

## TEACHER TRAINING AND ABORIGINAL STUDIES

\*Myra Dunn

One of the most important issues in planning and implementing Aboriginal Studies at Higher School Certificate level is that of teacher quality. We need to consider the kinds of people who will be teaching Aboriginal Studies since this will have a direct bearing on the kind of program we end up with. There are a number of different perspectives which need to be considered.

### TRAINING

#### 1. *Qualifications*

Aboriginal Studies is not a traditional subject area such as French or History or Maths. There is no bank of specifically qualified teachers. There *is* a pool of qualified Social Science teachers, but it cannot be assumed that these teachers have suitable competencies for teaching Aboriginal Studies.

It is obvious from the observations and experiences of many working in the field that teachers themselves feel unqualified and insecure on a professional level to teach Aboriginal Studies. In addition, many Aboriginal organisations and individuals have pointed out that teachers are not qualified to teach Aboriginal Studies either personally or professionally.

These insecurities are also felt by Black teachers who feel that, whilst they can bring Black perspectives to Aboriginal Studies via personal/vicarious experiences, they need to work at getting accurate and relevant information for themselves so that these personal perspectives can be placed in the context of history, current events and the culturally diverse nature of Aboriginal societies in Australia.

Given the foregoing situations, it seems necessary that teachers are able to demonstrate their professional abilities/competencies to Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal communities. This is important for a number of reasons:

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\*Armidale College of Advanced Education, Armidale NSW 2350

1. Aboriginal communities do not want or deserve second-class teaching in a subject of considerable importance to them both personally and politically.
2. If Aboriginal Studies is to be regarded as a significant field of study in the general community, that is, if the subject is to have status as a Higher School Certificate subject, teachers must have the best possible training.

Gaining expertise in teaching Aboriginal Studies should be a commitment on the part of individual teachers to a specified form of personal development.

Tertiary studies in the graduate/post graduate area are desirable for both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal teachers, in particular, because these studies are essentially conducted and directed by students themselves rather than institutions or lecturers. Teachers undertaking graduate/postgraduate study in Aboriginal Studies are thus demonstrating their willingness to extend and develop professional competencies in a field of growing importance in the definition and redefinition of Australian national identity.

Thus, teachers of Aboriginal Studies at Higher School Certificate level should be formally qualified in the field (as teachers in other Higher School Certificate subjects) or should be in the process of obtaining such qualifications.

It is anticipated that Aboriginal Studies will be instituted as a Board subject in 1990. Since the time-frame is fairly short, moves towards preparing teachers to teach Aboriginal Studies need to be instituted immediately through negotiation with the Education Department and various tertiary institutions capable of preparing teachers for this task.

Several New South Wales institutions already offer basic degrees in Aboriginal Studies. This year the Armidale College of Advanced Education and the University of New England are offering an Aboriginal Studies methods course in the secondary Diploma in Education.

In Queensland for a number of years a full-time release scheme was available to prepare teachers to teach Aboriginal children. Students did one semester of a graduate diploma on full-time release and completed the program externally. At present teachers are being trained for music, mathematics and a number of

other subjects in intensive programs in New South Wales. Similar ten-week programs could be instituted to retrain social science teachers, for instance, giving some initial skills in an intensive program to be followed by completion of relevant tertiary studies.

Presently, a number of Aboriginal teachers are completing the Graduate Diploma in Educational Studies (Aboriginal Education) at Armidale College of Advanced Education through the Equal Employment Opportunities Office. This should continue and expand.

## 2. PRESERVICE TRAINING

The Aboriginal Studies Syllabus Committee is, at present, committed to the introduction of Aboriginal Studies as a Higher School Certificate subject in 1990. This has meant a concentration of effort into short-term matters of teacher training. Long-term planning cannot be neglected. Planning for preservice training is of crucial importance. Selected institutions training secondary teachers will need to offer specialised training programs in Aboriginal Studies.

Aboriginal Studies in primary schools is important in the establishment of the subject at Higher School Certificate levels. Also, since Aboriginal Studies programs are now mandatory in primary schools in New South Wales, all primary teachers need preservice training in Aboriginal Studies. Thus, tertiary institutions training primary teachers and, in particular, secondary English/History/Geography/Social Science teachers, should be increasing their offerings of compulsory and optional programs in Aboriginal Studies.

## 3. INSERVICE TRAINING

Inservicing is an essential component of teacher/inspectorial/executive preparation in the Aboriginal Studies area. It should contribute to awareness of and sensitivity to Aboriginal issues, a sound knowledge of the field, and teaching competencies (including consultative skills).

