

Critical Design Features of Pre-Service Education Programs to Enhance Teacher Capacity to Effectively Work in Schools With Indigenous Students

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For more than 3 decades governments and education systems have struggled to address the gaps in educational outcomes between Indigenous and non-Indigenous students. Over the past 10 years it has become increasingly apparent that central to redressing these gaps is the development of teachers who are able to effectively engage with Indigenous students, their families and communities. The introduction of National Professional Standards has increased the focus on the development of pre-service teachers' capacity to effectively teach Indigenous students. In 2008, the New South Wales Department of Education (DET) and four universities implemented an enhanced teacher training program (ETTP) that was delivered to final-year primary pre-service teachers. The success and continuing expansion of this program, coupled with the current national focus on building pre-service teachers' capacity to teach Indigenous students, suggests it is timely to detail the critical design features of, and rationale for, this program to inform and support development of similar programs within pre-service teacher education. The article reports on four critical elements of the program: knowledge and understanding of Aboriginal history and culture; effective cross-cultural communication skills; holistic understanding of Aboriginal education and strategies required for improving Aboriginal student outcomes; and appropriate pedagogy and classroom management strategies.

■ **Keywords:** Indigenous education, Aboriginal education, teacher education, pre-service teacher training

The continuing gap between Indigenous and non-Indigenous students in education in Australia remains a significant concern. Since the early 1980s, priorities in Indigenous education have been codified and incorporated into the National Goals for Australian Education, promulgated by successive meetings of the Ministerial Council of Education Employment Training and Youth Affairs (MCEETYA). MCEETYA's current Melbourne Declaration (2008) clearly acknowledges the crisis in Indigenous education, stating:

Educational outcomes for Indigenous children and young people are substantially behind those of other students in key areas of enrolment, attendance, participation, literacy, numeracy, retention and completion. Meeting the needs of young Indigenous Australians and promoting high expectations for their educational performance requires strategic investment. (p. 15)

Similarly, MCEETYA's Hobart Declaration (1989) and its subsequent Adelaide Declaration on National Goals for

Schooling (1999) have been quite explicit and quite definite in establishing priorities for Indigenous students. Paragraph 3.3 of the Adelaide Declaration stipulated that 'schooling should be socially just so that: Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students have equitable access to, and opportunities in, schooling so that their learning outcomes improve and, over time, match those of other students'.

The previous Rudd/Gillard federal government, in its policy statement on Indigenous affairs, acknowledged the crisis in Indigenous education and emphasised the need to address the gap between Indigenous and non-Indigenous outcomes in early childhood education, the development of literacy and numeracy skills, school completion rates

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and Year 12 outcomes (Department of Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs [FaHCSIA], 2009). This statement, together with National Partnership Agreements under the Council of Australian Government's (COAG) 'Closing the Gap' reforms, places significant responsibilities on the education systems to redress these gaps.

Recognition of the Need for Specialist Training in Aboriginal Education

It has long been clear that effective teaching is the key to addressing these gaps and that this requires the development of specialised knowledge, understanding and skills in teacher training (see Senate Education, Employment and Workplace Relations Committee, 2000; McRae, 2000; Department of Education Training and Youth Affairs, 2000; Price, 2012). Unfortunately, however, the evidence suggests marked inadequacies in teacher training. The Senate Employment, Workplace Relations, Small Business and Education References Committee (2000) noted:

Though Indigenous education represents a significant challenge for teachers and requires high levels of skill and sensitivity to the needs of students, many teachers in Indigenous communities were among the most inexperienced and least adequately prepared to meet the challenges of teaching in such demanding and unfamiliar environments. (p. 103)

Indeed, the report concluded that pre-service preparation of teachers for working in Indigenous communities and with Indigenous students was 'demonstrably inadequate' (p. 117).

Several years after the publication of the Katu Kalpa Report, mapping of mandatory Aboriginal studies subjects in pre-service teacher education suggested a national incidence of less than 50%, and even when they did occur their relative weighting within the total pre-service program is 'generally so low as to appear tokenistic' (Craven, Halse, Marsh, Mooney, & Wilson-Miller, 2005, p. vii). Furthermore, it was noted that employers did not require this for beginning teachers.

While there have been some improvements in this situation — for example, the NSW Institute of Teachers (NSW IT) currently requires graduating teachers to have completed a mandatory unit in Aboriginal education (NSW IT, 2007) — the Australian Education Union's (AEU) surveys of beginning teachers (2005–2008) reflect very minor improvements. The large majority of beginning teachers continue to feel ill prepared for teaching Indigenous students or delivering curriculum content in Indigenous studies (AEU, 2008). Of the 1,545 respondents to the AEU's 2008 survey, 75% felt their training had not prepared them to teach Indigenous students. Moreover, only 41.9% — a drop of 4% from the 2007 survey — reported undertaking Indigenous studies programs as part of their training (AEU, 2008). These responses on

the effectiveness of training in Indigenous education were much lower than for those training to teach any other specialised groups of students. Where training does exist, the approaches are varied and inconsistent, as recently noted in the Indigenous Education Consultative Bodies (IECB) position paper: 'Currently, there is no consistent approach to the inclusion of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander study units or courses in Australian universities' (IECB, 2012, p. 2).

