



Indigenous Education
- Everybody's Business:
Implications for teacher
education

**BOARD OF TEACHER REGISTRATION
QUEENSLAND**

Indigenous Education - Everybody's Business: Implications for teacher education

**Report of the Working Party on
Indigenous Studies in Teacher Education**

December 2004

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Citation should be in the following form:

Indigenous Education - Everybody's Business: Implications for teacher education, a report of the Working Party on Indigenous Studies in Teacher Education (2004), Queensland Board of Teacher Registration, Toowong, Brisbane, Australia.

This report is available on the Board's website <http://www.btr.qld.edu.au>

National Library of Australia card number and ISBN
0 95858002 6 X

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Contents

Letter of Transmittal	v
Preface	vii
Acknowledgments	vii
Introduction	1
Perspectives from Recent Literature	1
Scan of Indigenous Studies within Preservice Teacher Education Programs	5
Consultations with the Queensland Education Community	5
Conclusion	14
References	18
APPENDIX 1	20
APPENDIX 2	24
APPENDIX 3	25
APPENDIX 4	33

Letter of Transmittal

28 January 2005

Mr John Dwyer, Chair
Board of Teacher Registration
Toowong, Queensland

Dear Mr Dwyer

In April 2003 a Working Party was established, through the Board's Professional Education Committee, to update the Board's 1993 report *Yatha: Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies in Teacher Education*.

Terms of Reference for the Working Party were:

- to develop a position paper;
- to undertake a scan of teacher education institutions and their offerings on Indigenous education;
- to survey teachers of Indigenous students about what they thought should be included in preservice teacher education and induction programs to prepare for teaching Indigenous students.

The project was expanded from the initial terms of reference to include a literature review and to involve a broader consultation process capturing the views of teachers, school principals, Indigenous parents and community members, teacher aides and district-level administrators.

The Working Party is pleased to present to you its report, *Indigenous Education – Everybody's Business: Implications for Teacher Education*, and makes the following recommendations:

1. That the report be endorsed for publication and distribution.
2. That when the report is distributed to the various groups with an interest in Indigenous education, it be accompanied by a letter seeking a response and suggesting actions that might be followed to address key issues outlined within it.

The Working Party believes that the responsibility to provide effective teacher education and induction must be shared equally among higher education institutions, teacher employers, schools, Indigenous communities and the teaching profession to ensure successful learning outcomes for Indigenous students.

We suggest that as a follow-up to the report's distribution, information about its impact be sought from targeted groups before the end of 2005. Such groups might include universities, employers, teacher associations, parents and Elders, unions, principals' associations, Indigenous bodies and the Queensland Studies Authority.

Yours sincerely

Dr Penny Tripcony (AM)
Chair, Indigenous Studies in Teacher Education Working Party

Preface

The Board of Teacher Registration's *Professional Standards for Graduates and Guidelines for Preservice Teacher Education Programs* are published to assist teacher education institutions to develop programs acceptable for teacher registration purposes in Queensland. These standards and guidelines are supplemented by a range of reports in key areas such as Indigenous education.

It was decided in 2003 to update the area of Indigenous studies in teacher education. The Board's previous focus on Indigenous education had involved coordinating the 1993 'Yatha' Conference and publishing a report of the conference proceedings. 'Yatha' – an Aboriginal word meaning 'coming together to discuss' – had provided opportunities to share understandings about Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures and to talk about their place in teacher education (see Appendix 1).

A decade on, the Board's 2003-2004 project to update Indigenous studies in teacher education draws on the understandings gained through the 'Yatha' process and re-examines Indigenous education and its implications for teacher education in the light of movements in research, policy and practice.

Acknowledgments

The Board of Teacher Registration expresses its sincere thanks the following people who contributed to the 2003-2004 project of the Indigenous Studies in Teacher Education Working Party and to the preparation of this report:

- The members of the Indigenous Studies in Teacher Education Working Party (listed in Appendix 2).
- The teachers, parents and Elders, teacher-aides and Community Education Coordinators, district-level administrators and school principals who participated in the project's consultation and interview processes.
- Staff of the Office of the Board of Teacher Registration for professional support during the project and in preparation of the report.

Introduction

The Board of Teacher Registration's (BTR) interest with regard to Indigenous studies within teacher education programs lies in two areas: the preparation of teachers to teach Indigenous students, and the preparation of teachers to teach all students about Indigenous cultural and historical matters.

In the decade following publication of the Board's report of the Yatha Conference (1993), a somewhat mixed picture has emerged regarding the status and treatment of Indigenous issues in teacher education. Only some of the recommendations resulting from the Yatha conference process have been implemented in Queensland by higher education institutions, education authorities, and the BTR – either wholly or in part. At the same time, there is broad acknowledgement that general improvements in Indigenous education nationally have been slow, with a strong impetus currently being expressed to bring about more rapid and significant benefits for Indigenous students (Australian College of Education, 1999: 2-3).

