad & Serlin, 2006; Wiersma & Jurs, 2009) shows that there is agreement on the importance of incorporating triangulation to provide multiple measures of the same phenomenon. By using triangulation and multiple sources, a case study is considered stronger and therefore regarded as being more dynamic. As Wiersma and Jurs (2009, p. 287) stated:

> **Triangulation** is qualitative cross validation. It assesses the sufficiency of the data according to the convergences of multiple data sources or multiple data-collection procedures.

Hence, this design enables the phenomenon to be understood at close range and from different perspectives. The study utilises a multi-case-study design to present an accurate picture of how opinions and events have impacted on the institutions in the study and how these institutions have changed through time. This approach provides rich detail and real life examples of institutional values and culture that have contributed to the development and implementation of core Aboriginal Studies subjects in two institutions and the impact of core Aboriginal Studies teacher education subjects on pre-service teachers.
Case Study Framework

The framework set out below provides a descriptive picture to “set the scene” for the Aboriginal Studies core subject in each institution in the study under three discrete themes:

- **Background** (Aboriginal Studies core subject and the institutions);
- **Academic perspectives** (Heads of School, Directors of Aboriginal Education Units and teacher educators) (see Appendix 1); and
- **Pre-service teachers’ perceptions** via in-depth semi-structured interviews and open-ended questionnaire responses (see Appendix 1 and 2).

**Background.** The data sources for the background of the case study are divided into two discrete components described below.

The first component addressed in the framework of the multi-case study is a descriptive analysis of each institution’s profile and geographical location. This component provides a situational analysis of the institutional context in which a core Aboriginal Studies subject is delivered.

The second component provides an overview of the nature of the core Aboriginal Studies subject offered. It contextualises the place of the core Aboriginal Studies subject within the teacher education course from the perspective of the Head of School, Director of Aboriginal Education Unit and teacher educator on the institution’s rationale for inclusion, teacher education program, year offered, content implemented and pedagogy employed to deliver the institution’s core Aboriginal Studies teacher education course.

The overall case study design was brought together in a multi-case-study replication design. Key themes in the data collected were identified and placed in a cultural framework to identify shared experiences.
Rationale for Chosen Methodology

A qualitative methodology was deemed the most appropriate due to the nature of the research, the research focus and the research questions. Qualitative methodologies emphasise processes and meanings, stressing “how social experience is created and given meanings” (Denzin & Lincoln, 1998, p. 8). Denzin and Lincoln et al. (p. 3) define qualitative research as, “multi-method in focus, involving an interpretive, naturalistic approach to its subject matter”. To this end, qualitative research methodologies apply to natural settings and attempt to interpret phenomena in terms of the meanings people bring to them. Hence, this study is concerned with investigating a particular phenomenon from participants’ self-concept, the researcher being the primary source who: collects, organises the emergent themes and analyses the data which then can be generalised across the case studies. The study uses an inductive approach to build abstractions, concepts and theory.

Approach. Due to the researcher’s desire to explore the perceptions of the participants, the use of a qualitative method was chosen since quantitative methodology was not deemed to be able to provide the depth of insight required. Marshall and Rossman (1989; 1999), Minichiello, Aroni, Timewell and Alexander (1990), and Minichiello, Aroni and Hays (2008) put forward the proposition that semi-structured interviews are particularly useful for collecting data on individuals’ lived experiences. Accordingly, semi-structured interview questions were undertaken with academic staff and pre-service teachers as representing the most appropriate technique which allowed the researcher to delve for additional information where required (Fielding & Thomas, 2001). An open-ended questionnaire (see Appendix 2) was used to collect information from final year pre-service teachers as this allowed the researcher to organise themes emanating from the data (Gething, 2006). Interviews and questionnaires were used as they are “a more valid explanation of the informant’s perceptions and constructions of reality” (Michinichiello, Aroni & Hays, 2008, p. 51).
**Ethical Issues**

Qualitative researchers also stress ethical issues. This research was designed according to ethical codes, with all research participants told of the nature of the research and its intended uses, and consent received (see Appendixes 3 - 8). The ethical aspects of the study were approved by the University of Western Sydney Macarthur Ethics Review Committee (Human Subjects).

**Semi-structured Interviews and open-ended questionnaires**

Semi-structured interviews are seen as a form of social interaction (Taylor & Bogdan, 1998, p. 98). Minichiello, Aroni, Timewell and Alexander, (1997, p. 22) contend that through semi-structured interviews we “discover the contents of their [people’s] minds… through inference… to interpret the meaning of someone’s actions”. This study employed semi-structured in-depth interviews to understand people; it aimed to learn from them, to elicit their beliefs, their feelings and understanding within a given situation. Therefore, interviews were considered appropriate for examining the reality faced by pre-service teachers and their learning environment, particularly in relation to curriculum and pedagogy.

The responses from the open-ended questionnaires were also typed and grouped by question and analysed into similar themes and patterns. The interviews with Heads of School and Directors of Aboriginal Education Units were used to gain an understanding of the institutional factors that facilitated the introduction of a core Aboriginal Studies subject into their primary teacher education course. The interviews with teacher educators gave the researcher an understanding of the intentionality of the teacher educators with respect to their teaching practices and provided an insight into the pedagogy utilised in the classroom. The open-ended questionnaire responses from final year pre-service teachers provided statements from the participants with few limitations on their responses. As Gething (2006, p. 102) notes, open-ended items are useful for gathering information “in a situation where the researcher is interested in the process as well as the content of the answers”.

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The semi-structured interviews and questionnaires with pre-service teachers served a dual purpose as they provided information on the curriculum as well as an understanding of pre-service teachers’ perceptions of the nature and impact of the Aboriginal Studies subject, while enabling the researcher to cross-check against the perceptions of Heads of School, Directors of Aboriginal Education Units and teacher educators. In this context, validation of the participants required careful cross-checking across the range of interviews and questionnaires. Thus the research design assisted in understanding the perceptions held by those involved in the Aboriginal Studies subject. In addition, it allowed access to multiple stakeholder perspectives of pre-service teachers’ teaching Aboriginal Studies self-concepts, attitudes, knowledge, skills and commitment to understand and teach Aboriginal Studies to all Australian students and to effectively teach Aboriginal students. Finally, as suggested by Conrad and Serlin (2006, p. 414), a case study must be “useful to others in similar situations”. This study will contribute to the collective knowledge base for educators around Australia and contains information and strategies that are generalisable or transferable across other institutions wishing to introduce an Aboriginal Studies subject into their primary teacher education courses.

**Instrumentation and Procedures**

*In-Depth Semi-Structured Interviews with Academics.*

In-depth semi-structured interviews of one to one and half hours were undertaken by the researcher with Heads of School, Directors of Aboriginal Education Units and teacher educators (see Appendix 1). Participants were interviewed utilising parallel in-depth semi-structured interviews, using prompts when required to elicit additional information. The purpose of these interviews was to identify what Heads of School, Directors of Aboriginal Education Units and teacher educators perceived as the:

- Motives, values and attitudes in relation to introduction of a core Aboriginal Studies subjects (Research Aim 1, see Chapter 4);
- Features which impacted on the motives, values and attitudes in the institution that contributed to the development and implementation of the core Aboriginal Studies subject (Research Aim 1, see Chapter 4);

- Features such as the structure and usefulness of subject content and the pedagogy and in what ways they contributed to the development and implementation of the core Aboriginal Studies subject (Research Aims 2 to 3, see Chapter 4); and

- Impact of the core Aboriginal Studies subject on pre-service teachers’ attitudes, commitment, knowledge, skills, ability and understanding in relation to teaching Aboriginal Studies and teaching Aboriginal students (Research Aims 2 and 3, see Chapter 4).

A package containing a letter of introduction, overview of the research project, research questions and copies of surveys for final year pre-service teachers was sent to the Heads of School in the selected institutions, inviting them to participate in the project. All agreed to participate. In the two institutions the Head of School had recently been appointed. Whilst these Heads of School did not participate in the interview, they did provide the researcher with the names of alternative academic staff members who had been Heads of School and so had a better knowledge of historical factors that had contributed to the development and implementation of the core Aboriginal Studies subject. These additional participants, along with teacher educators nominated by Heads of School and Directors of Aboriginal Education Units, were contacted by phone. Letters explaining the project and a copy of the questions were then mailed to the participants (see Appendixes 3 & 4). All participants were then contacted by phone and interview dates timetabled. All but three of the participants were interviewed at their place of work, the remaining participants elected to be interviewed at the researcher’s place of work. Open-ended, semi-structured questions were asked and prompts were used to draw out further responses when additional information needed to be elicited in a specific area or topic (see Appendix 1).
In-depth, semi-structured interviews with pre-service teachers

In-depth, semi-structured interviews of half an hour to an hour were undertaken by the researcher with five pre-service teachers from each institution (see Appendix 1). Participants were interviewed utilising parallel in-depth interviews using prompts where required to elicit additional information. This was done to explore perceptions of pre-service teachers who had recently completed a core Aboriginal Studies course in relation to:

- Understanding of why their institution had introduced a core Aboriginal Studies subject (Aim 1, see Chapter 4);
- Attitude towards how well their institutions had taught the Aboriginal Studies subject (Aims 2 and 3, see Chapter 4);
- Attitudes, commitment, knowledge, skills, ability and understanding to teach Aboriginal Studies and teach Aboriginal students (Aims 2, see Chapter 4); and
- Institutional factors, course characteristics and personal experiences that had impacted positively and negatively on their attitudes, commitment, knowledge, skills, ability and understanding to teach Aboriginal Studies and students, and investigate the influence of the initial experience of learning Aboriginal Studies and learner self-concept on pre-service teachers’ subsequent approaches to teaching Aboriginal Studies (Aim 3, see Chapter 4).

Teacher educators were asked to put forward the names of ten pre-service teachers who had successfully completed the Aboriginal Studies core Aboriginal Studies subject. The teacher educators were asked to select the pre-service teachers on the basis that they had participated with enthusiasm while undertaking the subject. The pre-service teachers were then contacted by telephone. In each institution the first five pre-service teachers agreeing to participate in the study were interviewed. The five pre-service teachers from each institution who agreed to participate were sent a package that included letters of introduction, an overview of the research project, a copy of the research questions (Appendix 1) and an invitation to participate in the project.
Three of the pre-service teachers were interviewed at their institutions, two were interviewed at their homes and five elected to undertake the in-depth interview via telephone. All of the interviews were recorded and transcribed.

**Open-ended questionnaire with final year pre-service teachers**

Due to the low response rate of return from mail-outs to final year pre-service teachers, the researcher contacted the teacher educators in each of the institutions and asked for the name of a final year teacher educator who would be willing to allow the researcher to invite final year pre-service teachers to fill out the questionnaire in their class. The researcher contacted the final year teacher educators, who kindly agreed to allow the researcher into their class. This was done to ensure that the largest possible cohort was obtained. The researcher met with final year pre-service teachers in class and gave them an oral overview of the project; a copy of the questionnaire (Appendix 2), a written letter explaining the project (Appendix 6) and a letter of consent (Appendix 8) to be filled out by the participants. Those who wished to participate were asked to complete the questionnaire. The purpose of this questionnaire was to identify participants’ insights into institutional factors, course characteristics and personal experiences after completing a core Aboriginal Studies subject, in order to ascertain what factors had impacted positively and/or negatively on pre-service teachers’ values and attitudes, commitment and ability to understand and teach Aboriginal Studies (Aims 1 to 3, see Chapter 4). The questionnaire was also used to cross-check the findings for pre-service teachers with those for Heads of School, Directors of Aboriginal Education Units and teacher educators. In addition, as core Aboriginal Studies subjects are either taught in the first or second year of their degree, it enabled the researcher to ascertain what content in the subject matter the final year pre-service teachers most valued.

The open-ended questionnaire (see Appendix 2) also contained ‘Background’ questions on age, gender, whether or not the student was an Aboriginal Australian participant, or had Aboriginal friends and/or relatives. It also asked whether or not the participant had undertaken previous degrees in Aboriginal Australian studies. The
background questions were set so that the researcher could validate changes in attitude of the individual participants.

**Background profile of final year pre-service teachers**

In institution A, where 69 ($N=69$) participants completed the surveys, 64 of the pre-service teachers were 25 or younger. All but six of the participants were female. Fifty-five were born in Australia, with 14 identifying that they were born in another country and had migrated to Australia. There were no Aboriginal Australian participants, although 13 had either met Aboriginal people or had Aboriginal friends. None of the students had undertaken any previous tertiary Aboriginal Studies subject.

In institution B, 65 ($N=65$) participants completed the surveys, and 50 of the pre-service teachers were 25 or younger. Sixty of the participants were female and five were male. Fifty-nine were born in Australia, with six identifying that they were born in another country and migrated to Australia. There was one female Aboriginal Australian participant, although 27 either had Aboriginal family members or had Aboriginal Australian friends. One participant had undertaken a previous tertiary study in Aboriginal Studies.

**Data Analysis Procedures**

Data from the semi-structured interviews and questionnaires were hand scored using content analysis, as suggested by Marshall and Rossman (1989, p. 114) who based their analysis procedures on “organising the data; generating categories, themes and patterns; testing the emergent hypotheses” (also see Denzin & Lincoln, 1994; Marshall & Rossman, 1999; Fielding & Thomas, 2001; and Michinichiello, Aroni & Hays, 2008).

Data collected from participants were hand coded to generate categories and organise emergent themes and patterns; identify variations in perspectives amongst participants; and ground analysis for identification of new themes, issues, insights into practice and possible policy directions. Triangulation was employed with the data.
collected from different groups of participants to cross-validate, following Denzin and Lincoln (1994, p. 241). Triangulation is a process using “multiple perceptions to clarify meaning… verifying different ways the phenomenon is being seen” (also see Wiersma & Jurs, 2000). Triangulation enabled the researcher to overlap the results from the different data sources (in-depth semi-structured interviews with Heads of School, Directors of Aboriginal Education Units and teacher educators; in-depth semi-structured interviews with pre-service first and second year teachers; and in-depth semi-structured interviews and open-ended questionnaires with pre-service teachers in their final year) to strengthen the reliability of the study.

The interviews with academic staff allowed the researcher to explore the contextual conditions under which the institutions introduced a core Aboriginal Studies subject, emphasising personal accounts and views relating to the outcomes. Interviews held with Directors of Aboriginal Education Units in the participating institutions were undertaken to enhance the study by incorporating an Aboriginal perspective, and to discover Directors’ perceptions of the content and the cultural appropriateness of subjects taught. The interviews focused on the participants’ knowledge and attitudes to the introduction of core Aboriginal Studies and the choice of subject matter. The in-depth interviews were used to emphasise and understand the processes and interactions between people through their personal accounts of the social conditions which specifically promoted and/or inhibited introducing a core Aboriginal Studies subject. The interviews with pre-service teachers were undertaken in order to further examine the impact of the implementation of an Aboriginal Studies core subject. The interviews enabled the researcher to explore the self-perceptions of the values and attitudes, commitment and ability to understand and teach Aboriginal Studies of individuals who have just completed a core Aboriginal Studies subject. Consequently, the semi-structured interviews and open-ended questionnaires allowed the researcher to collect data, not just in a statistical form, but through a dynamic process in which the participants’ opinions and intentions could be critically interpreted through time, from their own personal perspective and within a social context.
Assumptions and Limitations of the Study

To date, most research in Aboriginal education has been directed towards developing policies, curriculum and pedagogy about teaching Aboriginal students. Rarely has deliberation and research been directed to the extent to which pre-service teachers are adequately prepared to understand and teach Aboriginal Studies effectively. Hence, this research differs from previous studies as it gives rich analysis of multiple stakeholder perspectives of Aboriginal Studies teacher education subjects while focusing on pre-service teacher’s perceptions of their values and attitudes, knowledge, skills and commitment to teach Aboriginal Studies once in the workforce.

Thus far in Australia, there has only been one extensive program of research into the outcomes of teacher education institutions teaching Aboriginal Studies: Craven, Halse, Marsh, Mooney and Wilson-Miller (2005a; 2005b; 2005c). This research validates the factors previously identified and builds upon the Craven et al. studies by further elucidating a broader range of content and pedagogy that impact on pre-service teachers who have undertaken a core Aboriginal Studies subjects. As the researcher is one of the authors of the Craven study, it was important that the research delve deeper into the perceptions of pre-service teacher through in-depth interviews and open-ended questionnaires to understand the Aboriginal Studies subject from the perspectives of pre-service teachers. The study also differs as it is one of the very few research studies using self-concept from a qualitative methodological standpoint.

There are two important points to be considered in this research. The first is that the researcher is an Aboriginal person who has worked for many years in Aboriginal education so has a strong interest in the area of Aboriginal Studies, and the researcher also held the position as Director of an Aboriginal Centre in one of the institutions in the study. The other point is that there is a small pool of people working in Aboriginal Higher Education, so the researcher knew most of the personnel in the institutions under investigation, if not as a friend, then on a collegial basis. This in itself can present a problem as the data offered by these participants can be in jeopardy of being influenced by the researcher being part of the group. Another problem for a researcher with insider information or prior knowledge of the situation under study is the researcher can be
susceptible to prior ideas and values, and this could be seen as a limitation. More importantly in regard to prior knowledge, as Conrad and Serlin (2006, p. 502, emphasis in original) note:

The problem that the researcher faces, therefore, is not one of how to put aside prior knowledge but rather one of how to capitalize on prior knowledge and use it to extract as much new knowledge as possible from the findings.

Therefore, as the researcher, it was my responsibility to use my relationship with the participants as an integral aspect of the final findings. But as an Aboriginal researcher with connections to a number of communities, I found that Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal participants were happy to be involved. One of the strengths of the study was that it was conducted by an Aboriginal researcher who could gain a rapport particularly with Aboriginal participants. Collecting data as an insider has both positive and negative aspects; it also gave the researcher a more in-depth understanding of the data analysis. Taking the Conrad and Serlin statement above into account, this study used semi-structured, in-depth interviews and it incorporated open-ended questionnaires with final year pre-service teachers to present a much fuller picture of core Aboriginal Studies subjects under investigation. This study also enabled the researcher to generalise the findings across two institutions using multiple stakeholders’ perceptions.

Summary

This chapter provides a comprehensive overview of the methodology employed to successfully investigate the aims and research questions posed in Chapter 4. It has described in detail the characteristics of the participants; measurements employed; the administrative procedures; and the contextual components of each of the case studies.

The chapter demonstrates that the strongest possible methodology was employed to address the qualitative research design. The rationale for using a multi-case-study design is explained, showing that it provides validity and reliability to address the research questions and identify the research findings. The research was
designed to test the impact of the implementation of core Aboriginal Studies subject into primary teacher education courses. Hence, this chapter shows that a strong methodology was devised and evaluated within a powerful research design.

The following chapter presents the findings from the semi-structured, in-depth interviews and questionnaires based upon the methodology outlined above.
CHAPTER 6

RESULTS CASE STUDY A: CRITICAL ANALYSIS OF THE RATIONALE, APPROACH TO AND IMPACT OF A CORE ABORIGINAL STUDIES SUBJECT

Introduction

The purpose of this chapter is to present voices from the participants in the first of the individual case studies from the two metropolitan institutions in NSW with a core Aboriginal Studies subject in their primary teacher education courses. To set the scene for case study A, the context gives an overview of the institution, the Aboriginal Education Unit, and the core Aboriginal Studies subject.

Secondly, the results for each of the research questions addressed by in the in-depth interviews with Heads of School, the Director of the Aboriginal Education Unit, and teacher educators are presented. This is followed by a discussion of the answers from the in-depth interviews with pre-service teachers who had recently completed the core Aboriginal Studies subject in the second year of their degree. Thirdly, the results from analyses of the responses from final year pre-service teachers’ open-ended questionnaires are presented. Key themes emerging from the in-depth interviews and with final year pre-service teachers are identified.

Context: Case Study A

The Institution

The institution is a large university situated near a substantial urban Aboriginal population. It is located in a metropolitan area and draws students from across NSW, Australia and internationally. Primary teacher education is situated in the Faculty of Education and the core Aboriginal studies subject is taught by staff from the university’s Aboriginal Education Unit.
The Aboriginal Education Unit

The Aboriginal Education Unit has a long and distinguished record in promoting equity of access, participation, and outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students in the institution. The director explained that the Aboriginal Education Unit “Provides access, academic, cultural and personal support to Indigenous students while working to create a holistic learning environment in which they can optimise their learning”. Another dimension to the Aboriginal Education Unit’s work is its integrated and inclusive approach to learning and teaching initiatives, which involves Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal staff and students contributing to a single, institution-wide strategic goal. The goal is to promote Aboriginal learning, knowledge, and perspectives across the institution. Besides teaching the core Aboriginal Studies subject in the Faculty of Education, the Aboriginal Education Unit also has an elective subject for pre-service teachers who wish to learn more about teaching Aboriginal children. As well, the Aboriginal Education Unit has some six additional Aboriginal subjects situated in the Faculty of Arts which are taught by the staff within the Unit.

The Aboriginal Education Units is also engaged in supporting Aboriginal students across the university and teaching their own specific programs for Aboriginal students. The Unit is staffed with “a substantial critical mass” of Aboriginal academics. Importantly, two-thirds of the academic staff are Aboriginal, and act as mentors and role models for Aboriginal students. Staff also play a strong leadership role in the wider institution in advising on curricula involving Aboriginal issues and perspectives. They provide an authentic voice while modelling culturally appropriate practices in learning and teaching.

The Core Aboriginal Studies Subject

While the core Aboriginal Studies subject of study is situated in the Faculty of Education primary teacher education course, the teaching of the core Aboriginal Studies subject is co-ordinated by Aboriginal staff from within the Aboriginal Education Unit. The co-ordinator of the core subject has membership of the Faculty of Education primary teaching undergraduate committee to ensure that Faculty processes and
procedures are met. Hence, a strong working relationship has been built between the Faculty and the Aboriginal Education Unit.

The core Aboriginal Studies subject is somewhat different to the pre-service teachers’ other subjects as it involves re-learning Australia’s colonial history and learning about the sometimes very distressing outcomes of past policies which affected Aboriginal people. This was confirmed by the teacher educator who stated that “at times it [the Aboriginal Studies subject] can be quite confronting”. The director felt that Aboriginal Studies needed to be taught by both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal staff as this validated the subject and assured pre-service teachers that, as non-Aboriginal educators, they had a place in teaching Aboriginal Studies. The Aboriginal teacher educators are able to draw upon individual experience as a teacher, while including stories from their life, their family and community. The non-Aboriginal teacher educator is seen as a role model who encourages pre-service teachers through their own learning and teaching practices to be as enthusiastic and motivated as they are in teaching Aboriginal Studies.

The core Aboriginal Studies subject is taught in the second year of the primary teacher education course. It is a ten-week subject, delivered through a combination of lectures and tutorials. A one-hour lecture presents the information on the topic to be covered in that week. This is followed by a one-hour tutorial. The rationale for the core subject is to ensure that, consistent with the NSW Department of Education and Training (DET) Aboriginal Education Policy (AEP), pre-service teachers are taught the impetus for including an Aboriginal Studies and perspective into all of the key learning areas.

The core Aboriginal Study subject focuses on the relevance of teaching Aboriginal Studies in the primary school curriculum. The subject presents a contemporary education and cultural study that is linked to historical issues and interrelated social, policy, and economic themes. The outline of the core subject describes the learning outcomes and purpose of the study, which is to:
Increase all students’ current level of knowledge in relation to Aboriginal Australian issues;

Provide skills in the development and implementation of Aboriginal perspectives into the school curriculum and classroom practice;

Develop competence to critically evaluate resources for inclusion in Aboriginal studies programs;

Develop an understanding of the historical background of Aboriginal Australians and how these experiences may impact upon their schooling; and

Develop skills that will create an inclusive learning environment in the classroom for Aboriginal students.

Results: Interviews with Academic Staff and Second Year Pre-service Teachers

Introduction. The Head of School (HOS), and the Director of the Aboriginal Education Unit (director), teacher educators, and pre-service teachers who had recently undertaken the core subject in the second year of their degree were asked to respond to a series of questions. The questions are divided into an analysis of the responses from HOS, director, and teacher educator, followed by an analysis of the in-depth interviews with second year pre-service teachers’ responses. (See Appendix A for in-depth interview schedule; See Chapter 4 for full explanation of aims, research questions and rationale).

Research Question 1.1: Institutional Motives, Values, and Attitudes

What do multiple stakeholder perceive as the institutions’ motives, values and attitudes in relation to incorporating and ongoing implementation of core Aboriginal Studies subjects in their primary teacher education course?
Results: Academic staff. Participants were asked to reflect on how their university came to introduce a core Aboriginal Studies subject into the primary teacher education course, and their understanding of the official rationale for its inclusion. In the conversation with the HOS, she disclosed she had been at the university since 1976 and had always worked in the Faculty of Education. She reflected whether or not the university was the first to introduce an Aboriginal Studies subject, but thought that “Rhonda Craven at the then St George Institute of the Sydney College of Advanced Education, I think made claim to being the first”. The HOS thought that it was not that important who was first, and stated that “she was more intent upon having a much more substantial subject and virtually what we had here at [this institution] was a subject, a compulsory unit, within a subject”. The HOS then described the subject in its earliest form. She noted that they had two classes running over two hours a week for six weeks or so. Therefore it was not a fully developed subject but more a unit within a subject. The issues the early unit covered were described by the HOS as:

an orientation to issues and concerns in relation to Aboriginal Education both in terms of opportunities for working with and teaching Aboriginal children, recognising that teachers were more likely to teach children from a range of different backgrounds and experiences, but with a sensitivity to the experiences and needs of Indigenous people.

The HOS went on to speak about the support from the faculty to include the new subject. She noted that back in the 1970s the faculty was not as regulated as it is now. “It was an internal decision, so it’s not that the University did or didn’t support me it was rather that it was a fairly sort of autonomous”. The HOS also mentioned that because they were given additional resourcing, there was little conflict in the team and said “there wasn’t any fight about the budget”.

Although the director did not know the full history of the introduction of the core Aboriginal Studies subject, he suggested that before a core subject could be introduced, certain pre-conditions must apply. The director suggested it was probably the strong association between the Aboriginal Education Unit and the Faculty of Education and a growing awareness in the NSW Department of Education and Training
and NSW Aboriginal Education Consultative Group of the need to inform teachers
generally about culture and educational issues. Increasingly, he recalled, young teachers
were connecting with Aboriginal children in classrooms and teachers were expected to
introduce appropriate content about Aboriginal culture across the curriculum. The
director suggested that a good point to start with was in the pre-service education of
primary school teachers, where a timetable opportunity existed, and there were
individuals prepared to argue for the necessary diversion of resources, human, and
material. This is the case with all innovation, argued the director, who said “it involves
commitment by individuals above and beyond existing duties”.

The academic participants thought that an awareness of the NSW Aboriginal
Education policies and national Aboriginal Education policies could have impact on
institutions to introduce a core subject. The director suggested that policies “provided a
reference point for when people wanted to act” but he went on to point out that “there
had been Aboriginal policies in the past, but not a great deal had come from them”. We
can infer from this that it is a combination of a number of factors coming together rather
than the policies themselves which make a change to the curriculum. Although the
director suggested that the policies were not the main impetus for the core subjects to be
introduced, he went on to say “I think it’s essential to have these policies as a reference
point and as a form of generalisation”. The teacher educator also thought that the
introduction of a core subject was consistent with the national and NSW Aboriginal
education policies.

The director strongly supported a recognised and discrete component of
Aboriginal education in teacher education. He went on to reiterate that the official
rationale for the introduction of the core Aboriginal Studies subject was that due to
increased numbers of Aboriginal students and awareness of their low achievement rate,
“the condition of Aboriginal children in the school system presented a disturbing
picture – low achievement and early graduation was standard”. The director went on to
speak about the strategies employed by informed school personnel, which could
improve the teaching of Aboriginal children, if teachers were more generally aware of
Aboriginal culture and the needs of Aboriginal children at school. As the director
stated, “In part a bad situation could be alleviated if effective pre-service teacher
education was mounted”. Hence adequate teacher education was seen as an important contextual element. At the same time he emphasised that “it is one step of many which are required to fully realise the aims of a NSW teaching force, well informed about Aboriginal education and equipped to improve schooling”. The director reiterated that the involvement of the Aboriginal Education Unit and the Faculty of Education in teacher education represents a commitment by both parties.

The teacher educator supported the university’s ongoing implementation of a core subject, saying “I support them wholeheartedly, otherwise I wouldn’t be here”. He then disclosed “That’s one of the particular reasons why I got into this area… so I could keep future teachers aware of the gamut of issues that Koori kids face… what teachers need to be aware of”. In considering whether the core subject changed pre-service teachers’ attitudes, he thought that it changed some pre-service teachers’ attitudes to Aboriginal history and culture, but not all. Finally, the teacher educator expressed his thoughts on the learning outcomes of the subject, commenting that:

They [pre-service teachers] need to understand the issues involved firstly in Aboriginal education and how they can be an “agent of change” in the education system. How they can include Aboriginal perspectives into their classroom so that they can teach all students both Indigenous and non-Indigenous about the true history of this country.

**Results: Pre-service Teachers.** Second year pre-service teachers who had just completed the core Aboriginal Studies subject were asked why they thought the university required them to undertake a core Aboriginal Studies subject. Reflecting the comments by academic staff, pre-service teachers agreed that learning to teach Aboriginal students and Aboriginal history was a major factor promoting institutions to introduce a core subject. As Noel noted, for him it was “to get a better understanding of the background of the Indigenous students, but also a better and broader understanding of Australian history and culture”. These sentiments were supported by another pre-service teacher, Sandra, who added another dimension to the importance for migrant pre-service teachers to be taught a core Aboriginal Studies subject:
Okay, so that we get an understanding about what Aboriginal Studies is about and what, like, if we have Aboriginal students in a class or in the school, then we have knowledge about them. Also like, because I was not born in Australia, it increases my knowledge of Indigenous people and the culture.

In a discussion on whether or not the core subject promoted reconciliation and respect for Aboriginal culture, Sandra replied “I guess so yep, because we get an understanding of the culture”. When discussing whether or not the core subject promotes attitude change, Noel responded:

Yeah, yeah, very much. I’ll have to admit that like, growing up I could have been termed a bit of a racist kid, but in growing up over the later years of my school and in particular university, I’ve become a lot more aware of my surroundings and as such I can happily say that no way I’m racist any more.

Because of the sorts of encounters Noel has had through his personal life as well as through undertaking the core subject, he has been able to learn a lot more about Aboriginal history and culture, and this has obviously made a difference to the way he now perceives Aboriginal people and his sense of his own views.

According to pre-service teachers, the reasons the institution should introduce a core subject into a primary teacher education course include an awareness of Aboriginal history and culture and encompassing teaching in a respectful manner. As pre-service teacher Betty stated, the purpose is “to be able to teach it in a sensitive way in the classroom, in an honest way”. A philosophical understanding of the rationale behind the formation of the National and NSW Aboriginal Education Policy was also identified by pre-service teacher Lucy: “it’s policy for us not to just adequately teach Indigenous students but adequately teach all students about Indigenous issues”. These sentiments were supported by Nelly, who stated that the reason for the institution to introduce a core Aboriginal Studies subject was “because of the department of Education’s Aboriginal Education Policy – to ensure that Aboriginal perspectives are taught in relation to the KLAs [key learning areas]”.

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Emerging themes: Academic staff. The comments by the academic staff reflected that the introduction and ongoing implementation of core Aboriginal Studies teacher education subjects was:

- A strong commitment from dedicated individuals;
- Collaboration between the institution and community organisations;
- Growing awareness of NSW Aboriginal education policy;
- Increased numbers of Aboriginal students in the system;
- Growing awareness of the low achievement rates of Aboriginal children.
- An important part of teacher education; and
  - Improved the teaching of Aboriginal children.

In addition, there was an awareness of a need for teacher education to teach pre-service teachers about Aboriginal education, including history and culture, so they could become “change agents” within the education system.