Such strong data suggested an urgent need to examine the design of more comprehensive pre-service teacher preparation for teaching Indigenous students. Hence, in 2006 the then NSW Department of Education (DET), in conjunction with the NSW Aboriginal Education Consultative Group (AECG), the principal advisory body on behalf of Aboriginal communities on issues relating to education and training, invited the Faculties of Education from all universities in NSW and the Australian Capital Territory (ACT) to submit proposals for the development and delivery of an Enhanced Teacher Training Program (ETTP) to augment the standard undergraduate training so graduate teachers would be better prepared for initial appointment to schools with significant Aboriginal enrolments. The program was to target primary pre-service teachers, as both DET and the universities involved believed that the enhancement program was best situated earlier in the education process where school attendance tended to be more stable (Gray & Beresford, 2002).

Four universities submitted proposals, and the submission from the School of Education, NSW, at the Australian Catholic University (ACU) was accepted as the successful tender. The other three universities — Charles Sturt University, the University of Western Sydney and the University of Wollongong — which had also submitted proposals, became involved in its implementation due to scholarships being awarded to students from all four universities. Applications for scholarships were open to final-year primary pre-service teachers who were interested in gaining guaranteed employment on graduation in a school with high Indigenous enrolments. The scholarship covered the Higher Education Contribution Scheme fees for the two enhanced training units, a training allowance, and an allowance to assist with community engagement and professional internship experiences. Those students offered scholarships were also given a guarantee of permanent employment with DET at the completion of their training. These features prompted applications from students with an intrinsic interest in working with Aboriginal children, their families and communities. This may be a limitation of the program in that it works with pre-service teachers who are committed and interested in engaging with Aboriginal students. While it is a much greater challenge to implement broad-based programs such as these, the four elements outlined are essential to enhancing teacher capacity to

work effectively with Indigenous students, whether they are conducted on small scale, such as the program, or embedded broadly across all pre-service teacher education programs.

The pilot program began in 2008. Initially, only students from the four tendering universities were invited to apply for scholarships as these universities were committed to the program and prepared to support students to participate. Applications were submitted to DET and participants in the program were determined by DET through a competitive interview process. Once DET had selected the participants, the universities managed the program and modified it to suit different contexts and student needs such as practicum requirements, Aboriginal mentor support, and community engagement processes. Since then, the program has been extended to a number of other universities with very positive results (e.g., Buckskin, 2012; Harrington & Brasche, 2011).

Subsequent research has shown the program to be highly successful in developing teachers who engage confidently and skillfully with Indigenous students and communities (e.g., Harrington & Brasche, 2011; Labone et al., 2009; Long & Labone, 2010). While the program is currently state-based, the movement to a national curriculum and National Professional Standards for Teachers calls for closer examination of effective approaches to pre-service education for skilling teachers to work with Indigenous students, parents and communities. In response to this need, the Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership, in partnership with the Queensland Department of Education, Training and Employment, held a national forum in July 2012 titled 'Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education — Improving Teaching through the National Professional Standards for Teachers'. This was a consultation forum on equipping teachers to work with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students, parents and communities. This focus was exactly what the ETTP has been successfully achieving in NSW for the past 4 years. As such, it is timely to detail the critical elements of the initial program developed by ACU that has yielded these successes and remains the basis subsequent development of the ETTP. Hence, this article provides a detailed explanation of how each element was incorporated into the enhancement program, as well as the provenance of each element in policy and research, in the hope that it will inform and support development of similar programs within pre-service teacher education. The article also provides a brief overview of the preliminary research findings around the impact of each element.

The Underlying Principles of the Enhanced Teacher Training Program

Notwithstanding the collaboration that has developed between DET and all participating universities, the origi-

nal ACU program provided the basis for the development and implementation of the ETTP. The principal components of the program were:

- two additional units in Aboriginal education to supplement the core unit in Aboriginal perspectives that was already compulsory for primary education students at ACU;
- a 2-week immersion experience to be undertaken within a community or government agency working in a community with a significant Aboriginal population;
- mentoring throughout the entire enhanced training by Aboriginal mentors recruited from the existing Aboriginal teacher education programs at ACU;
- a full-day training program in the mentoring process for both the mentors and the mentees;
- an additional internship/practice teaching experience of a minimum of 6 weeks in a school with a significant Aboriginal enrolment; and
- ongoing monitoring to evaluate the impact of the enhanced training on the early career service of the participants after graduation and appointment.

The program was consistent with the Professional Teaching Standards Framework developed by the NSW IT and designed to enhance the Professional Knowledge, Practice and Professional Commitment of graduate teachers in regard to Aboriginal education. However, conscious of the time constraints on what was intended only as an enhancement program and the fact that Aboriginal education programs were prone to suffer from attempting to do too much, it was agreed that the enhancement program would focus on enhancing four critical elements of Aboriginal education:

1. Knowledge and Understanding of Aboriginal History and Culture;
2. Effective Cross-Cultural Communication Skills;
3. A Holistic Understanding of Aboriginal Education and of the Strategies Required for Improving Aboriginal Student Outcomes; and
4. Awareness and Pre-Service Experience of Appropriate Pedagogy and Classroom Management Strategies.

A final critical element for developing more effective teachers in Aboriginal education that was identified, but beyond the scope of the enhancement program itself, was the systematic provision of ongoing professional development and support after appointment.