In 2003 it was proposed that a discussion paper be prepared as part of a process by the Board's Professional Education Committee (PEC) to re-examine the area of Indigenous Studies in Queensland teacher education. The Working Party on Indigenous Studies in Preservice Teacher Education was established to undertake this project (membership in Appendix 1). It was decided the paper would draw on: recent literature; a background paper prepared for the PEC; a scan of teacher education institutions and their offerings on Indigenous education; and the results of interviews with teachers, school principals, Indigenous parents and community members, teacher aides, and district-level administrators focusing on what they believe should be included in preservice teacher education and induction programs to prepare teachers for Indigenous education.

Perspectives from Recent Literature

Preservice Teacher Education

The inadequate teacher preparation for teaching Indigenous students, and the low levels of employment of Indigenous people as teachers, are both cause for concern (Commonwealth of Australia, 2000). Calls have been made for all initial preservice teacher education programs to promote as a core competency in qualifying teachers an understanding of the diversity of students and their communities – most especially in relation to Indigenous students – and provide in-school experiences in a range of settings, including rural communities (Department of Education Science and Training, 2003). There has been no coordinated or comprehensive approach taken to ensure that preservice teachers are adequately prepared in the area of Indigenous education (Price, 2003). Improved strategies are required of education authorities

for targeting and screening quality teachers for schools in Indigenous communities (MACER, 2004).

The current practice of teacher education is predominantly assimilationist yet its rhetorical goals are those of culturally diverse and pluralist education (Hickling-Hudson & Ahlquist, 2003). There is some empirical evidence to support the concept that mandatory Indigenous studies in teacher education programs will enhance teachers' self-concepts regarding their management of Indigenous issues, and will produce other desirable outcomes (Craven, 2002). Sim et al. (2004) voice concern over the status of preservice and inservice education for teachers in the area of Indigenous Australian Studies (as reported via two national studies) and outline a cross-cultural teaching approach for preservice secondary teachers of SOSE with an emphasis on challenging knowledge and developing understandings of difference in ways that invite considerations of how these should influence professional knowledge.

Harslett et al. (2000) outline teacher-identified characteristics of effective teachers of Indigenous students. These include: understanding students' culture, history and home backgrounds; the ability to develop good relationships with Indigenous students and their families; a sense of humour; preparedness to invest time in interacting with Indigenous students outside the classroom; and including cultural relevance and recognition in the curriculum and classroom environment. Along similar lines, Osborne (2001) suggests four 'frames' as a means of addressing the question of how well preservice teacher education can prepare teachers' hearts, minds and actions to deliver quality teaching to Indigenous students in remote communities. The frames are: productive pedagogy; equitable multiculturalism; school reform via school-wide pedagogy; and culturally relevant pedagogy which builds from students' daily lives and cultures.

Partington (2003) argues the case for all graduating teachers having an understanding of the reality of classroom life for Indigenous students. Six major areas are identified: awareness of the existence of racism; involving parents in the education of the child; an understanding of the potentially different values of Indigenous students; understanding of what constitutes threats to the teachers' classroom management and how Indigenous students respond to threats against them; understanding and acceptance of Aboriginal English or other Aboriginal languages in the classroom; and an understanding of the diverse environmental influences on Indigenous students and the strategies that may be helpful in overcoming their negative aspects. According to Partington, government efforts to effect change in Indigenous education will not succeed by focusing on the students; teachers must change first.

One of the difficulties newly-graduated non-Indigenous teachers face when posted to remote Torres Strait (TS) and Cape York Peninsula (CYP) schools is that of teaching students whose first language is not English and for whom English may be only one of several languages spoken (Shnukal, 2002).

Deans of education across Australia have expressed concern regarding the substantial decline

in participation in the Education field of study by Indigenous students (a much greater decline than in other fields of study) and have recommended government support for proposals that relieve the inequitable financial burden on significant numbers of Indigenous students, taking account of the educational, social and financial circumstances and needs of Indigenous students and their communities (Australian Council of Deans of Education, 2001). There should be a review of RATEP (Remote Area Teacher Education Program) with a view to enhancing its capacity to produce greater numbers of quality Indigenous teachers (MACER, 2004).

Teacher Induction

The Katu Kalpa report (Commonwealth of Australia, 2000) recommended that MCEETYA draw up guidelines for improved induction courses for teachers posted to schools with significant Indigenous enrolments, including those teachers who are appointed to positions during the course of a year. Price (2003) stressed that induction programs for teachers prior to their posting to schools with Indigenous students are essential, and provide support to teachers, schools and communities.

Curriculum and Pedagogy

It is acknowledged that Indigenous students face difficulties as they move between cultures and subcultures, including those connected with schooling (Aikenhead, 1998). Aboriginal children are capable participants in the school context, particularly when there is teacher recognition and understanding of the cultural layers embedded in the discourse (Simpson & Clancy, 2001). Three factors underpinning success for Indigenous students are cultural recognition, acknowledgement and support; the development of requisite skills; and adequate levels of participation (DETYA, 2000). Partnerships between schools and universities can produce positive outcomes for Indigenous students in their development of critical multiliteracies while also becoming familiar and comfortable with university settings through initiatives such as the PLUS (Positive Links between Universities and Schools) project (Doherty, 2002).