Emerging themes: Pre-service teachers. The remarks by the pre-service teachers as to why there should be a core Aboriginal Studies subject in the primary teacher education course included the imperatives to:

- Break down stereotypes about Aboriginal people;
- Improve and broaden understanding of Australian history and culture and how to incorporate understandings about these areas in the curriculum;
- Improve understanding of Indigenous students; and
  - Conform with mandatory NSW DET Aboriginal Education Policy.
Research Question 2.1: Impact of Core Aboriginal Studies Subjects on Pre-service Teachers

What do multiple stakeholders perceive as the impact of core Aboriginal Studies subjects on pre-service teachers’ self-concept, attitudes, commitment, knowledge and skills and ability to understand and teach Aboriginal Studies?

Results: Academic Staff. To elucidate what academic participants perceive as the impact of core Aboriginal Studies subjects on pre-service teachers’ self-concept, attitudes, commitment, knowledge and skills and ability to understand and teach Aboriginal Studies they were first asked, how they thought undertaking a core Aboriginal Studies subject impacted on the way pre-service teachers think about teaching Aboriginal Studies. The teacher educator thought that the core subject gave pre-service teachers “a very broad knowledge of issues, but not a real deep understanding of issues”. The director felt that this was a difficult question. He noted that “it depends on the quality of the course, the previous and present attitudes of the students and post-service experiences”. The director went on to discuss the change in attitude of the pre-service teachers undertaking the core Aboriginal Studies subject, stating “some students openly express their appreciation of the course… other students are motivated to seek employment in schools with significant Aboriginal populations. Generally, students are positive about their experience in course evaluations”. However, in connection to pre-service teachers’ harbouring negative values and attitudes, the director stated:

a few students will take away negative perceptions – they may reinforce negative perceptions they already hold or which are evident in their families. They may pick up negative views from other students or they may react negatively to remarks or the personality of the lecturer or tutor. Some students who have negative views of the course may re-evaluate their learning in a teaching situation.

The HOS agreed that there were pre-service teachers who immediately became engaged and understood the purpose of undertaking the subject. But she also
acknowledged that some were quite hostile. In talking about the hostility of some pre-service teachers, she recalled:

It’s funny how things actually stick in your mind. One of them was the use of body language. I had some students who would actually, and I’d never seen this manifest before, would turn right away from [the Aboriginal teacher educator] when he was teaching. I don’t want to hear this, I don’t want to know this is going on. And I have to say that I was quite shocked, I was quite surprised at… that those sorts of behaviours would manifest.

The HOS recollected that this hostility shown by the pre-service teachers was not problematic in the sense that the students did not display “overt hostility in speaking out or whatever”. Another observation was a sense or feeling as described by the Head of Unit who remembered “I know this is probably drawing a very long bow, but I also had the sense that they were, they were some of the college students who came from country NSW rather than being from urban Sydney”.

Juxtaposing the concerns about pre-service teachers’ hostility, both the teacher educator and the director thought that some pre-service teachers’ self-concept became overly inflated as a consequence of undertaking the subject, as expressed here by the teacher educator: “a lot of them think they’ve done the course and now they’re experts”. The director went on to say that it is the nature of undertaking the degree that some pre-service teachers could become overconfident but with time he felt that “others who are overly positive on course may become more realistic in teaching when their understandings are challenged”. The director indicated that once the pre-service teachers graduated, their attitudes to teaching would influence teachers in schools, and stated that “input from older teachers in school settings is also important”. The director noted that although teacher training was equal to learning outcomes, “It cannot fully simulate the conditions of the chalk face”. The director concluded his comment stating that “University education as a whole is predicated on the view that knowledge, skills, and attitudes can be transmitted and there’s centuries of experience backing this”.

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The second question asked participants what they thought were the three main factors that make a good core Aboriginal Studies subject. The aim was to understand how a core subject impacted on pre-service teachers’ self-concept, attitudes, commitment, knowledge and skills and ability to understand and teach Aboriginal Studies. For the director, the quality of the lecturers and tutors was the first major factor. He went on to name some of the attributes he thought that teaching staff should have: “persons who are informed, positive, and sensitive to others”. Among the negative attributes identified by the director was a staff member who was “off-putting… excessively ideological or has a mission manager view” and he also noted that some “course material may prove to be counter-productive”. The director also expressed the importance of having qualified Aboriginal staff as the director thought that “capable Aboriginal people are best able to transmit this core subject and I believe here there is an issue of authenticity”.

For the teacher educator, the most important factor which contributes to the self-concept of pre-service teachers was community consultation. The director agreed that the core subject needed to utilise a broad range of media and human resources experiences. The director reiterated that teaching resources utilising a full range of teaching media and imaginative ways of drawing on others maximises the Aboriginal experience. Finally, the director noted that given that time and funding are restricted, “teaching activities need to be carefully planned and budgeted. Direct experience, thoughtfully conceived is an excellent teacher”.

The teacher educator, although an Aboriginal person, acknowledged the authenticity of Aboriginal voices and identified the importance of also inviting Aboriginal guest speakers to lecture on specific topics. The teacher educator went on to suggest that pre-service teachers needed to meet speakers from the Aboriginal community, but also from the Aboriginal directorate within the NSW Department of Education and Training, and organisations such as the Aboriginal Education Consultative Group as he thought it would boost pre-service teachers’ confidence to meet people who could help them when in the classroom. The teacher educator went on to suggest that presenting the core subject in this fashion built self-confidence for pre-
service teachers by providing pre-service teachers with tangible human resources to refer to once they become teachers.

**Emerging themes: Academic staff.** Various themes emerged in relation academic staff perceptions on pre-service teachers’ self-concept, attitudes, commitment, knowledge and skills and ability to understand and teach Aboriginal Studies. In relation to pre-service teacher training they noted:

- The effectiveness of core Aboriginal Studies subject is in part captive to the limitations of teacher training;
- Importance of good quality lecturers and tutors;
  - The authenticity of Indigenous voices, as teacher educators and guest speakers;

Themes specifically related to pre-service teachers learning outcomes were:

- A core subject gives a broad knowledge of the issues;
- The core Aboriginal Studies subject does expose pre-service teachers to the issues of Aboriginal education from an Aboriginal perspective;
- Aboriginal Studies/perspectives can make a difference in a school setting.
- Need for a broad range of resources.
- Some pre-service teachers may be overconfident in their perceived ability to teach the subject; and
  - Some pre-service teachers were openly hostile to the subject matter and or lecturers;

**Results: Pre-service Teachers.** To explore what pre-service teachers perceive as impacting on their self-concept, attitudes, commitment, knowledge and skills, and ability to understand and teach Aboriginal Studies they were first asked to describe how
well the institution taught the core Aboriginal Studies subject and what they had learnt by participating in the subject. There were mixed messages about how well the core subject was taught. Sandra did not feel that the subject was taught well. She felt that only one subject of study was not sufficient, and had not adequately provided the skills she felt she needed to confidently teach Aboriginal Studies/perspectives. In contrast, for Noel, Betty and Sally, the core subject had sparked their interest to a point where they chose to take further subjects of study in Aboriginal Studies taught at the institution. Betty and Nelly thought the subject was taught well. Nelly expressed it by saying “Quite well, quite well”. She went on to describe highlights of the course: “the lecturers were really interesting, we were always given really good stories, it was a really good course and the tutorials went through what the lectures was about”.

Participants explained the approaches that were used in teaching the core subject. They said it was taught via a combination of lecturers, tutorials, and presentations/workshops. Several participants noted that they had enjoyed the presentations. As Sandra explained, “the workshops were good, because it made us go and find out about the topics that we wanted to do and then presenting the topics we learned more when the other students presented… so we got more information”.

When asked what sort of things they learnt in the course, not surprisingly, the participants unanimously cited Aboriginal history and culture as the main component of the subject. Their responses are encapsulated in Noel’s statement of what he had gained: “A broader understanding of the overall cultural value of students, parents, and the community”. Other key components identified were strategies to deal with Otitis Media, different policies, the sorts of resources that are available to teachers and educators, and Aboriginal English. Sally mentioned cross-cultural studies, an example of which was that one of the other students in their presentation had spoken about Native Americans. Additionally, Betty stated “But I think the main thing that I got out of it was really about the effects of colonisation and how that’s still relevant today”.

Secondly, pre-service teachers were asked how the core Aboriginal Studies subject changed their attitude about teaching Aboriginal Studies in the future. All agreed that they are more committed to teaching Aboriginal Studies and perspectives in
their classrooms. Three of the participants identified undertaking the core subject in
their primary teacher education course as the springboard for them wanting to learn
more about Aboriginal Studies. Betty stated that she had always had a commitment to
Aboriginal Studies and stated “I don’t know whether it has changed the way I think
about teaching Aboriginal Studies, but it’s given me a better understanding of what to
teach”. Noel mentioned that other subjects in the degree had incorporated Aboriginal
perspectives. In particular, he stated:

in first year, I did a religion course, and the first unit was actually
Indigenous culture, in a religious sort of context I guess, and that’s what
really got me intrigued and interested in the whole Indigenous culture sort of
thing, so it sort of built on from that… So I guess in respect to the core
subject I was already hoping to actually go on with other Indigenous studies
subjects.

As a pre-service teacher who was not born in Australia, Sandra’s perspective
was that “It actually made me realise the importance of being in Australia”. Sandra
went on to express her thoughts about what she had gained from the subject and said
“actually, it was really interesting because there are so many good things about the
culture… and it actually increased my awareness of it”. Sandra noted that the core
subject had increased her desire to teach Aboriginal Studies, saying “It gave me more
confidence, I guess, to teach it in the class”.

Finally, pre-service teachers were asked to evaluate the three main factors which
helped prepare them to teach Aboriginal Studies in a classroom. For a few of the
participants this was not an easy question to answer as they had elected to undertake a
series of additional subjects in Aboriginal Studies offered at the university. Betty in
particular, who took four additional Aboriginal Studies subjects, identified the main
factor for her:

I’d say probably the thing that I have taken away the most is the effects that
are still happening today because of the Stolen Generation and colonisation.
Before I did these courses I never realised how much that impact is still
relevant today. So I think it’s sort of given me more understanding and sensitivity towards those issues… That really stuck in my mind.

Other participants thought that being taught where to find and how to assess appropriate resources was an important factor, along with knowing that there are Aboriginal human resources in the form of Aboriginal workers within the Department of Education and Training. How to access Aboriginal community members was also mentioned. All of the participants mentioned learning about Aboriginal history and culture as a main factor. One participant noted that over the past couple of years at the university she had formed strong friendships with Aboriginal students and that she had learnt a lot about culture. As she noted, “it helped me see and be able to talk about that culture… in an everyday sort of context as well”. A few of the participants noted that because of the subject they were able to discern that they needed to be aware of difference of all children in the classroom, as Nelly went on to eloquently articulate:

the first point is very important not to stereotype children, any Indigenous or any other culture that’s the main factor. I think skills… in relation to the culture … expectations of students would be different based on their cultural values and experiences… Because without that understanding of their culture… being able to understand their behaviour in the classroom, helps stop them lagging behind because of [teacher] ignorance or a naïveté.

**Emerging Themes: Pre-service Teachers.** For pre-service teachers, learning about Aboriginal history and culture was again a major theme which had broadened pre-service teachers’ understanding. They cited the following issues as important factors in the core subject:

- Enjoyed the combination of workshops and lectures;
- The student presentations were useful;
- Understanding difference;
- The impact of colonisation;
The Stolen Generations;

How past policies are still impacting on Aboriginal people today; and

Resources and how to access them.

**Research question 3.1: Multiple Stakeholders Perceptions of Strengths and Limitations**

What do multiple stakeholders perceive as the strengths and limitations of the current core Aboriginal Studies subject?

**Results: Strengths – Academic Staff.** To further elucidate the experiences, challenges, and incentives of those involved in designing, delivering and experiencing a core Aboriginal Studies subject, participants were asked to comment on the strengths of the current core subject. The director thought that the fact that it is a core subject therefore compulsory for all primary pre-service teachers was very important, along with its being taught by experienced staff who are predominantly Aboriginal. The director thought that another strength of the subject was the collaborative arrangement between the Aboriginal Education Unit and the Faculty of Education. For the teacher educator, the strength of the subject was more a pedagogical one “I think the strength of the course is it raises student’s awareness that there’s a different way of learning – a different way of teaching”. Although the teacher educator admitted that teaching Aboriginal Studies is a challenge, it also has negative connotations: “it challenges the whole way they [pre-service teachers] have perceived education and that also could be a negative too, because some people see it as too big a challenge”. The teacher educator also spoke about the changing nature of Aboriginal Education and theory. The example he used was Stephen Harris, whose theory of Aboriginal Learning styles was popular in the 1980s and 1990s.

Harris (1980) became well known for his writings on appropriate learning styles for Aboriginal students. His studies of children in North East Arnhem Land challenged pre-conceptions about how Aboriginal students learn and, for the first time, gave educators tangible reasons why Aboriginal students were not succeeding in mainstream
educational institutions. It became accepted that Aboriginal students’ educational failure was due to cross-cultural conflict or a mismatch of appropriate styles of learning. Put simplistically, all one had to do was teach with a specific pedagogy and Aboriginal children would succeed. Although Harris’s research was carried out among traditionally orientated people in Milingimbi, and was quite successful, it became ensconced in pedagogical practice for teachers of Aboriginal students around Australia. Harris’s research was and still is to some extent ground-breaking and had a huge impact on unpacking our understanding of cross-cultural difference. The danger lies in assumptions about Aboriginal learning styles and the idea that all Aboriginal children (or, indeed, any cultural group) learn in one particular style. Teachers need to explore numerous learning styles as each child is an individual. Here the teacher educator warned that they need to teach pre-service teachers not to assume that all Aboriginal children learn in one specific way, and what works in one Aboriginal community will not necessarily work in another.

**Emerging themes: Academic Staff.** In summary, strengths of the subject identified by academic staff were seen as the core subject:

- Being a compulsory subject;
- Being predominantly taught by Aboriginal staff; and
- Raising pre-service teachers’ awareness that there are different ways of learning and teaching.

**Results: Limitations – Academic Staff.** In terms of limitations of the core subject, the director felt that there needed to be more “externally evaluated assessment of the course… subject to research and attitudinal outcomes”. He noted that it needed closer alignment with schools and practicum situations and he also thought that time was an issue, as too much is attempted in too short a time. The director thought that there should be two core subjects taken over two semesters. He suggested that this could take the form of a subject such as “Indigenous Australia” for one semester, and a subject such as “Teaching Aboriginal Children in the Classroom” for the second semester. Time or length of the course was also identified by the teacher educator as an
issue as the subject only runs for 10 weeks. “I think the big weakness relates to time. I think that’s the biggest issue”.

**Emerging themes: Academic Staff.** Limitations identified by academic staff were the:

- Need for research into attitudinal outcomes for pre-service teachers;
- Challenging nature of the subject, and
- Short time-frame of the subject which means too much is attempted in too limited a time.

**Results: Strengths – Pre-service Teachers.** Four out of the five pre-service teachers interviewed thought that having the core subject taught by Aboriginal teacher educators was a strength. As Sandra noted, “having their experience… like from the source, that was very important”. Another identified the readings as a strength. Others acknowledged the assignments as a strength. “The case study report we had to do as well that was great as it gave us the opportunity to gain some insights into aspects of what we hadn’t touched on in the lectures.” The Icon Assignment, which asks pre-service teachers to make a representation and art piece on themself and their culture, was identified as a strength by two participants. Noel said:

You’re getting the opportunity to share your own experiences so it’s not only an Indigenous subject that we’re learning, but at the same time, it’s put in a way that you’re able to contribute your own life experiences and your own culture into it.

**Emerging Themes: Pre-service Teachers.** The key themes that emerged about the strengths of the core course from pre-service teachers’ perspectives included:

- The authenticity of Aboriginal staff; and
- Assignments such as the Icon presentation and the case study assignment were helpful.
Results: Limitations – Pre-service Teachers. In contrast to Noel who thought that the Icon assignment was a strength, another participant, Nelly, identified the Icon Assignment (presentation) as a limitation. She stated that “we spent a lot of time doing icon presentations”. She went on to say how passionate some of the pre-service teachers were with their presentations, which left little time for discussion. Time constraints were again mentioned as pre-service teachers thought there was not enough time to cover the issues raised in the subject properly, and Sandra thought it should be taught over two semesters. Sandra thought that, as pre-service teachers, they needed to be taught more hands-on teaching techniques, and said “in Aboriginal Studies it would be nice to actually do something that we’ll be teaching the children”. Finally, a concern was raised about why some pre-service teachers were hostile to the subject, where it has sparked such passion in others. As Noel surmised, “I’ve got the interest there, but from what I’m aware, a lot of other students aren’t”. He thought that some pre-service teachers felt that the subject concentrated on Aboriginal issues to the detriment of other cultures. In particular, he mentioned that “there seems to be a lot of feeling that why should one culture more than another be put into a subject?... But I mean, that’s not my own opinion, but that’s what I’ve heard”. So it was recognised by this participant that although he was particularly interested in this subject, other pre-service teachers were not. This was also mentioned by pre-service teacher Sandra, the only student interviewed who was not born in Australia, who said:

I found that, hearing from other students, they didn’t want to hear about this any more, you know, it was more like, instead of talking about how their people were treated, they could look at it another way, like telling the students just an introduction and okay what do we do about it now…. for me it was okay, but other students were just saying “We don’t want to hear this any more”.

Emerging themes: Pre-service Teachers. In relation to limitations of the core subject for pre-service teachers, the themes which emerged were:

- The need to be taught more hands-on teaching techniques;
• That student presentations took up too much time;

• Time constraints – not enough time to learn all they need to; and

• The hostility of some pre-service teacher to the subject.

Results: Final Year Pre-service Teachers’ Voices

This section analyses (69) final year pre-service teachers’ responses to the survey that contained open-ended questions (see Appendix 2).

Research Question 4.1: Final Year Pre-service Teachers’ Perceptions of Institutional Factors and Course Characteristics

What are the institutional factors and course characteristics from the perspectives of final year students that have impacted positively and negatively on their self-concept, attitudes, commitment, knowledge and skills, and ability to understand and teach Aboriginal Studies?

Life Experiences

Final year pre-service teachers (n=69) were asked to identify the three most important life experiences that influenced their views on teaching Aboriginal Studies in a school setting. This was done to analysis the amount of prior life experiences which had impacted on pre-service teachers’ learning.

Results: Life Experiences. The themes emerging from this research question were wide-ranging as the participants were identifying what had influenced them individually to teach Aboriginal Studies. As participants were asked to identify three important life experiences, there is some overlap in responses. Table 6.1 highlights the broad themes and the number of responses from the (n=60) participants who chose to answer this question.
Table 6.1.

Emerging Themes and Response Rates of Final Year Students’ Perceptions of the Three Most Important Life Experiences that Influenced their Views on Teaching Aboriginal Studies, Institution A

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Emerging themes</th>
<th>Responses</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Undertaking the core Aboriginal Studies subject</td>
<td>47</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Influence of practicum experience</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Study of Aboriginal history/culture in primary and high school</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Inspired to take further study</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Negative views of Aboriginal people</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Travel</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aboriginal friends</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Going to church</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

A high percentage (68 per cent) of participants \((n=47)\) clearly identified that of all their life experience, undertaking the core Aboriginal Studies subject in their primary teacher education course had the most influence on them. They identified that the core subject had taught them about Aboriginal history and culture, and impacted on their understanding of teaching Aboriginal Studies. While many responses were brief, for example stating “Aboriginal Studies at Uni”, a number of participants expanded on their answer and clearly identified the benefits of undertaking the core subject. As participant A07 expressed it, “our core course here at Uni has probably had the most influence as it really reinforced the importance of teaching Aboriginal Studies in a relevant and contextualised manner”.

Participants also specified specific subject matter within the core subject that had impacted on their learning: Reading literature on Aboriginal people, class discussions on possible issues which can arise when teaching children with and Aboriginal background, and presentations for assignments. Pre-service teachers
revealed that the core subject emphasised the importance of incorporating Aboriginal Studies into a school setting and integrating Aboriginal perspectives into the curriculum. Understanding difference was a topic covered by the participants, alongside the importance of recognising culture and the need to respect children’s backgrounds, breaking down cultural barriers, desire to learn more about Aboriginal issues alongside students, and learning history from an Australian perspective. These sentiments are encapsulated in the words of A17 who stated “coming from a multi-cultural background it is important that we respect and acknowledge other people’s cultural backgrounds”. Others noted that they had been affected by the negative light that Aboriginal people are portrayed in the media – what is seen and written in the newspaper. For instance, participant A63 wrote “politics and conflicts in the media regarding Aboriginal issues often affect your view about what needs to be addressed in the classroom”. Positive influences were seen as role models such as Anthony Mundine and Cathy Freeman, listening to Elders talk, viewing Rabbit-Proof Fence and documentaries on Aboriginal issues, reading My Place by Nadia Wheatley, and watching Message Stick and other such programs. Undertaking a practicum with Aboriginal children made it possible to talk to and work with Aboriginal children in the classroom was acknowledged as an important experience by (n=12) participants.

In terms of negative views of Aboriginal people which were expressed by some (n=7) participants, A68 noted that growing up in Kempsey, NSW, and living in Redfern had resulted in “negative interactions” with the Aboriginal community. Others also identified [suburb] and in particular [name removed] Street as impacting on them. Comments such as “travelling around [suburb] Station” from A61 and A30, “Walking through [suburb]… seeing the poverty, drugs, and alcohol problems Aboriginal people face”. Finally, A45’s only response to this section of the questionnaire was, “Walking past [name removed] Street and hearing of bag snatching”.

Being influenced by previous Aboriginal studies in primary and high school was also identified by participants (n=12). For example, A03 stated, “My own experiences at primary school i.e. Learning Aboriginal history of schools, land site, and art”. And A15 stated, “Going on excursions in high school to sacred sites was important in learning the culture and beliefs of Aboriginal people”. A further ten, (n=10) participants
identified that they had gone further in their studies, and had completed additional Aboriginal Studies subjects offered at the university while undertaking their degree. Life experiences such as travel \((n=5)\), as expressed by A57: “Extensive travel within Australia (predominantly rural) is very important for children to be well informed of the country’s Indigenous history”. Three participants \((n=3)\) identified growing up with and having Aboriginal friends as an important influence, as A52, stated, “Living in Doonside for 10 years and seeing Aboriginal kids responding to their culture being celebrated”. Finally, two \((n=2)\) of the participants acknowledge that they had been influenced by attending their church, as A14 recounted, “going to church regularly at the Catholic Church at Redfern as a child and seeing lots of Aboriginal people there”, the other participant A52 stated, “my church involvement (Presbyterian) and understanding that for too long Aboriginal studies have been marginalised”.

**Perceptions of Institutional Motives for the Introduction and Ongoing Implementation of Core Aboriginal Studies Subject**

What do final year pre-service teachers perceive as the institutions’ motives, values, and attitudes in relation to incorporating and ongoing implementation of core Aboriginal Studies subjects in their primary teacher education course?

**Results: Implementation.** Final year pre-service teachers were asked why they thought the institution requires all pre-service teachers to undertake a core Aboriginal Studies subject. Interestingly, all participants responded to this question (see Table 6.2).
Table 6.2.

Emerging Themes and Response Rates for Final Year Students’ Attitudes Towards Implementation of Aboriginal Studies, Institution A

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Emerging themes</th>
<th>Responses</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>To learn about Aboriginal culture/history</td>
<td>60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Combat racism</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teach Aboriginal children</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NSW DET Requirement</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Preparing pre-service teacher to be aware of Aboriginal culture/history before they go into a school classroom setting was identified as an important overarching theme by 60 (n=60) of the participants. In addressing the theme to learn About Aboriginal culture/history, although there was some overlap in responses, participants fell loosely into three categories: recognising difference, learning history and culture, and training to be able to better teach and teaching Aboriginal Studies/perspectives in the classroom.

**Addressing learning Aboriginal culture and history.** Participant A55 described it as “knowledge of individual difference”. Participants specifically spoke about understanding history and culture. For example, A61 expressed this as follows: “Australian history, equal opportunity, education for all, broaden knowledge etc.” A15 believed it was “In order to make them aware of how important it is to learn about this country’s history and how our nation has formed over the years to where it is now and what we can do to make a better future”. Hence, participants identified there is a need for pre-service teachers to learn Aboriginal Studies as part of their teaching degree. The following quote recognises that they, as pre-service teachers, need to be taught Aboriginal Studies to enable them to better teach the subject in schools. A28 stated that the purpose is “To provide us with knowledge about the past, present, and future information about issues relating to Aboriginal studies, for awareness”. Other participants delved deeper into the reasons why teachers needed to be taught a core
Aboriginal Studies subject. Participant A29 identified issues relating to the lack of Aboriginal education in their schooling in the following statement:

Because we should be equipped to teach ALL aspects of the culture of our own country. And I’m guessing (sadly) that if it wasn’t compulsory, a lot of students wouldn’t choose it as an option.

Combating racism, or as expressed by several participants, “de-bunking myths” in relation to Aboriginal people and culture was a theme that most (n=32) participants clearly identified. The comment made by participant A42 is indicative of the range of responses: “To educate about true nature of Indigenous population, the social struggles and the myths that surround them”. In relation to needing to undertake a core Aboriginal Studies subject to address the educational disadvantage of Aboriginal children, (n=26) participants identified that this was an important aspect of the subject. A27 summed up the collective feeling:

To understand the importance of Aboriginal people and their culture so we can effectively teach these students, sensitively considering their needs, and to educate all students on the importance of Aboriginal culture.

The NSW Department of Education and Training (DET) Aboriginal Education and Training Policy (2008) requires teachers in NSW to teach Aboriginal Studies and perspectives in primary schools. Understanding these requirements was identified by (n=8) participants. As A10 stated, “Because it is a DET policy that Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal students be taught about Aboriginal issues”. Another participant, A03, said “Because it is mandatory to teach Aboriginal Studies in schools, and it has been taught very poorly in the past, due to ignorance and prejudice”.

**Perceptions of Positive and Negative Characteristics of the Core Aboriginal Studies Subject**

To elucidate the institutional factors and course characteristics from the perspectives of final year pre-service teachers that have impacted positively and negatively on their attitudes, knowledge, skills, and commitment to understand and
ability to teach Aboriginal Studies, pre-service teachers were asked to describe how well they thought it was taught. This research question elicited a wide range of responses which have been grouped under the positive and negative responses although again there was overlap in the replies from the \( (n=68) \) participants who addressed this question.

**Results: Positive Characteristics.** The overall were positive responses included: That the subject was taught well, coverage of history and culture, resources identified, and strategies for teaching Aboriginal students (see Table 6.3).

**Table 6.3.**
Emerging Themes and Response Rates of Final Year Students’ Course Characteristics, Positive Themes, Institution A

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Emerging themes</th>
<th>Responses</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Taught well</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>History and culture</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Resources</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teaching Aboriginal students</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The overall positive responses were encouraging, with 42 \( (n=47) \) responses from the final year pre-service teachers espousing positive experiences in the core subject. Participants identified the subject was taught “well” to “very well”, others expanded their comments such as A60 who said “the course was personally reflective”. With respect to teaching history and culture, remarks varied from A45, who said “It taught the history component well”, and A66, who thought it covered both culture and teaching Aboriginal students. “The Aboriginal studies subject went well. It allowed us to get insights on the Aboriginal culture and different ways you could deal with Indigenous kids.”

In terms of receiving information on resources to use when the pre-service teacher are qualified, A26 stated that the subject was taught “Very well. Wide variety of
issues covered, readings were excellent, lots of support and resources provided.” And A52 said “It was a short course but covered many areas I was curious/confused about. Directed me to helpful resources.” When discussing the extent to which the subject taught pre-service teachers to teach Aboriginal students, A41 stated “we got a general understanding of how to teach Aboriginal students”, and A47 noted that the course “was able to convey most of the content of teaching Aboriginal students”. Finally, one participant, A14, reflected on her enjoyment of the subject, saying:

I enjoyed the subject and got a lot out of it… I think the subject was taught without instilling guilt in non-Indigenous students and that it was relevant to teaching and to being an Australian today.

**Results: Negative Characteristics.** In relation to negative responses, there were four emerging themes: Teaching techniques, negative sentiments, time constraints and teaching staff. The researcher was mindful that some negativity was linked to specific concerns but was not an overall rating of the subject (see Table 6.4).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Emerging Themes</th>
<th>Responses</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Teaching techniques</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Feelings of guilt</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Time constraints</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teaching staff</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Generally, less satisfied \(n=26\) participants felt the subject could not cover enough content, and that there were not enough teaching and learning strategies and activities that could be used in the primary curriculum. This was expressed by A05 who thought there was an overemphasis on giving pre-service teachers “the skills of inquiry into Aboriginal issues” and an under-emphasis on “its integration into the curriculum,
more content would have ensured more interest”. Another deficiency identified was that the subject of study did not show how Aboriginal Studies could be linked to other Key Learning Areas (KLAs) in the primary school curriculum. A51 stated that “We were not really well informed on HOW Aboriginal education can be incorporated into other KLAs”. Other pre-service teachers argued the subject was too short, as mentioned by (n=12) participants who felt that there was not enough time to cover all that needed to be learnt. As A25 put it, “We only did it for 10 weeks, I think it was a little rushed”.

Some participants (n=12) identified that they felt bullied by the teaching staff and made to feel “to blame” for the past injustices towards Aboriginal people. Some of the negative sentiments are highlighted in the following remarks by A30, who said “They treated us as though we had personally done something to them and we needed to make up for it”. The feeling of guilt and blame is noted disapprovingly by A16, who remarked:

Shocking! It was the most blatant use of, “us vs. them” stereotyping I have ever been subjected to. The staff assumed the students were ignorant of Aboriginal issues and customs and such views set the tone of the course. I came out with a very different view I went in with. I learnt nothing to help me in a classroom and that is incredibly disappointing.

A few participants (n=6) mentioned matters relating to teaching staff. Although they represented a small number within the overall participants, it is important to note how the teaching of the Aboriginal Studies subject has affected some pre-service teachers. Comments covered lecturing and tutorial staff. A51 mentioned that the lecturers were “very nice and helpful”, then said “our own tutor was not”.

Course Characteristics

Final year pre-service teachers gave an overview of what they learnt in the Aboriginal Studies subject from their own personal experience.
Results: Course Characteristics. Of the \( n=64 \) pre-service teachers who answered this question, three broad themes emerged with several participants mentioning all three themes. The themes are: teaching history and culture, teaching Aboriginal students, and teaching Aboriginal Studies and perspectives (see Table 6.5).

Table 6.5.
Emerging Themes and Response Rates of Final Year Students’, Course Characteristics, Institution A

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Emerging themes</th>
<th>Responses</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>History and culture</td>
<td>57</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teaching Aboriginal students</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teaching Aboriginal Studies and perspectives.</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

History and culture was identified by the majority \( n=57 \) of the respondents. A09’s response, though brief, encapsulates many of the statements. “More specifics on Aboriginal culture” and “Some references to history and current issues”. Other specific issues identified across the broad range of content areas were:

- Colonial history including invasion: dispossession, segregation and oppression, Stolen Generation, laws, and legislative issues;

- Cultural issues such as the importance of family, land, and spirituality; Aboriginal people’s connectedness to the land; varied language groups; and cultures;

- Racism and discrimination including combating myths, stereotypes, and prejudice, misconceptions of Indigenous people in the Australian wider community and media bias; being taught about teaching and resources, and understanding bias in old text books; and
• How to find resources on health, education, education strategies, policy, icons and symbols relating to the pre-service teachers class assignments, NAIDOC week celebrations, and how to access Indigenous organisations.

Under the theme of teaching Aboriginal students, one respondent said simply “How to effectively teach Indigenous students” (A06). A11 stated “the importance of teaching Aboriginal children” and A43 stated “What not to teach and do with children in schools”. The majority of the respondents (n=24) felt they had learnt “how to cater to the needs of the Aboriginal child in the classroom” and had gained a broader understanding of difference, which could assist them in their teaching. On catering for Aboriginal children, A07 identified respect as an issue for teachers teaching Aboriginal children, saying:

I learnt that Aboriginal Studies must be contextualised for it to be valued and effective. There is no use in including it in a programme if it is going to seem disjointed or tokenistic. Also, that Aboriginal students may come from a very different background i.e. family/household than most other students and are often going to have very different views about schooling, i.e. they are used to independence and don’t give respect to teachers because they are authority – you (as the teacher) have to earn it!