Each of the four critical elements encapsulated in the program were identified and grounded in existing policy imperatives, an extensive body of academic research, and the practical experience in Aboriginal education of the ACU staff involved in the drafting of the program, particularly their experience in the long-standing Aboriginal Teacher Education Programs at the university.

Critical Elements of the Enhancement Program

Critical Element 1: Knowledge and Understanding of Aboriginal History and Culture

The unique focus of the first element in program was recognition that a deep understanding of Aboriginal history and culture is an essential component of good teaching practice in Aboriginal education. This should include an understanding of the nature of the relationship between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal peoples.

To address this, the program included an existing mandatory unit in Aboriginal education that provided an introduction to the history of contact between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal peoples and to the structure of the discipline of Aboriginal education and skills for incorporating Aboriginal perspectives into the Key Learning Areas of Human Society and its Environment (HSIE), English, and the Visual and Performing Arts. The enhancement program supplemented this mandatory unit with two additional specialist units:

- a unit on Aboriginal education that reviews the history of Aboriginal education, contextualising it within socio-political developments since the beginning of the colonial era; analysing the NSW Aboriginal Education and Training Policy and other relevant policies; examining developments in contemporary Aboriginal education; and reviewing recent research into Aboriginal education; and
- a unit on contemporary issues in Aboriginal Australia, focusing on a holistic approach to Aboriginal education by exploring relevant social, cultural and economic issues likely to impact on the relationship between teachers and their students and families.

The rationale for the inclusion of this element was based on policy and a growing body of research documenting the advantages of providing graduate teachers with a grounding in the historical and cultural contexts of the Indigenous communities in which they might work.

Policy imperatives at both state and national level have emphasised the importance of teachers having cultural knowledge and understanding. One of the key commitments of the NSW Aboriginal Education and Training Policy (DET, 2008) is 'to provide Aboriginal cultural education for all staff' (Objective 1.1.4). Furthermore, recommendation 9.1 of MCEETYA's Australian Directions in Indigenous Education 2005–2008 states that by 2010 both pre-service and in-service teachers should have completed accredited professional learning to 'ensure that school leaders and teachers have the cultural understandings to significantly improve outcomes for Indigenous students' (MCEETYA, 2006 p. 8). The requirement for such knowledge is now written into the Australian Professional Standards for Teachers (see Standards 1.4 and 2.4).

The research into the impact of knowledge and understanding of Aboriginal history and culture suggests that it has advantages for both teachers and students. For teachers, such knowledge enhances their ability to connect with their students and results in enhanced learning outcomes for students (Cronin, Sarra, & Yelland, 2002; Purdie, Boulton-Lewis, Fanshawe, Tripcony, & Gunstone, 2000). This knowledge also empowers teachers to identify biases in the curriculum and modify the curriculum to include Indigenous perspectives (Hickling-Hudson & Ahlquist, 2003). Furthermore, teachers with an understanding of Aboriginal history and culture have a more positive attitude to Reconciliation (McClure, 2008). Advantages for students include: enhanced self-concept, identity and attitude to school (Hickling-Hudson & Ahlquist, 2003; Purdie et al., 2000); and improved learning outcomes (Cronin et al., 2002). Following is a brief review of the research that underpinned this element.

Awareness of Indigenous culture in teachers is a significant factor in their relationship with their students. Cronin et al. (2002) found that such knowledge enhances teachers' ability to connect with their students and that this was an important factor in improving numeracy outcomes. They concluded that if teachers 'have thorough background knowledge of the [Aboriginal] learner and their social and cultural context, then there is a greater chance that more meaningful learning and teaching will occur' (Cronin et al., p. 7).

Further evidence of the importance of teachers having this knowledge is seen in a comparative study of schools in the United States and Australia (Hickling-Hudson & Ahlquist, 2003). This study found that the most effective teaching of Indigenous students occurred in schools where teachers had the skills to deconstruct the Anglo-centric, neo-colonial bias of the curriculum and replace it with more culturally relevant perspectives. The factors that most differentiated schools in which effective teaching was occurring were: rewriting of the curriculum to emphasise Indigenous history, society and culture; use of Indigenous texts whenever possible; and deconstruction of mainstream texts and education ideology to ensure it had an Indigenous perspective. This resulted in there being a sense of local culture embracing global culture, and the students' identities and histories being validated and affirmed.

The promotion of Indigenous culture in schools was found to be a particular source of pride for students, who generally displayed more positive feelings about their place within the total school community (Purdie et al., 2000). Purdie et al. (2000) concluded that Indigenous cultures and history should be promoted more widely within schools and teachers should be given more training to help them to implement culturally appropriate curricula and teaching methods. More, and better, training in Indigenous cultures was particularly important as there was a common view among Indigenous students that many

teachers had no idea of the kinds of lives they lived, did not know how to talk or interact with them, and asked embarrassing questions in class or even made comments that could be seen as racist. Further support was provided in a research project that found teachers who had participated in formal training in Indigenous history displayed significantly more positive attitudes to reconciliation than teachers who had not participated in such training (McClure, 2008).

The enhanced teaching skills and improved student outcomes reported in these research projects do not simply develop when teachers find themselves in front of a class with Aboriginal students, but are clearly an outcome of pre-service training that explicitly addresses the need for knowledge and understanding of Aboriginal history and culture.