The Katu Kalpa report (Commonwealth of Australia, 2000) acknowledged that some progress has been made in the implementation of more culturally-inclusive curriculum and teaching practices in schools. Recommendation 12 from the report sought the development by MCEETYA of a coordinated consultative national approach to ensure that culturally inclusive best practice informs all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander education and training needs. Support for the maintenance of bilingual education programs was sought in those areas where they are seen as appropriate and necessary by Indigenous communities (Recommendation 15). In Recommendation 21, universities were asked to address more effectively the need to provide preservice teachers with a much stronger grounding in theory and practice relating to the teaching of Indigenous children, including ESL.

Culturally inclusive curriculum and/or the presence of Indigenous teachers will not automatically lead to an improvement in Indigenous student outcomes (Mellor & Corrigan, 2004). Schools need to strengthen learning and management structures to ensure greater alignment between curriculum, pedagogy and assessment practices in Indigenous education (MACER, 2004).

There is too little advice available on how to develop a range of tools that allow educators to cater within the classroom for the linguistic and cultural diversity of students and their lifelong learning needs (MCEETYA, 2001). Rather than simply relating 'learning styles' to cultural traits in ways that marginalise and alienate Indigenous students within mainstream education, there should be an emphasis on the communicative processes within the school community context and a focus on how these can either work positively or negatively towards desired outcomes (Stewart, 2002).

The establishment of good functional levels of literacy in Standard Australian English and numeracy for Indigenous students is one focal point identified for continuing work (DETYA, 2000).

Inservice Education

Price (2003) presented research findings indicating that inservice education for teachers related to Indigenous issues most commonly occurs at the school level by means of executive staff passing information on to teachers. Lack of time, cost, teacher workload and fixed timings for pupil-free days were identified as prohibitive factors for teacher attendance at inservice courses. A further issue, according to Price, is that of teachers feeling unsure of their learning needs in Indigenous education. As decisions about non-mandatory inservice education are made at the school level, Indigenous education has had to compete for attention with all other curriculum areas, is often given a low priority, and has not been adequately funded to effect change. On the other hand, some structures have been put in place from time to time to support and enhance specific priority areas and projects such as 'Literacy for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students' (Taylor, 2002).

The Katu Kalpa report (Commonwealth of Australia, 2000) recommended to MCEETYA the development of appropriate performance indicators for monitoring the employment of Indigenous people in education (Recommendation 16). The report also recommended (in Recommendations 18 and 20) the establishment of improved incentives for experienced and accomplished teachers to accept appointments in schools with a high proportion of Indigenous students, and a review of incentives to attract and retain experienced teachers in such schools and in remote areas.

Continuing professional learning of Indigenous education workers, including study to qualify as teachers, should be encouraged and supported (Department of Education Science and Training, 2003).

Scan of Indigenous Studies within Preservice Teacher Education Programs

To assist the Working Party, Queensland higher education institutions offering preservice teacher education were asked to provide information about how the area of Indigenous Studies was being addressed in their programs. Summary information was prepared from the data provided.

The summaries reveal a range of offerings and teaching approaches in programs, even within programs offered by the same institution. Only one university requires the study of a core unit on Indigenous Studies in all its preservice teacher education programs. Two other universities include core units in some programs. In the remaining cases, the area of Indigenous studies is addressed through embedded components or individual strands within curriculum units and teaching and learning studies units and/or electives units (see Appendix 3 for summary tables).

Consultations with the Queensland Education Community

Overview

The recent literature conveys consistent messages about the personal and professional attributes, knowledge and skills which teachers need to work effectively with Indigenous students. In light of this, the Working Party sought to confirm the relevance of those messages within the Queensland context by consulting with local educators and community members.

During September and early October 2004, Working Party members conducted 21 interviews involving teachers (7), school principals (8), para-professionals (2), and district-level administrators (4). Consultations were also held with 30 parents and four Elders. The purpose was to gather information from individuals and groups about the knowledge, skills and understandings they believe teachers need so as to work effectively with Indigenous learners, and to compare this with findings from the literature.

Interviewees were selected to ensure a fair distribution across state and non-state schooling sectors (early childhood, primary, and secondary) and metropolitan and regional Queensland, as indicated in the table below.

Context \ Interviewee	Teacher	Principal	Para-professional	District Officer	Parent/Elder
State system (Metropolitan, SE Qld)	2	2		1	
State system (Regional Qld)	2	5	2	2	
Non-state system (Metropolitan, SE Qld)	2	1			
Non-state system (Regional Qld)	1			1	
Brisbane metropolitan					22
Outside Brisbane					12

Consultations with Indigenous parents and community members were conducted by telephone and personally, some individually and some in groups. A summary was prepared of the comments and opinions expressed. The interviews with school-based personnel and district-level administrators took place mostly by telephone, with a small number occurring face-to-face. The interviews were all recorded and later transcribed. The data from all interviews and consultations were analysed to compare responses and extract key themes and issues.

The same base question was used in all the interviews and consultations with slight modifications made according to the category of interviewee (see Appendix 4). All groups were asked to describe the knowledge, skills, experiences and understandings about Indigenous education needed by teachers. School Principals and District Officers were asked what they wanted teachers to bring with them from their preservice preparation and what areas would be developed at the school. Teachers were asked about the knowledge, skills and understandings they had when they commenced teaching, what skills they would have liked to have had, and what knowledge and skills they gained 'on the job'. Teacher aides, community education counsellors and parents were asked to comment on the knowledge and skills needed by teachers in order to work successfully with Indigenous children.

