



INDIGENOUS STUDIES FOR TEACHERS

The AEU Position

The AEU believes that all teachers employed in the public education system in Australia should complete a comprehensive sequence of Aboriginal studies and Torres Strait Islander studies as a minimum requirement for their employment. Ensuring that existing teachers receive this training brings with it a multitude of complexities. Therefore the AEU's position at this stage is to ensure that all undergraduate teacher-education programs, within an agreed time-frame, build in significant and assessable mandatory Indigenous studies units.

What is Indigenous Studies?

In the context of this campaign, Indigenous Studies are referred to as studies about Aboriginal peoples and cultures, and Torres Strait Islander peoples and cultures. The AEU believes that teacher education programs containing Indigenous studies should be developed with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, and thus, has determined not to be overly prescriptive in a definition. Therefore, in this context, Indigenous Studies *includes*, but is *not limited to*, studies about:

- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander histories and cultures, prior and subsequent to invasion;
- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander teaching and learning practices;
- The development of teaching practices which meet the needs of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students;
- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander languages; and
- Teaching practices which meet the needs of English as Second/Foreign Language speakers.

Why should teachers learn Indigenous Studies?

Numerous publicationsⁱ both recent and dated, including the Federal Government's flagship report on the Indigenous Strategic Results Projects (SRPs), *What works? Explorations in improving outcomes for Indigenous students* (McRae, et al. 2000), have all concluded that effective teaching practice is essential to improving educational outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students.

The AEU contends that this evidence signifies a failure in the system to provide teachers with the professional skills and knowledge required to work effectively with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, and further, provides a basis for the argument that lack of access to this type of pre-service teacher education contributes in a variety of ways to the low level of learning outcomes achieved by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students.

Given the consideration that improving Indigenous educational outcomes is a National Priority Area, this is a particularly disturbing indictment on the education system.

Why a mandatory requirement?

The Executive Summary of *Teachers in Australian Schools – A report from the 1999 National Survey*ⁱⁱ, states:

Fourteen percent (13.7%) of respondentsⁱⁱⁱ, the lowest response for any single priority, indicated that they had undertaken training in these aspects of this priority area^{iv}. Less than half (5.6% of all respondents) indicated they had pre-service training, 1.9% of all respondents

had pre-service and in-service training, and 8.1% of all survey respondents had undertaken in-service only (p 17).

Further, recent data collated by the Commonwealth Grants Commission in 2001^v, has revealed that it is highly unlikely that any teacher will not teach at least one Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander student throughout their career, as more than 60% of Government primary schools, and more than 80% of Government secondary schools have Indigenous students enrolled.

In spite of the data, reports, policies and strategies advocating this approach, there has, to date, been no comprehensive systemic response in relation to this issue.

The AEU therefore believes that ensuring Indigenous studies as a minimum mandatory employment requirement for all beginning teachers, will ensure that teachers are adequately equipped to meet the needs of Indigenous students, and to contribute to the process of Reconciliation by ensuring that all students are able to develop a respect and understanding for the unique cultures of Australia's Indigenous peoples.

Initial evidence has indicated that receiving this type of training assists teachers to work more effectively with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples in an educational context. Teachers with access to adequate pre-service training, and comprehensive in-service programs are therefore well-placed to impact significantly on the educational outcomes of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, and would be more likely to have a rewarding and fulfilling professional experience when teaching Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students.

What can I do?

- Send a letter – to your State/Territory Minister for Education, and the Federal Minister for Education
- Visit your local member for parliament
- E-mail the AEU with your comments (dmoyle@aeufederal.org.au)

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ⁱIncluding: the National English Literacy and Numeracy Strategy (DETYA, 2000); Learning Lessons – An independent review of Indigenous education in the Northern Territory (Collins, 1999); the National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Policy (NAEP) (1986); Katu Kalpa, Report on the inquiry in to the effectiveness of education and training programs for Indigenous Australians (Senate References Committee, 2000); Royal Commission in to Aboriginal Deaths in Custody (1990); Review of the National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Policy (1995); Partners in a Learning Culture – Australia's National Strategy for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Vocational Education and Training (ANTA, 2000), and many others...

ⁱⁱAustralian College of Education (2001) *Teachers in Australian Schools – a report from the 1999 National Survey – Executive Summary*, Department of Education, Training and Youth Affairs, Canberra.

ⁱⁱⁱ10 019 teachers from Government and non-Government schools responded to this survey

^{iv}See *The National Goals for Schooling in Australia in the Twenty-first Century* (MCEETYA, Adelaide, 1999) www.curriculum.edu.au (accessed 11.07.02, 2.56pm)

^vCommonwealth Grants Commission (2001) *Report on the Inquiry in to Indigenous Funding*, Commonwealth of Australia, Canberra. www.cgc.gov.au (accessed 11.07.02, 3.10pm)