Finally, ten (n=10) pre-service teachers acknowledged that they had learnt that Aboriginal Studies and perspectives need to be integrated into the curriculum. A68 simply stated “Integration with the curriculum”, with A11 saying “I’m aware of their culture and history, integrating Aboriginal studies across the curriculum”.

Commitment, Knowledge and Skills, Ability to Understand and Teach Aboriginal Studies

Final year pre-service teachers were asked to what extent, and in what ways, completing a core Aboriginal Studies subject had impacted on their commitment, knowledge and skills, and ability to understand and teach Aboriginal Studies.
Results: Commitment. The themes emerging in relation to commitment are illustrated in Table 6.6.

Table 6.6.

Emerging Themes and Response Rates of Final Year Students’ Commitment to Teach Aboriginal Studies, Institution A

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Emerging themes</th>
<th>Responses</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Deep commitment to teaching Aboriginal Studies</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Feel ill equipped</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Have always been committed</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Have been dissuaded from teaching Aboriginal Studies</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Of the 65 (n=65) participants who answered this question, 33 (n=33) identified that they were committed to teaching Aboriginal Studies and perspectives, and nine (n=9) acknowledged that the core subject had not impacted on their commitment. They had always intended to teach it as the following two participants confirm. A03 said “I have always thought it was necessary part of schooling, it has just reinforced it”. The rest of the participants expressed a deep commitment to teaching Aboriginal Studies and introducing Aboriginal perspectives, expressing the opinion that “it made it stronger” and “I am very committed”. These sentiments are captured in the remarks from A10, who said:

Immensely, I believe that this is the area that I want to work in because from the course I see that this group needs good teachers who believe in them and cherish and nurture their cultural beliefs.

To varying degrees, (n=17) pre-service teachers felt ill-equipped to teach Aboriginal Studies and perspectives. Areas participants identified as a concern were insufficient knowledge or lack of knowledge. Some participants, such as A43, were critical of the core subject for not teaching the subject matter sufficiently, as encapsulated in the comment by A43: “I think we needed to have less talk about
Aboriginal issues and more about how we can use these things in the class”. Others felt unsure about how to teach it. A52 said “I am keen to do so, but worried of trivialising it in trying to weave it into all KLAs all the time”.

Of the remaining participants, four \( (n=4) \) indicated that the core subject had dissuaded them from teaching Aboriginal Studies and perspectives. As the following comments from A64 and A68 indicate, both identified that it had impacted on their commitment “negatively”, and A45’s rating in terms of teaching Aboriginal children, was “Not highly. I find they require more privileges and more attention than other students.”

**Results: Knowledge and Skills.** Participants were asked to what extent, and in what ways, completing a core Aboriginal Studies subject has impacted on their knowledge and skills (see Table 6.7).

**Table 6.7.**
Emerging Themes and Response Rates of Final Year Students’, Knowledge and Skills to Teach Aboriginal Studies, Institution A

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Emerging themes</th>
<th>Responses</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Only built knowledge to teach Aboriginal Studies</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gave knowledge and skills to teach Aboriginal Studies</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not confident</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Of the \( (n=47) \) participants who answered this question, 20 participants \( (n=20) \) said that it had given them the knowledge of Aboriginal people and history but had not given them the skills to teach it, hence it provided “skills and no practical advice”. Although the development of knowledge was identified as a positive feature by participants who commented they had become more “interested in the culture”. In the following comment which is relevant to knowledge, A40 said “From practically no knowledge to having a greater understanding of ways to include Aboriginal perspectives”. Within the knowledge and skills paradigm, pre-service teachers
expressed the opinion that the core subject had either made them feel more “confident” and that they knew how to access resources, as the following comments show. A14 said “I feel able to teach Aboriginal studies and know where to get resources and how to involve local Indigenous communities”. A11 stated that:

This course did provide us with excellent opportunities to experience using the resources we have available to us. The knowledge and skills that I have gained was amazing – great tutor however.

A12 acknowledged that “I have been made far more aware of a gaping hole in my own knowledge base”. In conceding this lack of knowledge base, two other respondents mentioned that they had taken further studies in the area of Aboriginal Studies at their university. Finally, eight (n=8) said they did not “feel confident” in teaching Aboriginal Studies in schools.

Results: Ability to Understand and Teach Aboriginal Studies. Participants were asked to what extent, and in what ways, completing a core Aboriginal Studies subject has impacted on their ability to understand and teach Aboriginal Studies (see Table 6.8).

Table 6.8.
Emerging Themes and Response Rates of Final Year Students’, Ability to Understand and Teach Aboriginal Studies, Institution A

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Emerging themes</th>
<th>Responses</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Increased ability and understanding to teach</td>
<td>43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No confidence or not sure or negative</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Within the (n=51) responses associated with the question, 43 (n=43) participants’ perceptions of their ability to teach Aboriginal Studies ranged from “A little” to acknowledging that they “needed more knowledge to teach” to “I have a greater understanding”. One respondent, A25, said “It has made me feel I need a lot
more training to teach Aboriginal studies” and A27 said “Feel like I could teach Aboriginal studies, but would still need extra assistance planning”.

There were some negative responses (n=8). For example, A16 said “it failed”, and A01 said “I don’t feel prepared”. Although there were some mixed messages, such as A68 who said I “Feel totally lost but would have enough surface knowledge to meet NSW DET compulsory requirements”. A42 and A05, respectively, were extremely worried about correctly teaching Aboriginal content and stated that they “need more ideas for lessons” and “still lack in ability as I still don’t feel confident in teaching even though I have become more aware of certain issues in Aboriginal Studies”.

Key understandings of important aspects of the core Aboriginal Studies subject

Final year pre-service teachers were asked to describe the three most important factors in the core Aboriginal Studies subject that have impacted on them personally, hence there is overlap in the emerging themes. As this question dealt with what had personally affected the individual, generally a more complex range of responses was recorded from the (n=52) participants who answered this question, with many giving more than one response across the themes.

Results: Important aspects. For ease of contextualising the participant answers, the responses have been grouped into the three themes: Teaching history and culture; Teaching Aboriginal children; and teaching Aboriginal Studies and perspectives (see Table 6.9).
Table 6.9.

Emerging Themes and Response Rates of Final Year Students’, Important Aspects, Institution A

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Emerging themes</th>
<th>Responses</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>History and culture</td>
<td>43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teaching Aboriginal children</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teaching Aboriginal Studies and perspectives</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In learning Aboriginal history and culture, some participants mentioned that certain aspects of the core subject like “hearing personal stories” were important. The value of the assessment tasks was also discussed as A19 recalled, singling out “Practical assignments that will help us in our teaching career”. Participants identified that they had learned an array of topics covered in the history and culture lectures. A48 said “Greater/deeper understanding of Aboriginal culture”. Others identified the importance of learning Aboriginal Studies to be able to teach it well, as the following participant expressed it: “the need for the history to be taught” and “the need for the right history to be taught”. A deeper understanding of health issues was discussed by five (n=5) participants, while six (n=6) identified the importance of interacting with the Aboriginal community. A33 mentioned “the importance of speaking to local Indigenous community on the cultural significance of subject/work taken in the classroom”. Participants (n=15) identified that they personally realised the importance of teaching Aboriginal children, as the following remarks indicate. A07 said “we have to understand students’ backgrounds as that may have a large role in their behaviour at school”.

Within the theme of Aboriginal Studies and perspectives, participants clearly identified that they had learnt how to teach Aboriginal Studies and perspectives. A15 spoke of the “need to incorporate Aboriginal perspectives in your teaching”, and this was further explained by A07, who said “Aboriginal Studies can be integrated across the curriculum areas effectively. It does not have to be a discrete subject area”. Finally, in terms of what pre-service teachers had learnt personally, the following remarks from
A44 and A12, respectively, indicate the complexity of the responses from the participants:

- Evaluate and reflect on all aspects of knowledge;
- Never regurgitate what you hear without looking into it; and
- Struggle and equity is a battle worth fighting (A44).
- The different ways of presenting and assessing;
- The open ignorance of many of the other beginning teachers; and
- How overwhelming my own lack of knowledge on the issues was – I am working on it still! (A12).

**Strengths and Limitations of the Current Core Aboriginal Studies Subject**

To further elucidate the experiences, challenges, and incentives of those involved in designing, delivering, and experiencing a core Aboriginal Studies subject, participants were asked to comment on the strengths and limitations of the current core subject.

**Results: Strengths.** Emerging themes are illustrated in Table 6.10.

**Table 6.10.**

Emerging Themes and Response Rates of Final Year Students’ Strengths, Institution A

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Emerging themes</th>
<th>Responses</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Increase ability and understanding to teach</td>
<td>54</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Positive account related to teaching style</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Of the \((n=60)\) participants, the overall strengths identified by \((n=54)\) participants were: Understanding of history and culture, compassion and empathy, reflective of own culture, knowledge of Aboriginal students, and including perspectives into the curriculum. This comment from A35 expresses it as follows: “To give a small taste of
Aboriginal perspectives in education and to provide resources for further development in knowledge and understanding”.

Participants made positive comments about the teaching staff, such as A50, who noted as a strength “Staff dedication to teaching others Aboriginal education”. Others identified the tutors as a strength, with comments such as A46, who said “I had a great tutor” and A53, who stated “Tutors and lecturers had a very friendly nature which aided our interest in learning”. In addition, four (n=4) specifically noted how useful the assessment tasks were.

Results: Limitations. Participants were asked to identify the limitations of the core Aboriginal Studies subject that they had completed. The emerging themes are illustrated in the following (Table 6.11).

Table 6.11.
Emerging Themes and Response Rates of Final Year Students’, Limitations, Institution A

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Emerging themes</th>
<th>Responses</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The need for more practical skills</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teaching style</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not long enough</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Of the (n=62) responses, 32 (n=32) participants spoke in varying degrees about the need for more practical skills in teaching Aboriginal Studies and incorporating Aboriginal perspectives into the curriculum. For instance, two respondents said the core subject “highlighted what not to do” and “what resources not to use”, which was not helpful in what to teach. Another two would have liked the subject to be less political. Generally, though, pre-service teachers wanted more hands-on teaching resources, and lesson plans on how to teach Aboriginal Studies.

The teaching style of the lectures and tutors was identified as a limitation in the core subject. Participants (n=17) noted the off-putting teaching of lecturers and tutors.
As A29 stated, “We were sometimes pre-judged as being uncommitted or disinterested in this area which I found highly insulting. If anything we were hungry to learn.” Comments ranged from A43: “Too much anger at all other people” and, sadly, A29 stated “Feeling alienated in lectures”. This hostility towards the content of the core subject and teacher educators was observed by a fellow participant A14, who observed “Obviously some students were not enjoying the subject or finding it relevant. Some opportunity for feedback during the course may have helped with this”.

Of the remaining participants, four (n=4) said that the core subject was “not long enough”, with A03 saying “As with most other uni subjects there is little time to get through everything. Also as with all subjects in teaching they don’t actually tell us good ways to teach the subject.”

In finishing the section on weaknesses, a final comment from a participant A11 warned:

A little learning can be a dangerous thing, I believe people have a false sense of confidence from this course.

**Summary**

This chapter presented the voices of multiple stakeholders’ perceptions of the motives, values, and attitudes in relation to incorporating core Aboriginal Studies subjects in the primary teacher education curriculum. It differentiated the institutional factors, personal experiences, and course characteristics that pre-service teachers perceive as impacting positively and negatively on their attitudes, commitment, knowledge and skills, ability and understanding to teach Aboriginal Studies and Aboriginal students. In addition, the chapter has provided a summary of the key emerging themes relating to each research question posed. The emerging themes from the data in this chapter will be correlated with the responses for the following case study (Chapter 7) and discussed in greater depth in the cross-case analysis (Chapter 8).
CHAPTER 7

RESULTS CASE STUDY B: CRITICAL ANALYSIS OF THE RATIONALE, APPROACH TO, AND IMPACT OF A CORE ABORIGINAL STUDIES SUBJECT

Introduction

This chapter presents participant views from the second individual case study from a NSW metropolitan institution with a core Aboriginal Studies subject in primary teacher education. As with the first case study, the context gives an overview of the institution, the Aboriginal Education Unit, and the core Aboriginal Studies subject. Secondly, the responses from the Head of School, the Director of the Aboriginal Education Unit, and teacher educators are analysed for each of the research questions posed, followed by a discussion of responses to the in-depth interviews with pre-service teachers who had recently completed the core subject in the first year of their degree. Finally, the responses from the final year pre-service teachers to open-ended questionnaires and in-depth interviews are analysed. The chapter also identifies themes from the data arising from the in-depth interview questions and questionnaires.

Context: Case Study B

The Institution

The institution is a large university situated near a substantial urban Aboriginal population. It is located in a metropolitan area and draws students from across NSW, Australia and internationally. Primary teacher education is situated in the School of Education and the core Aboriginal studies subject is taught by teacher educators from within the Faculty and the Aboriginal Education Unit.
The Aboriginal Education Unit

The Aboriginal Education Unit is a fairly new unit as it was reconstituted in 2006 after a review. The director explained that prior to this, there had been an Aboriginal Education Unit, but it was more or less disbanded in the restructuring that took place in the University in 2000–2001. The director, who was new to the position, mentioned the Australian Quality University Audit (AQUA) report on the University in 2006 noted that in the area of “Indigenous education, [the University] has enjoyed periods of vigorous development, interspersed with periods of latency”. AQUA recommended that the University develop appropriate systems to implement the Indigenous education commitment, including redeveloping the resource plan and giving consideration to adding a graduate attribute. This was a major focus for the Aboriginal Education Unit. In addition, the director noted that the unit was multi-faceted, running its own Aboriginal programs as well as being charged with supporting Aboriginal students across the university.

The Core Aboriginal Studies Subject

The core Aboriginal Studies subject is situated in the School of Education’s primary teacher education course. There is a principal teacher educator and a number of Aboriginal tutors delivering the subject. The HOS felt that Aboriginal Studies needed to be taught by both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal staff but went on to say how important it was to have an Aboriginal teacher educator as the principal lecturer. She named two non-Aboriginal lecturers who taught other subjects within the degree, one in particular, “who had a doctorate in Koori kids’ resistance to school”, which she thought was a great bonus to the overall primary teacher education course. She thought that the combination of such strong Aboriginal teacher educators validated the core subject as it gave authenticity to the subject through the Aboriginal voice, supported by strong non-Aboriginal expertise in other subjects.

The core Aboriginal Studies subject is taught in the first year of the primary teacher education course. It is delivered by a combination of lectures and tutorials over
a 13-week semester. The first five weeks cover concepts from pre-invasion society. As the teacher educator explained:

So we are looking at how people had a spiritual concept, a social living concept, and from that how we communicated and interacted and learned, because they’re the extrapolations we need to make into a classroom with children, through post-invasion history into the concepts of the Stolen Generations and the multitude effects…. that are still affecting the classroom.

The major content of the subject was identified as: Culture, racism, education, language and social justice issues. The outline of the learning outcomes of the core Aboriginal Studies subject states that on completion of this subject students will:

- Recognise the importance of teaching Indigenous Australian Studies in the context of Australia’s modern society at primary level;

- Gain knowledge on the origins, history, and contemporary issues and initiatives of Indigenous Australia;

- Learn to develop and implement appropriate Indigenous Studies teaching activities and perspectives;

- Critically analyse resources for inclusion in Aboriginal studies programmes;

- Develop an understanding of the consultative mechanisms necessary when approaching Aboriginal communities, organisations, and individuals;

- Gain further insights into Aboriginal learning styles and extended family kinship systems and ways of strengthening and building on these; and

- Gain knowledge about and develop effective strategies for combating racism in education; develop an understanding and appreciation of Aboriginal culture.
Results: In-depth Interviews Heads of School, Directors of Aboriginal Units, Teacher Educators, and First Year Pre-Service Teachers

Introduction

As in Case study B, interview questions asked of the Head of School, the director of Aboriginal Education Unit, teacher educators, and pre-service teachers who had recently completed the core subject in the first year of their degree were analysed (see Appendix A for in-depth interview Schedule; See Chapter 4 for full explanation of aims, research questions, and rationale).

Research Question 1.1: Institutional Motives, Values and Attitudes

What do multiple stakeholder perceive as the institutions’ motives, values, and attitudes in relation to incorporating and ongoing implementation of core Aboriginal Studies subjects in their primary teacher education course?

Results: Academic Staff. Participants were asked how their university came to introduce a core Aboriginal Studies subject into the primary teacher education course and to outline their understanding of the official rationale for its inception. The participants agreed that the impetus for having a core subject was due to the institution’s long history with Aboriginal programs. The teacher educator believed it was also from the enormous amount of support from the HOS who had an “understanding of the disadvantage that Koori kids suffer in our schools”. He also believed that the Aboriginal Education Unit had a vested interest in its establishment as they had consulted the Aboriginal community who indicated they wanted a strong and rigorous core Aboriginal Studies subject to “minimise the harm that non-Koori teachers do to our children”.

The University restructured in 2000–2001, resulting in merged campuses. The HOS reflected that prior to the campus amalgamation, “the University had always had a strong Aboriginal Studies program within the Diversity subjects”. She said, “As Head of School, or in those days as Associate Dean of the Faculty of Education, I was very
keen to ensure that the next opportunity of course revision would see that emphasis on diversity in Aboriginal Education come into the Primary program”. The HOS also mentioned that because of the restructure, one Aboriginal staff member of the Aboriginal Education Unit moved over into their School and they employed another Aboriginal person. She said of the Aboriginal teacher educators, “they did more than just teach it. They had leadership of it”.

Discussion ensued about the support across the School of Education for the inclusion of the new core subject. The HOS went on to discuss the complexity of the issues arising from the amalgamation and the problems that universities have when there is great change. She then concluded these reminiscences about bringing together two separate programs in teacher education because only one of the programs had previously contained a core subject. She noted that there were opposing views on the inclusion of a core subject and went on to saying that “it was the Dean of the College [name removed] whose authority was… to insist that all of our programs had an Indigenous education subject”. This was confirmed by the teacher educator who said, “it’s my understanding that there was a vote held on the subject… and the consensus, it wasn’t truly a consensus, it was one casting vote that enabled this subject to continue as a core subject”. The teacher educator felt that it could be understood why there was conflict with continuing the core subject, at a time of downsizing and people losing their jobs. The teacher educator simply stated: “but the Uni has stood by its original commitment and I support them entirely”. The director said she did not know the history of the introduction of the core Aboriginal Studies subject, but she believed that it was the Aboriginal Education policy and an awareness of the Department of Education’s mandatory requirements similar to Queensland where she had previously worked.

As well as supporting the university’s introduction of the Aboriginal Studies subject, the HOS strongly supported a recognised discrete component of Aboriginal education in teacher education, rating her support as “A million per cent, a million per cent”. The HOS went on to say:
I personally can’t imagine preparing anybody to be a teacher in Australia without, to the extent which your course can… to the extent that we can raise awareness, provide some historically accurate information upon which our future teachers might respond to and advocate for Indigenous people, Indigenous families, Indigenous communities, Indigenous kids. I just think it is essential.

The teacher educator also acknowledged that since the restructure, all academic matters Indigenous “were secured within the relevant school and college” within the university. The teacher educator also thought that without the support of the School of Education and the university, “very little Indigenous education would have survived” the restructure.

**Results: Pre-service Teachers.** Pre-service teachers in their first year of study who had recently complete the core subject were asked why they thought the university required them to undertake a core Aboriginal Studies subject. Reflecting the comments by the teacher educator, one pre-service teacher, Vicki, thought that its introduction was due to the “recommendation after the whole Deaths in Custody problems and Royal Commissions”. Another pre-service teacher, Donna, could not at first understand why they had to focus on Aboriginal Studies as she stated “the percentage of the population of Aboriginal people to me there’s not that many… we have a lot of children from different backgrounds and I couldn’t understand why we had to concentrate on Aboriginal Studies”. After completing the core subject, however, Donna, like the other participants agreed that the core subject had changed her view of Aboriginal people and given her a deeper understanding of the history and culture. As Sharon noted, “from the very first lecture I learnt in that time, in that one-hour lecture, more than I had learnt in my 30 something years”. For Cathie, who also had little knowledge of Aboriginal history, the core subject made her rethink her previously held view about Aboriginal people. Cathie stated:

It’s opened up my eyes and a lot of other students too, cos you perceive the Aboriginal people were a “pack of bloody whingers, you know, they get
everything” – that was my outlook at one stage and now I just think – well give them what they need, look what we’ve done to them.

Another reason identified by Sharon for the university to introduce a core subject was NSW and national Aboriginal Education policies. Linda was sceptical about how many teachers actually implement the policy and teach Aboriginal studies/perspectives. She recalled that “on the two pracs I’ve been on I haven’t seen anything”. In further discussion about the practicum, Linda thought that when pre-service teachers are on their practicum, the supervising lecturers should check to see if the practicum lessons contained an Aboriginal perspective. She expressed her concerns, saying “like how many of the students [pre-service teachers] even taught a lesson or incorporated anything to do with Indigenous studies – there wouldn’t have been many that actually do”. Finally, in discussing the Aboriginal Education Policy with Sharon, she became quite animated when she learnt that although the policies mandated that Aboriginal Studies should be taught in schools that not all universities in Australia included a core subject in their primary teacher education courses. Sharon exclaimed:

But that’s ridiculous. I mean you have to teach maths so you learn maths at university. If you have to teach it [Aboriginal Studies] later on you need to learn about it somewhere how are you expected to teach it if you don’t learn it?

**Emerging themes: Academic staff.** The key themes emerging from the academic staff in relation to how and why institutions should introduce a core Aboriginal Studies subject were:

- Understanding of the disadvantage that Koori kids face;
- The enormous amount of support from the HOS and relevant faculty;
- A strong commitment from dedicated individuals;
• Collaboration between the Aboriginal Education Unit and the School of Education with input from community organisations which work towards a successful introduction of a core Aboriginal Studies subject; and

• NSW DET Aboriginal Education Policy.

Emerging themes: Pre-service teachers. The comments from pre-service teachers suggest that, based on their perceptions, the reasons the institution should introduce a core Aboriginal Studies subject into primary teacher education courses include to:

• Break down stereotypical ideas about Aboriginal people;

• Promote an awareness of Aboriginal history and culture;

• Better prepare pre-service teachers to teach Aboriginal Studies; and

• Give pre-service teachers a better understanding of Aboriginal children in the classroom.

A perceived reason for the introduction of the subject was to fulfil the recommendations of the Royal Commissions into Deaths in Custody and the NSW DET Aboriginal Education Policy. Furthermore, one pre-service teacher recommended that supervisors should ensure that pre-service teachers are incorporating Aboriginal perspectives in their practicum.

Research Question 2.1: Impact of Core Aboriginal Studies Subjects on Pre-service Teachers

What do multiple stakeholders perceive as the impact of core Aboriginal Studies subjects on pre-service teachers’ self-concept, attitudes, commitment, knowledge and skills, and ability to understand and teach Aboriginal Studies?

Results: Academic staff. Participants were asked how they thought undertaking a core Aboriginal Studies subject could change the way pre-service teachers think about
teaching Aboriginal Studies. The teacher educator thought any good core Aboriginal Studies subject should begin with the pre-invasion era, and that its inclusion in the primary teacher education degree “reflects having Indigenous academics working to a greater degree within the subject matter”. The teacher educator explained that reason he thought the subject should start before invasion is to give pre-service teachers a greater sense of a cultural continuum. The teacher educator elaborated and said:

It gives them the ability to understand why a Koori person, no matter what background, where they are from in the state or the in the metropolitan area, no matter how they appear or how they talk, or how they’re socialising, what makes those children, in some way, still different from the rest of the classroom no matter where they are in multicultural Australia. And that cultural continuum concept from the first lecture in pre-invasion right through to perspectives across the curriculum, and then particular aspects of pedagogy for Aboriginal children in the classroom, has really brought about the understanding that these students need to cater for Koori children in a different way. And it’s a fundamental way, that isn’t just a socio-economic base.

The HOS thought that the core subject gave pre-service teachers an appreciation of the importance of teaching Aboriginal Studies because they studied it in the broader context of Australia’s history and actually understood that there is a pre-colonisation history. She said, “You know, that Australia didn’t start with the arrival of some European explorer or another”. The HOS also thought that the second important attribute that pre-service teachers gained from undertaking a core subject was not only an appreciation, but some confidence that they could implement it in their classrooms. This meant that pre-service teachers were taught enough:

not to be arrogant and think they know everything, but that they know enough that they are confident, that they want to learn more, get more information, and they would feel more confident introducing aspects of Indigenous Studies right across the curriculum.
Hence, the HOS hoped the core subject would facilitate deeper learning. She identified the three most important learning outcomes as “One is an appreciation, two I think is about confidence, and three hopefully they will finish the course almost committed to wanting to do something”.

The HOS and the director both discussed the importance of having Aboriginal staff alongside non-Aboriginal staff. They thought that because pre-service teachers were hearing from Aboriginal as well as non-Aboriginal lecturers, pre-service teachers were more likely to develop some commitment, keep themselves knowledgeable, and when they are in a school where there are Aboriginal families and Aboriginal children, then “hopefully” they can feel confident taking that a step further, and engage with the Aboriginal community.

Finally, the HOS spoke about how she and the teacher educator had talked about the core subject facilitating real “attitude change” for most of the pre-service teacher but acknowledged that “a small number [were] becoming more rigid and more locked in and more defensive”. This hostility from a small percentage of the pre-service teachers was seen as a challenge by the academic staff.

The participants were then asked to also elucidate three main factors they thought made a good core Aboriginal Studies subject. The HOS thought that a good Aboriginal Studies subject needs to incorporate some contemporary issues such as what is happening in the “newspaper at the time”. The HOS also thought that a subject needs to allow pre-service teachers to explore some of their own experiences and have some pedagogical strategies that connect that exploration to the individual’s personal experiences and assumptions. The HOS went on to explain that through using these strategies, by the end of their studies, pre-service teachers would say, “Oh, okay maybe that first reaction needs to be kind of analysed and understood from a particular perspective, and if I think about it from that perspective, I see it differently”. She went on to say, “I think you’ve got to do that linking in so it’s more than relevance, but you’ve gotta connect it so that your students and teachers walk away thinking, ah, some of these issues are in me and I have to deal with them”. Another concern raised was that the area where the university was situated had a high population of Aboriginal people.
and that the university produced 30 per cent of those who would be teaching Aboriginal students. She worried that:

the kids in [this area], who grow up in [this area’s] schools, come to [this] university and go back to schools [in this area]. They’re not getting too many life experiences that might broaden the strong and often unexamined beliefs that they grow up with. And sometimes I think you need to really think about HOW you teach.

In terms of changing attitudes of the pre-service teachers, the HOS thought that as it was only one semester subject,

It’s not going to do a lot unless you’ve had something in that 13 weeks that give students an “Ah ha” experience. That really confronts them. I don’t mean destructively, but really confronts them or challenges them, so they don’t necessarily think it changes attitudes. I think it’s how it’s done.

The director thought that the most important outcome was not only knowledge and skills, but disposition and empathy. By this she meant a disposition towards critical reflection about power and relationships and society, and the empathy to be able to place yourself in the shoes of somebody who has had experiences you have not had. The director felt that the core subject is more than just knowledge and skills, as it tries to get to the heart of the pre-service teachers. The director said, “I think the content needs to include some history, some cultural studies, some curriculum studies, and also some pedagogy studies”. She went on to explain this approach, saying that this contributed to “how you would teach appropriately Aboriginal issues or how you would teach Aboriginal children in traditional curriculum areas”. The director’s final remarks were to do with her concern about the lack of Aboriginal perspectives being taught in other subjects in the degree. She surmised that some teacher educators, particularly older staff, were “stuck in their ways” and not interested in learning how to incorporate Aboriginal perspectives into their subject area.
The teacher educator also believed that Aboriginal perspectives should be taught across the curriculum of the primary teacher education degree. He said, “I will stand by that as one of the three, because it gives an equivalence and a validity to who we are as people, as well as giving the concept that we are not only tarred with previous history but we’re part of Australia and we are part of the future history of Australia”. He also thought that understanding how to incorporate Aboriginal perspectives into the curriculum, recognised the identity of Aboriginal children within the classroom and would build their [pre-service teachers] self-esteem. In addition, he suggested that by including perspectives across the curriculum, education is inclusive of the past, present, and looking into the future. The teacher educator said, “It breaks down the ‘us and them’. It breaks down the need to fight for who you are. So I see that as a major issue”. The other major factor that the teacher educator believed needed to be included in a good Aboriginal Studies subject was an understanding of different pedagogies; he described this as “the understandings of communication, questioning, socialising, peer orientation, experiential learning and kinaesthetic learning”. In teaching these concepts, the teacher educator went on to say, “I have not had one student say that if we include these in the classroom, they will disadvantage anyone else, that they will probably advantage everyone else as well as our children”. The third important component, as identified by the teacher educator, was access for pre-service teachers to appropriate resources. He elaborated on this, saying he meant “links to resources and community, not just the pretty big picture books, and not just the videos, but people. That they are establishing links with Aboriginal organisations, Aboriginal workers in the school, and the AECG.” The teacher educator believed that the three most important factors to be included in the curriculum for a good core Aboriginal Studies subject were not only teaching Aboriginal history but teaching how to include this Aboriginal perspective into the classroom, that pre-service teachers needed to gasp a range of pedagogical concepts, and they needed to be shown good resources, both material and human. Finally, the teacher educator explained that by teacher educators learning about including perspectives across the curriculum, he thought that Aboriginal Studies in the schools:

would be more than a discrete subject, it would be year-long and it’s community year-long and, it’s not just a bit of kangaroo mince on NAIDOC Week and someone up doing some dancing and face-painting and slap a
mural on the toilet usually, rather than on the Principal’s wall. So at the
moment, they’re the three major factors.

Emerging themes: Academic Staff. The themes emerging from responses
regarding teacher training were:

• Content needs to include history and cultural studies from pre-invasion to
  contemporary issues, curriculum studies, and pedagogy studies;

• There was a need to provide an understanding of how to incorporate Aboriginal
  perspectives into the curriculum and recognise the identity of Aboriginal
  children;

• It was important that the subject be taught by experienced Aboriginal and non-
  Aboriginal lecturers and tutors; and

• There was a need for a broad range of resources.

The themes that emerged in relation to undertaking a core subject and the ways
that it changed the way pre-service teachers think about teaching Aboriginal Studies
included:

• The core subject need to cover the period from the pre-invasion era to
  contemporary issues to give pre-service teachers a greater sense of a cultural
  continuum;

• Pre-service teachers need to undertake a core subject to gain an appreciation of
  Aboriginal Studies and some confidence that they can implement Aboriginal
  Studies in their classrooms;

• The importance of both competent Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal teacher
  educators;

• The core subject facilitating real “attitude change”; and

• The hostility of a small number of pre-service teachers to the core subject.
Results: Pre-service teachers. To explore what pre-service teachers’ perceive as impacting on their self-concept, attitudes, commitment, knowledge and skills, and ability to understand and teach Aboriginal Studies, they were first asked to describe how well the institution taught the core Aboriginal Studies subject and what they had learnt by participating in the subject. Participants all agreed that the core subject was taught well or, in Cathie’s words, “very well”. Cathie went on to speak about how difficult it is as an older student who was brought up without any knowledge of Aboriginal history and culture. She discussed the content of the core subject because in her opinion, “it’s a really hard subject to teach” and commended the teacher educator on the good job he had done. Cathie then made the following comment about the teacher educator’s teaching style, “although I must say, he can be a bit over-zealous, I understand, but there are two sides to every coin; he tries to put both sides of the story in”. Vicki, although she thought the core subject was “taught well”, thought that it was “stupid” to have the core subject in semester one in the first year of the primary teacher education course as she felt it was too early, and the pre-service teachers would have forgotten most of what they had been taught in Aboriginal Studies by the end of the primary teacher education course. Sharon, said that she was “impressed by the course”, but went on to note the negative attitudes of some of her peers. In discussing the negativity, she stated:

I know that a lot of the people in our class found it very confronting, some people went in with very negative attitudes and came out with even more negative attitudes, partly because of the subject matter that was chosen to cover in the very first lecture.