Discussion of Findings

Data analysis revealed a clear clustering of responses around four key areas:

- teachers' knowledge and understanding of Indigenous history and culture;
- partnerships and protocols for working with the community;
- applying pedagogical knowledge to the Indigenous learner; and
- language and literacy issues.

While the discussion that follows deals with each area individually as a matter of convenience, it is important to acknowledge their fundamental interrelatedness. Each area impacts on, and is influenced by, all the others. The areas of preservice teacher education, induction, and ongoing professional development are also closely linked and are addressed within each section.

TEACHERS' KNOWLEDGE AND UNDERSTANDING OF INDIGENOUS HISTORY AND CULTURE

Links between knowledge of history and cross-cultural awareness

All categories of respondents placed emphasis on the need for graduate teachers to have some generic cross-cultural awareness and knowledge of the history of Indigenous people in Australia, and for this to be built upon and contextualised once teachers are employed in specific settings. There was acknowledgement given by many respondents to the fundamental importance of teachers being able to interact in culturally-sensitive ways to Indigenous students and their families. A parent summed up the situation succinctly with the comment, 'teachers need historical knowledge to understand cross-cultural issues.'

Areas of history and culture mentioned specifically by respondents included significant historical events and government policies (national and state); aspects of Indigenous spirituality; specific cultural norms (eg yarning, eye contact, 'shame', the role of extended family in children's upbringing); and the challenges faced by Indigenous students in schools and at home. In the words of one principal, 'It is necessary to look at things like stolen generation policies ... policies of protection and control, all of those things so that people who are sent out to the remote communities or communities anywhere can ... get an understanding that those kinds of political processes underpin things like alcoholism and community dysfunction ... and be able to connect to those issues.' A district administrator commented on the need for 'skilling [teachers] in the interpersonal side of things', while another identified 'cross-cultural understanding of the context that they're getting themselves into and what makes that context' as an area to be introduced at the preservice teacher education level.

Teachers and para-professionals highlighted in their responses the diversity of Indigenous cultures, languages and local histories, and the need for teachers to understand the cultural influences at play in the classroom. One teacher suggested there should be specific cultural studies units within teacher education programs. Another proposed that preservice teachers should, as part of cross-cultural awareness, be required to surface issues, and learn, about their own culture – ‘our own culture is the one that is invisible to us.’

The importance of context-specific knowledge and understanding

Comments by principals and district officers indicated that, while they look to the teacher preparation programs to provide some grounding in cross-cultural awareness and some knowledge of relevant history, context-specific knowledge and understanding can only be gained by working in schools and living in communities. Several of the district officers, principals, teachers and teacher aides made direct reference to the essential nature of local conditions in determining how teachers should engage with Indigenous students, their families and the community. As one district officer put it, ‘[it’s] very important that induction programs about culture actually happen in the community where the teacher is going’. Other comments reinforcing that belief included, ‘the best preparation for Aurukun is to live and work in Aurukun’ and ‘you need to understand and know where they [Indigenous students] started from.’

With respect to inservice education, there was reference made by all groups interviewed to teachers needing ongoing development to understand the local Indigenous culture. One principal expressed the view that teachers at her school need to gain knowledge of ‘the challenges that face my young people and the community they’re in ... the challenges they face in school and therefore how it is going to impact potentially on how they teach.’ One teacher interviewed supported the idea of developing school policies to promote Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures. Another teacher noted that ‘teachers really need to know an ... Indigenous [community] classroom looks very different from a classroom [with Indigenous students] at, say, Brisbane State High School.’

Parents were also in favour of including ‘local history, culture, aspects of Indigenous language and knowledge’ within the local school curriculum. One referred to the fact that ‘a lot of kids are part of a culture that parents have been brought up with negativity towards school ... a stumbling block we have to get over.’

The need to address issues of tolerance

However, some parents reported that when attempts had been made by Indigenous teaching and support staff to introduce Indigenous content in this way, there had been complaints by non-Indigenous students and some of their parents about the Indigenous focus – ‘They made comments about why they had to learn “that stuff”’.

A non-Indigenous teacher also commented on having to deal with racism demonstrated by Indigenous students and community members towards him. In his words, 'Many of these kids come from backgrounds where they're very suspicious of, and very hostile towards, white people and white teachers particularly.' There was a strong sense from several of the interviewees that racism is diminished when teachers are able to create positive relationships with their students and with community members.

PARTNERSHIPS AND PROTOCOLS FOR WORKING WITH THE COMMUNITY

Teachers' personal and professional attitudes to Indigenous people

The important role played by teachers' dispositions towards Indigenous education was a recurring theme in the data, both explicitly and implicitly.