However, as in other fields, content is not everything in Aboriginal education. The designers of this program were mindful that the strategies used in introducing pre-service teachers to Aboriginal education were also important. This is emphasised in research and incorporated into the teaching of the content on Aboriginal histories and cultures. These strategies included:

- an emphasis on experiential learning and learning in cross-cultural contexts as suggested by Malezer and Sim (2002);
- direct interaction in a variety of ways between the students and Aboriginal peoples and cultures, and a linking of theory and content so that there was a focus on *how to teach* as well as *what to teach* as suggested by Craven et al. (2005); and
- building on the students' introduction to Aboriginal history to foster *transformative* insights into the contemporary issues impacting on Aboriginal communities, as suggested by Mooney and Craven (2002).

These strategies were also incorporated into the other critical elements around which the program was developed.

Early Research Findings on the Impact of Element 1

The benefits of this element are evident in the early research on the ETTP (Buckskin, 2012; Harrington & Brasche, 2011; Long & Labone, 2010). In interviews with mentors of ETTP participants the positive benefits of cultural knowledge were noted: 'His cultural awareness is very important. He shows tolerance and respect and has a different way of teaching' (ACU mentor; Long & Labone, 2010, p. 28). Similarly, Harrington and Brasche (2011), in following ETTP graduates into their first year of teaching, noted that: 'all report that they have settled into their first teaching placement confidently and with a sense of being culturally well prepared' (p. 28). This knowledge was also reported to impact on their teaching, with one graduate noting: 'Knowledge of culture in the past has also framed my curriculum decisions' (Long & Labone, 2010, p. 29).

While the benefits of cultural knowledge developed from the ETTP program are noted, Buckskin (2012), in her study of ETTP participants, makes the important point that 'it is not enough to be culturally aware ... students must have explicit and contextual cross cultural knowledge, understandings and pedagogical skills in order to address inequities faced by Aboriginal students' (p. 191). The development of this applied cross-cultural understanding is the focus of the second element.

Critical Element 2: Effective Cross-Cultural Communication Skills

The second critical element in the program was the enhancement of participants' cross-cultural communication skills, to assist them in working with Aboriginal students, families and community members. This element was specifically designed to address the lack of contact many non-Aboriginal pre-service teachers have with Aboriginal people and the subsequent impact on their capacity to work with Aboriginal students, their families and their communities. The program specifically addressed this by:

- presenting the two supplementary units in an Aboriginal context by scheduling them as part of the university's Bachelor of Education (Indigenous) Program. This meant that the participants were in a minority and in a learning situation that required them to share and, at times, defer to the *superior* knowledge and experience of their Aboriginal peers;
- incorporating assessment tasks into the supplementary units that required the course participants to meet with and interview several Aboriginal people. Initially, most students found this to be a daunting task and it was a first for a number of them;
- requiring the program participants to undertake an *immersion experience* in an Aboriginal community and to work in an Aboriginal agency. This component of the course again involved the students coming into immediate contact with Aboriginal people and required them to practise cross-cultural communication skills; and
- scaffolding each student in his/her immersion experience with an Aboriginal mentor who was also a *peer* in the final year of a Bachelor of Education program. The main tasks of the mentors were to introduce the program participant to the local community and to provide them with advice on appropriate communication skills and protocols.

These strategies were intended to break down latent fears and apprehensions about contact with Aboriginal people. The immersion experience and associated mentoring developed this strategy further and were a particularly important part of the program.

The more specific aims of the immersion included the enhancement of particular cross-cultural communication skills, such as the application of appropriate protocols,

the ability to *hear* Aboriginal English, and the ability to *switch registers* when moving from one context or setting to another. In addition, the immersion experience was intended to enhance:

- knowledge of the broader context of potential work places, including the importance of community relationships and community expectations of teachers;
- understanding of relationships between Aboriginal communities and agencies and their potential impact on learning;
- skills for engaging in meaningful consultation and partnerships with Aboriginal communities and organisations; and
- the ability to reflect on personal attitudes to cross-cultural experiences.

Recognising that cross-cultural skills cannot be developed in a vacuum, the immersion experience was intended to reinforce previous classroom learning about contemporary culture and Aboriginal community issues.

The rationale for this element was based on research documenting the negative implications of non-Aboriginal teachers having minimal contact with Aboriginal people prior to commencing their careers. Despite this contact increasing over recent decades, the quality of the understandings that develop from increased contact remains problematic. Reconciliation Australia (2009) found that while 58% of Australians report being involved in recent contact between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people, only about 1 in 10 people (both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people) feel that there is a high level of trust in the interracial relationship. Moreover, only about half of either population group agree that 'the relationship between Indigenous and other Australians today is either good or improving' (p. 5).