Sharon thought that perhaps instead of a “baptism of fire” at the beginning of the core subject, maybe a little gentler introduction would have gone a bit further in wooing more of the pre-service teachers into being more interested in the content of the core subject. Sharon concluded her remarks by saying “I found the class was divided very much into those who continued with their negative attitudes and those that embraced the concept and picked up the ball and ran with it”.
Participants identified the approaches used to teach the core subject as a combination of lectures by the principal teacher educator with some video presentations, followed by a one-hour tutorial. Cathie felt that she would have liked more community involvement in the lecturers as she stated, “I would have liked some more guest speakers to come in, Aboriginal community members to come in, Elders, something to that effect”. Two of the participants talked about the problems with the presentations in their tutorial, not the principle teacher educator. As Linda commented, “it was pretty much just students getting up and running the class, presenting whatever topic it was”. Sharon agreed with Linda’s assessment of this particular tutor’s involvement and said the tutorials were “so student-driven... to a point where [name removed], who was our tutor, he umm in a lot of issues did not voice an opinion at all”. Both Linda and Sharon felt that it would have been helpful if this tutor had engaged with the pre-service teachers in a discussion of the issues raised in the presentations. Sharon also spoke about a female tutor who she described as a “get up and stamp about it type of person, picked you up by the throat and give you a shake”. Although she felt that the tutor made the tutorials interesting, she also felt that there were some “derogatory remarks” made about her ancestors. Sharon expressed her disappointment at her treatment by the tutor and said:

they wanted to be treated like individuals and not be stereotyped as a cultural group but then they were quite happy to treat us as a cultural group and not see me as an individual with my own issues about my ancestors and I found that disappointing more than anything.

Linda thought there could have been more site visits and mentioned how she had taken herself to Mount Annan Botanic Gardens and had gone on the Indigenous garden walk. Donna also spoke about the Botanic Gardens at Mount Annan as she personally knew the education officer there. Donna went on to say:

he’s really good and he has a number of people he gets in to do talks on Aboriginal history I suppose mainly in the Campbelltown area but it covers Sydney, Sydney south-west and I was actually talking to [him] about it and
he would really love to see the students come out and do maybe a half-day walk around the gardens. There’s some really interesting sites out there.

It was clear that participants thought that a field trip as part of the core subject was very important and would give the pre-service teachers an insight into aspects of the core subject.

When identifying what sort of subject matter they had learnt in the core subject, the participants cited Aboriginal history and culture, but also included:

- Missionaries;
- Aboriginal education;
- The frontier wars, e.g. Myall Creek massacre;
- Aboriginal health and services, in particular Otitis Media;
- Awareness of different social customs;
- Awareness of Aboriginal children in the schools and Aboriginal learning styles;
- How to incorporate Aboriginal Studies in all the KLAs; and
- Resources (e.g. websites to phone numbers of people pre-service teachers can contact).

Pre-service teachers were then asked how the core Aboriginal Studies subject changed the way they thought about teaching Aboriginal Studies in the future. Cathie stated “well, it’s educated me – full stop”. All five participants agreed that the core subject had taught them more about Aboriginal history and culture and to be aware of Aboriginal children in the classroom. As Linda noted, “it’s actually made me aware of what’s gone on. I can acknowledge that the problem still exists. It’s not something that’s just going to be fixed over night and just go away“. In addition, two participants recognised that if they had not completed the core subject they would probably have ended up being teachers who just did a lesson on Aboriginal art and that would have
been the extent of Aboriginal Studies in their lessons. The development of an understanding that there was more to Aboriginal Studies and making Aboriginal children welcome in the classroom is articulated by Sharon, who said:

Yeah it’s made me realise that to make these kids feel welcome in the classroom, you have to embrace more of their culture than just their art, well I mean if you want to make a Dutch child welcome you have to do more than just put a Rembrandt on the wall.

Another participant, Vicki, disclosed that she intended to make a difference in Aboriginal education and was hoping to join her cousin in Queensland working out on cattle stations. She recognised the important connection between health and education. Sharon spoke about how the subject opened her eyes to Aboriginal children’s need to be accepted and established that it had taught her the importance of understanding that all children needed to be accepted. Finally, Donna spoke passionately about how she was brought up with stereotypical beliefs about Aboriginal people and how she has had to change her way of thinking. She articulated that changing attitudes start at home and said:

I’ve had to change my point of view and my thinking and I’ve been – like I have three children… and I’m finding that I’m telling them things because it starts at home. And I don’t want them growing up with a misunderstanding of our past and that affects the way we interact today. So it’s really changed my opinions, my point of view.

Finally, pre-service teachers were asked to evaluate the three main factors which helped prepare them to teach Aboriginal Studies in a classroom. For Linda the three most important factors that prepared her to teach were: Learning Aboriginal history which she felt was, “very important”; along with learning about Aboriginal children’s learning styles; and issues to do with health. She reiterated that she felt that pre-service teachers should be required to undertake a practicum which had Aboriginal perspectives and that one of the marking criteria for practicum supervisors should be the inclusion of Aboriginal perspectives in the practicum lesson plans, as she said “so you actually have
something hands on and you’re actually experiencing it”. Learning about Aboriginal education was a major factor for Vicki and she was surprised when she realised the “dropout rate from high school, for Aboriginal kids”. In terms of history and culture, she noted that she had learnt that there was a “huge variation of cultural differences from one Aboriginal group to another”.

Donna, Cathie, and Sharon identified the importance of being given resources to use in schools, with several of the participants identifying *Teaching Aboriginal Studies* by Rhonda Craven as an extremely useful text. Both Cathie and Sharon noted the importance of the assignment which required pre-service teachers to prepare lesson plans which included an Aboriginal perspective. As Cathie said, they “had to write a whole Aboriginal subject that would cover all the KLAs for later use”. Finally, several of the pre-service teachers noted that they had observed teachers in their practicum who used the same technique, the same lesson structure, regardless of the subject. Sharon commented on the importance of understanding a variety of techniques to teach children which she felt she had learnt in the core subject. As she put it, “the pedagogical skills, learning a variety of teaching techniques, learning a variety of teaching styles, I think is a big thing”.

**Emerging themes: Pre-service teachers.** When asked how well the core subject was taught, generally pre-service teachers thought it was taught well although one participant thought that the teacher educator could be a little over-zealous in his delivery style. There was a wide variety of responses to what participants thought they had learnt but they unanimously agreed that history and culture was the main component. Other issues identified were:

- It would be better taught later in the primary teacher education course;
- There was some discontent with the confrontational aspect of some of the teacher educator’s teaching style;
- Tutors need to engage with pre-service teachers in the discussion of the issues raised in the presentations; and
• It would be a stronger subject if it included site visits and more community participation.

All participants expressed the opinion that the core subject had extended their learning and increased their appreciation and commitment to teach Aboriginal history and culture. Hence the core subject had increased:

• Awareness of how and what to teach in the classroom; and

• Understanding the needs of Aboriginal children.

The comments from pre-service teachers suggest that the major factors which had prepared them to teach Aboriginal Studies included:

• Learning about Aboriginal history;

• Learning a variety of techniques or learning styles for use in the classroom;

• The usefulness of writing lesson plans as an assignment;

• The importance of pre-service teachers being required to incorporate Aboriginal perspective into their teaching while on practicum; and

• Being aware of available human and material resources.

• Research Question 3.1: Identify from the Perceptions of Multiple Stakeholders the Strengths and Limitations of the Current Core Aboriginal Studies Subject

What do multiple stakeholders perceive as the strengths and limitations of the current core Aboriginal Studies subject?

**Results: Strengths – Academic Staff.** Academic staff were asked what they thought were the strengths and limitations of the core Aboriginal Studies subject. The HOS acknowledged that in her position as the Head of School she did not know a lot about the running of the core subject, and said, “to be honest, I’ve been totally at arm’s length. As the Head of School, I see the written material but I don’t know a lot about the daily running of the course.” But she recognised the strength “from a distance” was
The mixture of Indigenous and non-Indigenous staff. “I think the staff is a strength, I think our content and subject matter is nicely balanced”.

The teacher educator conceded even as an Aboriginal person that the core subject was not a comfortable subject for the participants. To discover past histories, or Aboriginal history, which most of the pre-service teachers do not know, is always quite confronting. He believed that the strength of the core subject was its content, and said:

It is quite a confronting course. It has quite a strong community base – it draws on community attitudes quite strongly. It draws community people in to talk to students, which can be quite confronting for students. It’s blatantly political in that it pushes concepts of black politics, and black schooling needs, and does not back away from those issues and the tutorials are quite hotly contended over those.

The teacher educator thought ten to fifteen per cent of pre-service teachers still entertain political and Christian fundamentalist opinions, continuing to hold views that were common 30 to 50 years ago. In discussing the pre-service teachers’ previously held opinions he mentioned that these opinions, he said “are expressed quite strongly in tutorials”. He also felt that one of the successes of the core subject was the countering of opinions held by pre-service teachers undertaking it. In speaking about the core subject and the pre-service teachers, the teacher educator said:

It’s all new and it’s all shocking to them. It is still gaining a major step forward in that these people are confronted with a history, they’re confronted with circumstances they did not know about. They can understand reasons why there are two discrete groups in many instances in this country and certain attitudes that exist.

He also conceded that there would always remain a number of pre-service teachers who would harbour racist attitudes and said “you can’t change someone from being a racist and a bigot, and if they are going to be a racist and a bigot still, let them be that in their own society, in their own living room, in their own religious group,
political group”. He then went on to note that because of the core subject, there were
eough people coming out of the primary teacher education degree in staffrooms who
would censure those people who harbour racist attitudes. He concluded, “So I do think
there are positives all the way across the board, even with the ones we can’t shift”.

**Emerging themes: Academic Staff.** Strengths of the subject that emerged as key themes were that:

- The core subject was predominantly taught by Aboriginal staff;
- Participants discover the Aboriginal history of Australia; and
- Enough people were coming out of the primary teacher education degree who have taken the core subject and therefore could censure teachers who harbour racist attitudes.

**Results: Limitations – Academic Staff.** When identifying the limitations of the core subject, the HOS thought that situating the core subject in the first semester could be seen as a weakness. All lecturers in first year are dealing with academic literacy problems, which detract from the students’ ability to articulate their views. Expanding on this, she said, “Everybody who takes students in first year has to deal with helping them to read and write in academic discourses. So, that’s a bit of a struggle”.

Both the director and the HOS thought that one of the weaknesses of the core subject was the lack of support for the inclusion of Aboriginal perspectives from other teacher educators of subjects within the degree. This was articulated by the HOS, who said:

A weakness is we’ve got to further develop a team of staff who can teach it and ideally I’d like the team to have some people who teach in other subjects, so they can take that experience into their other subjects. So, there might be one subject that is a focus, there might be a strand that is not Indigenous studies but at least a strand around cultural studies that re-visits the concepts. And then we are looking for integration into other areas.
Another limitation identified by the teacher educator was the lack of qualified Aboriginal teacher educators to cover the tutorial groups. He stated “It’s hard to get enough [Aboriginal] people who have a wide enough view of the educational issues, curriculum issues, as well as some of the social outcomes of the history to be able to adequately defend a lot of the contentious issues that get raised in tutorials”. Finally, the teacher educator thought that a major limitation of the core subject was that it was not part of the Aboriginal Education Unit, therefore its inclusion in the degree was dependent on the goodwill of the School of Education.

Emerging themes: Academic Staff. Limitations identified were:

- That the core subject may be taught too early in the degree;
- The lack of an Aboriginal perspective being taught by other teacher educators in their subjects across the degree;
- The lack of qualified Aboriginal academics; and
- That it was not embedded in the Aboriginal Education Unit therefore its inclusion in the degree was dependent on the goodwill of the School of Education.

**Results: Strengths – Pre-service Teachers.** Participants were asked to identify the limitations of the core Aboriginal Studies subject. Three of the five participants thought that having the core subject taught by Aboriginal lecturers was a strength. As Linda noted, “you have got to have people who really believe what they are talking about. If your lecturers have no credibility you may as well kiss it goodbye.” Donna agreed and noted the benefits of having a strong Aboriginal lecturer. She said that the teacher educator:

> gave us a really good coverage of the history and what’s happened today. That was really strong. He is very knowledgeable; he’s a very intelligent man; he knows a lot and that was probably the main strength.
The importance of being comfortable debating the issues and feeling safe was also mentioned by the participants. Feeling confident was identified by Vicki, who appreciated the teaching style of the teacher educator and said “You need to be able to say the things, not in a derogatory manner, but just what you feel and learn maybe why it’s wrong or learn maybe how it can be changed. That was a strength”. Vicki went on to talk about how it was important in all subjects of study to feel that pre-service teachers can debate the issues, but she said, “like a lot of classes, you just fail cos the teacher’s not approachable, or they’re too busy for you, or they talk down to you”. This had not been the case in the core subject with the Aboriginal teacher educator.

Learning the history of Aboriginal Australia was also seen as a strength, as Cathie said. “It was their history, that that’s where the strength lies, in the history because, for myself, I had no idea. It wasn’t even taught when I was at school.” Two participants identified the benefit of having good texts and pointed to the book Teaching the Teachers as a strength. Sharon mentioned that she had actually used the book for other subjects of study and said “some of the teaching techniques in there are broad spectrum and apply to any child and in fact I’ve used that as a reference for some of the other subjects as well”. Donna felt that the presentations were a real strength. She was a diligent student who looked at the topics being covered each week and researched them on the internet and in books.

**Emerging themes: Pre-service Teachers.** Pre-service teachers identified the strengths and limitations of the core Aboriginal Study subject.

Themes that emerged as strengths included:

- The authenticity of Aboriginal staff;
- Learning Aboriginal history;
- Feeling safe to ask question in class;
- Learning teaching techniques;
- Assignments, doing research for the presentation; and
Results: Limitations – Pre-service teachers. In terms of limitations, in contrast to Donna, who identified the presentations as a strength, another participant, Vicki, identified presentations as a limitation, saying “I know a lot of them [presentations] were done by people the night before anyway”. Hence, Vicki felt that some of her peers’ presentations may not have been appropriate. The absence of the inclusion of Aboriginal perspectives across other subjects of study within the degree was also identified by a participant as a limitation of the overall primary teacher education course. Finally, a concern was raised about why some pre-service teachers were hostile to the subject, whereas for others it had been a real learning experience. As Sharon acknowledged:

It was a bit brutal to begin with. I mean it worked on me but I know I have friends that it didn’t work on at all, it did get their back up… it got them out of their comfort zone to the point where they then, they rejected the subject.

Sharon surmised that many of the pre-service teachers wanted to be learning about teaching Aboriginal Studies in the classroom and did not want to hear the history of what had happened to Aboriginal people in the past. But, as Sharon went on to say, “they weren’t meant to be learning what they would be teaching in the classroom”. Sharon acknowledged that she knew they were learning Aboriginal history to “better understand Aboriginal people and be able to teach Aboriginal children”. Sharon found it very frustrating being in a class with people who didn’t want to be there, didn’t want to do the work, and actively tried to undermine the lessons. She mentioned that a friend had worked out that they personally were paying in excess of $50 an hour per lesson and they did not want their learning disrupted. As Sharon said, “some of us were going ahead in leaps and bounds and just lapping it up and others were more interested in when the next cigarette break was going to be. It was disappointing”. In her concluding remarks, Sharon thought maybe it would be better to explain in the first lecture that the first few weeks would cover Aboriginal history, so that pre-service teachers understood the context of the core subject. On the same topic of pre-service teachers not understanding the context of the core subject, Donna said straight out “if people read
through the course outline for each week, they would know what to expect”. In conclusion, in answer to the concerns about negativity in the core subject Cathie explained:

We’d sit down for coffee in the cafeteria there’d be a heap of us, and, and we’d all say, well we didn’t do anything, how come we feel bad, they’re making us feel bad. I think that’s just our guilt!

Linda thought there were few limitations in the core subject, but reiterated that checks and balances are needed to ensure that pre-service teachers included Aboriginal perspectives in their subjects of work for their practicum. The final issue which was identified as a limitation was a lack of recent publications covering the assignments in the library, as the most recent books were taken out in the first weeks leaving mainly old texts.

Emerging Themes: Pre-service Teachers. The themes which emerged as limitations were:

- Dubious authenticity of the student presentations; and
- Hostility of some pre-service teachers to the core subject.

Results: Final Year Pre-service Teachers’ Voices

This section analyses 65 participant, final year pre-service teachers’ responses to the survey that contained open-ended questions (see Appendix 2).

Research question 4.1: Final Year Pre-Service Teachers’ Perceptions

What are the institutional factors and course characteristics from the perspectives of final year students that have impacted positively and negatively on their self-concept, attitudes, commitment, knowledge and skills, and ability to understand and teach Aboriginal Studies?
Final year pre-service teachers were asked to identify the three most important life experiences that influenced their views on teaching Aboriginal Studies in a school setting.

**Results: Life experiences.** The themes emerging from this question were wide-ranging as the participants were identifying what had influenced them individually to teach Aboriginal Studies. Across the range of responses many participants identified more than one theme as they were asked to identify three important life experiences. The following table highlights the broad themes and the number of responses from the \((n=62)\) participants who chose to answer this question (see Table 7.1).

**Table 7.1.**

Emerging Themes and Response Rates of Final Year Students’ Perceptions on the Three Most Important Life Experiences that Influenced their Views on Teaching Aboriginal Studies, Institution B

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theme</th>
<th>Responses</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Undertaking the core Aboriginal Studies subject</td>
<td>53</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aboriginal friends and family</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Life experiences</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Primary and high school experiences</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

A high proportion of participants, \((n=53)\), clearly identified that undertaking the core Aboriginal Studies subject in their primary teacher education course had enhanced their knowledge of Aboriginal history and culture, and had increased their understanding of teaching Aboriginal Studies. While many responses were brief and to the point – “Studying Aboriginal Studies at University” – a number of participants expanded their answer and clearly identified the benefits of undertaking the core subject. As participant B58 said, “the Aboriginal Studies subject at University involved research about possible teaching/learning experiences and why it is important”. This
was expanded on by B25, who identified the benefits to a migrant, who said, “coming from a different culture/county gave more in-depth understanding into Aboriginal Studies… allowing for more critical thinking”. In addition, several of the participants noted the excellent teaching style of the principal teacher educator. Participants also specified specific subject matter in the core subject that had impacted on their learning, for example: Reading literature on Aboriginal people, and the usefulness of the text *Teaching Aboriginal Studies*; learning about the Stolen Generations; class discussions on possible issues which can arise when teaching children with an Aboriginal background; understanding health issues such as Otitis Media; and undertaking assignments. In addition, understanding difference was another major topic covered by the participants, along with the importance of respecting all cultures in relation to: Breaking down cultural barriers and combating racism; the negative light that Aboriginal people are portrayed in the media; and positive influences were seen as role models such as Cathy Freeman and viewing the movie *Rabbit-Proof Fence*.

The influence of undertaking a practicum within their degree with enthusiastic teachers was acknowledged as important component of learning Aboriginal Studies by \((n=10)\) participants. These experiences were highlighted by B10, who said “one of my prac. teachers was very passionate about Aboriginal Education and incorporated perspectives terrifically in her programme”. Another pre-service teacher, A52, noted the benefits of speaking with Aboriginal workers in the school setting, “speaking with an Aboriginal Education Assistant during a recent practicum experience”. Pre-service teachers also revealed that the core subject emphasised: Understanding difference; the importance of teaching Aboriginal children; incorporating Aboriginal Studies into a school setting; and integrating Aboriginal perspectives into the curriculum. These sentiments are encapsulated by B34, who said the core subject “taught me a lot about issues and how to cater for Indigenous students needs within the classroom”.

A large number of participants – 43 per cent – identified Aboriginal friends and family as an important influence on their commitment to teach Aboriginal Studies. One participant mentioned that her father had married an Aboriginal person and another participant said her brother had married an Aboriginal woman and she had two Aboriginal nieces. The Aboriginal participant, B19, acknowledged that she was an
Aboriginal person therefore had been influenced by her family upbringing. She went on further to explain her commitment to teaching Aboriginal Studies saying that “writing my Honours thesis on Indigenous education has made it very clear the problems in the education system”. General comments from the participants identified they had been influenced by Aboriginal friends with some participants acknowledging that they had grown up with Aboriginal people, as B5 stated. “I grew up with Aboriginal people, giving me a greater understanding of the culture”.

Life experiences such as work experience, travel, and growing up with and having Aboriginal family and friends had influenced some participants’ views of teaching Aboriginal Studies. Four of the participants noted that they had come into contact with Aboriginal people through work experience with beneficial outcomes although B30 noted that she had witnessed racism in one of her work environments: “I worked in Bega Commonwealth Bank, until this time I had not witnessed such blatant racism and the circle of poverty that the Aboriginal people endured”. The impact of travel in the Northern Territory was mentioned by several participants, with B46 declaring she had been influenced to teach Aboriginal Studies after “meeting an Aboriginal man who was from the Stolen Generation”.

Others talked about attending schools with large populations of Aboriginal students. Attending events, for example “the Sorry Day campaign and walking over the harbour bridge”, and learning Aboriginal Studies in primary and high school were identified by participants as having a positive influence on them to teach Aboriginal Studies. A few participants made statements about how they had witnessed Aboriginal students being encouraged to undertake sport above academic learning, or being withdrawn or sent out of class. The negative comments about the treatment of Aboriginal children in the school setting are encapsulated by B16, who grew up in a rural setting, and stated that “no learning occurred for Aboriginal students. They were removed/sent out before the lesson started”.

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Perceptions of Institutional Motives for the Introduction and Ongoing Implementation of Core Aboriginal Studies Subject

Participants were asked why they thought the university requires all pre-service teachers to undertake a core Aboriginal Studies subject.

Results: Implementation. Like the participants in case study A, all of the participants responded to this question, again there were overlaps with their responses. However, none of the participants specifically identified Aboriginal Education policy requirements as a driving factor for the university to introduce a core Aboriginal studies subject. The following table highlights the broad themes and the number of responses from the \( n=65 \) participants who answered this question.

Table 7.2.
Emerging Themes and Response Rates for Final Year Students’, Attitudes Towards Implementation of Aboriginal Studies, Institution B

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theme</th>
<th>Responses</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Learn about Aboriginal culture/history.</td>
<td>51</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teach Aboriginal children</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Combat racism</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Preparing pre-service teachers to be aware of Aboriginal culture/history before they go into a school classroom setting was identified as a major overarching theme by 78 per cent of participants. B49’s comment was typical. “So we get an understanding of the significance of Aboriginal culture to Australia and give due recognition to Indigenous issues is critical to the general well-being of the nation”.

Although there was overlap in responses regarding being aware of Aboriginal culture/history, participants fell loosely into two categories: Recognising difference and training to be able to better teach Aboriginal Studies/perspectives. Addressing difference was identified by twelve \( n=12 \) participants. For example, B16 said “to give
an understanding of cultural differences and enable teachers to learn about Aboriginal services, programs for students”. When identifying training to teach Aboriginal Studies, participants specifically spoke about understanding history and culture. Others (n=12) commented that they were required to learn Aboriginal Studies in order to incorporate Aboriginal perspectives, as expressed by B24, who said, “We need to have a good understanding of different perspectives of Aboriginal Ed. It’s not just about Art/dancing rather incorporating Aboriginal Education into all KLAs”. And B10 believed they were taught the core subject to “support them to be comfortable to implement Aboriginal perspectives into the curriculum and cater for Aboriginal students”.

A significant number (n=31) or 47 per cent of participants recorded that the core subject needed to be undertaken in order to address the educational needs of Aboriginal children. These feelings were verbalised by B57, who said, “because just like learning about how to teach ESL [English as a second language] students – different people have different needs and we need to be able to meet these needs”. B32 summed up the collective feeling in these words:

Because Indigenous Australians make up a large part of our society and due to negative connotations perpetuated by the media, it is necessary to develop awareness about the specific issues facing Aboriginal students and their families and communities, and learn how to best meet their needs without falling back on stereotypes and outdated generalisations.

Combating racism towards Aboriginal people and culture was a theme that participants clearly identified by (n=18) participants. The comment made by pre-service teacher B46 is indicative of the range of responses:

Because education can continue the prejudice and myths if unchecked. We can be taught the truth and pass it on. We can also become enlightened to the “context” of some Aboriginal students and create better learning environment for them.
Perceptions of Positive and Negative Characteristics of the Core Aboriginal Studies Subject

Participants were asked to describe how well they thought they were taught in the Aboriginal Studies subject. This research question elicited a wide range of responses which have been grouped under the positive and negative responses, although again there was overlap in the replies from the \( n = 65 \) participants who addressed this question.

**Positive responses.** The overall positive responses were encouraging, with \( n = 51 \) final year pre-service teachers’ responses expressing positive experiences in the core subject. Although a number of participants in this group gave a negative comment to some aspects of the subject, overall the responses were positive (see Table 7.3).

Table 7.3.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theme</th>
<th>Responses</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Taught well to very well</td>
<td>51</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teaching Aboriginal students</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>History and culture</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Inspired by teacher educator</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Resources</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Participants \( n = 51 \) identified that the core subject was taught “well” to “very well”, with some of the participants giving a short clipped answer while others went into detail on what aspects of the core subject they perceived were taught well. When discussing how well the core subject had been taught in relation to teaching pre-service teachers to teach Aboriginal Students some respondents \( n = 15 \) were positive. B15 stated that “It broadened my knowledge of Aboriginal students”. B20 also emphasised:
I believe this subject was extremely useful. A real eye opener which helped understand the needs of Aboriginal students – being able to cater for them as well as the importance of teaching Aboriginal Education in schools.

From the point of view of teaching history and culture, the following responses \((n=12)\) are indicative of the cohort, for instance, B09 said “the subject has been taught very well, with a balance struck between history and teaching content” and B23 said, “the subject was taught well. I came away with a better understanding and appreciation of Aboriginal Education”. Finally, B29 said:

I think that [the University] has done a great job teaching us the Aboriginal Studies subject because it looked at a variety of issues from pre-invasion through to how the past influences the future and how our kids need to be taught in schools. It broke down some barriers for many pre-service teachers.

In addition, ten \((n=10)\) participants identified the principal teacher educator by name and noted that he had been the catalyst for them to engage in the subject. As B65 stated, “[name removed] was very passionate in his delivery of the subject so made me interested”. In response to this question, only four participants commented on receiving information on resources. B29 remarked reflectively on the core subject:

I think it’s taught well. I learnt a lot about Aboriginal people, culture, and perspectives. I would say it’s changed the way I would have handled certain situations or lessons. It also gave me ideas for lessons and introduced me to new resources available.

**Results: Negative responses.** When coding the participants \((n=36)\) who identified negative responses, there were four emerging themes which are highlighted in Table 7.4 below. Although, noting negative responses, the researcher was also mindful that some negativity was linked to specific concerns rather than their overall view of the subject.
Table 7.4.

Emerging Themes and Response Rates of Final Year Students, Course Characteristics, Negative Themes, Institution B

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theme</th>
<th>Responses</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Teaching staff</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Negative sentiments</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teaching techniques</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Time constraints</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Participants \((n=14)\) mentioned dissatisfaction with tutors as they thought the tutorials were lacking in depth. For example, B62 mentioned that the principal lecturer was “great”, then continued, saying “although others were more on the blame side”. Within this group eight pre-service teachers specifically commented on the tutor’s lack of interest in participating in their tutorial, which is reflected in B11’s comment that “A lot of the time it was based around student presentations – and should have been more focussed on teacher discussions”. Another proffered a negative comment about their tutor, indicating that their learning was due to other factors such as “other student presentations” rather than his input. This comment about tutorials was expanded on by B45 who said:

The lecturer [tutor] of my class (not the subject coordinator) was extremely disinterested in what was occurring in class. The majority of the learning was through group presentations which was not always helpful.

Further negative sentiments by \((n=13)\) participants on the confrontational way the core subject was presented are highlighted in the following remarks. For B07, the first lecture was too confronting: “I think the first lesson felt like a religion lesson, it seemed pretty full on”. B54 said “There was an element of guilt attached though where we were learning about injustice. I don’t believe that people should be made to feel guilty for past injustice”.

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Other participants ($n=6$) felt the core subject concentrated too heavily on history and although it successfully taught “knowledge of culture”, B61 noted that “there was no strong aspect in reference to educational settings and strategies”. Hence, some participants felt they did not gain enough practical skills to use in the classroom. In addition, three participants felt that the core subject was not long enough with B42 commenting “you can’t cover such a big topic in such a short time”. Others suggested it needed to be a longer subject taught over several semesters, and that it would be beneficial for pre-service teachers if the university introduced more Aboriginal Studies subjects.

**Course Characteristics**

This question asked the pre-service teachers for an overview of what they learnt in the Aboriginal Studies subject.

**Results: Course Characteristics.** Of the ($n=62$) pre-service teachers who identified what they had learnt personally in the core course, there was a wide range of responses. Table 7.5 below shows the themes emerging from this question, although many of the participants mentioned multiple themes within their answer.

**Table 7.5.**

Emerging Themes and Response Rates of Final Year Students, Course Characteristics, Institution B

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Themes</th>
<th>Responses</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>History and culture</td>
<td>60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teaching Aboriginal students</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teaching Aboriginal Studies and perspectives</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Negative responses</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

History and culture was identified by the majority ($n=60$) of the respondents, as encapsulated by B47’s sentiments “I learnt about Australian history, this has impacted
on how I perceive the problems Indigenous people are facing and I learnt about culture – and how to teach it in a respectful way”. Other specific subject matter identified across the broad range of responses were:

- Colonial history including invasion: *terra nullius*, invasion and dispossession, assimilation, and the stolen generation;

- Cultural issues such as, the importance of family, land and spirituality, Aboriginal people’s connectedness to the land, reconciliation and its importance;

- Racism and discrimination including: Exclusion, denial of rights, injustice, stereotypes, poor education situation Aboriginal people were and are in, misconceptions about Aboriginal people in the Australian wider community, issues in the media; and

- How to find resources, the importance of engaging with the Aboriginal community, secret sacred objects, understanding of intellectual property (e.g. art, health and education issues), Aboriginal English, policy, importance of the class assignments, NAIDOC week celebrations, and how to access Indigenous organisations were all identified as aspects of the subject that pre-service teachers had learnt.

A significant number (n=26) of the respondents clearly felt that they had learnt how to cater for the needs of the Aboriginal child in the classroom and had gained a broader understanding of difference, which they could utilise in their teaching. Within this framework, participants such as B39 also recognised that they had learnt a great deal about how to “cater for Aboriginal learning styles in the classroom”. B38 expanded on this comment by saying that “Aboriginal students, like all students, are a diverse group of people and need to be looked at as individuals rather than as a ‘generalised whole’”. Finally, on the question of catering for the needs of Aboriginal children, B32 identified respect as an issue, and said:

One of the most significant things I learnt was in relation to literacy and the inclusion of Aboriginal English as a valid form of expression and communication. I have learnt how crucial it is to value and respect the home
culture of all students, and, in regard to Aboriginal students, to develop an awareness of how students’ “home experiences” may differ to my own.

Pre-service teachers acknowledged that they had learnt ways to teach Aboriginal Studies and incorporate perspectives into the curriculum. B20 simply described it as “The importance of teaching Australia’s history from the Aboriginal perspective”. B31 said:

I have learnt about the dispossession of Aboriginal people from their land, families. By having an Aboriginal policy in schools which emphasises Aboriginal education pedagogies, we teachers can at least contribute a small portion to the restoration of Aboriginal dignity and pride, as well as helping to increase Aboriginal school/high school/university attendance and graduation rates.

In terms of negative responses, two proffered a negative comment about their tutor, indicating that their learning was due to other factors such as “other student presentations” rather than his input. Plus B19 stated, that “whilst the university’s efforts to help combat the ignorance in students that still exists, I felt that it lacked ‘content’ as it stayed in the cultural differences rather than examining the societal”.

Commitment, Knowledge and Skills, Ability to Understand and Teach Aboriginal Studies

Final year pre-service teachers were asked to what extent, and in what ways, completing a core Aboriginal Studies subject has impacted on their commitment, knowledge and skills, and ability to understand and teach Aboriginal Studies.

Results Commitment. The themes emerging in relation to commitment are illustrated in Table 7.6.
Table 7.6.