All categories of interviewee highlighted the importance of preservice teachers having access to Indigenous people as part of their preparation to be teachers – both on campus and in field experiences. It was noted by some teachers and principals that many preservice teachers have had little or no exposure to Indigenous people in their prior lives. There were several references made to the value of having direct input by Indigenous people to relevant areas of teacher education programs. One teacher also suggested that preservice teachers should 'go out into the community and look at some Aboriginal organisations', adding that Indigenous studies 'isn't just within a unit but [needs] to be integrated and used right across the rest of life.' Another suggested that preservice teachers should engage with – and critique – policy documents relevant to Indigenous education. Two of the teachers interviewed felt they had no knowledge, skills or understandings about Indigenous education prior to taking up their first school appointment.

Several of the district office personnel and principals alluded to the value of having good role models for teachers at both the preservice and inservice levels with respect to Indigenous education. Reference was made to giving preservice teachers 'opportunities to go into schools where there is good practice occurring', and having 'aspiring teachers spend more time in schools ... and engaging in the communities where they may well choose to work.' At the inservice level, one district officer saw a need for teachers 'to debate and get an opportunity to talk about their beliefs and values.'

Comments from teachers included reference to 'a real focus on attitude', the importance of being 'open to all sorts of possibilities', and the need to generate 'a different mindset about the job of teaching.' District officers and principals offered comments such as the need for teachers to 'understand that Indigenous parents really want the same things for their kids as other parents' and to 'have a sense of justice ... stretch their head to that sense of justice for all.'

The ability to establish and maintain relationships

Not surprisingly, the need for teachers to have highly-effective interpersonal skills featured strongly in comments about relationship- and partnership-building. This is a desirable attribute for all teachers in all contexts. However, some respondents alluded to the need for particular sensitivity by non-Indigenous teachers when establishing relationships with Indigenous people. A district administrator identified a two-fold process involving the development of interpersonal skills for teachers alongside the building of community capacity at the 'broader than interpersonal level.' One principal suggested that preservice programs should include 'things that you can do to get the Indigenous community on side and ways that you can communicate with parents.' A teacher-aide offered the advice that 'you wait to be invited and take the lead of another person as in how to address the person.' In the words of a parent, 'teachers have got to listen – not just hear ... put aside their own life history and listen to what parents, Elders and kids are saying ... it's about respect.'

Many of the interviewees made some kind of reference to the importance, at the inservice level, of teachers continuing to develop skill in relationship-building – 'skills in developing those partnerships', 'build those relationships between the community and the teacher and the education system', 'encourage teachers to become part of the community ... share their own life experiences.' One principal identified flexibility (of individual teachers as well as schools) as a key ingredient in building positive relationships between the school and its community.

There was a strong message from all categories of interviewee that some skills necessary for relationship-building can only be developed within the context of a specific community. Understanding the broader context was mentioned by one teacher, such as awareness of 'family values ... knowing that there are aunties and that involved in the immediate family.'

Comments from parents and Elders reflected the importance they place on being involved in decision-making within the school. One Elder noted 'the principal ... invites us to special events at the school and is now looking at introducing the local language into the school.' Some parents expressed satisfaction with current partnership arrangements. Others felt there could be more contact directly with them rather than referring issues to Elders.

There was emphasis given by most categories of interviewee to the importance of providing teachers with support in strengthening partnerships. Several of the district officers, teachers, principals and teacher aides made reference to this issue. The support was seen as needing to come from all levels of the system – from district offices, from the school administration and from the teachers and teacher aides themselves. There was, however, little information provided about the specific nature of the support respondents considered necessary. One district officer gave the example of videotaping and critiquing of role plays to prepare teachers for interviews with parents.

District officers and principals suggested that teachers need to work closely with community

Elders in order to understand protocols – ‘speak to one of the Elders in that community and that’s where you would get your protocols.’ A teacher commented that ‘My initial way of being in a situation is to be very quiet and to be a bit more of an observer and I started to look at how things were happening.’

Induction processes for teachers

The issue of appropriate induction into community relationships was raised by most categories of respondents.

One district administrator was of the view that to induct teachers into a school community, ‘working with a specific person is probably better, very localised and very contextualised to the specific area.’ The value of induction occurring at the community level lay in teachers seeing that ‘you treat Indigenous people like you treat anyone else and they will actually support you and help you through all the protocols.’

Comments from principals about induction of new teachers included, ‘we talk about the community so that we can ... give them a little bit of readiness in terms of what to expect’, and ‘induction program is where we introduce them to the local elders, we give them a bit of a bus tour.’

Teachers suggested that understandings about the protocols of working with the community came from ‘being mentored by people who are very good at it, and who are respected within the community’ and ‘recognising the role models that are out there.’ One teacher emphasised the point that ‘real contextualised dealing with the Indigenous issues is best done in-service,’ and that teachers new to a community need to focus on ‘learning to work in another culture.’

APPLYING PEDAGOGICAL KNOWLEDGE TO INDIGENOUS LEARNERS

Having high expectations of success

A strong theme within the data was that of teachers being able to apply pedagogical knowledge to help Indigenous learners achieve successful outcomes.

District officers, principals and some teachers raised the issue of the need to have high expectations of Indigenous students. The word ‘accountability’ was used repeatedly in that context. This was seen as an area to be dealt with at the preservice level with further development at the induction phase and through ongoing targeted professional learning. One district administrator commented on, ‘the importance of having expectations and aspirations for learners and ensuring that we find the models to ... engage their interest.’ Another

spoke of the importance of teachers having ‘an understanding of pedagogy ... what are the key elements that make successful learning and teaching happen.’