It also appears possible that the extent of contact reported by Reconciliation Australia is overstated for those who enter the teaching profession from predominantly middle-class environments. The Senate's Katu Kalpa Report (Senate Employment, Workplace Relations, Small Business and Education References Committee, 2000) found that cross-cultural communication skills was a major issue for beginning teachers, citing one experienced principal who noted: 'In many instances I had young non-Indigenous teachers arrive [at her school] who had never actually met an Aboriginal person before' (p. 130). This minimal contact coupled with limited, if not absent, training in cross-cultural communication has significant negative implications for teacher engagement with Aboriginal students and communities. In a report on school attendance, Bourke, Rigby, and the Department of Education, Training and Youth Affairs (2000) was alarmed that teachers received minimal, if any, cross-cultural training and, as a result, in many cases did not participate in community activities. Their lack of communication skills

manifested itself in a propensity to ask embarrassing questions and even make racist remarks in class, be awkward in interacting with Aboriginal students and their families, and be overly critical of students in public. Additionally:

The relationship between community members, students and the teaching staff was sometimes hostile and quite often fraught with misunderstanding and a lack of empathy. Some teachers appeared to be frightened, or at least felt threatened by the Indigenous community in which they were teaching. (p. 4)

Similarly, Cronin et al. (2002) strongly advocated the importance of teachers engaging with students' social and cultural contexts:

... if a teacher is not prepared to engage with the student's social and cultural context, then they may as well not bother to engage with the syllabus either. It is further argued that those not prepared to engage with the student's social and cultural context are of no productive use to Indigenous students or Indigenous communities and one must question their use to a highly reputable teaching profession. (p. 7)

The critical point of the experiences included in this element was not only to build cross-cultural communication skills in teachers, but also to help them recognise that they may have a different cultural background to their students and that the values and attitudes that they bring to the classroom may impact on their communication skills and on the potential learning outcomes of their students (Long, Cavanagh, Nicholson, & Maskell, 2008). Cross-cultural skills foster understanding and inclusion of Indigenous students in classrooms and help teachers recognise their often-uncritical acceptance and promotion of the dominant culture in the school setting (Long, Moran, Harris, & Ryan, 2007). Without cross-cultural knowledge, teacher expectations are set in a paradigm framed by the dominant culture, and the uncritical acceptance of this can result in teachers unconsciously reinforcing and supporting a cycle of alienation and lowered expectations (Long et al., 2008). The importance of cross-cultural knowledge in breaking this cycle is noted by Malin (2003):

The negative consequences of classroom practices are unintended but are products of Australian institutions being configured to the needs of the dominant non-Indigenous group ... with specific cultural knowledge, personal knowledge of the families and community, and good teaching skills, teachers can organise their classes around regimes of social and cultural support. In this environment, the students blossomed, their literacy levels and their confidence levels were significantly elevated and their anti-social behaviour evaporated. (p. 15)

To support non-Aboriginal pre-service teachers in developing cross-cultural communication skills, the designers of ETTP recognised that the use of Aboriginal mentors was crucial to the immersion experience, and were envisaged as *agents of change*. The mentors were selected through

an interview process from students enrolled in ACU's Indigenous teacher education program on the basis of their ability to assist the mentees engage with the particular communities in which they were to be *immersed* and aid them in developing deeper understanding, knowledge and skills to work effectively in schools and communities with Aboriginal students.

An added advantage of selecting the mentors from ACU's Indigenous program was that as they themselves were in the final stages of their own teacher training and experienced in educational contexts, they had professional as well as community insights into the educational needs of Aboriginal students and their families.

Importantly, training was provided for both mentors and mentees to develop a common understanding of the mentoring process and of the roles and expectations of each. The relationship between the mentors and mentees was allowed to develop respectfully, and it was not until the completion of the training that the mentors and mentees freely chose their own particular partnerships.

Also crucial to the immersion was the use of focused assessment tasks in one of the supplementary units as an integral part of the immersion experience. This meant that participants were engaged in current literature, policy and dialogue about contemporary Aboriginal issues and their impact on educational outcomes prior to the immersion. The mentor was also a resource in this preliminary study, helping to enhance the learning of the mentee as they explored issues of poverty, racism, health, education, and employment from an Aboriginal perspective.

During the actual immersion, the mentee was required to reflect on experiences in the context of their previous learning. With additional insights from the mentor's own life experiences, it was envisaged that new understandings and insights would transform and change participants' attitudes and actions.

Thus, learning was developed from the lecture room and academic reading to learning from 'Indigenous people [who] have a lot to offer in terms of imparting our own knowledge' (Howey, 2005, p. 156). This was a very experiential approach which became 'an active, ongoing and constantly changing process and is determined by the interaction of cultural knowledge and individual knowledge' (Wadham, Pudsey, & Boyd, 2007, p. 195). The immersion and mentoring process were thus an essential part of the development of the participants' cross-cultural skills and cultural knowledge.

Early Research Findings on the Impact of Element 2

Early findings indicated that the cross-cultural experiences in this element of the ETTP were effective in enriching cross-cultural communication (Buckskin, 2012; Harrington & Brasche, 2011; Long & Labone, 2010). As reported by one ETTP graduate, 'the ETTP provided opportunities for myself to consider and implement culturally specific sensitivities and protocols when communicating with var-

ious members within the school, parents and other community members' (Harrington & Brasche, 2011, p. 27). It was apparent that the processes most instrumental in development of these skills were the cross-cultural unit enrolment and the community immersion experiences, but that these experiences, particularly the immersion, were not without significant challenges.