Emerging Themes and Response Rates of Final Year Students’ Commitment to Teach Aboriginal Studies, Institution B

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theme</th>
<th>Responses</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Deep commitment to teaching Aboriginal Studies</td>
<td>59</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strengthened commitment</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Feel ill-equipped</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Of the \(n=62\) participants who answered this research question, 59 \(n=59\) identified that they were committed to teaching Aboriginal Studies and perspectives, with two participants expressing the view that they were considering applying to teach in rural and remote settings. The rest of the participants expressed a deep commitment to teaching Aboriginal Studies and introducing Aboriginal perspectives. “I am committed to teach Aboriginal Studies, I have a great empathy and respect for the rightful owners of Australia”, said B31. Eight final year pre-service teachers said that the core subject had strengthened their dedication. As B10 said, “I now have a stronger commitment to teaching Aboriginal Studies”. These sentiments are captured by this remark from B32 who said:

It has definitely enhanced my commitment due to the fact I now feel far more confident and prepared to teach Aboriginal students so that they are being appropriately and thoughtfully catered for.

A small number of pre-service teachers \(n=4\) mentioned that they felt ill-equipped to teach Aboriginal Studies and perspectives. “I don’t feel it prepared me to teach Aboriginal Studies”, said A61. This was expanded on by B13, who said “It has made me more interested to find the best way to teach it, it hasn’t trained me as to how to teach it”.

**Results: Knowledge and Skills.** Participants were asked to what extent, and in what ways, completing a core Aboriginal Studies subject had impacted on their
knowledge and skills, in being able to teach Aboriginal Studies in a school (see Table 7.7).

Table 7.7.

Emerging Themes and Response Rates of Final Year Students’, Knowledge and Skills to Teach Aboriginal Studies, Institution B

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Themes</th>
<th>Responses</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Gave knowledge and skills to teach Aboriginal Studies</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Only built knowledge to teach Aboriginal Studies not skills</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not confident</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Of the \((n=60)\) participants who answered this research question, \((n=30)\) acknowledged that the core subject had increased their knowledge and skills “greatly”. As the following remarks encapsulate, B31 said “I have gained lots of knowledge and skills for effectively teaching Aboriginal Studies” and the following comment by B58 who said “I am now more knowledgeable on the implementation of Aboriginal Studies in the classroom”. Interestingly, one pre-service teacher thought that the knowledge and skills required would be enhanced by its inclusion in other subjects of study within the degree, as expressed by B18, who stated, “The knowledge and skills need more reinforcement and lesson plans/units of work for teaching Aboriginal Studies throughout uni”. Within the knowledge and skills paradigm, gaining the knowledge and skills to access resources was also identified as an important aspect of the core subject, as B34 said, “I now know where to look for reliable information, and who to contact for support”.

A further twenty-nine \((n=29)\) said that it had given them knowledge of Aboriginal people and history with B53 conceding that “it wasn’t dealing with teaching skills but with knowledge”, and B16 who said “A good start but not enough specific information”. The development of knowledge was identified by participants who said they had more “understanding of Aboriginal issues”. Finally, B41 expressed the opinion
that the core subject did not teach any knowledge and skills “I feel that I cannot completely teach Aboriginal Studies as I need more knowledge and understanding”.

Results: Ability to Understand and Teach Aboriginal Studies. Participants were asked to what extent, and in what ways, has completing a core Aboriginal Studies subject, impacted on their ability to understand and teach Aboriginal Studies in a school. The themes emerging in relation to their ability and understanding are illustrated in Table 7.8.

Table 7.8.
Emerging Themes and Response Rates of Final Year Students’, Ability to Understand and Teach Aboriginal Studies, Institution B

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Themes</th>
<th>Responses</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Increased ability and understanding to teach</td>
<td>44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No confidence or not sure</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Within the (n=55) responses, most (n=44) participants believed that the core subject had increased their ability and understanding. “It has increased my ability to teach Aboriginal Studies in an empathetic and knowledgeable way”, said B36. And B19 said “I know have a better understanding of the realities and I can better empathise”. Participants again identified that the core subject had provided them with useful resources and texts to read on Aboriginal Studies and taught them to integrate perspective across the curriculum. B01 stated “I learnt to: Involve community members, teach the facts, avoid stereotypes, and be critical of resources”.

Finally, eleven participants identified a lack of confidence in their ability to understand and teach Aboriginal Studies. As B42 explained, “it has impacted on my knowledge and understanding of the topic, however it is not sufficient enough, as I don’t know enough”, and B3, who said “I don’t think I can go in depth because my knowledge is not 100%”.
Key Understandings of Important Aspects of the Core Aboriginal Studies Subject

Final year pre-service teachers were asked to describe the three most important factors in the core Aboriginal Studies subject that have impacted on them personally therefore there is overlap in the emerging themes.

Results: Important Aspects. In addressing this research question, as it dealt with what had personally affected the individual participant, generally a more complex range of responses was recorded. Again, many participants identified multiple themes. For ease of contextualising participant answers, Table 7.9 below shows the themes emerging from this question.

Table 7.9.

Emerging Themes and Response Rates of Final Year Students’, Important Aspects, Institution B

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theme</th>
<th>Responses</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>History and culture</td>
<td>57</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teaching Aboriginal children</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teaching Aboriginal Studies and perspectives</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Of the (n=59) participants, as one would expect, the majority (n=57) agreed they had learnt about Aboriginal history and culture. Participants identified they had learnt an array of topics covered in the history and culture lectures. There was a more measured response from the participants about what they had learnt which had affected them. B52 simply said “teaching the true history”. Others identified the importance learning Aboriginal Studies to be able to teach it well, for example, two participants expressed, “learning Australian history from the Aboriginal side!” B49 and B28 elaborated, saying:

Aboriginal history was very important as I thought I had a good understanding however, I found that there was a lot I didn’t know. I was also surprised at how prolific otitis media was in Aboriginal children, and learnt
how to develop strategies to help these children in the classroom. The tutor also helped me to develop ideas not only in Aboriginal Studies but also about my own identity.

In addition, some participants mentioned other aspects of the core subject such as the importance of the teacher educator and his approachable teaching style, with B38 mentioning his knowledge and that he is a “passionate lecturer”. The value of the cultural assessment was also mentioned by several participants, as noted by B61, who commented on the benefit of “creating an art work of my own culture to try and understand Aboriginal culture”. Learning outcomes included a deeper understanding of health issues, which was discussed by eight participants, while five identified the importance learning about resources and support services available for teachers.

Participants (n=16) clearly comprehend the importance of learning to teach Aboriginal children and about different learning styles. As the following comments show, B39 commented on gaining a greater awareness of Aboriginal English, and learning about “appropriate pedagogy for Aboriginal students”. Another participant, B43, mentioned learning “to understand the cultural difference of Aboriginal students – to be aware that students have different customs and behavioural differences”.

Within the theme of Aboriginal Studies and perspectives, a further seven participants clearly identified that they had learnt how to teach Aboriginal Studies and perspectives. As the following remark from B15 shows, there is a need to “teach Aboriginal perspectives especially when teaching about Australian history”. Finally, in terms of what pre-service teachers had learnt personally, the following remarks from B14 and B07, respectively, are typical of the whole and are an indication of the complexity of the responses from the participants:

• Tolerance is important;

• Do not accept negative stereotyping;

• Be aware of difference and celebrate it (B14); and
Seek understanding before judging;

Learn more about the history; and

Teach kids about what really took place (B07).

**Strengths and Limitations of the Present Core Subject**

To further elucidate the experiences, challenges, and incentives of those involved in designing, delivering, and experiencing a core Aboriginal Studies subject, participants were asked to comment on the strengths and limitations of the current core subject.

Results: Strengths. Participants were asked to identify the key strengths of the core Aboriginal Studies subject that they had completed. Emerging themes and responses are illustrated below (see Table 7.10).

**Table 7.10.**

Emerging Themes and Response Rates of Final Year Students’, Strengths, Institution B

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Themes</th>
<th>Responses</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Strengths of Aboriginal history and culture core subject</td>
<td>36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Positive account related to teaching style</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Of the \( n=46 \) participants, the majority \( n=36 \) praised the core subject. The comment by B47 is indicative of these sentiments:

I really enjoyed the subject as it opened my eyes to such important aspect of Australia, it has made me more passionate about ‘TEACHING THE TRUTH’ Not what people want to hear” [participant’s emphasis]

The overall strengths identified by the remaining of participants covered:
• Understanding of history and culture, understanding of Aboriginal education issues, learned the truth, effects of colonisation and its impact today, knowledge and respect;

• Knowledge of Aboriginal students, good strategies for teaching, Aboriginal English, health issues;

• Including perspectives into the curriculum, ways to implement Aboriginal perspectives, focused on real classroom scenarios;

• Usefulness of resources, opportunity for in-depth research, usefulness of the assignments, and the text *Teaching Aboriginal Studies*; and

• Several participants identified that it “changed deficit view of thinking” about Aboriginal history.

Eight participants made positive comments about the teacher educator, with three participants simply naming the lecturer, and A60, who thought that he was “a valuable source”.

**Results: Limitations.** Participants were asked to identify the key limitations of the core Aboriginal Studies subject that they had completed (see Table 7.11).
Table 7.11.
Emerging Themes and Response Rates of Final Year Students’, Limitations, Institution B

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Themes</th>
<th>Responses</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Need for more practical skills</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teaching style</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not long enough</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No Weakness</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lack of Aboriginal perspectives in other subjects in the degree</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Of the \(n=51\) participants, four simply stated that there were “no weaknesses”. Of the remaining \(n=47\) respondents who did identify limitations in the core subject, around half \(n=22\), revealed to varying degrees the need for more practical skills in teaching Aboriginal studies and incorporating Aboriginal perspectives into the curriculum. For example, B13 said the course “did not give specific examples” and B44 said that there were “not enough info or suggestions for how we as educators could achieve change or make a difference”. In general, pre-service teachers wanted more hands-on teaching resources and lesson plans on how to teach Aboriginal studies and incorporate Aboriginal perspectives.

The teaching style or “the way it was taught” was identified as a limitation of the core subject. Comments ranged from B15’s “too much emphasis on treating them different”, and B04, who said “continued stereotyping from the lecturer”, to B22, who stated that “the lecturer I had was very biased and I think it would have been beneficial to have someone neutral that didn’t make everything really personal”. A couple of participants felt that the core subject was not well organised, with another two identifying a lack of teacher-guided learning. As B45 expressed it, they “could have gained more knowledge from someone who was interested in sharing Aboriginal culture rather than someone who was clearly attending the campus for the pay cheque”.

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Eleven ($n=11$) said that the core subject was “too short” with several echoing the words of B58, who said “it was only 1 subject across a four year degree”. B40 said the subject “should have run over 2 semesters”. Participants acknowledged that there was too much to learn in too short a time-frame. A final limitation highlighted by three participants was the lack of synergy with the other subjects of study within the degree as one respondent, B35, said “there should be more integration with other subjects that include Aboriginal perspective (education)”. In the words of B52, “while it provided a good basis, other subjects failed to build on the information provided”, and B49 said “it is considered as ‘outside’ the core subjects we do”.

**Summary**

This chapter presented the voices of participants from the data collected in the in-depth interview questions and questionnaires in the second of the individual case studies. It presented an account of multiple stakeholders’ perceptions of the motives, values, and attitudes in relation to incorporating core Aboriginal Studies subjects in the primary teacher education curriculum. It differentiates between institutional factors, personal experiences, and course characteristics that pre-service teachers perceive as impacting positively and negatively on their attitudes, commitment, knowledge and skills, ability and understanding to teach Aboriginal Studies and Aboriginal students. In addition, it has given a summary of the emerging themes from each of the data sets. In the next chapter, cross-case analysis will be undertaken to synthesise the findings of case study A and B.
CHAPTER 8

RESULTS OF CROSS-CASE ANALYSIS

Introduction

This chapter presents the cross-case analysis results and discusses the findings of case studies from two metropolitan institutions in NSW with a core Aboriginal Studies subject in their primary teacher education degree. Drawn from multiple stakeholder perceptions, the chapter synthesises and illustrates the motives, values, and attitudes that compelled the case study institutions to incorporate a core Aboriginal Studies subject in their primary teacher education program and the impact of the subject on pre-service teachers. It also synthesises and illuminates the results of the cross-case analysis and discussion of the significant institutional factors, course characteristics, and personal experiences that stakeholders from two institutions perceive as impacting positively and negatively on pre-service teachers’ attitudes, commitment, knowledge, skills, ability, and understanding to teach Aboriginal Studies. It elucidates the initial experiences of learning Aboriginal Studies and the learner self-concept of pre-service teachers who have undertaken a core Aboriginal Studies subject. For ease of contextualisation, the chapter is set out under three research questions – 1.1, 2.1 and 3.1 – with the final year pre-service teachers’ research question 4.1 interwoven into the results. Emerging themes from across the two institutions have been identified and the cross-case analysis addresses each of these themes.

Results of Cross-case Analysis: In-depth Interviews and Open-ended Questionnaires

Introduction

This chapter presents the results of the cross-case analysis of the responses from Heads of School (HOS), the Directors of the Aboriginal Education Unit (director), teacher educators, and pre-service teachers who had recently undertaken the core
subject either in the second year institution (A) or first year institution (B), and pre-
service teachers in their final year of study from both institutions.

**Research questions 1.1 and 4.1**

What do multiple stakeholders perceive as the institution’s motives, values, and
attitudes in relation to incorporating and ongoing implementation of core Aboriginal
Studies subjects in their primary teacher education course?

**Results of Cross-Case Analysis: Research Questions 1.1 and 4.1**

Table 8.1 shows the response rate of multiple stakeholders reflecting the
incorporation and ongoing implementation of a core Aboriginal Studies subject into the
primary teacher education course. There are no responses from pre-service teachers in
the first two categories as these questions deal with the initial introduction of the core
Aboriginal Studies subject.
Table 8.1.
Summary of Results of Cross-Case Analysis of Institutional Motives for Initial Introduction and Ongoing Implementation of Core Aboriginal Studies Subjects

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Response rate themes</th>
<th>Head of School</th>
<th>Directors</th>
<th>Teacher Educators</th>
<th>First/Second Year Pre-service Teachers</th>
<th>Final Year Pre-Service Teachers in percentages</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Institution</td>
<td>A</td>
<td>B</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Individual’s Dedication</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Collaboration Aboriginal Ed. Unit and Community</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NSW DET Policy</td>
<td></td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Learn about Aboriginal culture/history.</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>5 1 78</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teach Aboriginal children</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3 4 48</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Combat racism (change agents)</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2 5 7.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Results of Cross-case analysis: Introduction of a core Aboriginal Studies subject – Academic Staff

Academic participants reflected on what had motivated their university to introduce a core Aboriginal Studies subject into the primary teacher education course, and their understanding of the official rationale for its inclusion.

**Individual’s Dedication.** According to academic staff in both institutions, the motives, values, and attitudes underpinning the development and implementation of a core Aboriginal subject into the primary teacher education degree rely on a strong commitment from individuals who value the inclusion of a core Aboriginal Studies subject and are motivated to drive the enterprise. In both cases, enormous initial backing from the Head of School, along with that of dedicated individuals within the faculty/school, was the principal motivating force. It was also noted by the HOS and the director in institution (A) that if funds were set aside in the budget, other staff were less likely to be threatened by cuts to their own teaching area, and so more likely to support the introduction of a core Aboriginal Studies subject into the primary teacher education curriculum.

**Collaboration between Aboriginal Education Unit and Community.** The directors in institutions A and B and teacher educator B believed that a strong association and collaboration between the Aboriginal Education Unit within the institution, and close links with the Aboriginal community were motivating factors in informing teachers about Aboriginal history and culture, and educational issues.

Other factors thought to lead to the introduction of a core subject identified by the director (A) were increasing numbers of Aboriginal children within the education system and a growing awareness of their low achievement rates. This is consistent with the data shown in Ministerial Council on Education, Employment, Training and Youth Affairs (MCEETYA), (Commonwealth of Australia, 2006) which shows that “despite some gains, Indigenous Australians are yet to achieve equitable outcomes” (p.4) also see Closing the Gap (Commonwealth of Australia, 2009; 2011). Speaking about the problems Aboriginal children face, the director in A and the HOS in B suggested that
introducing a core subject and teaching pre-service teachers about Aboriginal history would break down stereotypes and give pre-service teachers the confidence they need to work with Aboriginal children and the Aboriginal community. Academic staff considered adequate teacher education in Aboriginal Studies for pre-service teachers to be an important contextual element.

Results of Cross-case Analysis: Ongoing Implementation of the Core Aboriginal Studies subject – multiple stakeholders

New South Wales Department of Education and Training mandatory Aboriginal education policy. The reason that the core subject is taught was attributed by some participants to it being a mandatory requirement of NSW DET (see Chapter 2). The development and implementation of the NSW Aboriginal education policy was therefore identified as a driving force in the introduction of the core subject and its ongoing implementation. Both directors, the teacher educator B, two interviewee pre-service teachers from each institution, and 12 per cent of final year participants in institution A cited the policy as highlighting the need for teachers to implement Aboriginal Studies and incorporate Aboriginal perspectives within the school curriculum. As some pre-service teachers noted teaching Aboriginal Studies is needed because it is a NSW DET policy that Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal students are taught about Aboriginal Australia.

In addition, a pre-service teacher was shocked to learn that not all institutions with primary teacher education courses included a core Aboriginal Studies subject. She reasoned that pre-service teachers were taught about teaching maths, and they should also be taught about teaching Aboriginal Studies. Therefore, participants felt that it is incumbent on those responsible for primary teacher education courses to ensure that Aboriginal Studies is part of the curriculum. With the concerns of this participant in mind it then can be argued that the policy (see for example Aboriginal Education Policy [AEP] NSW DET, 1982; 1997 and NSW DET’s Aboriginal Education and Training Policy, 2008; 2009) which is mandatory in NSW schools as stipulated by the NSW Department of Education and Training, has not been translated into practice across all NSW institutions that teach a primary teacher education course.
Learn about Aboriginal culture/history. Among the comments from the in-depth interviews with final year pre-service teachers about the ongoing implementation of a core Aboriginal Studies subject in the primary teacher education curriculum, a high percentage nominated learning Aboriginal history as a major rationale for its inclusion. All of the participants interviewed, along with final year participants (46.3 per cent in institution A and 33.1 per cent in institution B), recommended that institutions should incorporate a core Aboriginal Studies subject into the primary teacher education degree as a means of ensuring that pre-service teachers are aware of and value Aboriginal history and culture before they enter a classroom. One participant in B made the point that most pre-service teachers “just don’t know how to teach Aboriginal Studies”. Furthermore, a large majority of final year pre-service teachers (68 per cent in institution A and 85 per cent in institution B) commented that, of all their life experiences, the core subject had had the greatest impact on them in learning about Aboriginal history and culture. In the words of another participant, “I can’t believe I got to year 12 and did not know about the Stolen Generation”. Comments like this one are of concern as they indicate that students in some NSW schools may not be being taught adequately about Australia’s Aboriginal history. This implies that mandatory Aboriginal perspectives are not being incorporated into the curriculum.

Teaching Aboriginal students. The academic staff, two interviewees and 43 per cent of final year participants in institution A, plus three interviewees and 48.6 final year participants in B believed that institutions implemented a core Aboriginal Studies subject to teach pre-service teachers Australian history and culture from an Aboriginal perspective so that pre-service teachers could gain an understanding of cultural differences and address the diverse learning needs of their students. Learning about Aboriginal history and culture and about how to teach Aboriginal students was another important feature identified by the participants in both institutions as a means of addressing the educational disadvantage of Aboriginal children. For example, pre-service teachers believed that undertaking a core subject provides them with a better understanding of the background of Aboriginal students and a broader understanding of Aboriginal Australian history and culture.
Combating racism. Another major reason to include a core Aboriginal Studies subject in the primary teacher education course was thought to be, in the words of a pre-service teacher in B, because “lots of teachers still have racist views about Aboriginal people and prejudices that would impact on the way they teach Aboriginal students. Combating racism, was identified by academic staff and pre-service teachers, and illustrated in the final year participants’ response rate (86.9 per cent in institution A and 27.6 per cent in institution B). “Debunking myths” was another important reason identified by participants as to why the institution should include a core Aboriginal Studies subject in the primary teacher education course. This was noted by a pre-service teacher who stated:

Education can continue the prejudices and myths if unchecked. We can be taught the truth and pass it on. We can also be enlightened to the ‘context’ of some Aboriginal students and create a better learning environment.

Finally, a particular concern of the teacher educator in institution B regarding the ongoing implementation of the core Aboriginal Studies subject is that it is embedded in the primary teacher education course and is not taught by Aboriginal staff of the Aboriginal Education Unit. This, he believed, made the core Aboriginal Studies subject dependent on the goodwill of academic staff in the School of Education. Hence, the place of the core subject was seen to be fragile as it did not have the backing of the director of the Aboriginal Education Unit and other strong Aboriginal advocates within the university.

Research questions 2.1 and 4.1

What do multiple stakeholders perceive as the impact of core Aboriginal Studies subjects on pre-service teachers’ self-concept, attitudes, commitment, knowledge and skills, and ability to understand and teach Aboriginal Studies?

Results of Cross-case Analysis: Course Characteristics – Multiple Stakeholders

The following section shows the response rate of multiple stakeholders reflected on course characteristics of the core Aboriginal Studies subject impacting positively
(see Table 8.2) on pre-service teachers. In their responses, many participants mentioned multiple themes within their answers.

Table 8.2.

Summary of Results of Cross-Case Analysis of Multiple Stakeholder Perceptions, Positive Course Characteristics

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Response rate themes</th>
<th>Head of School</th>
<th>Directors</th>
<th>Teacher Educators</th>
<th>First/Second Year Pre-service Teachers</th>
<th>Final Year Pre-Service Teachers in percentages</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Institution</td>
<td>A  B</td>
<td>A  B</td>
<td>A  B</td>
<td>A  B</td>
<td>A  B</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>History and culture</td>
<td>✓  ✓</td>
<td>✓  ✓</td>
<td>✓  ✓</td>
<td>5  5</td>
<td>89  96.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Taught well to very well</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>4  5</td>
<td>35.2  78.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teaching Aboriginal students</td>
<td>✓  ✓</td>
<td>✓  ✓</td>
<td>✓  ✓</td>
<td></td>
<td>37  41.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teaching Aboriginal Studies and perspectives</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>1  5</td>
<td>15  22.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Importance of good Aboriginal staff</td>
<td>✓  ✓</td>
<td>✓  ✓</td>
<td>✓  ✓</td>
<td>1  2</td>
<td>15.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Resources</td>
<td>✓  ✓</td>
<td>✓  ✓</td>
<td>✓  ✓</td>
<td>5  4</td>
<td>10  6.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Inspired to take further subjects</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>4  10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Class Assignments Presentations</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>3  3</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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Results: Cross-case analysis of course characteristics – multiple stakeholders

**Taught Well.** An overwhelming number of pre-service teachers held a positive outlook on the core subject: nine out of the ten pre-service teachers interviewed and 35.2 per cent of participants in institution A and 78.4 per cent in institution B in their final year. These participants expressed the view that the core subject was taught “well” to “very well”.

**History and culture.** All of the academic staff agreed that pre-service teachers need to undertake a core subject to gain an appreciation of and confidence in implementing Aboriginal Studies in a classroom. As noted by the director A and both HOS, some pre-service teachers immediately became engaged with the subject and understood the purpose of undertaking an Aboriginal Studies subject, others plainly expressed their appreciation of the core subject, and some were motivated to seek employment in schools with significant Aboriginal populations. HOS (A) thought that an important benefit that pre-service teachers gained from undertaking a core subject was not only an appreciation of the course content, but some confidence that they could implement it in their classrooms. This said, there were concerns raised by the HOS, the teacher educator in institution B and the director in institution A about pre-service teachers who became overconfident in their perceived ability to teach Aboriginal Studies. Overconfidence was also recognised by one of the pre-service teachers in A, warned that “A little learning can be a dangerous thing, I believe people have a false sense of confidence from this course”. In identifying overconfidence, the director in institution A believed that pre-service teachers would become more realistic in their teaching when their understandings were challenged, and that their attitudes to teaching would also be influenced by more experienced teachers once they were teaching in a school.

All pre-service teachers interviewed and, of the final year participants, 89 per cent in institution A and 96.7 per cent in institution B, considered that they had learnt Aboriginal history and culture, and indicated that they had gained insights into the culture and a better understanding and appreciation of Aboriginal education. For example, one student in institution B said:
I think that [the institution] has done a great job by teaching us the Aboriginal Studies subject because it looked at a variety of issues from pre-invasion through to how the past influences the future and how kids need to be taught in schools. It broke down some barriers for many pre-service teachers.

In discussing what makes a good core Aboriginal Studies subject, the teacher educator in institution B believed that the core subject needed to cover the ground from pre-invasion to contemporary issues to give the pre-service teachers a greater sense of cultural continuum. The HOS thought that the core subject gave pre-service teachers an appreciation of the importance of teaching Aboriginal Studies because they studied it in the broader context of Australia’s history and actually understood that there is a pre-colonisation history. The director and the teacher educator (B) also thought that the core Aboriginal Studies subject should include some approaches across the curriculum, so that there is an understanding of how to incorporate Aboriginal perspectives. The teacher educator also stated that the subject needed to recognise different pedagogies: “the understandings of communication, questioning, socialising, peer orientation, experiential learning and kinaesthetic learning”.

Pre-service teachers described the core subject as a combination of lectures and presentations. When asked what they had learnt in the course, not surprisingly, the participants unanimously cited Aboriginal history and culture as the main component of the subject. Broadly speaking though, within the core subject pre-service teachers learnt a range of topics as the following examples show. A participant in A, when describing the three most important factors of the subject that impacted on her learning, stated that she had learnt “The support Aboriginal students need”, “The need for the right history to be taught” and “Need to treat students equally”. A participant in B said “Health issues, poverty”, “Teaching Aboriginal perspectives especially when teaching Australian history” and “Reconciliation – the importance and significance of it”. It is clear from participants’ responses in institution A and B that pre-service teachers in each of the institution had learnt similar topics (see Table 8.2.1).
Table 8.2.1.

Course topics

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Institution A</th>
<th>Institution B</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Colonial history:</strong> including invasion, dispossession, segregation, oppression, Stolen Generation, laws, and legislative issues</td>
<td><strong>Colonial history:</strong> <em>terra nullius</em>, dispossession, assimilation, missionaries, massacres, and the Stolen Generation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Cultural issues:</strong> including the importance of family, land, spirituality, reconciliation, varied Aboriginal language groups and cultures, importance of understanding difference</td>
<td><strong>Cultural issues:</strong> including the importance of family for Aboriginal people, spirituality, Aboriginal people’s connectedness to the land, secret sacred objects, reconciliation and its importance, different social customs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Racism and discrimination:</strong> including combating myths, stereotypes, and prejudice, past policies and their effects, misconceptions about Aboriginal people in the Australian wider community and media bias, being taught about teaching and resources and understanding bias in old text books</td>
<td><strong>Racism and discrimination:</strong> including exclusion, denial of rights, injustice, stereotypes, historic and current poor educational outcomes for Aboriginal people, misconceptions about Aboriginal people in the wider Australian community, issues in the media</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>How to find resources:</strong> health issues such as otitis media, education, education strategies, policy, Aboriginal English, icons and symbols relating to the pre-service teachers’ class assignments, ASSPA committees, NAIDOC week celebrations and how to access Aboriginal organisations.</td>
<td><strong>How to find resources:</strong> the importance of engaging with the Aboriginal community, understanding of intellectual property (e.g. art, health, and education issues), Aboriginal English, policy, importance of the class assignments, NAIDOC week celebrations, and how to access Aboriginal organisations.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Teaching Aboriginal students. Academic participants thought that the core Aboriginal Studies subject does expose teacher educators to the issues of Aboriginal history and culture from an Aboriginal perspective, which promotes their confidence and their perceived ability to teach the subject matter and to teach Aboriginal children. This was substantiated by pre-service teachers, of whom 34.7 per cent (A) and 40 per cent (B) mentioned they had learnt to cater for the needs of Aboriginal children in their classrooms. As Sharon in institution A said, taking the core subject had opened her eyes to the needs of Aboriginal children and deepened her appreciation that all children need to be accepted. In addition, many of the pre-service teachers identified that they had gained a broader understanding of difference, which could assist them in their teaching. This was encapsulated by a participant in B, who that said it was “good to know the history of Aboriginal people in our education system and their current plight – opens your eyes and makes you understand the importance of Aboriginal education”. Another participant in (A) spoke about how the core subject had given them insights for teachers teaching Aboriginal children – “How we might adapt the curriculum in order to accommodate for Indigenous students was covered quite thoroughly”. Respect for Aboriginal children’s learning needs was also identified by a participant in B, who said “The course was effective in addressing Aboriginal students and family needs and issues they face in today’s society which ultimately effects myself as a teacher”.

Teaching Aboriginal Studies and perspectives. The teacher educator in institution B stressed the importance of Aboriginal perspectives across the curriculum and noted that it should be a major emphasis in the core subject, and the HOS (B) agreed with the teacher educator’s assertion. Among pre-service teachers, 14.4 per cent in institution A and 21.5 per cent in institution B acknowledged that they had learnt that Aboriginal Studies and perspectives need to be incorporated across the curriculum. For example, participant B20 noted he had learnt “The importance of teaching Australia’s history from the Aboriginal perspective”. A participant in A said “I’m aware of their culture and history, integrating Aboriginal studies across the curriculum” and a participant in B said “Our introduction to Aboriginal Studies provided us with information from an Aboriginal perspective. This perspective enabled us to be informed of difficulties that are particular to these students. This was valuable”.

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Importance of good Aboriginal staff. It was agreed that the core Aboriginal Studies subject exposes pre-service teachers to the issues of Aboriginal education from an Aboriginal perspective, particularly if there are strong Aboriginal teacher educators in charge of lectures and tutorials. The HOS (A), the director (B), and the teacher educator (B) discussed the authenticity of Indigenous voices and thought it was a significant factor in pre-service teachers’ learning. One director (A) noted that it was an advantage if the teacher educators are “informed, positive and sensitive” to the learning needs of the pre-service teachers. Participants agreed that it was vital that the subject be taught by committed Aboriginal personnel, supported by committed non-Aboriginal lecturers and tutors. As the HOS and the teacher educator (B) noted, it was hoped that positive teacher educators would help pre-service teachers develop commitment, want to learn more and keep themselves knowledgeable. It was also hoped that when they are working in schools, they will have gained the confidence to engage with the Aboriginal community.

The authenticity of Aboriginal staff was also identified by one pre-service teacher, in A, who said “Our teacher was a Koori, thus giving greater understanding/perspective”. In addition, two pre-service teachers interviewed and 15.3 per cent of final year participants in institution B actually identified the teacher educator and noted that he had engaged them in the subject and made them want to learn more. As a participant in B noted, the lecturer “was very passionate in his delivery of the subject so made me interested”. Finally, the importance of engaging tutors who are resourceful and encouraging was discussed by a participant in A, who noted:

I think the success of the course is highly dependent on the tutor who presents the material. The content is adequate, however I changed tutors halfway through and with my 1st tutor I felt it was a boring and pointless course but with my 2nd tutor it was interesting, fun and made relevant to what the course was about.

Resources. The teacher educator and the director (A) felt that the core subject needed to explore a broad range of resources, both human and material. For the teacher educator (B), teaching pre-service teachers about appropriate resources was extremely
important. As he said, what was required were “links to resources and community, not just the pretty big picture books, and not just the videos, but people”. So, for academic staff it was important to show pre-service teachers how to establish links with Aboriginal organisations, Aboriginal workers in the school, and the AECG.

Among the participants in institution A, five in second year, including 10 per cent of the final year pre-service teachers, thought that being taught where to find and how to access appropriate resources were important factors, along with knowing that there are Aboriginal human resources in the form of Aboriginal workers within the Department of Education and Training. The same sentiments were expressed by three first year pre-service teachers and 6.1 per cent of the participants in institution B. How to access Aboriginal community members was also mentioned as an important element within the core subject. Several of the pre-service teachers also cited the importance of being given resources to use in schools, with several participants identifying *Teaching Aboriginal Studies* by Rhonda Craven as an extremely useful text. All agreed that pre-service teachers needed to be shown good resources, both material and human.