Some teachers and principals commented explicitly on the fundamental importance of school ethos and leadership in improving outcomes for Indigenous learners. Teachers’ comments included: ‘I think it is the ethos of the school itself which is probably ... more powerful than anything’; ‘I think it’s often best to start with looking at where the school culture is’; and ‘I sometimes feel I’m fighting a losing battle by promoting Aboriginal and Islander culture – promoting it positively.’

Principles of effective learning

Teachers, principals, para-professionals and district officers identified the need for teachers to have knowledge of and skills in applying principles of effective learning and teaching – such as knowledge of a range of preferred learning styles – to Indigenous learners. This was identified as a preservice issue that needs to be contextualised during teachers’ induction. A teacher-aide gave the example of the need to ‘break down whatever it is or have questions in the classroom that relate to the environment here.’ A number of teachers alluded to the importance of understanding the specific school context. One teacher noted that ‘individual differences are more significant than cultural differences’. Another said, ‘Individual schools [should] have their own strong program that looks at the context in the schools because teaching Indigenous kids is not the same wherever you go.’

Many of the respondents advocated that teachers should be able to develop or adapt curriculum in culturally-relevant ways. Examples of specific programs were mentioned such as ‘Early Language Enrichment Program’, ‘Dare to Lead’ and FELIKS (Fostering English Language in Kimberley Schools). Comments from district officers, principals and teachers included offering programs that are culturally-sensitive and that occur in the students’ natural environment. A principal spoke of ‘giving the staff different perspectives on thinking about how we teach Indigenous students ... and get them more interested and engaged in learning.’ One parent presented a concern that ‘teachers saw the kid as the problem rather than the teaching method.’

Classroom relationships

Several responses from school-based interviewees and district officers reinforced the need for non-confrontational approaches by teachers to behaviour management. This was seen as being both a preservice and inservice issue. One teacher spoke of the importance of ‘doing a lot of listening’ while another offered the opinion that the most effective teachers in Indigenous contexts are those who are ‘calm, they are non-reactive, they are ... emotionally very stable people.’ A third teacher advocated an approach that was ‘firm but fair ... and [incorporating] a sense of humour.’ A teacher-aide referred to successful teachers talking to students in non-authoritarian, non-judgemental ways.

LANGUAGE AND LITERACY

Explicit literacy teaching and ESL pedagogy

There was a very strong message coming through from all respondents that preservice teacher preparation should involve explicit literacy teaching and ESL pedagogy. Suggested areas of focus included: tools such as FELIKS; teachers being able to embed literacy strategies in lesson planning; and ways of helping Indigenous students develop understanding of their first language.

One district administrator identified the need for graduate teachers to have a 'different skill set to recognise that [English] is a second language then build that second language capacity.' Another emphasised the value of visual learning through technology and indicated that this was an area of inservice education that he encouraged teachers in his district to undertake.

Teachers and para-professionals made specific mention of the need for preservice programs to address the teaching of literacy. In offering support for the suggestion that there might be a generic literacy unit in preservice teacher education programs, one teacher favoured the idea that 'the focus could be on literacy teaching [be]cause it's good practice whether you teach ESL kids or low socio-economic kids or Indigenous kids.' A teacher-aide said, '[Aboriginal literacy] should be brought into their preservice, too, like in training in English as a second language.'

Parents felt teachers did not seem to know about the effects that Aboriginal children's hearing problems caused by otitis media could have on literacy and learning. One said, 'The teacher saw the problem as (child's name) not being able to understand.'

Aboriginal English

There were comments from across the interviews about the need for teachers to understand, value and make use of Aboriginal English as a language in its own right. One district officer spoke of the need for preservice teachers to 'learn about Indigenous education, their language and their literature ... how they study, how they learn, themselves as learners.' A principal spoke of the need for teachers to have 'methods of communicating with young Aboriginal children ... understand that [they] do in fact speak a second language ... there is a structure to the [first] language that's being used.'

One teacher expressed the view that teachers are very conscious of language differences in the case of international students who have English as a second language. She believed that school structures catered quite well for those students. This was in contrast, however, with the case of Indigenous children. She said, 'But when we have students from remote areas – [for] some of our kids, Standard Australian English is their third language – these kids come with Aboriginal English as their first language ... Aboriginal English just sounds like bad English, and I think it's really important that all preservice teachers have an understanding of the integrity of Aboriginal English itself.'

A parent commented, 'Classroom language is different from the way we speak at home and (child's name) is having trouble comprehending.' Some parents also indicated their own difficulty in understanding teachers' language during parent-teacher meetings.

Conclusion

The decade since Yatha

The purpose of this project has been to re-examine the area of Indigenous studies in teacher education in light of movements in research, policy and practice in the decade or so since the Yatha conference was convened. From evidence gathered via recent literature, the scan of Queensland teacher education institutions, and consultations with teachers, administrators and community representatives, there is little to suggest that the Board's position regarding Indigenous issues in teacher education should shift significantly from that which is reflected in the recommendations of the Yatha report (see Appendix I).