For teachers, as individuals, it should contribute to attitudinal development and personal growth as well as the development of interpersonal skills. These personal competencies are especially important in the light of the emphasis the syllabus committee has placed on community participation and consultation.

Inservice training, therefore, needs to be an integral part of the ongoing planning and implementation of Aboriginal Studies as a Higher School Certificate subject. The possibility of ten-week retraining courses conducted by the Professional Development Unit has been mentioned previously. In establishing and maintaining a pool of secondary teachers of Aboriginal Studies, inservicing should happen on a regular basis and could be organised jointly by the Department of Education, the Aboriginal Education Consultative Group and relevant tertiary institutions. Summer schools at appropriate tertiary institutions are also possible, and Departments of Continuing Education could be a source of inservicing.

The Board of Secondary Education and the NSW Education Department need to concern themselves with the development of suitable inservicing procedures to support the introduction of this subject at the Higher School Certificate level.

## OTHER FORMS OF TEACHER SUPPORT

### 1. *Resource Development*

In addition to comprehensive inservice training there are a number of other areas where support for teachers is necessary. In the Aboriginal Studies field resources are not highly developed. Particular areas, such as Contemporary Aboriginal Issues, are poorly serviced by teaching materials. Rural areas suffer from a lack of access to resources because of time/distances involved in servicing them. The Aboriginal Education Unit has a limited collection of materials and is unable to develop these further since many other urgent priorities which occupy staff must be dealt with first.

It is well known that there are only small numbers of teachers qualified to teach Aboriginal Studies at Higher School Certificate level. Thus it will be necessary to support teachers attempting to gain expertise whilst in service. It would be disastrous if those teachers did not have sufficient and appropriate library and curriculum resources to teach Aboriginal Studies.

The Department of Education therefore needs to consider procedures for resource provisions in schools, including consideration of suitable textbooks and accompanying handbooks.

## 2. Professional Association

Establishing a professional association related to Aboriginal Studies is important for a number of reasons which closely concern teacher support and preparation:

- a) to provide a forum for discussion of Aboriginal Studies issues.
- b) to provide support for teachers of Aboriginal Studies.
- c) to publish a journal of Aboriginal Studies to enhance the prestige of studies in the field and disseminate the latest thinking in the field.
- d) to co-ordinate and manage the development of resources.
- e) to provide the opportunity for interaction between teachers, community, academics and students interested in development of the field.
- f) to provide a source of funding for workshops and materials development.
- g) to mount conferences, summer schools and workshops in Aboriginal Studies.
- h) to form part of an Aboriginal Studies network nationally and internationally (to promote comparative studies).
- i) to conduct and encourage research in the field.

## PROFESSIONAL COMPETENCIES

As well as being competent professionals on a general level, teachers of Aboriginal Studies need a number of specific competencies:

1. They should be able to utilise anti-racist teaching strategies and other strategies which specifically assist attitudinal development.
2. Teachers need to have some background in cross-cultural education. These could include intercultural skills and communication skills which demonstrate a knowledge of and ability to handle potential and actual personal reactions of students to the subject matter.
3. Good interpersonal skills will be essential in negotiations with community.

5. Teachers will need motivation - an ongoing interest in the continuous development of personal expertise in the field.

## CONSULTATION

Much of the foregoing discussion has been based on the observations and experiences of teachers and other members of the Aboriginal Studies Syllabus Committee. To confirm the major contentions of the discussion, teachers, students and community will need to be consulted.

Firstly, much information concerning teachers, programs and schools can be provided by regional consultants. Through this network teachers can be consulted about their concerns in Aboriginal Studies at a Higher School Certificate level.

Secondly, the Board of Secondary Education can provide a list of O.A.S. courses presently operating in the field. Schools and teachers can then be contacted to provide input in written or other form.

Thirdly, Aboriginal students can be consulted and surveyed through Year 12 seminars, Commonwealth Education and DEET in relation to their expectations for Aboriginal Studies and its teachers. Other students may be consulted through their teachers as outlined in the first and second points.

Fourthly, a teacher's workshop could be arranged to workshop and inservice the Syllabus Committee so that teachers' concerns could be aired, expertise assessed by them, and information on existing courses presented. It may also be appropriate to conduct this in conjunction with community consultations.

## CONCLUSION

The issues relating to teacher preparation for implementing Aboriginal Studies as a Higher School Certificate subject are complex and multi-dimensional. Issues which concern training, teacher support and specialist professional competencies need to be addressed in an environment of productive discussion and consultation with Aboriginal communities. Teachers of Aboriginal Studies will need opportunities to develop as professionals in their chosen field so that the aspirations of Aboriginal communities are fulfilled and their students have the best possible programs.

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