The most significant impact of the immersion was the initial change in attitude, reported by Long, Cavanagh, and Labone (2009) with comments such as: 'I have now finished the immersion and am coming home, and it may be as a better teacher (and) a better person. I have learnt so much about Aboriginal people, culture and more importantly issues affecting this community' and 'I had perceptions of being bashed in towns like Bourke and Walgett but found people in those towns to be warm supportive and caring. . . . I am certainly not as scared as I was before' (p. 35). This attitudinal change is particularly significant, as the ETTP graduates in the Harrington and Brasche's (2011) study reported that the most challenging experience in teaching Indigenous students was 'managing their own personal opinions and pre-conceptions about Indigenous communities' (p. 26).

Enrolment as a minority group in units in the Bachelor of Education (Indigenous) also prompted attitudinal change:

. . . definitely having Aboriginal students there (in class) was helpful. It was also important in breaking down fears of each other . . . learning not to impose middle class values on others. . . . Just listening to Aboriginal students and role playing with them helped us to understand their concerns and backgrounds. . . . If you are in the cultural minority group you begin to get a feeling for what they experience all the time. (Long et al., 2009, p. 36)

Mentors helped ETTP participants to negotiate and understand their experiences, and in the majority of cases both the mentee and mentor benefitted, as one mentor reflected:

. . . [the whole] experience was wonderful. . . . An essential platform for beginning teachers and even for young Indigenous people like myself to take a leadership role . . . [my mentee] has found a new family [in this community] I have found a new Tidda . . . (Long et al., 2009, p. 34)

The mentor relationships, however, were not without challenges. There was recognition of the importance of training of mentors and mentees: 'simply being Aboriginal does not necessarily provide an individual with understanding or skills to guide others' (Long et al., 2009, p. 38). There was also recognition of the need for a long period of mentoring, possibly over a full academic year extending into the first year of teaching: 'You need to have a mentor with whom you can have a long-term relationship — it's hard for them to just open up. . . . A trusting relationship takes time to develop' (Long et al., 2009, p. 38).

But there was also recognition of the impact of this time investment on the mentor, with the suggestion that ‘perhaps students can be mentored by Aboriginal Education Assistants in their schools during practicum’ (Long et al., 2009, p. 38). It should also be noted that in some instances the mentor/mentee relationship did not work; this was usually when the ETTP immersion model was varied and the mentor was shared between students. Nevertheless, this element provided critical attitudinal change necessary to facilitate a holistic understanding of Aboriginal education that was the focus of the third element of the ETTP design.

Critical Element 3: A Holistic Understanding of Aboriginal Education and of the Strategies Required for Improving Aboriginal Student Outcomes

The third element of ACU’s program recognised that outcomes for Aboriginal students are improved when teachers and schools adopt a holistic approach to education. The designers considered a holistic approach to have two key characteristics: the first and most prominent is the involvement of Aboriginal families and communities in education; the second is the application of whole-of-government or inter-agency strategies that attempt to improve educational outcomes of Aboriginal students and communities. The program attempted to address this through:

- the supplementary unit on Contemporary Issues delivered by an Aboriginal lecturer. This was intended to provide an Aboriginal perspective on a range of contemporary social, economic and cultural issues affecting Aboriginal communities and likely to impact on the participation of Aboriginal students in education; and
- the immersion experience in an Aboriginal community. This was envisaged as a 2-week experience involving the student in a work-experience placement with an Aboriginal community agency. It was specified that the work-experience was not to be a school placement.

While the immersion experience also contributed to the second element, the unique focus of the immersion in supporting this element was on developing an understanding of the role of community in education and recognition of the interrelatedness of government agencies in supporting improved outcomes for Aboriginal students.

The rationale for this element was largely based on policy, as research in this area is limited. The DET recognised the crucial importance of the relationship between its schools and local Aboriginal communities in all three versions of its Aboriginal Education Policy published in 1982, 1996 and 2008. The program was directly informed by the 1996 edition of the policy that stated: ‘it is through a meaningful partnership with communities that education for Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal students will be enhanced in NSW’ (DET, 1996).

Additionally, the first Partnership Agreement between DET and the NSW Aboriginal Education Consultative Group Inc (NSW AECG, 1999) committed the department to working with the Aboriginal community in a variety of ways, including through:

- recognising the AECG as the peak advisory body on Aboriginal education;
- ensuring that future policies and practices are inclusive of the needs of Aboriginal people through consultation with the AECG;
- ensuring that Aboriginal people are partners in the development, implementation and evaluation of Aboriginal education programs and resources; and
- encouraging the participation of all NSW Department of Education and Training staff from all levels in the NSW Aboriginal Education Consultative Group Inc.

The importance of partnerships and cooperation are continued in the revised Partnership Agreement 2010–2020: ‘This renewed Partnership Agreement builds on the joint work undertaken by the Department and the NSW AECG to ensure Aboriginal parents and communities are actively engaged in public education and training in NSW’ (AECG & DET, 2010, p. 3).

This commitment to community engagement is also a key feature of the Aboriginal education policies of the NSW Board of Studies and of key federal government agencies. MCEETYA’s Melbourne Declaration (2008) clearly identifies community engagement as a key strategy in addressing the needs of Indigenous students: ‘Meeting the needs of young Indigenous Australians and promoting high expectations for their educational performance requires strategic investment. Australian schooling needs to engage Indigenous students, their families and communities in all aspects of schooling’ (p. 15).