There appears to be a strong correlation between the data from the interviews and consultations conducted by the Working Party and what the recent literature tells us about Indigenous education. Universities, teacher employing authorities and the profession itself must share the responsibility for providing appropriate high-quality learning opportunities to Indigenous students. In addition, it is essential that teachers are adequately prepared – and confident – to teach Australian Indigenous Studies to all students.

The Working Party consultations confirmed the importance of issues such as:

- teachers' personal and professional attitudes to Indigenous learners;
- the links between knowledge of Indigenous history and cross-cultural awareness;
- teachers' ability to establish and maintain positive relationships with the community;

- the need for teachers to understand local contexts when creating learning environments for Indigenous students; and
- the need for every teacher to be able to teach literacy, understand the role of Aboriginal English as a language in its own right, and engage appropriate ESL pedagogy where required.

Cultural knowledge and protocols

All graduate teachers need to have some generic cross-cultural awareness and knowledge of the history of Indigenous people in Australia. This should be supplemented and contextualised as part of teachers' induction in schools and through their ongoing professional learning. Teachers require both an appreciation of the diversity of Indigenous cultures, languages and local histories, and an understanding of the ways in which cultural influences play out in the classroom. Knowledge of how various government policies and practices have had impact on Indigenous people's lives is an important component of this understanding.

It is essential that the Indigenous community is included in the development and implementation of these aspects of teacher education. Preservice teachers must have access to Indigenous people as part of their preparation to be teachers – in both on-campus and field experiences.

Teaching and learning

It is also necessary for teachers to know about and be able to apply principles of effective learning and teaching to Indigenous students. Critical to this is the capacity of teachers to both cater to a range of learning styles and to teach literacy, incorporating second-language pedagogy as required.

Language and literacy

Foundation work in the area of literacy teaching should take place at the preservice level for all teachers with further development occurring in context through inservice opportunities.

High expectations of student success

It is essential that teachers have high expectations of academic success for Indigenous students. This is closely linked to teachers' understandings of literacy learning, and culturally-relevant curriculum and pedagogy.

Community relationships and partnerships

In addition to a requirement for highly-effective interpersonal skills, teachers of Indigenous students need to continue developing skills in relationship-building and working in partnership with Indigenous parents and communities. Having high expectations of students is an important aspect of this relationship-building. So, too, is a disposition towards entering appropriately into the community and learning the protocols for working within it.

Clearly, all the areas identified above require some foundational work within preservice teacher education programs and preservice providers may need to review the ways in which their programs are addressing these dimensions.

Teacher induction and ongoing professional learning

However, it is at the specific school and community level that teachers truly come to grips with the particulars of relationships, language, culture, curriculum and pedagogy. It would appear important, therefore, that due attention be given by employers to the means by which teachers are inducted into communities and schools where there are Indigenous learners.

Elements of induction identified in the consultations as being important include:

- providing new teachers with information about local history and culture;
- allocating mentors to new teachers to assist in their entry into the community;
- guiding new teachers through the school's learning program, particularly as it relates to Indigenous learners;
- demonstrating how the roles of Community Education Counsellor (CEC) and Indigenous Education Worker (IEW) operate within the school and the community; and
- providing opportunities for teachers to further develop their knowledge and skills in key areas such as literacy and ESL.

Evidence from both the literature and the Working Party's consultations points to a mixed picture regarding the quality of teacher induction generally, and induction to Indigenous contexts in particular. Recommendations from the 2004 Review of the Powers and Functions of the Board of Teacher Registration include a strengthening of Board functions regarding teacher induction. Consideration could be given to the development of a framework for induction, drawing on the best of the processes currently employed in Queensland and elsewhere.

Final comments

This project has reinforced the importance of preservice teacher education providing all graduates with a solid foundation in Indigenous education which needs to be built upon through induction and ongoing professional learning, in diverse contexts, for the benefit of Indigenous students.

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APPENDIX 1

RECOMMENDATIONS from the 1993 BTR REPORT:

YATHA: ABORIGINAL AND TORRES STRAIT ISLANDER STUDIES IN TEACHER EDUCATION CONFERENCE PROCEEDINGS

The recommendations put forward by the nine discussion groups on the second day of the Yatha conference addressed a wide range of issues related to the conference theme and revealed a strong consensus for Aboriginal studies and Torres Strait Islander studies to become a core component of all preservice teacher education programs.

After the conference, a consolidated set of recommendations was developed. The recommendations are reproduced below.