**Inspired to take further subjects.** Four pre-service teachers interviewed and ten per cent of final year pre-service teachers in institution A (where there are additional Aboriginal subjects in the Faculty of Education and Arts) said that they had been so inspired by the core subject that they had taken further subjects on Aboriginal issues in the Faculty of Education and Arts. This fulfilled the hopes of the HOS and the director (A), who suggested that some pre-service teachers immediately take the subject on board and are inspired to expand their knowledge on Aboriginal educational issues. For example, a pre-service teacher noted “I don’t think I learnt that much in the core subject, but in [the other subject taken in the Faculty of Arts]. I learnt a lot about culture, history and background. Teaching comes from acquiring knowledge”. These sentiments are close aligned with other comments from pre-service teachers that acknowledged that although the core subject was adequate and covered many topics it was too short to go in-depth so many pre-service teachers felt they needed to learn more. Given the opportunity, though, those who are committed will elect to take further subjects to expand their knowledge.
**Class Assignments – Presentations.** Cathie and Sharon in institution B noted the importance of the assignment which required pre-service teachers to prepare lesson plans which included an Aboriginal perspective. As Cathie said, they “had to write a whole Aboriginal subject that would cover all the KLAs for later use”. The value of the cultural assessment was mentioned by several other participants in institution B, who commented on the benefit of undertaking the icon assignment which asked pre-service teachers to creating an art work of their own culture to try and understand the diversity within Australian culture. In addition, for some of the pre-service teacher thought the presentations from peers were seen as extremely useful. They identified that this assignment made students explore further topics not covered in the lectures which they felt gave them additional information, from their own research and that undertaken by their peers.

Pre-service teachers commented that taking the core subject had changed their view of Aboriginal people, giving them a deeper understanding of the history and culture and prepared them to teach Aboriginal Studies, Aboriginal students, and to incorporate Aboriginal perspectives into the curriculum. Participants also said that they had acquired a better understanding of how to teach Aboriginal students and understood that they need to teach Aboriginal history to children in their classrooms in a sensitive and honest way.

**Results of Cross-case Analysis: Negative Characteristics**

Table 8.3 shows the response rate of multiple stakeholders reflecting on the negative characteristics of the core Aboriginal Studies subjects. Negative comments from participants are not always indicative of the participants’ overall rating of the core subject. The negative comments expressed by the participants were grouped under the following five headings: teaching techniques, teaching staff, time constraints, hostility to subject and lack of perspectives in other subjects.

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Table 8.3.

Summary of Results of Cross-Case Analysis of Multiple Stakeholders, Negative Characteristics of the Core Aboriginal Studies Subject

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Response rate themes</th>
<th>Head of School</th>
<th>Directors</th>
<th>Teacher Educators</th>
<th>First/Second Yr Pre-service Teachers</th>
<th>Final Yr Pre-Service Teachers in percentages</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Institution</td>
<td>A</td>
<td>B</td>
<td>A</td>
<td>B</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teaching technique (pedagogical Skills)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Institution A</strong></td>
<td>1</td>
<td>37.6</td>
<td>9.2</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Institution B</strong></td>
<td>2</td>
<td>8.6</td>
<td>21.5</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Teaching staff</strong></td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hostility to subject</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Time constraints</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lack of perspectives in other subjects</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Teaching technique (pedagogical skills). It was of particular concern that teaching and learning strategies that could be utilised in the primary curriculum in the future were not extensively covered in the courses. This lack of pedagogy was of concern to one pre-service teacher interviewed in institution A, as well as 38.2 per cent of final year teachers in institution A who felt that the subject did not give enough hands-on instruction on incorporating Aboriginal Studies into the Key Learning Areas (KLAs). These concerns were mirrored by a smaller proportion (9.2 per cent) of final year teachers in institution B. Lack of pedagogical skills was also identified in Craven, Halse, Marsh, Mooney & Wilson-Miller (2005a, p.103), so is of concern. This lack of pedagogy means that there are pre-service teachers who feel that they do not have the self-confidence to incorporate Aboriginal perspectives successfully into the curriculum.
once they enter the teaching profession. A small number \((n=2)\) in institution B suggested that the core subject would benefit from the inclusion of a field trip, which would result in a more hands-on approach to resources in the community and give pre-service teachers a resource from which to build their confidence.

**Teaching staff.** In institution A, 8.6 per cent of participants and a larger proportion in institution B, 21.5 per cent, indicated that the attitude of the teacher educators and their teaching styles had a negative impact on their learning. This was also a concern raised by the director in A who voiced the opinion that teacher educators need to be sensitive and not over zealous when teaching the core subject as it could be counterproductive. It was also noted that tutors needed to be active in the tutorials and to engage with pre-service teachers in discussing the issues raised in the presentations. The main problems concerning tutors/tutorials were identified in institution B. Within this group, eight specifically commented on the tutor’s lack of interest in participating in their tutorial, which is reflected in a participant in B’s comment that “A lot of the time it was based around student presentations – and should have been more focussed on teacher discussions”. It is therefore important that teacher educators be mindful when presenting such sensitive and confrontational material and there is a need to employ competent and engaging tutors who interact within the tutorial presentations.

**Hostility to subject.** Hostility to the core subject on the part of some pre-service teachers was identified in both institutions by the HOS, director, teacher educators in A and the HOS and teacher in B. An average of 17.3 per cent of final year pre-service teachers in institution A and 20 per cent in institution B identified the core subject as intimidating, and commented on some of the confronting aspects of the subject matter. The responses indicated that some participants felt “bullied” and “made to feel guilty for past injustice”. They felt there was an element of guilt attached. Others were concerned about the political subjectivity of some of the content. Hence, some pre-service teachers obviously felt alienated by the approach of the teacher educator and the confrontational nature of the subject matter.

For those pre-service teachers who were interested in the core subject and wanted to learn, the behaviour of some pre-service teachers was extremely frustrating,
and had a negative impact on their learning. Sharon in institution A, like many participants, found it very frustrating being in a class with people who didn’t want to be there, didn’t want to do the work, and actively tried to undermine the lessons. Sharon went on to mention that a friend had calculated that they personally were paying in excess of $50 an hour per lesson and they did not want their learning disrupted. As Sharon said, “some of us were going ahead in leaps and bounds and just lapping it up and others where more interested in when the next cigarette break was going to be. It was disappointing”.

The perceptions of pre-service teachers who took a negative attitude to the content covered in the core subject were discussed by both HOS, the director in institution A and both teacher educators, who noted that negativity could be attributable to the fact that some pre-service teachers already held such views or such attitudes may have been promoted within their families. Other pre-service teachers may have been influenced by negative views held and articulated by their peers, while others may have reacted negatively to remarks made by lecturers or tutors or they may have responded negatively to teacher educators’ personalities. Some also raised the possibility that pre-service teachers who exhibit negative views may re-evaluate and reflect on their learning in a teaching situation and under the influence of older, more experienced teachers.

**Time constraints.** The problem of insufficient time was mentioned in both institutions, with participants commenting that the subject needed to be longer because of the complexity of the subject matter. As one participant said, “you can’t cover such a big topic in such a short time”. Due to the time factor, participants felt that it was not possible to cover sufficient content. Time constraints were identified more in institution A (20 per cent compared with 8.3 per cent in institution B). This was not surprising as the duration of the subject in institution B is 13 weeks, compared with only ten weeks in institution A. The director in institution A and some pre-service teachers felt that there was a lot to learn in the core subject and, accordingly, it needed be taught over two semesters. Participants felt that the core subject was not long enough, and was a bit rushed, leaving little time to cover all that needed to be learnt.
**Cross-case Analysis of Commitment, Knowledge and Skills, Ability to Understand and Teach Aboriginal Studies**

Pre-service teachers, particularly those in their final year of study, were asked to comment on their commitment, knowledge and skills, and ability to understand and teach Aboriginal Studies. Although the substantial responses are from final year students, they are interspersed with comments from pre-service teacher interview participants.

**Results of Cross-case Analysis: Commitment – Pre-service Teachers**

Table 8.4.

Summary of Results of Cross-Case Analysis of Final Year Students’ Commitment to Teach Aboriginal Studies

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Response rate themes</th>
<th>Head of School</th>
<th>Directors</th>
<th>Teacher Educators</th>
<th>First/Second Yr Pre-service Teachers</th>
<th>Final Yr Pre-Service Teachers in percentages</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Institution</td>
<td>A</td>
<td>B</td>
<td>A</td>
<td>B</td>
<td>A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Deep commitment to teaching Aboriginal Studies</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strengthened commitment</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>have always been committed</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Feel ill-equipped</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dissuaded from teaching Aboriginal Studies</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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Final year participants were asked to what extent, and in what ways, completing a core Aboriginal Studies subject impacted on their commitment to teaching Aboriginal Studies. A large percentage (50.7 per cent in institution A and 81 per cent in institution B) commented that after completing the core subject, they were now deeply committed to teaching Aboriginal Studies: “I am committed to teach Aboriginal Studies, I have a great empathy and respect for the rightful owners of Australia”, said B31. Betty in institution A stated that she “had always had a commitment to Aboriginal Studies”.

Other participants (13.8 per cent in A and 12.9 per cent in B) noted that the subject had enhanced their commitment as they now felt far more confident and prepared to teach Aboriginal Studies and Aboriginal students. As B10 said, “I now have a stronger commitment to teaching Aboriginal Studies”. These sentiments are captured by this remark from a participant in B who said “I have more knowledge and respect for Aboriginal culture and am more confident to teach Aboriginal students and Aboriginal Studies”.

In institution A, 26.1 per cent of participants compared with 6.4 per cent in institution B felt ill-equipped to teach Aboriginal Studies. Some participants were critical of the core subject for not teaching sufficient pedagogical skills, as encapsulated in the comment by A43: “I think we needed to have less talk about Aboriginal issues and more about how we can use these things in the class”. Others felt unsure about how to teach it.

A small percentage of final year teachers in institution A identified that the core subject had impacted on them negatively, dissuading them from teaching Aboriginal Studies. Of concern is a comment by one pre-service teacher who said she had been dissuaded from teaching Aboriginal children because “Aboriginal children require more privileges and more attention than other students”. It is obvious that this particular participant did not grasp the historical factors which have lead to Aboriginal students’ disengagement for the schooling system. It is also of concern that there are many non-Aboriginal disadvantaged students who also need extra attention. It can only be hoped that with strong support from experienced teachers that this pre-service teacher and
those dissuaded from teaching Aboriginal Studies take a more professional stance and implement the NSW DET guidelines which require them to teach Aboriginal Studies to all students in their classroom.

**Results of Cross-case Analysis: Knowledge and Skills**

**Table 8.5.**

Summary of Results of Cross-Case Analysis of Final Year Students’, Knowledge and Skills to Teach Aboriginal Studies

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Response rate themes</th>
<th>Head of School</th>
<th>Directors</th>
<th>Teacher Educators</th>
<th>First/Second Yr Pre-service Teachers</th>
<th>Final Yr Pre-Service Teachers in percentages</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Institution</td>
<td>A B</td>
<td>A B</td>
<td>A B</td>
<td>A B</td>
<td>A B</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gave knowledge and skills to teach Aboriginal Studies</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>34 50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Only built knowledge to teach not skills</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>42.5 48.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not confident</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>17 1.6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Participants were asked to what extent, and in what ways completing a core Aboriginal Studies subject impacted on their **knowledge and skills** to teach Aboriginal Studies in a school. There was an equal division between those who thought that they had only acquired knowledge and not skills and those who believed they had acquired both the knowledge and the skills to teach Aboriginal studies. Proportionally, 34 per cent in institution A and 50 per cent in institution B acknowledged that they had gained both knowledge and skills, and had become aware of what is required to teach Aboriginal Studies. As a participant in A said, he went from “practically no knowledge to having a greater understanding of ways to include Aboriginal perspectives”. Others
noted the “gaping hole” in their knowledge and recognised they would be seeking to study further in the area, while still others said they had gained the knowledge and skills to access resources, where to look for reliable information, and who to contact for support. A participant in (A) stated that “This course did provide us with excellent opportunities to experience using the resources. The knowledge and skills that I have gained was amazing”.

While 42.5 per cent of participants in institution A and 48.3 per cent in institution B agreed that they had learnt about history and culture, they mentioned that the subject had not taught them to incorporate Aboriginal perspectives into the curriculum. One participant noted that the core subject “wasn’t dealing with teaching but with knowledge”. It was recognised that the core subject was not designed to teach skills but to teach about Aboriginal history and culture, which the greater proportion of pre-service teachers conceded they did not know. Interestingly, a participant in B acknowledged that “my knowledge and skills need more reinforcement and lesson plans/units of work”. It was of concern that other subjects in the degree do not include Aboriginal Studies within the curriculum. That Aboriginal perspectives are not being reinforced across the degree, one could argue, devalues the mandatory status of Aboriginal perspectives across the curriculum.

Interestingly, there was quite a differentiation in those who did not feel confident with 17 per cent in A and a much smaller percentage 1.6 per cent of participants in Institution B said they did not feel confident about teaching Aboriginal Studies. As a participant in B explained, “Has given me some awareness of the issues but not the knowledge of skills”.

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Results of Cross-case Analysis: Ability to Understand and Teach Aboriginal Studies

Table 8.6.

Summary of Results of Cross-Case Analysis of Final Year Students’, Ability to Understand and Teach Aboriginal Studies

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Response rate themes</th>
<th>Head of School</th>
<th>Directors</th>
<th>Teacher Educators</th>
<th>First/Second Yr Pre-service Teachers</th>
<th>Final Yr Pre-Service Teachers in percentages</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Institution</td>
<td>A</td>
<td>B</td>
<td>A</td>
<td>B</td>
<td>A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Increased ability and understanding to teach</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not confident or not sure</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Participants were asked to what extent, and in what ways, completing a core Aboriginal Studies subject had impacted on their ability to understand and teach Aboriginal Studies in a school. Although there were mixed messages, approximately 80 per cent of the participants from both institutions felt that the core subject had increased their ability and understanding to teach, with participants conceding that they needed further training in the area. One pre-service teacher in B summed up the learning outcome of completing the core subject when she stated “It has impressed upon me the importance of integrating Aboriginal Studies in a real and meaningful way across all aspects of my program, rather than in a tokenistic ‘Aboriginal Day’ way”

A small percentage (15 per cent in institution A and 20 per cent in institution B) did not feel confident about their ability to teach Aboriginal Studies or incorporate Aboriginal perspectives. As a participant in B explained, “it has impacted on my knowledge and understanding of the topic, however it is not sufficient enough, as I
don’t know enough” while B noted “I gained respect and greater insights into
Aboriginal culture. But could not teach it”.

Results of Cross-case Analysis: Key Understandings of Important Aspects of the Core
Aboriginal Studies Subject

Multiple stakeholders were asked what they thought were the three main factors
that make a good core Aboriginal Studies subject. The aim was to understand how the
core subject impacted on pre-service teachers’ self-concept, attitudes, commitment,
knowledge and skills and ability to understand and teach Aboriginal Studies (see Table
8.8).
Table 8.7.

Summary of Results of Cross-Case Analysis of Aspects of the Core Aboriginal Studies Subject

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Response rate themes</th>
<th>Head of School</th>
<th>Directors</th>
<th>Teacher Educators</th>
<th>First/Second Yr Pre-service Teachers</th>
<th>Final Yr Pre-Service Teachers in percentages</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Institution</td>
<td>A</td>
<td>B</td>
<td>A</td>
<td>B</td>
<td>A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aboriginal history and culture</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teaching Aboriginal children</td>
<td></td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teaching Aboriginal Studies and perspectives</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Resources</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aboriginal teacher educators</td>
<td></td>
<td>✓</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Practicum</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Aboriginal history and culture.** As one would expect, all of the participants interviewed and 84.3 per cent of pre-service teachers in institution A and 80 per cent in B identified that they had learnt Aboriginal history and culture. Pre-service teachers expressed the opinion that they had learnt that they needed to teach the “true history of Australia” and also identified that they were taught Aboriginal Studies so that they could teach it well. Pre-service teachers identified that the core subject had touched on numerous topics which are shown in Table 8.2.1. In learning Aboriginal history and culture, one participant, Betty in institution A, noted that the subject had given her more understanding and sensitivity to issues surrounding colonisation and the Stolen
Generation. Betty, like many other participants, realised the relevance of the past to the situation that Aboriginal people confront today. For example, a participant noted that she had learnt “the residual impact that issues surrounding the Stolen Generation have, and will continue to have on students and their families in relation to their perceptions to school. Some participants mentioned certain aspects of the core subject that had impacted on their understanding, such as “How the Aboriginal people were not allowed into schools and how they had no right to vote until the late 1960’s”, “the hurt we have caused the culture”, some pre-service teachers expressed that they found this situation deplorable.

An important course component identified by academic participants in institution B covered what they believed pre-service teachers needed to learn and how the subject needed to be taught. The director in B thought that the core subject was not just about giving pre-service teachers the knowledge and skills to teach Aboriginal Studies but also to impart a sense of empathy and the ability to critically reflect about power relationships and society. The HOS in B said that the content of the subject needed to include some history, cultural studies, curriculum studies, and some pedagogical studies. The teacher educator B expressed the view that the subject needed to incorporate Aboriginal perspectives into the curriculum and to recognise the identity of Aboriginal children within the classroom. The teacher educator B believed the subject also needed to include an understanding of different pedagogies such as “the understandings of communication, questioning, socialising, peer orientation, experiential learning and kinaesthetic learning”. The teacher educator believed strongly that the subject needed to cover Aboriginal perspectives across the curriculum as it validated the place of Aboriginal people in society and diminishes the “us and them” dichotomy. “It breaks down the need to fight for who you are,” said the teacher educator. The HOS in B went further and expressed the view that the subject needed to allow pre-service teachers to explore some of their own experiences and assumptions. She thought that first there needed to be an analysis and understanding from an Aboriginal perspective. At the end of their studies, pre-service teachers might be able to view issues from a broader angle: “if I think about it from that perspective, I see it differently”. Of particular concern to the HOS in B was also that the university was situated close to a large urban Aboriginal population and that many of the pre-service
teachers would graduate and teach in the local area. This meant that it was extremely important that teachers should be knowledgeable of Aboriginal people. In terms of changing attitudes, it is clear from the comments made by the pre-service teachers about the three most important aspects that had impacted on their learning that the core subject had definitely broadened their knowledge of Australian history from an Aboriginal perspective.

**Aboriginal Students.** Teaching Aboriginal Students was a major topic specifically discussed by pre-service teachers in the interviews. This topic was listed by 28.8 per cent of participants in institution A and 27.1 per cent in institution B. Learning about and understanding different children’s backgrounds was an important element of the subject, along with learning different teaching technique. A participant in B mentioned “the importance of Aboriginal education for all children”. Nelly in institution A recognised that “the first point is very important not to stereotype children, any Indigenous or any other culture that’s the main factor”. Another element was learning about Aboriginal education. Vicki (B), for example, expressed shock at the high school dropout rate of Aboriginal children and another participant said “I was surprised at how prolific otitis media was in Aboriginal children, and learnt how to develop strategies to help these children in the classroom”. Importantly, as a participant in B stated, the three most important factors which had impacted on her were:

Learning about Aboriginal culture and finding out that some things done in the everyday classroom could be offensive to an Aboriginal child. Teaching the realities rather than stereotypes of the past. Because you never know when an Aboriginal child is in your class and the culture is an integral part of Australian history, it is your responsibility as a teacher to present the facts fairly.

Hence, for close to 30 per cent of pre-service teacher the main factors impacting on their learning in the Aboriginal Studies subject were a greater appreciation and knowledge for them about Aboriginal children and strategies to teach them.
Incorporating Aboriginal perspectives. Across the two institutions, 13.4 per cent of pre-service teachers interviewed in institution A and 11.8 per cent in institution B specifically commented on the need to incorporate Aboriginal perspectives across the curriculum. These pre-service teachers discussed the need to incorporate Aboriginal Studies across the curriculum and recognised that it does not have to be a discrete subject. This was noted by A07, who said “Aboriginal Studies can be integrated across the curriculum areas effectively. It does not have to be a discrete subject area”.

Resources. The second important factor identified by the academic staff was to provide pre-service teachers with a broad range of resources, both human and material, linking resources and community. This enables pre-service teachers to feel confident in establishing connections with Aboriginal organisations, Aboriginal workers in the school as well as staff from the Aboriginal Directorate within the NSW Department of Education and Training and members of the local Aboriginal Education Consultative Group. The teacher educator in A believed that introducing pre-service teachers to the Aboriginal community and workers gave pre-service teachers more confidence, providing them with substantial human resources to contact once they are in a school setting. Resources was also a major factor identified by pre-service teachers, who noted the importance of learning about appropriate resources and learning that there are Aboriginal staff within the Department and community organisations who can assist them when teaching. In addition, a small percentage \((n=2)\) of pre-service teachers in institution B believed that the subject would benefit by including field excursions.

Aboriginal teacher educators. For the director in institution A, the main factor which makes for a good Aboriginal Studies subject is the quality of the Aboriginal staff who are employed to teach it. He believed that Aboriginal people teaching the subject gave authenticity to the subject area. Among the main attributes the teacher educator should have, he mentioned “persons who are informed, positive, and sensitive to others”. He was concerned that if the teacher educator did not possess these attributes and was someone who was “off-putting… excessively ideological or has a mission manager view”, the core subject could be counterproductive. The authenticity of Aboriginal people teaching the subject was also raised by the teacher educator in A, who although an Aboriginal person himself, believed that it was important to bring
Aboriginal guest speakers into the lessons on specific topics, e.g. an Aboriginal person from the Stolen Generation. The importance and authenticity of Aboriginal people was confirmed by a pre-service teacher in A who said that she enjoyed “hearing personal stories”, and participants in B who mentioned the importance of the teacher educator and his approachable manner.

**Practicum.** The practicum experiences were identified as an important learning aspect by three interviewees in B, which had exposed some participants to Aboriginal children and Aboriginal workers in the schools. One participant, Linda in institution B, was concerned that that there was no requirement in the practicum component of the degree for pre-service teachers to incorporate Aboriginal perspectives in their lesson plans, nor were their practicum supervisors looking at Aboriginal perspectives as a requirement to fulfil the practicum component. This omission by supervising educators who do not assess Aboriginal perspectives as an examinable component within the practicum devalues Aboriginal Studies both as an important ingredient within the curriculum of primary teacher education course in the eyes of the pre-service teachers and implies that implementation of Aboriginal perspectives across KLAs in the primary curriculum may be problematic.

**Further aspects.** This research question asked participants to comment on the three main factors which had affected pre-service teachers personally. Pre-service teachers identified several noteworthy aspects of the subject. For one pre-service teacher in institution A, forming friendships with Aboriginal peers was cited as an important factor. She mentioned that it allowed her to talk about Aboriginal culture in an “everyday sort of context”. The importance of Aboriginal family and friends was also identified by pre-service teachers in their final year with 18.8 per cent in A and 41.5 per cent in B identifying they had Aboriginal family and friends in the background information provided, with one of the pre-service teachers in B identifying that she was of Aboriginal decent (see chapter 5). Others identified understanding of difference as an important aspect, for example “being aware of difference and celebrating it”, and understanding that you should “never regurgitate what you hear without looking into it”. Another comment was that the “struggle for equity is a battle worth fighting”.

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Research question 3.1 and 4.1: Identify from the Perceptions of Multiple Stakeholders the Strengths and Limitations of the Current Core Aboriginal Studies Subject

To further elucidate the experiences, challenges, and incentives of those involved in designing, delivering, and experiencing a core Aboriginal Studies subject, participants were asked to comment on the strengths and limitations of the current core subject.

Results of Cross-case Analysis: Strengths of the Core Subject

Table 8.8.

Summary of Results of Cross-Case Analysis of Multiple Stakeholder Perceptions of the Strengths of the Core Aboriginal Studies Subject

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Response rate themes</th>
<th>Head of School</th>
<th>Directors</th>
<th>Teacher Educators</th>
<th>First/Second Yr Pre-service Teachers</th>
<th>Final Yr Pre-Service Teachers in percentages</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Aboriginal history and culture</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>90 78.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Positive account related to teaching style</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>3 4</td>
<td>24 17.3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Aboriginal Studies and culture. Learning the history of Aboriginal Australia from an Aboriginal perspective was identified as a strength by 90 per cent of participants in A and 78.2 per cent of the final year pre-service teachers in institution B who answered this question. This was supported by comment by Cathie, a pre-service
teacher in B. who acknowledged that she had been ignorant of what had happened to Aboriginal people: “the strength lies in the history because I had no idea. I wasn’t even taught when I was at school.” A number of pre-service teachers also commented that they had enjoyed the core subject. As a participant in B, succinctly put it, “I’ve learnt a lot and it’s changed my attitude completely”.

For the director in institution A, that the core subject is compulsory was a strength. This was seconded by a pre-service teacher who agreed that ‘sadly’ if it were not compulsory, many pre-service teachers would choose not to take it. For the teacher educator in A, the strength of the subject was a pedagogical one, “raising awareness that there are different ways of learning – different ways of teaching”. The teacher educator in B was unapologetic about the confronting nature of the content of the core subject, regarding it as inevitable that some pre-service teachers would feel confronted by circumstances that they had previously been unaware of. He believed that the core subject he taught was strongly community based, and blatantly political. He described the content he taught as black politics, essential in his view for understanding the learning needs of Aboriginal children. He recognised that approximately 10 to 15 per cent of pre-service teachers held outmoded views about Aboriginal education, views which were common 30 to 50 years ago. He also recognised that some pre-service teachers will continue to hold racist attitudes but thought that the greater proportion of pre-service teachers coming out into the workforce would censure those people. He stated: “I do think there are positives all the way across the board, even with the ones we can’t shift”. Finally, pre-service final year teachers in institution B listed a range of subject matter that they thought was a strength in the course content (see Table 7.10).

Teaching staff. In institution B the HOS noted that while she was not involved in the day-to-day running of the core subject, for her a strength was that the core subject was predominantly taught by Aboriginal staff. Having Aboriginal teacher educators and tutors was also mentioned by three pre-service teachers and 24 per cent of final year participants in institution A and by four pre-service teachers and 17.3 per cent of final year participants in B. For example, a participant in A stated that “tutors and lecturers had a very friendly manner”. This was also confirmed by another participant in A, who acknowledged that “having their experiences… from the sources was important”
Participants agreed that having Aboriginal staff who were approachable was a significant strength, as a participant in B reiterated. Vicki thought it was extremely important to have teacher educators who you can talk to and debate the issues. She went on to mention that this is a rare quality as many teacher educators in other subjects were not approachable or too busy to talk with pre-service teachers. Finally, a small number of pre-service teachers highlighted the readings and the assignments as strengths, while another couple in B identified of good texts, specifically *Teaching the Teachers*. 
### Results of Cross-case Analysis: Limitations of the core subjects

**Table 8.9.**

Summary of Results of Cross-Case Analysis of Multiple Stakeholder Perceptions of the Limitations of the Core Aboriginal Studies Subject

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Response Rate Themes</th>
<th>Head of School</th>
<th>Directors</th>
<th>Teacher Educators</th>
<th>First/Second Yr Pre-service Teachers</th>
<th>Final Yr Pre-Service Teachers in percentages</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Institution</td>
<td>A</td>
<td>B</td>
<td>A</td>
<td>B</td>
<td>A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Need: more practical skills</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lack of Aboriginal perspectives in other subjects in the degree</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Negativity to Teaching style</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>27.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hostility of some pre-service teachers</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Subject not long enough</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>9.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Class Presentation</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Need for more Practical skills.** Of the pre-service teachers who answered this question, one interviewee and 51.6 per cent or participants in institution A and 78.2 per cent in Institution B felt that a major limitation was that the subject did not include
enough practical skills to use in the classroom. For example, a participant in A stated “it would be nice to do some that we’ll be teaching the children”. Another in B said “not enough info or suggestions for how we as educators could achieve change or make a difference”. Hence, a significant limitation of the core subject was seen to be the lack of hands-on teaching resources and lesson plans to teach Aboriginal studies in the classroom. At the same time, as the participant in institution B noted, the core subject was not designed to teach skills but rather it was intended as a means of teaching pre-service teachers about Aboriginal history and culture so that “they are better able to teach the Aboriginal Studies and Aboriginal children”. In contrast to pre-service teachers’ complaints of lack of skills taught in the core subject, the lack of Aboriginal perspectives in other subjects of the degree was also identified as a major limitation of the entire degree by one interviewee in each institution and 6.3 per cent of final year teachers in B. As a participant in B stated “while it provided a good basis, other subjects failed to build on the information provided”. Which was supported by another participant in B who said “there should be more integration with other subjects that include Aboriginal perspective (education)”. This lack of synergy with other subjects within the degree was also identified by both the director and the HOS in (B). The HOS expanded on this concern by explaining that she needed to further develop a team of teacher educators, with some teaching in other subjects so that pre-service teachers could experience Aboriginal perspectives in other areas. Lack of qualified Aboriginal teacher educators with knowledge to teach Aboriginal perspectives was also a concern of the director and the teacher educator in B. Again, the teacher educator in B mentioned that a limitation was that because the core subject was not imbedded in the Aboriginal Education unit, it was dependent on the goodwill of the School of Education. In addition, the HOS in B commented that the placement of the core subject in the first year of the degree was a limitation as the teacher educators in the first year of the degree are dealing with academic literacy problems (helping students read and write in an academic context). She mentioned that all academics teaching first year subjects had to contend with this situation, but it was exacerbated when trying to teach such a confronting subject. The director in A also felt that there needed to be some external assessment of the core subject and that there needed to be a closer alignment with schools and practicum situations.
Teaching style. The teaching style of the teacher educator and tutors was identified as a limitation by 27.4 per cent of final year students in A and 25.5 per cent in B. A couple of pre-service teachers in B mentioned that the lectures were not well organised and there was not enough teacher-guided learning in the tutorials. Two pre-service teachers commented that it would have been good to have a tutor who was interested in sharing Aboriginal culture, rather than as one mentioned, someone “who was clearly attending the campus for the pay cheque”. The lack of interaction from this particular tutor was a common complaint by pre-service teachers in institution B. Again, some pre-service teachers mentioned being made to feel guilty by the teaching staff, making statements such as “Feeling alienated in lectures” and “the lecturer I had was very biased and I think it would have been beneficial to have someone neutral that didn’t make everything really personal”.

Hostility. The hostility of some of the pre-service teachers was mentioned as a limitation. One final year teacher, in A, observed that “Obviously some students were not enjoying the subject or finding it relevant. Some opportunity for feedback during the course may have helped with this.” One pre-service teacher interviewee in A and three in B spoke at length about their concern about the open hostility to the core subject. In terms of feedback, participants thought that going through an outline of the subject more clearly in the first lesson might assist pre-service teachers to realise that the subject would cover history and culture so that they could understand the context of the core subject. This was contested by another, however, who argued that others should read through the course outlines so that they know what they are learning and why. The negativity of pre-service teachers was also commented on by several participants, who thought that other students were negative and felt that the subject concentrated on Aboriginal issues to the detriment of other cultures. One participant spoke at length about the cost she was personally paying to be in the lesson and was concerned about having her learning interrupted by others’ disruptive behaviour. Finally, the following comment from a participant in B highlights the shift which can be achieved by pre-service teachers undertaking the core subject. She had been part of a group of pre-service teachers who often complained about how they were being made to feel “bad” or guilty but she made this comment: “I think that’s just our guilt!”.
**Time constraints.** For the director and teacher educator in A, time was an issue. The teacher educator thought the length of the subject was too short, running for only ten weeks. The director also mentioned time and thought that too much was attempted in too short a time. He thought that the subject would be better taught over two semesters. He proposed a subject on Aboriginal history, followed by a subject on perspectives and integration into the curriculum. Final year pre-service teachers (9.6 per cent in A and 23.4 per cent in B) agreed that the core subject was “too short”. The following statements highlight some of their concerns, “it was only 1 subject across a four year degree”, and “the subject should have run over 2 semesters”. Finally, “As with most other uni subjects there is little time to get through everything”.

**Presentations.** Finally, one pre-service teacher, in A, identified that there was too much time wasted on the icon presentations. She mentioned that some pre-service teachers where very passionate about their subject area so there was little time within the tutorial for class discussion. Presentations were also a concern for Vicki in B who questioned the validity of some of the presentations and noted that she knew that some of the pre-service teachers had prepared their presentations the night before.