The emphasis on an inter-agency approach is evident in the current version of the Aboriginal Education and Training Policy in NSW, which indicates a need to ‘work together to build capacity within Aboriginal communities by working with other government agencies and non-government organisations to ensure that Aboriginal people participate as equal partners in education and training’ (DET, 2008, Commitment 1.7.1). This inter-agency strategy reflects the NSW government’s whole-of-government approach to Aboriginal policy implementation through working across agencies and with the Commonwealth government and peak Aboriginal organisations to implement policies and programs aimed at achieving overall improvements. This approach (an early example in NSW was the Walgett Community of Schools Project that commenced in 1999) recognises that improvements in any one of the government’s general priorities in Aboriginal policy will influence outcomes in other areas. The whole-of-government approach to the implementation of Aboriginal policy has also manifested itself in the involvement

of the Council of Australian Governments (COAG, 2002) in policy delivery at federal, state and local levels since 2002.

Despite the positive policy pronouncements on a holistic approach to improving Aboriginal education outcomes, there is still only limited empirical research support for these strategies.

Most research on community engagement appears to confirm that Aboriginal parents continue to have little involvement with schools, particularly in relation to curriculum development and school policies, most likely because of the negative historical relationship with schools (Dodson, 1994; Eckermann, 1994, as cited in Mellor & Corrigan, 2004; Herbert, Andeson, Price & Stehbins, 1999; Hughes, 1987; Mellor & Corrigan, 2004). Some preliminary research suggests that when schools foster community engagement there are tangible benefits for student participation and other academic outcomes (Cavanagh, 2005). For example, Cavanagh's 2005 review of the Yuwaalaraay Language Program at St. Josephs School in Walgett found that the introduction of the local language program had a very positive impact on community links with the school and was also associated with increased participation, attendance and other academic outcomes.

Schwab and Sutherland's (2001) review of a range of US and Australian approaches to community capacity building, through encouraging and fostering positive engagement of families, schools, and communities, suggests that there is considerable value in attempting to position the school at the centre of Indigenous communities. Some of the advantages of community engagement highlighted in this review included increased student participation and retention, greater community involvement in the school, and the fostering of a sense of 'community ownership of, and involvement in, both the school and the education process in general' (p. 15).

Research into a whole-of-government approach is still in its very early stages in Australia and its impact is as yet unclear (McGinty, 2002). This should not be surprising as the impact of community capacity building may be more likely to be felt over a generation than immediately.

Early Research Findings on the Impact of Element 3

From the preliminary research, it is evident that the ETTP did support some graduates in developing a more holistic understanding of Aboriginal education. At the conclusion of their first year of teaching in schools with high Indigenous enrolments, some ETTP graduates reported a much greater appreciation of the important roles of the wider community and the importance of communication across the community (Harrington & Brasche, 2011). A few graduate teachers indicated recognition of the impact of broader external factors, noting 'the extent to which issues arising outside flowed over into the classroom' and the challenges of welfare related issues and 'law issues

that impact on the classroom' (Long et al., 2009 p. 41). One teacher almost despairingly noted, 'Some children are coming to school with their home needs not being met so they can't learn — they're tired, hungry and frustrated — [there are] welfare issues' (Long et al., p. 41). Despite these comments, broad understanding of the impact of inter-government issues on students learning across the group of ETTP graduates was not widely recognised, with less than half of the graduates in the initial program listing issues related to disadvantages experienced by children in the home and social life as impacting on their implementation of the Aboriginal Education Policy (Long et al., 2009). This later finding suggests that teachers' understanding of the impact of wider community and government agencies on student learning remains a challenge.

Critical Element 4: Awareness and Pre-Service Experience of Appropriate Pedagogy and Classroom Management Strategies

The principle aim of the ETTP was to prepare teachers to work effectively in schools with significant Aboriginal enrolments so that better outcomes might be achieved with Aboriginal students. This expectation was embedded through this final element, which aimed to develop participants' knowledge and awareness of appropriate pedagogy for Aboriginal students by enhancing their:

- knowledge of program requirements and ability to design appropriate quality teaching and learning strategies;
- knowledge of learning styles and knowledge systems of Aboriginal children and the implications for program design and teaching and assessment strategies;
- knowledge of the linguistic needs of Aboriginal children;
- skills in cross-cultural communication and an appreciation of Aboriginal English; and
- skills in culturally appropriate behaviour management strategies.

The enhancement program was designed to achieve this by:

- incorporating an assignment in one of the supplementary units that required the students to review contemporary research in Aboriginal education;
- involving students in observational visits of schools currently demonstrating *best practice* in Aboriginal education, with a follow-up reflection on the strategies observed; and
- requiring students to undertake an internship in a school with significant Aboriginal enrolments, nominated by NSW DET.

The rationale for this element was based on DET policy that recognised the importance of teacher awareness

of cultural difference in the classroom and the ability to adapt pedagogy and classroom management practices accordingly. This element supported DET's commitment in the Aboriginal Education Policy to 'use quality teaching and assessment practices and resources that are culturally inclusive' (DET, 2008, Objective 1.6.4). The program did not presume the existence of a distinct Aboriginal pedagogy and learning style for all Aboriginal students, a presumption that has not been fully validated by research and which, in any case, is contradicted by the diversity of the contemporary Aboriginal community. Rather, the program drew on the assumption participants would apply pedagogy and classroom management knowledge covered in the core Bachelor of Education programs and reflect on this knowledge and these skills during the *best practice* observational visits and subsequent reflections and apply these during the internship in a school with significant Aboriginal enrolments.

The design of this particular element, consistent with the whole design of the program, was based on the conclusion reached by Mellor and Corrigan (2004) that culturally appropriate pedagogy developed from the ability of teachers to be reflective: their ability 'to be able to reflect critically on their own education and cultural identity' (p. 35) and, in turn develop 'pedagogical practice [that] must affirm each child's cultural identity. Rather than a child's culture being marginalised in teaching, it must be treated as an asset of real value to each child and to those who interact with them' (p. 35).

The components unique to this element were the focus on pedagogical skills, including language and classroom management strategies. The element was very much reliant upon observation of best practice and internship experience, rather than explicitly addressing these skills through unit content. This was perhaps a weakness of the program in the area of language, particularly in light of more recent work illustrating the benefits of explicit professional development programs such as Two-way Literacy and Learning (Oliver, Rochecouste, Vanderford, & Grote, 2011). However, mindful that the program could not cover everything, the focus was on developing awareness and valuing of Aboriginal English and recognition that 'Standard English is but one element in the linguistic repertoire of most Indigenous people' (Malcolm, 2011, p. 194). Malcolm (2011) stresses that Aboriginal English is 'distinctively Indigenous in many of its features. . . . Speakers of Aboriginal English and creoles are often mistakenly assumed to be able to learn, and learn through [Standard] Australian English without the support of a bidialectal or bilingual programme' (p. 195). As such, it was considered that fundamental to good pedagogy was understanding that Aboriginal English is the child's first language and central to their identity (Buckskin, 2012). In light of this more recent research, revisions of the program the ETTP should consider a more explicit focus on language.

Early Research Findings on the Impact of Element 4

The findings of the early research on impact of the ETTP clearly suggest that participants have developed the knowledge and skills to adapt their classroom management strategies and approach to pedagogy to comfortably and effectively teach Aboriginal students. They also display an awareness of and respect for Aboriginal English. Interviews with principals of the first ETTP graduates indicated that they were impressed by the classroom management skills of the ETTP graduates:

she has coped very well with a tough class [and is] a breath of fresh air in the school . . . she handles behaviour issues with tolerance and empathy and a range of strategies appropriate to the individual. There has been a notable shift in the behaviour of difficult students. (Long & Labone, 2010, p. 28)

Participants also reported feeling competent in behaviour management: 'The behavioural challenges tested me on many occasions, but I got through them' (Harrington & Brasche, 2011, p. 27).

Capacity to adapt and deliver appropriate pedagogy and to seek out appropriate support in developing lessons was also reported, as one teacher reflected:

The enhanced course has assisted me in creating effective lessons that are culturally specific and specific to my local area. . . . The use of the AEA [Aboriginal Education Assistant] to create lessons was very necessary as she had the understanding of the community and the culture of the children. (Long & Labone, 2010, p. 29)

The research also indicated that participants had an awareness of Aboriginal English and importantly, as Buckskin (2002) noted, 'that participants were aware that Aboriginal English was a highly politicised area, in which unequal power existed and played out in the classroom settings between Standard English and Aboriginal English' (p. 97). Buckskin also reported that 'participants expressed their desires to acquire more strategies on how they might genuinely recognise and incorporate the use of Aboriginal English in their classrooms' (p. 97). This latter point supports the need for a more explicit focus on language in the ETTP.

Conclusion

Clearly, each of the four critical elements underpinning the ACU program was inter-related and overlapping. However, taken together, it was expected that the four elements would greatly enhance the training of program participants and provide them with the best possible grounding to commence their careers in Aboriginal education. Preliminary research into the effectiveness of the program suggests it has been broadly successful in achieving these ends (Buckskin, 2012; Harrington & Brasche, 2011; Long & Labone, 2010). As such, the program provides a preliminary framework for the design of pre-service teacher education programs that support development of teachers

with knowledge and skills to work effectively with Indigenous students.

The challenges associated with the program should also be acknowledged. One of the most significant challenges is maintaining the integrity of the original program while adapting it to different university contexts. The preliminary research into the program found some modifications — particularly those that altered or reduced the immersion experience and shared mentors across a number of participants — undermined the benefits for participants (Long et al., 2009). Other strategies also present challenges, such as enrolling students in Indigenous residential program units. This was instrumental in attitudinal change, yet difficult due to the limited number of Indigenous residential teacher education programs offered in Australia. The final challenge is to adequately address language through more explicit attention to professional learning in this area.

Finally, the designers of the program also believed that a fifth critical element to assist the enhanced graduates would be ensuring they had access to ongoing support and professional development in Aboriginal education following their initial appointment. However, the designers recognised that provision of such post-appointment professional development was ultimately the responsibility of employers and beyond the resources of the university and the scope of the program.

The development of teachers who have the capacity to engage effectively with Indigenous students, their families and communities requires careful development of pre-service programs that move beyond tokenistic approaches of mandatory units on Aboriginal education to holistic programs that not only raise awareness of Indigenous issues but truly build individual capacities to work effectively in schools with Indigenous students. This article has outlined a detailed rationale and approach for the design of programs to achieve such ends. The responsibility now lies with universities and employing bodies to implement such practices to ensure equity and opportunity for Indigenous students.

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