**Summary**

This chapter has presented a cross-case analysis of multiple stakeholders’ perceptions of the motives, values, and attitudes to the introduction and continued implementation of the core Aboriginal Studies subject in the two institutions in this study. Each of the themes were compared to identify the institutional factors, course characteristics, and personal experiences that multiple stakeholders perceived as impacting positively and negatively on pre-service teachers’ attitudes, commitment, knowledge and skills, ability and understanding to teach Aboriginal Studies and Aboriginal students. The key themes identified in this chapter will be further analysed in Chapter 9, along with the Discussion and Implications for Theory Research and Practice.
CHAPTER 9

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

ABORIGINAL STUDIES: WHAT WORKS

Introduction

This chapter brings together a discussion of key themes from the previous chapters in order to illuminate the experiences, challenges, and incentives from multiple perspectives of those involved in designing, delivering, and experiencing a core Aboriginal Studies subject. The chapter provides a discussion to identify areas of congruence or dissonance of the findings from interviews with: Heads of School, Directors of Aboriginal Education units, teacher educators, pre-service teachers either in their first or second year of study, and comments by final year pre-service teachers. The discussion is divided under three headings. The first, titled Inspiring the Future, examines the place of the NSW Aboriginal education policy and its implications for the teaching profession. The second section, Inspiration and Change, reports on the introduction and ongoing implementation of core Aboriginal Studies subjects in the institutions with primary teacher education courses in this study. The third section, titled Inspiring Commitment in Teachers, further elucidates the initial experiences of learning Aboriginal Studies and learner self-concept of pre-service teachers who have undertaken a core Aboriginal Studies subject. Next the chapter gives an overview of pre-service teachers’ self-concept. Finally, the chapter considers the strengths and limitations of the present investigation, and outlines the significance of the findings for theory, research, and practice.
Inspiring the Future

The New South Wales (NSW) Aboriginal education policy as shown in Chapter 2 was formulated in 1982 and became mandatory in 1987. This policy was developed by the NSW Department of Education and Training (NSW DET) in collaboration with the NSW Aboriginal Education Consultative Group (AECG). The AECG is the peak Aboriginal group in NSW, which was founded in 1978 to address the educational disadvantage of Aboriginal children in the NSW education system. Over the years the policy has been revised (see for example Aboriginal Education Policy [AEP] NSW DET, 1982; 1996 and NSW DET Aboriginal Education and Training Policy [AETP], 2008; 2009) but the basic premise has stayed the same: to improve the educational outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students and to teach all students about Aboriginal history and culture. The latest revision of the AEP recognises that over the life of the policy (1982 to present), there has been resistance in some quarters to its implementation (Keech, 2010). The Aboriginal Education and Training Policy: An Introductory Guide (NSW DET, 2009) therefore focuses on Aboriginal education and training as core business for all Department staff via three guiding elements. These are: Relationships; Engagement, and Ongoing learning (p. 3). The overarching premise to these three elements recognises that all staff within the Department are charged with undertaking training to ensure that Aboriginal education is seen as core business. It also affirms the Department’s commitment to improving educational outcomes for Aboriginal students; increasing the knowledge and understanding for all departmental staff; and strengthening the collaboration between the education community and the Aboriginal community (p. 5). Therefore the goal of the AETP in NSW is to ensure “Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students will match or better the outcomes of the broader student population” (p. 6), which will be achieved through building cultural competence in Aboriginal history and cultures for all students and Departmental staff.

As noted above, teaching Aboriginal Studies/perspectives to all students and teaching Aboriginal students effectively has been a major goal of the NSW DET for the past 29 years. Teachers’ teaching their pupils about Aboriginal people, their history, culture and values is believed to have many positive outcomes. For Aboriginal students the goal of recognising their identity and respecting their diverse learning needs is
anticipated to result in enhancing self-esteem and self-efficacy, and facilitating a more positive self-concept (Mellor and Corrigan, 2004; also see Phillip & Lampert, 2005; Craven 1999a; Craven 1999b). Positive learning outcomes can be achieved for Aboriginal children if schools and teachers develop culturally inclusive curriculum in which Aboriginal children’s cultural identity is valued. By teaching Australian history which includes Aboriginal history teachers are providing all Australian students with knowledge that includes a broader understanding of Australia’s rich cultural heritage which, in turn, increases students’ understanding of social justice, fosters greater understanding of Aboriginal people and breaks down prejudices which are propagated through the omission of Aboriginal people and their history in the curriculum. In addition, by teaching Aboriginal Studies/perspectives, teachers can support the process of reconciliation between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal Australians. These learning outcomes are also promoted and supported by the National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Policy (1989).

The critical question, then, is “How we ensure that teachers are teaching Aboriginal Studies to all students effectively, be it in the form of a discrete unit or through inclusion of Aboriginal perspectives across the curriculum?” A further question is “What tools do teacher’s need to meet the NSW and national Aboriginal education policy objectives?” If we wish to inspire a more socially just future for our children and promote reconciliation, we need teachers in NSW classrooms who have a strong professional Aboriginal Studies teaching self-concept, and who are committed because they have acquired the knowledge, skills, ability, and understandings to teach Aboriginal Studies effectively. Teaching pre-service teachers a core Aboriginal Studies subject in their primary teacher education courses has been proffered as an effective educational tool to achieve this goal (Keech 2010; Phillip & Lampert, 2005; Craven, Halse, Marsh, Mooney & Wilson-Miller, 2005a; 2005b; 2005c; also see Chapter 2 for discussion on Calls for Teaching Teachers Aboriginal Studies).

In contrast to the strong policy initiatives of NSW DET, some institutions charged with the responsibility for the professional development of pre-service teachers in primary teacher education in NSW have not heeded the call for the introduction of a core Aboriginal Studies subject as part of the teaching degree. Teachers need adequate
training so that they can introduce effective Aboriginal Studies in a school setting and it is important that institutions begin to support reconciliation and the professional development of pre-service teachers to achieve this goal. The following discussion gives an in-depth analysis of core Aboriginal Studies subject from the perceptions of Heads of School, Directors of Aboriginal Education units, teacher educators, pre-service teachers either in their first or second year of study, and final year pre-service teachers in two institutions in NSW so that other institutions can learn from these experiences, and they too, can inspire future generations.

**Inspiration and Change**

Results based on data from the cross-case analysis demonstrate that academic participants unanimously agreed that the core Aboriginal Studies subject was an essential part of the pre-service primary teacher education program. The introduction and ongoing implementation of a core Aboriginal Studies subject is dependent on the value that academic staff place on Aboriginal education, a strong Aboriginal Education unit which is respected and valued by the institution, and the institution’s connectedness to and engagement with Aboriginal community. These findings are consistent with those found in Craven, Halse, Marsh, Mooney, and Wilson-Miller, (2005a; 2005b). The results also indicate that the place of core Aboriginal Studies subjects continues to be fragile as it depends largely on motivated and committed individuals and a supportive Head of School.

Academic staff and many pre-service teachers espoused a strong personal and professional commitment to pre-service teacher education in Aboriginal Studies, and maintained that pre-service primary teacher education courses had a moral responsibility to teach Aboriginal Studies. In identifying the perceptions of academic staff and pre-service teachers, it is clear from the responses that learning Aboriginal history is a major component of the core subject which assists pre-service teachers to better understand Australia’s rich and diverse cultural heritage by learning about Aboriginal history, culture, and values. Through the core subject, pre-service teachers are also alerted to the learning needs of Aboriginal students, and some participants saw the Aboriginal Studies subject as an effective tool for combating racism. It was
acknowledged across the case studies that some pre-service teachers enter teacher education with strongly held negative views of Aboriginal people and that, for many, undertaking a compulsory core subject highlights the plight of Aboriginal people and breaks down stereotypes and misconceptions. These results suggest that institutions should implement a core Aboriginal Studies subject in order to give pre-service teachers a better understanding of Aboriginal history and culture, provide the tools to combat racism, and give pre-service teachers strategies to teach Aboriginal children. Ultimately, a core subject enables pre-service teachers to be better prepared to teach Aboriginal Studies and perspectives in school settings and become effective ‘change agents’ within the school system.

The results of the present investigation also identified concerns about the lack of Aboriginal perspectives being taught in other subjects in teacher education degrees. It was thought that some teacher educators teaching other subjects in the primary teacher education course were “stuck in their ways” and not interested in learning how to incorporate Aboriginal perspectives into their own subject. This suggests that some teacher educators teaching other subjects within the degree may be unable (or unwilling) to teach pre-service teachers how to incorporate Aboriginal perspectives. If other subjects within the degree do not incorporate Aboriginal perspectives, they are ignoring the mandatory nature of the subject matter as stipulated by the NSW DET (2009), (also see above and chapter 2). Moreover, if pre-service teachers do not receive a sense of the subject’s importance, Aboriginal Studies will not be seen as a core area within the primary teacher education course, a point noted by several pre-service teachers. These results suggest that primary teacher education courses need to review their content to ensure that all subjects within the degree incorporate and reinforce Aboriginal perspectives throughout the primary teacher education course. These results offer further support for the value of implementing a core Aboriginal Studies subject to ensure student teachers are more able to implement Aboriginal Studies/perspectives in the classroom. In addition, by including a core subject in the primary teacher education courses, institutions are fulfilling NSW DET requirements by building cultural competence in Aboriginal history and cultures for all NSW DET staff (AETP, NSW DET, 2009).
Inspiring Commitment in Teachers

The study found that there was a consistency across the institutions with the type of topics taught in the core subject focusing on: colonial and contemporary Aboriginal history and Aboriginal education; an understanding and appreciation of cultural difference; historical and contemporary advances in Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal relationships; teaching Aboriginal children; understanding of different learning styles including Aboriginal English; and incorporating Aboriginal perspectives across the KLAs. Because of the complexity of the subject topics in Aboriginal Studies and Aboriginal education, hence the core subject requires pre-service teachers to cover a wide and diverse content in one semester. This means that when in the degree the core subject is taught is an issue. Teaching the core subject in the first year of the degree when the pre-service teachers are also grappling with learning to read and write for academic purposes adds a degree of difficulty because of the complex nature of the issues under discussion. Due to the complexity of the subject matter, participants were also concerned about time constraints, with several participants suggesting that the core subject should be taught over two semesters, with the first semester subject dealing with Aboriginal history, culture and values, and the second semester teaching Aboriginal education focusing on pedagogical skills and how to teach Aboriginal children and Aboriginal Studies to all Australian students in the classroom. This suggestion would be ideal but in reality the primary teacher education curriculum is already stretched to fit all of the required subject matter over the length of the degree (Ramsey, 2000). It would be more appropriate and expedient to engage all teacher educators in a review of current curricula to ensure that Aboriginal perspectives is a common thread running through a primary education degree which supports and reinforces pre-service teachers’ learning outcomes from the core subject.

In the cross-case analysis, approximately 40 per cent of pre-service teachers identified learning Aboriginal education (how to teach) as important for teaching Aboriginal students. Acquisition of knowledge about a range of different learning styles (pedagogical skills), gaining an understanding of different children’s background, and gaining an awareness of not stereotyping children of any cultural background were found to be important learning facets within the core Aboriginal Studies subject (Halse
& Robinson, 1999; Craven & Rigney, 1999; Partington, 2003). The findings also suggest that for some pre-service teachers, undertaking the core Aboriginal Studies subject had made them aware of historical events that had affected Aboriginal students’ learning, and the diversity of cultural variation of Aboriginal students. Hence the core course instilled in pre-service teachers an understanding of cultural difference and provided them with pedagogical skills they could use when teaching. These findings also suggest that the core subject had increased pre-service teachers’ self-confidence in their perceived ability to effectively teach Aboriginal children.

Teaching Aboriginal perspectives across the curriculum has been identified as a key strategy in the advancement of reconciliation and Aboriginal students in order to achieve educational equity with the broader Australian community (NSW DET, Aboriginal Education Policy, 1996, 2008; 2009; Commonwealth Government, 1999, 2000, 2008; Craven, 1999; Craven, Marsh, & Wilson Miller, 2003). As Craven, Marsh, and Wilson-Miller (2003, p. 1) state, “without effective teacher training, Aboriginal perspectives and studies cannot be taught effectively to all Australian students”. Teaching Aboriginal Studies by incorporating Aboriginal perspectives across the curriculum was also identified by academic staff in this study as an important component of a core Aboriginal Studies subject. Pre-service teachers noted that due to the core subject they had learnt that Aboriginal perspectives could be incorporated into the KLAs. Among those pre-service teachers who commented that they had acquired the confidence to incorporate Aboriginal perspectives, many noted that they had also learnt that Aboriginal perspectives was more than just a picture on a wall or a one-off National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Day celebration. This is consistent with the ideals of the teacher educator in B who commented that as a result of undertaking a core subject, he believed that most pre-service teachers had come to understand that the integration of Aboriginal perspectives into the curriculum could result in breaking down the “us and them” concept between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people and building a more cohesive Australian society.

In contrast to those who had positive experiences in the core subject, a number of concerns were identified. Lack of teaching technique or pedagogical skills in how to teach Aboriginal Studies and incorporate Aboriginal perspectives across the KLAs was
of major concern for around 40 per cent of final year pre-service teachers in institution A and a smaller number in B (see Table 8.3). This lack of skills was again identified by final year pre-service teachers when asked to comment on their perceived commitment to teaching Aboriginal Studies (see Table 8.5) and their knowledge and skills to teach Aboriginal Studies (see Table 8.6). The final year pre-service teachers who answered these questions expressed the concern that they felt ill-prepared to teach Aboriginal Studies since the core subject had only taught knowledge and not skills. These finding are also consistent with those found by Craven et al. (2005a and 2005b). Participants commented that although the core subject had given them an understanding of Aboriginal history and culture, it had not given them the skills to translate this knowledge into practical application in the classroom.

There are a number of points to be gleaned from the comments from the pre-service teachers who did not feel that they were given enough hands-on class instruction on how to implement Aboriginal perspectives across the KLAs. The first point is that the core subject is only one subject in a four-year degree covering a diverse subject matter, which includes teaching Aboriginal history, culture, and values from an Aboriginal perspective as well as pedagogical skills. Furthermore, a large proportion of pre-service teacher identified that they were unfamiliar with the core Aboriginal Studies subject matter. Another point is whether or not it is the responsibility of lecturers of other subjects to ensure that Aboriginal perspectives are included to build upon the learning of the pre-service teachers in the core Aboriginal Studies subject and reinforce the mandatory nature of the subject matter. A final point is that quality teaching literature suggests that pre-service teachers often believe that they need skills over theory and knowledge. It is important to recognise that although a high percentage of student teachers commented that they needed more skills, the core subject had for many been their first in-depth study of the history and culture of Aboriginal people. Furthermore, by undertaking a core subject it made many pre-service teachers aware of their own lack of knowledge, a point many would not have known or acknowledged, had they not participated in the core Aboriginal Studies subject. These findings suggest that although some pre-service teachers believed that they need more hands-on skills to implement Aboriginal Studies in the classroom, participants also acknowledged that a lack of teaching skills is a common complaint across other subjects and is not confined
to Aboriginal Studies. It is likely that some pre-service teachers who lack confidence in teaching Aboriginal Studies at this stage of their career may feel more able once they are in the classroom.

There was a general consensus that if pre-service teachers were exposed to Aboriginal students and Aboriginal workers in their practicum, they acquired a deeper understanding of how to teach Aboriginal Studies and Aboriginal students. A few participants noted the benefits of working with experienced teachers who integrated Aboriginal Studies into their lessons. From the comments regarding working with experienced teachers in their practicum, pre-service teachers spoke about how they had been inspired by these teachers and felt more comfortable in their knowledge of how to incorporate Aboriginal perspectives across the curriculum. Conversely, pre-service teachers who did not have this exposure were also concerned that there was no modelling of Aboriginal perspectives in the practicum and that there was no requirement for them to include Aboriginal perspectives in the lesson plans in preparation for the practicum. In addition, supervisor’s in-charge of practicum did not espouse the inclusion of Aboriginal perspectives as a core component of practicum. These results offer important findings as they suggest that the practicum component in the primary teacher education degree may need to be revised to include more interaction with Aboriginal students and Aboriginal workers to build the self-confidence of pre-service teachers. It implies that the actual implementation of Aboriginal perspectives across KLAs in the primary classroom may be problematic. The findings also show that pre-service teachers would benefit from exposure to experienced and able teachers who model how to incorporate Aboriginal perspectives. Finally, supervisors need to be vigilant in examining the practicum component of the degree to ensure that the mandatory Aboriginal perspective is a core requirement.

The importance of class assignments which include Aboriginal perspectives was noted as a worthwhile exercise by some pre-service teachers in institution B. In this exercise, they were expected to write an entire unit of study which incorporated Aboriginal perspectives across the curriculum. This assignment was seen as useful in that it built confidence by providing a resource (a starting point) for the inclusion of Aboriginal perspectives once they enter the classroom. Positive views were also
expressed about the usefulness of the icon presentations assignment. In this assignment, pre-service teachers were asked to create an icon (art work) which represented their culture. This is a particularly useful assignment as it asks pre-service teachers to study and to share their own culture. Culture is something that we learn from our family and friends. It is something we practise and which expresses the way we think about ourselves (Phillips & Lampert, 2005, pp. 15–16; also see Said, 1993). Hence, by completing this assignment, pre-service teachers are exposed to the diversity of multiculturalism in Australia. In addition to writing essays there were presentations by pre-service teachers on specific topics not covered in the content of the lectures. Some noted that they had looked up the topics to be presented in the tutorials and were prepared and able to ask questions and engage in the weekly presentation of topics. For others, there was an issue of the authenticity of these presentations, with some pre-service teachers surmising that presentations were prepared the night before, causing them to question the accuracy of the information presented. Overall though, for enthusiastic pre-service teachers who were engaged with the subject matter, the assignments had been rewarding.

The authenticity of Aboriginal voices (Aboriginal teacher educators and guest lecturers) was considered to be of benefit to the learning outcomes by both academic staff and pre-service teachers. Across the cases (see Table 8.2; Table 8.8; Table 8.9), participants identified that they enjoyed learning about Aboriginal history, culture and values from the perspectives of Aboriginal educators. Others enjoyed the guest Aboriginal lecturers which they perceived gave authenticity to the subject matter/topic. There were also positive comments about non-Aboriginal teacher educators who taught Aboriginal Studies from a non–Aboriginal perspective. These findings provide insights into the dynamics and perceived benefits from the perceptions of pre-service teachers of having core courses delivered by both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal teacher educators.

Some pre-service teachers expressed negative views and believed that Aboriginal teaching staff had an adverse impact on their learning (see Table 8.3). Complaints ranged from the perception that pre-service teachers were treated as if they knew nothing or had no prior knowledge of Aboriginal issues and customs and
therefore felt belittled by the teacher educator, to those who felt bullied and made to feel guilty about past injustices, to negative comments on the disinterest of the tutor. Across institution B, which had the largest proportion of pre-service teachers who made negative comments about teacher educators, most of the comments concerned a particular tutor and his lack of input into the class. This was not isolated to institution B, however, as some pre-service teachers in A also noted their dissatisfaction with tutors. These results highlight the importance of employing tutors with specialised expertise in the content and topics covered in a core Aboriginal Studies subject. Having able teacher educators was also a key area covered by academic staff. They recognised the importance of teacher educators being sensitive and mindful of the confrontational nature of the subject matter and receptive to the needs of pre-service teachers. There was a concern that if teacher educators were not well informed, positive, and sensitive to pre-service teachers’ needs, the core subject could be counterproductive and cause hostility amongst some pre-service teachers.

It was also agreed by academic staff across both institutions and those identified in Craven et al. (2005a) that some pre-service teachers enter the primary teacher education course with deeply held negative views about and prejudices towards Aboriginal people. The core subject can be a confronting experience for these individuals. As demonstrated in chapter 2, many Australians have been nurtured on assumptions of Aboriginal people’s inferiority and representations portrayed in the media of an Aboriginal “problem”, of alcohol and drug abuse, and with little understanding of the causal effect of colonisation on Aboriginal people. Many accept the dominance of their culture unknowingly and without question, so are challenged when confronted with alternative stories of Australia’s Aboriginal history. As Phillips (2005, p. 17) states:

Indigenous mistreatment at the hands of past Australians upset the ideological inheritance which states that colonisation was a process beneficial for all Australians ... produce a quandary for those who wish to see themselves as a product of an untroubled past.
Hostility to the core subject can therefore be threatening for some pre-service teachers and pose a challenge to teacher educators. These findings are also consistent with the discussion of Gerrett-Magee (2006) and Radermacher (2006), which detail the implementation of an Aboriginal Studies unit in a university psychology degree from the viewpoint of an Aboriginal teacher educator and an international student (who has little knowledge of the historical relationship between Australian Aboriginal peoples and colonisation). These two authors engaged in a discourse of their observations of teaching and learning Aboriginal Studies and their observations on what it means to be ‘white’, and particularly noted non-Aboriginal students’ uneasiness at learning the truth about Australia’s Aboriginal history.

There was also concern expressed by other pre-service teachers about the lack of engagement and open hostility from some of their peers to the subject matter in the core subject. Some pre-service teachers suggested alternative approaches that may engage pre-service teachers who were openly hostile. Such suggestions included incorporating more structured lessons where the first lecture makes it clear that the core subject would initially address Aboriginal history and would subsequently cover pedagogical skills, although others felt that the less engaged pre-service teachers needed to read the course outline more carefully. Others talked about the passionate nature of the teacher educator who had inspired them but who, they thought, had dissuaded others from learning. Overall, the comments from pre-service teachers about others’ hostility were that these less engaged pre-service teachers were disruptive and affected the learning of others, a disappointment for those who were interested to learn more Aboriginal Studies. The findings also imply that not every graduate teacher is willing to teach Aboriginal Studies and Aboriginal students effectively, something which is of dire concern given the potential number of Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal students that graduates are likely to teach over the course of a career.

The findings emanating from the cross-case analysis also suggest that there will always be a proportion of pre-service teachers who, for one reason or another, hold racist attitudes towards Aboriginal people (see Said 1993; 1997; Phillips & Lampert, 2005; DePlevitz, 2007). This prejudice towards Aboriginal people could arise from views held by their family or peer influence. The overarching agreement across
academic staff participating in the present investigation is that despite the fact that the ten to fifteen per cent of pre-service teachers who do not engage with the course and continue to hold misconceptions and racist attitudes, there are proportionally more whose prejudices are challenged. The interview and survey data also confirmed this assumption as pre-service teachers acknowledged that they have a defining moment when they realise that their long-held misconceptions and prejudices towards Aboriginal people are unfounded. Several pre-service teachers openly stated that the subject had informed them of the truth about Australia’s history and that the core subject had changed their perceptions about Aboriginal people. This mind shift was also noted by Miller, Dunn, and Currell (2005, pp. 60–79), three practising teachers who had completed a core Aboriginal Subject in their degree, and who discussed the ways in which the subject matter had challenged their dominant views of Australian history. The results suggest that although there will be some pre-service teachers who continue to foster misconceptions and racist attitudes, there is overwhelming evidence that a significantly higher proportion of pre-service teachers grasp the significance of Aboriginal Studies and learn significantly more about Aboriginal history and culture and are therefore more likely to challenge and redress the prejudices held by those they come into contact with.

The negative comments indicate challenges for the teacher educators of the core subject as they try to engage these pre-service teachers in a positive way. It also suggests that teacher educators need to be sensitive. Obviously, some tutors are not. It is possible that some pre-service teachers may change their negative outlook when they begin teaching, although it is worrying that negative attitudes could be carried by pre-service teachers into the classroom and affect the way they approach teaching Aboriginal Studies and Aboriginal children throughout their teaching careers. Such views present a challenge for teaching institutions, the NSW Institution of Teachers, and Australian education systems such as the NSW Department of Education and Training.

From the results of the cross-case analysis, nearly all academic staff and pre-service teachers interviewed and approximately ten per cent of final year pre-service reiterated the importance of being taught about appropriate resources (see Table 8.2)
Learning about appropriate resources and gaining an understanding of inappropriate resources was raised, along with being given information about websites and other human resources both at the community level as well as from education authorities. Some pre-service teachers spoke about having a resource folder which they have compiled for when they start teaching. The book *Teaching Aboriginal Studies* edited by Craven (1999) was also identified as a helpful resource which went beyond Aboriginal Studies and was seen to be helpful in completing assignments related to developing engaged learning activities with other subject areas within the degree. These finding suggest that pre-service teachers need to be given a range of resources which give them the skills and confidence to know how and where to access resources once they are in schools.

Learning more about Aboriginal history, culture, and values was an important facet of undertaking the primary teacher education course identified by ten per cent of pre-service teachers across institution A where additional subjects in Aboriginal Studies were offered. The interviews and survey responses with these pre-service teachers who undertook further subjects noted that their commitment to learning more about Aboriginal issues. It appears that those pre-service teachers who were committed to teach Aboriginal Studies took the opportunity to take additional subjects while in the primary teacher education course and that this course was the impetus for deeper learning. It is also interesting to note that these particular participants’ comments across the themes were consistently positive about their commitment, knowledge, skills, and ability to understand and teach Aboriginal Studies.

Another incentive to teach Aboriginal Studies that emerged from the study was expressed by pre-service teachers who identified they had Aboriginal family and friends. Although there was only one Aboriginal participant in the study, others identified that their father or brother had married an Aboriginal person. These participants, along with those who identified that they had formed strong relationships with Aboriginal people, acknowledged that they had gained further insights into Aboriginal culture and Aboriginal history by discussing issues with family members and with friends in an everyday context (see Table 6.1 and Table 7.1). These findings
suggest that having Aboriginal family and friends can facilitate a stronger understanding of Aboriginal people and a commitment to teaching Aboriginal Studies.

**Self-Concept**

A positive self-concept is deemed to be a person’s perception of themselves which is influenced by their environment and reinforced by significant others. The way that an individual perceives themself is thought to influence the way that they will act (Shaveson et al., 1976). Self-concept is closely aligned with attribution theory, self-efficacy theory, and expectancy-value theory as a framework within self-concept and self-perceptions as a key indicator of academic achievement, motivation, and learning outcomes (Weiner, 1985; Bandura, 1986; Eccles & Wigfield, 2002; also see Chapter 3). It is clear that motivational theorists agree that enhancing outcomes has a positive correlation to self-concept which, in turn, is attributed to creating positive self identity, academic self-concepts, and academic resilience (Craven & Parente, 2003; Marsh & Craven, 2006; Huiit 2009). Undertaking a core Aboriginal Studies subject thus has two important cognitive outcomes whereby pre-service teachers acquire: (1) knowledge and understanding of Australia’s Aboriginal heritage which can facilitate engagement, achievement, and motivation to teach Aboriginal Studies; and (2) awareness of historical factors which impact on Aboriginal people and, in particular, the low achievement rates of Aboriginal children at school (e.g. Australian Government, Closing the Gap Report, 2011; Commonwealth of Australia, Closing the Gap Report, 2008; Report of the Review of Education, NSW AECG & NSW DET, 2004). This knowledge makes pre-service teachers more perceptive to the learning needs of Aboriginal students in their classrooms.

The results based on the interviews and survey data on pre-service teachers’ self-concepts show that many increased their self-concept in commitment, knowledge, skills, and ability to understand and teach Aboriginal Studies. The findings of this study suggest that for many pre-service teachers, the core subject had impacted positively on their self-concept and self-efficacy; it had increased their awareness of Aboriginal history and culture; given them knowledge in order to combat racism; provided them with an understanding of how to teach Aboriginal students; and developed an
appreciation of why they need to teach Aboriginal history to children in the their classroom.

**Strengths and Limitations of the Core Subject**

Across the two institutions the following strengths, which reiterate the findings above, were identified. A strength of the core subject was seen as its status as a compulsory subject which meant that all pre-service teachers were exposed to Aboriginal history and culture. Another strength identified were the strong collaborative arrangements between the Aboriginal Education Unit and the Faculty of Education. Participants agreed that the core subject raises pre-service teachers’ awareness of Aboriginal history, culture, and values. The challenging nature of the subject matter, which many pre-service teachers were not fully aware of before undertaking the subject, can be considered as a limitation. As the teacher educator in institution B indicated, learning about Australia’s Aboriginal history can be quite confronting, and he mentioned that pre-service teachers’ negative opinions “are expressed quite strongly in tutorials”.

Participants agreed that the core subject raises pre-service teachers’ appreciation of various pedagogical approaches in that they are taught that there are different ways of learning and teaching. A strength was seen to be that it is taught by experienced and knowledgeable Aboriginal lecturers and tutors, and that experienced non-Aboriginal staff bring another viewpoint and rationale for teaching Aboriginal Studies. Another positive outcome of completing the core subject was that pre-service teachers became more aware of the reasons for the existence of two discrete histories in this country – a colonial history and an Aboriginal history. This meant that many pre-service teachers felt more able to combat racism in Australian schools.

One of the main strengths identified by pre-service teachers across both institutions was the authenticity of Aboriginal teacher educators. As expressed in the sentiments of this participant from institution A, “having their experience… like from the source, that was very important”. A participant in institution B stated that “you have got to have people who really believe what they are talking about”. It is extremely
important from the perspective of the participants that the core subject be taught by experienced Aboriginal educators. Feeling safe to ask questions in class was also mentioned. Being able to speak openly and ask for clarification without feeling shamed “was a strength”. Other strengths were believed to be the research and presentation aspects of the assignments required for the subject.

The limitations of the core subject identified are consistent with those that were expressed throughout the discussion above. Hence, in institution B, a limitation identified in the core subject was that it was taught in the first year of the degree, which meant that the teacher educator was charged not only with teaching a confronting curriculum but also had to deal with teaching academic writing to beginning teaching pre-service teachers. Participants in both institutions felt that the core subject was too short and emphasised that there was a lack of Aboriginal perspectives in the subjects taught by other teacher educators across the degree. This meant that Aboriginal Studies and perspectives were not reinforced as an important area of study within the degree. Another limitation identified by pre-service teachers from both institutions was the amount of time spent on presentations. Some questioned the authenticity of the information presented. The teacher educator in institution B felt there was a lack of qualified Aboriginal academics within the institution. He was also concerned that because the core subject was not embedded in the Aboriginal Education Unit and taught by academics from within that Unit, the core subject was included in the degree subject to the goodwill of the School of Education. Finally, due to the confrontational nature of the core subject, a teacher educator in institution A felt that the subject would benefit by a research project which investigated the attitudinal outcomes for pre-service teachers.

The open hostility of some of the pre-service teachers to the core subject was seen as a limitation. It was surmised that some pre-service teachers found the subject matter confronting and internalised the confrontational aspect of the subject as blaming them for past injustices perpetrated against Aboriginal people. Some pre-service teachers questioned why Aboriginal Studies was a separate subject and not taught as part of Australian history or part of multicultural studies. Some pre-service teachers expressed the view that Aboriginal children needed too much ‘special treatment’. It appeared that many of these pre-service teachers just wanted to learn about teaching
Aboriginal Studies in the classroom and did not want to hear the history of what had happened to Aboriginal people in the past and how this affects the present. This of course is problematic as it fails to acknowledge the validity and the special place of Aboriginal people, history, and culture within mainstream Australia. The findings also imply that such pre-service teachers will not be professionally skilled as they will lack accurate knowledge about how to teach Aboriginal Studies or Aboriginal children effectively.

**Strengths and Limitations of the Present Investigation**

One of the main strengths of this study is that it employed in-depth interviews with Heads of School, directors of Aboriginal Education units, pre-service teachers in year one or two of their studies who had recently completed the core Aboriginal Studies subject, and comments from final year pre-service teachers in the form of an open-ended questionnaire. The comments by final year pre-service teachers offered support for and enriched and extended the findings of the in-depth interviews. This qualitative approach therefore allowed pre-service teachers to speak frankly about the core Aboriginal Studies subject, and their views were placed alongside those from Heads of Schools, directors of Aboriginal Education units, and teacher educator so that congruence or dissonance in themes across the groups could be identified. Triangulating the findings across multiple groups to compare and contrast findings provides a qualitative validation of the findings and allows the unique perspectives of individuals involved in the study to be revealed and their voices heard (Yin, 2003; Conrad & Serlin, 2006; Wiersma & Jurs, 2009).

Methodologically, this is one of the very few studies which has utilised a purely qualitative methodology to investigate the impact of a core Aboriginal Studies subject on pre-service teachers’ self-concepts. Self-perceptions of people are regarded by many (see Bong & Shaalvik, 2003; Saunter & Saunders, 2006; Pajares, 2007; and discussion in Chapter 3) as the most reliable and valid source of information for gathering data on self-concept. The challenge for the qualitative researcher, as Denzin and Lincoln (1998) advise, is making sense of the huge amount of data relating to the most significant themes presented. This was overcome by giving voice to the participants (see Chapters 6 and 7) and by providing a cross-case analysis of the themes which emerged (see
Chapter 8). The diversity of participants meant that different viewpoints on a series of related research questions were obtained. The interview findings are not only informative in their own right, but provide further insights when analysing the responses from final year pre-service teachers. Furthermore, the richness of data obtained from the interviews and the questionnaires provides an insight into this study not easily obtainable from a purely quantitative methodology.

The strength of this study was validated by use of in-depth interviews and open-ended questionnaires. While the interviews could be seen as biased, since participants may answer the questions in a more positive light in front of the researcher, this is counterbalanced by the questionnaires, which were anonymous and allowed the pre-service teachers to comment freely with no intervention from the researcher. Perhaps the most important strength of this study was the openness with which participants spoke to the researcher and the comprehensive answers written by the final year participants, and the multiple-stakeholders’ willingness to participate in this study. The results clearly suggest that core Aboriginal Studies subjects make a significant difference to pre-service teachers’ knowledge and understanding of Aboriginal history and culture from an Aboriginal perspective. Taken together, the responses from the multiple-stakeholders provide validity for the research findings.

Even though the strength of the qualitative data is well documented throughout the study, a potential limitation of this investigation could be seen to be that all of the data analysis is based on the self-perceptions of the multiple stakeholders. Therefore, it may be useful to employ other measures not reliant on self-perception in future research. It could also be argued that other constructs could have been used to evaluate the core Aboriginal Studies subjects. For example, to evaluate the effectiveness of the teacher educators and the content taught, the researcher could have gained access to the lectures and the tutorial sessions.

**Implications for Theory, Research, and Practice**

This investigation has the potential to inform further theory, research and practice in primary teacher education courses with core Aboriginal Studies subjects and
those who wish to implement such a subject. The results of the study indicate that this study has made a valuable contribution to advancing theory and understandings about the role of self-concept in qualitative evaluation of multiple stakeholder’s self-perception of core Aboriginal Studies subjects. The theory was useful as it provided the self-perceptions of the multiple stakeholders’ value in relationship to the inclusion of core Aboriginal Studies subject and showed that, from their perspective, core subjects are a valued part of the primary teacher education course. The theory employed in this study demonstrates that self-concept determinants are involved in pre-service teachers’ motivation to learn about Aboriginal history, and culture and the findings demonstrate that completing a core subject results in pre-service teachers having a higher self-concept in relation to their perceived ability to teach Aboriginal Studies and Aboriginal children in the future.

The study has the potential to inform further research and practice in understanding the dynamics of implementing and the impact of undertaking a core Aboriginal Studies subject in primary teacher education courses. The results of the study indicate that the outcomes of undertaking the core subjects are that these subjects: facilitate deeper learning and an appreciation of Aboriginal history, culture, and education; build self-confidence and commitment in pre-service teachers; and inspire some to learn more and become more involved. Gaining this appreciation, confidence, and commitment can also assist pre-service teachers to acquire the self-confidence to engage with the Aboriginal community. Furthermore, it was shown that for pre-service teachers who have grown up with latent prejudices and misinformation about Aboriginal people, the core subject can facilitate a real “attitude change”. Hence, new insights were gained from this study that further elucidated the importance of teaching pre-service teachers a compulsory core Aboriginal Studies subject.

Although these findings are significant, this research has identified that there is much more work to be done. The NSW Institute of Teachers has noted that NSW has the highest Aboriginal population and hence the highest proportion of Aboriginal children of any State or Territory in Australia. The Ramsey report (Ramsey, 2000), *Quality Matters Revitalising Teaching: Critical times critical choices*, led to the formation of the NSW Institute of Teachers, an institution charged with overseeing the
quality of the NSW teachers, the first body in any State or Territory in Australia to deal with overarching reform of the teaching profession (see http://www.nswteachers.nsw.edu.au/home.aspx). The Institute oversees a system of accreditation and recognition of a teacher’s professional capacity against professional standards. As such, it has the oversight of higher education teacher education courses and their accreditation process as an independent body separate from NSW DET. The results of this study offer some important new directions for strengthening and addressing the limitations of existing core courses for primary teacher education.

The study’s findings also imply that there is a need for primary teacher education courses to review the way that Aboriginal perspectives are taught and integrated across the curriculum. The lack of pedagogical skills being taught was an issue for approximately 40 per cent of pre-service teachers across this study. Lack of pedagogical skills was also a concern which was highlighted in Craven, Halse, Marsh, Mooney & Wilson-Miller (2005a; 2005c). Hence, there is a need to investigate whether or not perspectives are being successfully integrated under the accreditation process of the NSW Institute of Teachers.

The open hostility held by some pre-service teachers was a further area of concern raised by academic staff and pre-service teachers. It would be useful for further research to undertake a study to explicate why these pre-service teachers are hostile to the core Aboriginal Studies subject in order to develop successful interventions to counter this situation. Finally, whilst this study has focused on pre-service primary teacher education, it would also be useful to extend the findings of this research to test the impact of core Aboriginal Studies subjects on the self-concepts of secondary pre-service teachers. In addition, it would be useful to conduct longitudinal research to examine the long-term impact of teacher education core courses on actual classroom practice. Finally, given that little is known about the extent to which teacher education institutions implement Aboriginal core, electives, and perspectives across the curriculum, it would be helpful to investigate this information.
Summary

This chapter identified the results of the findings in relation to the themes that emerged from the in-depth interviews and survey data from the two cases (see Chapter 6; Chapter 7) and cross-case analysis (see Chapter 8) and offered research evidence for the validity of these findings. The discussion provided an analysis of the congruence or dissonance across the study to expand and broaden our understandings of the experiences of learning Aboriginal Studies and learner self-concept of pre-service teachers who have completed a core Aboriginal Studies subject. Finally, the chapter discussed the strengths and limitations of this study and the implications of the findings for theory, research and practice.

Summary and Conclusion

This thesis sought to rigorously examine core Aboriginal Studies subjects in two NSW institutions with primary teacher education courses. The study has shown that over the past three decades, there have been numerous policies and reports which have identified the importance of teaching Aboriginal Studies, including the history of Aboriginal occupation as well as the effects of colonisation and the impact of past policies which have impacted on Aboriginal people. These policies and reports (see Chapter 2) have called for the introduction of Aboriginal Studies to be taught to all Australian students to combat prejudices which have led to the socio-economic disadvantage of Aboriginal people (see Chapter 2). In addition, many prominent Australians have begun to call for the truth about the colonisation and subsequent impact on the lives of Aboriginal people to be told (see Chapter 2). Unfortunately, the ongoing omission of Aboriginal Studies from NSW primary teacher education courses continues to contribute to Aboriginal students’ educational disadvantage and, as such, maintains non-Aboriginal Australians’ ignorance about Australia’s shared history. As stated in the Closing the Gap: Prime Minister’s Report (Commonwealth of Australia, 2011, p. 17), “government investment is only one part of the strategy for achieving the closing the gap targets. Individuals and communities also need to take responsibility to promote positive norms and social behaviours to create lasting change”.

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As this research confirms, teaching Aboriginal Studies and perspectives in the primary years of schooling is seen by NSW AECG, NSW DET, NSW Institute of Teachers, and the NSW and Commonwealth government (see Chapter 2) as an important element in combating racism in the wider community. Hence, teaching primary school children about our shared history is seen as an important tool in breaking down long held prejudices which have been allowed to be perpetuated due to a silence in the curriculum about Aboriginal people. The findings of this investigation reveal that for a vast majority of pre-service teachers, taking the core Aboriginal Studies subject in the primary teacher education course was their first intensive exposure to Aboriginal history and culture. Comments such as “our core course here at Uni has probably had the most influence as it really reinforced the importance of teaching Aboriginal Studies in a relevant and contextualised manner” and “I can’t believe I got the year 12 without knowing about the Stolen Generation” are good indications that Aboriginal Studies may not be a priority area in some NSW schools. It is imperative that pre-service teachers have the opportunity to learn about Australia’s history and culture from an Aboriginal perspective and the core Aboriginal Studies subjects fill this role.

The findings in this study further validate and extend those found by Craven et al. (2005; 2005b; 2005c). The present investigation contributed to further understandings of the ability of core Aboriginal Studies subjects to elucidate effective practices. The overall picture to emerge from both Craven et al. National Priority Studies and this present NSW study is that undertaking a core Aboriginal Studies subject does assist in developing a strong personal and professional commitment to teaching Aboriginal Studies.

The results of this study are important as they demonstrate that core Aboriginal Studies subjects can make a positive difference in changing the attitudes of many pre-service teachers towards Aboriginal people. This change can affect pre-service teachers’ self-concepts, attitudes, commitment, knowledge, skills, ability, and understandings to teach Aboriginal Studies. Therefore, pre-service teachers’ understandings of how they can contribute to the development of a vibrant learning community and their understandings of cultural difference and learning styles are
essential in assisting their motivation to enhance the self-efficacy among Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal students in their classrooms in the future. As such, these findings validate the inclusion of core Aboriginal Studies subjects in all institutions with teacher education courses in New South Wales.
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## Appendix 1

### In-depth Interview Schedule

**Heads of Schools, Directors, Teacher Educators and Pre-service Teachers**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Aims</th>
<th>Heads of Schools, Directors and Teacher Educators</th>
<th>Pre-service Teachers</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>One</td>
<td>Tell me how your university came to introduce a core Aboriginal Studies subject into the primary teacher education course?</td>
<td>Why do you think your university requires pre-service teachers to do a core Aboriginal Studies course?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>What is your understanding of the official rationale for including a core Aboriginal Studies subject?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Two</td>
<td>In what ways do you think completing an Aboriginal Studies subject changed the way students think about teaching Aboriginal</td>
<td>How well did your university teach Aboriginal Studies and what sorts of things did you learnt about in your course?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>To what extent has undertaking an Aboriginal Studies subject changed the way you think about teaching Aboriginal Studies?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Question</td>
<td>Question</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What do you think are the three main factors that make a good Aboriginal Studies subject?</td>
<td>Tell me about the three main factors that have prepared you to teach Aboriginal Studies?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Three</td>
<td>What do you think are the strengths and limitations of the current core Aboriginal Studies subject?</td>
<td>What do you think are the strengths and limitations of the core Aboriginal Studies subject that you have just undertaken?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Are there any further comments you would like to make?</td>
<td>Are there any further comments you would like to make?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Appendix 2

Background Information

PRE-SERVICE TEACHER SURVEY

1. Age □  2. Gender (M/F) □

3. Were you born in Australia? □ Yes □ No

4. Are you an Indigenous Australian person? □ Yes □ No

5. Have you got Indigenous Australian friends or relatives? □ Yes □ No

6. Have you any qualifications in Aboriginal Studies? eg. Diploma, Degree etc. □ Yes (please specify__) □ No

Questions

Please write a short written response to the following questions in the space below each question.

1. Of all your life and educational experiences, could you please describe the three most important life experiences that have influenced your views on teaching Aboriginal Studies in a school setting?

______________________________________________________________________
______________________________________________________________________
______________________________________________________________________
2. Why do you think, your University requires all preservice teachers to undertake a core Aboriginal Studies subject?

3. Now that you have completed the core Aboriginal Studies subject, could you describe how well do you think the University has taught you the Aboriginal Studies subject and explain, in your own words, why you think this is or is not so?

4. From your own personal experience, can you give a short overview of what you have learnt in the Aboriginal Studies subject that you have undertaken?

5. Could you describe the three most important factors in the core Aboriginal Studies Subject that have impacted on you?

6. To what extent, and in what ways, has completing a core Aboriginal Studies subject, impacted on your:

   Commitment to teaching Aboriginal Studies in schools?
Knowledge and skills, in being able to teach Aboriginal Studies in a school?


Ability to understand and teach Aboriginal Studies in a school?


7. Overall, what do you perceive as the key strengths of the core Aboriginal Studies subject that you have just been taught?


8. What do you perceive as the key limitations of the core Aboriginal Studies subject that you have just been taught?


9. Are there any other comments you would like to make?


Thank you for participating in this survey.
Appendix 3

Letters Seeking Informed Consent from Head of School to undertake Research Project and to participate in an In-Depth Interview

Dear

My name is Ms Janet Mooney and I am currently undertaking a PhD at the University of Western Sydney and I would appreciate you assistance in undertaking the study: A Critical Analysis of Core Aboriginal Studies Subjects in Primary Teacher Education Courses.

The primary purpose of this study is to capitalise on recent developments in Self-Concept theory, by applying this theories to critically analyse the impact of Aboriginal Studies subjects on pre-service teachers’ attitudes, commitment, knowledge and skills and ability to understand and teach Aboriginal Studies to all Australian students. Broadly, the thesis aims to result in identifying institutional and course characteristics that could be emulated by other institutions to contribute to the successful implementation of core Aboriginal Studies teacher education subjects. By utilising an in-depth case-study approach to explicate effective practice in primary teacher education core courses, the present investigation aims to:

- Identify and contrast the motives, values, and attitudes in relation to incorporating core Aboriginal Studies subjects in the primary teacher education curriculum of two metropolitan institutions in NSW;

- Elucidate the impact of core Aboriginal Studies subjects in primary teacher education courses on multiple stakeholder perceptions of pre-service teachers’ teaching Aboriginal Studies attitudes, commitment, knowledge, skills, ability, and understanding to teach Aboriginal Studies and teach Aboriginal students; and
• Identify the institutional factors, personal experiences, and course characteristics that pre-service teachers from two institutions perceive as impacting positively and negatively on their attitudes, commitment, knowledge, skills, ability, and understandings to teach Aboriginal Studies and Aboriginal students. In examining these issues, this study further elucidates the experiences, challenges, and incentives of those involved in designing, delivering, and experiencing a core Aboriginal Studies subject in two institutions in NSW. It also investigates the influence of the initial experience of learning Aboriginal Studies and learner self-concept on pre-service teachers’ subsequent approaches to teaching Indigenous Studies.

I would like to seek permission to interview you as Head of School and a teacher educator in your school who teaches in the core Aboriginal Studies subject in your institution. I also seek permission to undertake In-depth interviews with 5 preservice teachers. These In-depth questions parallel the question for Heads of Schools, Directors of Aboriginal Education Units, and teacher educators (Attachment 1). The study includes a questionnaire that is designed to be administered to all final year preservice teachers in the primary teacher education course (Attachment 2). These interviews and questionnaire will be used to identify the aims (above).

All participants will be asked to volunteer to participate by way of a written invitation to consider participating in an in-depth interview/surveys that also explains that participation is voluntary and participants are permitted to withdraw from the study at any time without penalty or prejudice and that their responses will be anonymous (see Attachment 3 - 5 for Participant Letters of Invitation and Attachment 6 Participation Advice Form).

I would be happy to supply you with any further information you may require (email janet.mooney@koori.usyd.edu.au Phone: (02) 9351 4859).

Thanking you for your consideration of this important initiative.

Yours sincerely,
Ms Janet Mooney  
PhD Student, University of Western Sydney  
Director Koori Centre, University of Sydney

The ethical aspects of this study have been approved by the University of Western Sydney Macarthur Ethics Review Committee (Human Subjects). If you have any complaints or reservations about the ethical conduct of this research, you may contact the Ethics Committee through the Executive Officer (tel: 02 4620 3641). Any issues you raise will be treated in confidence and investigated fully, and you will be informed of the outcome.
### Attachment 1: In-depth Interview Schedule Heads of Schools, Directors, Teacher Educators and Pre-service Teachers

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</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Two</strong></td>
<td>In what ways do you think completing an Aboriginal Studies subject changed the way students think about teaching Aboriginal Studies? What do you think are the three main factors that make a good Aboriginal Studies subject?</td>
<td>How well did your university teach Aboriginal Studies and what sorts of things did you learnt about in your course? To what extent has undertaking an Aboriginal Studies subject changed the way you think about teaching Aboriginal Studies? Tell me about the three main factors that have prepared you to teach Aboriginal Studies?</td>
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Attachment 2: PRE-SERVICE TEACHER SURVEY

Background Information

1. Age □ 2. Gender (M/F) □

3. Were you born in Australia? □ Yes □ No

4. Are you an Indigenous Australian person? □ Yes □ No

5. Have you got Indigenous Australian friends or relatives? □ Yes □ No

6. Have you any qualifications in Aboriginal Studies? eg. Diploma, Degree etc. □ Yes  □ No

Questions

*Please write a short written response to the following questions in the space below each question.*

10. Of all your life and educational experiences, could you please describe the three most important life experiences that have influenced your views on teaching Aboriginal Studies in a school setting?

____________________________________________________________________
____________________________________________________________________
____________________________________________________________________
11. Why do you think, your University requires all preservice teachers to undertake a core Aboriginal Studies subject?

______________________________________________________________________
______________________________________________________________________
______________________________________________________________________

12. Now that you have completed the core Aboriginal Studies subject, could you describe how well do you think the University has taught you the Aboriginal Studies subject and explain, in your own words, why you think this is or is not so?

______________________________________________________________________
______________________________________________________________________
______________________________________________________________________

13. From your own personal experience, can you give a short overview of what you have learnt in the Aboriginal Studies subject that you have undertaken?

______________________________________________________________________
______________________________________________________________________
______________________________________________________________________

14. Could you describe the three most important factors in the core Aboriginal Studies Subject that have impacted on you?

______________________________________________________________________
______________________________________________________________________
______________________________________________________________________

15. To what extent, and in what ways, has completing a core Aboriginal Studies subject, impacted on your:
   Commitment to teaching Aboriginal Studies in schools?

______________________________________________________________________
______________________________________________________________________

Knowledge and skills, in being able to teach Aboriginal Studies in a school?

______________________________________________________________________
**Ability to understand and teach** *Aboriginal Studies in a school?*

16. Overall, what do you perceive as the **key strengths** of the core Aboriginal Studies subject that you have just been taught?

______________________________________________________________________

______________________________________________________________________

17. What do you perceive as the **key limitations** of the core Aboriginal Studies subject that you have just been taught?

______________________________________________________________________

______________________________________________________________________

______________________________________________________________________

18. Are there any other comments you would like to make?

______________________________________________________________________

______________________________________________________________________

______________________________________________________________________

Thank you for participating in this survey.
Attachment 3:

Letter Seeking Informed Consent from Teacher Educator and Directors of Aboriginal Education Units to Participate in an In-Depth Interview

Dear

My name is Ms Janet Mooney and I am currently undertaking a PhD at the University of Western Sydney and I would appreciate you assistance in undertaking the study: A Critical Analysis of Core Aboriginal Studies Subjects in Primary Teacher Education Courses.

The primary purpose of this study is to capitalise on recent developments in Self-Concept theory, by applying this theories to critically analyse the impact of Aboriginal Studies subjects on pre-service teachers’ attitudes, commitment, knowledge and skills and ability to understand and teach Aboriginal Studies to all Australian students. Broadly, the thesis aims to result in identifying institutional and course characteristics that could be emulated by other institutions to contribute to the successful implementation of core Aboriginal Studies teacher education subjects. By utilising an in-depth case-study approach to explicate effective practice in primary teacher education core courses, the present investigation aims to:

- Identify and contrast the motives, values, and attitudes in relation to incorporating core Aboriginal Studies subjects in the primary teacher education curriculum of two metropolitan institutions in NSW;

- Elucidate the impact of core Aboriginal Studies subjects in primary teacher education courses on multiple stakeholder perceptions of pre-service teachers’ teaching Aboriginal Studies attitudes, commitment, knowledge, skills, ability, and understanding to teach Aboriginal Studies and teach Aboriginal students; and

- Identify the institutional factors, personal experiences, and course characteristics that pre-service teachers from two institutions perceive as impacting positively and negatively on their attitudes, commitment,
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I would like to seek permission to interview you. Your participation would involve participating in a one hour interview (see Attachment 1) at a time and in a location that is nominated by you. Participation is voluntary and participants are permitted to withdraw from the study at any time without penalty or prejudice. The interview would be conducted by me at a time nominated by you (see Attachment 2) and recorded on audio-cassette. Your responses to the questions would be transcribed. Your identity will be kept confidential by me and not reported nor recorded in transcripts of the interviews. Only the research team will have access to transcripts of our discussion which will be kept in a locked storeroom.

I would be happy to supply you with any further information you may require (email janet.mooney@koori.usyd.edu.au Phone: (02) 9351 4859).

Thanking you for your consideration of this important initiative.

Yours sincerely,

Ms Janet Mooney
PhD Student, University of Western Sydney
Director Koori Centre, University of Sydney

The ethical aspects of this study have been approved by the University of Western Sydney Macarthur Ethics Review Committee (Human Subjects). If you have any
complaints or reservations about the ethical conduct of this research, you may contact the Ethics Committee through the Executive Officer (tel: 02 4620 3641). Any issues you raise will be treated in confidence and investigated fully, and you will be informed of the outcome.
Dear Pre-service Teacher,

My name is Ms Janet Mooney and I am currently undertaking a PhD at the University of Western Sydney and I would appreciate you assistance in participating in the study: A Critical Analysis of Core Aboriginal Studies Subjects in Primary Teacher Education Courses.

I seek your assistance to participate in this research study that aims to identify the impact of core Aboriginal Studies subjects on pre-service teachers’ attitudes, commitment, knowledge and skills and ability to understand and teach Aboriginal Studies. It is hoped that the study will identify useful features of core Aboriginal Studies subjects that can emulated by other institutions to contribute to the successful implementation of core Aboriginal Studies teacher education subjects.

Your participation would involve participating in a one hour interview (see Attachment 1 for interview questions) at a time and in a location that is nominated by you. Participation is voluntary and participants are permitted to withdraw from the study at any time without penalty or prejudice. The interview would be conducted by me at a time nominated by you and recorded on audio-cassette. Your responses to the questions would be transcribed. Your identity will be kept confidential by me and not reported nor recorded in transcripts of the interviews. Only the researcher will have access to transcripts which will be kept in a locked storeroom.

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Attachment 5: Letters Seeking Informed Consent from final year Pre-service Teachers to Participate in an answering the Questionnaire

Dear final year Pre-service Teacher,

My name is Ms Janet Mooney and I am currently undertaking a PhD at the University of Western Sydney and I would appreciate you assistance in undertaking the study: A Critical Analysis of Core Aboriginal Studies Subjects in Primary Teacher Education Courses.

I seek your assistance to participate in this research study that aims to identify the impact of core Aboriginal Studies subjects on pre-service teachers’ attitudes, commitment, knowledge and skills and ability to understand and teach Aboriginal Studies. It is hoped that the study will identify useful features of core Aboriginal Studies subjects that can emulated by other institutions to contribute to the successful implementation of core Aboriginal Studies teacher education subjects.

Your participation involves completing this questionnaire.

Participation is voluntary and you are permitted to withdraw from the study at any time without penalty or prejudice. Your responses to the questionnaire will be kept confidential. Only the researcher will have access to the transcripts of your responses which will be kept in a locked storeroom. Please fill in attached Participant Consent form if you agree to participate.

I would be happy to supply you with any further information you may require (email janet.mooney@koori.usyd.edu.au Phone: (02) 9351 4859).

Thanking you for your consideration of this important initiative.

Yours sincerely,

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Attachment 6: Participant Advice Form

Participation Advice Form

Research Project: A Critical Analysis of Core Aboriginal Studies Subjects in Primary Teacher Education Courses

*Please complete and return this form in the reply paid envelope only if you wish to participate in the study.*

Name (Please Print) __________________

Email Address: ____________________

Phone Number: ____________________

I agree to participate in a one hour interview for the A Critical Analysis of Core Aboriginal Studies Subjects in Primary Teacher Education Courses research study.

The date I am available to meet is: _________________________________

The time I am available to meet with you is: _______________________

I would prefer you to ring me to organise a time to meet: (please circle)  Y    N

Signature: ____________________________________________
Appendix 4

Letters Seeking Informed Consent from Teacher Educator and Directors of Aboriginal Education Units to Participate in an In-Depth Interview

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My name is Ms Janet Mooney and I am currently undertaking a PhD at the University of Western Sydney and I would appreciate you assistance in undertaking the study: A Critical Analysis of Core Aboriginal Studies Subjects in Primary Teacher Education Courses.

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- Elucidate the impact of core Aboriginal Studies subjects in primary teacher education courses on multiple stakeholder perceptions of pre-service teachers’ teaching Aboriginal Studies attitudes, commitment, knowledge, skills, ability, and understanding to teach Aboriginal Studies and teach Aboriginal students; and

- Identify the institutional factors, personal experiences, and course characteristics that pre-service teachers from two institutions perceive as impacting positively and negatively on their attitudes, commitment, knowledge, skills, ability, and understandings to teach Aboriginal
Studies and Aboriginal students. In examining these issues, this study further elucidates the experiences, challenges, and incentives of those involved in designing, delivering, and experiencing a core Aboriginal Studies subject in two institutions in NSW. It also investigates the influence of the initial experience of learning Aboriginal Studies and learner self-concept on pre-service teachers’ subsequent approaches to teaching Indigenous Studies.

I would like to seek permission to interview you. Your participation would involve participating in a one hour interview (see Attachment 1) at a time and in a location that is nominated by you. Participation is voluntary and participants are permitted to withdraw from the study at any time without penalty or prejudice. The interview would be conducted by me at a time nominated by you (see Attachment 2) and recorded on audio-cassette. Your responses to the questions would be transcribed. Your identity will be kept confidential by me and not reported nor recorded in transcripts of the interviews. Only the research team will have access to transcripts of our discussion which will be kept in a locked storeroom.

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### Attachment 1: In-depth Interview Schedule Directors and Teacher Educators

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What is your understanding of the official rationale for including a core Aboriginal Studies subject? |
| Two  | In what ways do you think completing an Aboriginal Studies subject changed the way students think about teaching Aboriginal  
What do you think are the three main factors that make a good Aboriginal Studies subject? |
| Three| What do you think are the strengths and limitations of the current core Aboriginal Studies subject?  
Are there any further comments you would like to make? |
Attachment 2: Participant Advice Form

Research Project: A Critical Analysis of Core Aboriginal Studies Subjects in Primary Teacher Education Courses

Please complete and return this form in the reply paid envelope only if you wish to participate in the study.

Name (Please Print) __________________

Email Address: ____________________

Phone Number: ____________________

I agree to participate in a one hour interview for the A Critical Analysis of Core Aboriginal Studies Subjects in Primary Teacher Education Courses Studies research study.

The date I am available to meet is: _________________________________

The time I am available to meet with you is: _________________________

I would prefer you to ring me to organise a time to meet: (please circle) Y   N

Yours sincerely,

Signature: _______________________________________________
Appendix 5

Letters Seeking Informed Consent from Pre-service teachers to Participate in an In-Depth Interview

Dear Pre-service Teacher,

My name is Ms Janet Mooney and I am currently undertaking a PhD at the University of Western Sydney and I would appreciate your assistance in participating in the study: A Critical Analysis of Core Aboriginal Studies Subjects in Primary Teacher Education Courses.

I seek your assistance to participate in this research study that aims to identify the impact of core Aboriginal Studies subjects on pre-service teachers’ attitudes, commitment, knowledge and skills and ability to understand and teach Aboriginal Studies. It is hoped that the study will identify useful features of core Aboriginal Studies subjects that can be emulated by other institutions to contribute to the successful implementation of core Aboriginal Studies teacher education subjects.

Your participation would involve participating in a one hour interview (see Attachment 1 for interview questions) at a time and in a location that is nominated by you. Participation is voluntary and participants are permitted to withdraw from the study at any time without penalty or prejudice. The interview would be conducted by me at a time nominated by you and recorded on audio-cassette. Your responses to the questions would be transcribed. Your identity will be kept confidential by me and not reported nor recorded in transcripts of the interviews. Only the researcher will have access to transcripts which will be kept in a locked storeroom.

I would be happy to supply you with any further information you may require (email janet.mooney@koori.usyd.edu.au Phone: (02) 9351 4859).

Thanking you for your consideration of this important initiative.

Yours sincerely,

Ms Janet Mooney
PhD Student, University of Western Sydney
Director Koori Centre, University of Sydney

The ethical aspects of this study have been approved by the University of Western Sydney Macarthur Ethics Review Committee (Human Subjects). If you have any complaints or reservations about the ethical conduct of this research, you may contact the Ethics Committee through the Executive Officer (tel: 02 4620 3641). Any issues you raise will be treated in confidence and investigated fully, and you will be informed of the outcome.

Attachment 1: Participant Advice Form

Research Project: A Critical Analysis of Core Aboriginal Studies Subjects in Primary Teacher Education Courses

Please complete and return this form in the reply paid envelope only if you wish to participate in the study.

Name (Please Print) __________________

Email Address: ____________________

Phone Number: ____________________

I agree to participate in a one hour interview for the A Critical Analysis of Core Aboriginal Studies Subjects in Primary Teacher Education Courses Studies research study.

The date I am available to meet is: _________________________________
The time I am available to meet with you is: _________________________

I would prefer you to ring me to organise a time to meet: (please circle) Y N

Yours sincerely,

Signature: _______________________________________________
Appendix 6

Letters Seeking Informed Consent from final year Pre-service Teachers to Participate in an answering the Questionnaire

Dear final year Pre-service Teacher,

My name is Ms Janet Mooney and I am currently undertaking a PhD at the University of Western Sydney and I would appreciate you assistance in undertaking the study: A Critical Analysis of Core Aboriginal Studies Subjects in Primary Teacher Education Courses.

I seek your assistance to participate in this research study that aims to identify the impact of core Aboriginal Studies subjects on pre-service teachers’ attitudes, commitment, knowledge and skills and ability to understand and teach Aboriginal Studies. It is hoped that the study will identify useful features of core Aboriginal Studies subjects that can emulated by other institutions to contribute to the successful implementation of core Aboriginal Studies teacher education subjects.

Your participation involves completing this questionnaire.

Participation is voluntary and you are permitted to withdraw from the study at any time without penalty or prejudice. Your responses to the questionnaire will be kept confidential. Only the researcher will have access to the transcripts of your responses which will be kept in a locked storeroom. Please fill in attached Participant Consent form if you agree to participate.

I would be happy to supply you with any further information you may require (email janet.mooney@koori.usyd.edu.au Phone: (02) 9351 4859).

Thanking you for your consideration of this important initiative.

Yours sincerely,

Ms Janet Mooney
The ethical aspects of this study have been approved by the University of Western Sydney Macarthur Ethics Review Committee (Human Subjects). If you have any complaints or reservations about the ethical conduct of this research, you may contact the Ethics Committee through the Executive Officer (tel: 02 4620 3641). Any issues you raise will be treated in confidence and investigated fully, and you will be informed of the outcome.

Participant Participation Form

Research Project: A Critical Analysis of Core Aboriginal Studies Subjects in Primary Teacher Education Courses

Please complete and return this form if you wish to participate in this study

Name: (Please print) ________________________________

Signature: ________________________________

I agree to participate by filling out the questionnaire for the study A Critical Analysis of Core Aboriginal Studies Subjects in Primary Teacher Education Courses.
Appendix 7

Participant Advice Form

Research Project: A Critical Analysis of Core Aboriginal Studies Subjects in Primary Teacher Education Courses

Please complete and return this form in the reply paid envelope only if you wish to participate in the study.

Name (Please Print) __________________

Email Address: ____________________

Phone Number: ____________________

I agree to participate in a one hour interview for the A Critical Analysis of Core Aboriginal Studies Subjects in Primary Teacher Education Courses research study.

The date I am available to meet is ___________________.

The time I am available to meet with you is _________________.

Yours sincerely,

_____________________ Signature
Appendix 8

Participant Participation Form

Research Project: A Critical Analysis of Core Aboriginal Studies Subjects in Primary Teacher Education Courses

Please complete and return this form if you wish to participate in this study

Name: (Please print) _______________________________________

Signature:  _______________________________________

I agree to participate by filling out the questionnaire for the study A Critical Analysis of Core Aboriginal Studies Subjects in Primary Teacher Education Courses.