A. PRESERVICE TEACHER EDUCATION

1. That from no later than 1996 all preservice teacher education programs include core Aboriginal studies and Torres Strait Islander studies for all teacher education students.
2. That the content of such core studies include:
 - social justice and equity issues
 - historical/sociological/political/identity aspects of Aboriginal communities and Torres Strait Islander communities (rural/urban/isolated)
 - the nature of an inclusive curriculum
 - awareness of Aboriginal teaching and learning styles and Torres Strait Islander teaching and learning styles
 - cross-cultural awareness
3. That these core units be supported by the integration of:
 - Aboriginal perspectives and Torres Strait Islander perspectives
 - appropriate strategies for teaching Aboriginal children and Torres Strait Islander children
 - appropriate strategies for teaching Aboriginal studies and Torres Strait Islander studies in the school curriculum

RECOMMENDATIONS from the 1993 BTR REPORT: (cont)

into both:

- studies of teaching and learning
 - curriculum studies, especially those dealing with the eight key learning areas
4. That culturally inclusive teaching and learning strategies be adopted in the implementation of preservice teacher education courses.
 5. So that Aboriginal perspectives and Torres Strait Islander perspectives are adequately reflected in courses, that members of Aboriginal communities and Torres Strait Islander communities (for example, representatives of QATSIECC, Aboriginal elders) be involved in the development, implementation and evaluation of Aboriginal studies and Torres Strait Islander studies in preservice teacher education courses.
 6. That all teacher education institutions work with local Aboriginal communities and Torres Strait Islander communities to provide opportunities for students to undertake culturally appropriate practical experiences in Aboriginal settings and Torres Strait Islander settings, to participate actively in an Aboriginal community or Torres Strait Islander community and to gain skills to work with Aboriginal education workers and Torres Strait Islander education workers and Aboriginal communities and Torres Strait Islander communities.
 7. That, in addition to the above core studies, preservice teacher education courses offer the opportunity to take elective units and/or to take a major in Aboriginal studies and Torres Strait Islander studies, and/or Aboriginal education and Torres Strait Islander education.
 8. That the Board of Teacher Registration review its Guidelines on the Acceptability of Teacher Education Programs for Teacher Registration Purposes to include appropriate reference to Aboriginal studies and Torres Strait Islander studies.

B. INSERVICE TEACHER EDUCATION

1. That there be appropriate induction and systems of support for beginning Aboriginal teachers and Torres Strait Islander teachers, for beginning teachers teaching Aboriginal students or Torres Strait Islander students, and for all beginning teachers teaching Aboriginal studies and Torres Strait Islander studies.
2. That teacher employing authorities and universities develop, implement, review and evaluate, professional development in Aboriginal studies and Torres Strait Islander studies for teachers, especially principals, and for teacher educators, including:

RECOMMENDATIONS from the 1993 BTR REPORT: (cont)

- cross-cultural awareness
 - community involvement
 - curriculum leadership
 - Aboriginal pedagogy
 - Torres Strait Islander pedagogy.
3. That members of Aboriginal communities and Torres Strait Islander communities (for example representatives of QATSIECC, Aboriginal elders) be involved in the development, implementation and evaluation of Aboriginal studies and Torres Strait Islander studies in inservice teacher education courses.

C. RESEARCH IN TEACHER EDUCATION

12. That teacher education institutions initiate and support research into Aboriginal pedagogy and Torres Strait Islander pedagogy from a practical perspective that caters for diversity within cultural groups and communities.
13. That the Queensland Higher Education Forum develop a policy on research ethics in the areas of Aboriginal studies and Torres Strait Islander studies, and Aboriginal pedagogy and Torres Strait Islander pedagogy, for adoption by all higher education institutions.

D. REPRESENTATION ON DECISION-MAKING BODIES

14. That there be a representative of Aboriginals and Torres Strait Islanders on the Board of Teacher Registration.

E. SELECTION, RECRUITMENT AND PROMOTION

Complementing the recommendations concerning preservice and inservice teacher education were a number of recommendations with implications for selection and employment. These focused on the issues summarised below:

- increasing the number of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander graduates employed in schools;

RECOMMENDATIONS from the 1993 BTR REPORT: (cont)

- employing only graduates with appropriate qualifications and experience in locations with significant Indigenous populations;
- including Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander representatives (e.g. nominees of QATSIECC) on interview panels;
- ensuring that Aboriginal perspectives and Torres Strait Islander perspectives are taken into account in selection criteria and in selection processes;
- including an understanding of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Island cultures and of educating Aboriginal children and Torres Strait Islander children in the criteria for the selection of AST and other promotional positions;
- developing appropriate programs and career structures for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander education workers, including community teachers and teacher aides;
- appointing aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander education officers to all school support centres.

F. OTHER

A number of recommendations pertaining to school curriculum, community involvement in schools and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander languages in schools were also made and these are included in the full listing of group recommendations in the report.

APPENDIX 2

Membership of the Indigenous Studies in Teacher Education Working Party

Chair

Dr Penny TRIPCONY

Chair, Queensland Indigenous Education Consultative Body

Members

Mr Perry ANDERSON (from March 2004)

Queensland Teachers' Union

Ms Margaret DUFFIELD

Corinda State High School

Mr John DWYER

Chair, Board of Teacher Registration

Mr Evan HARRIS

Australian Catholic University, McAuley at Banyo Campus

Ms Kathryn KELLY (to December 2003)

Griffith University

Mr Leigh SCHELKS

Principal, Indigenous Education and Training Alliance

APPENDIX 3

Summary of Indigenous Studies within Queensland Preservice Teacher Education Programs (2003)

PROGRAM	CORE UNIT	EMBEDDED COMPONENTS – LEARNING OUTCOMES/TOPICS	ELECTIVES/STRANDS	TEACHING APPROACHES
AUSTRALIAN CATHOLIC UNIVERSITY QUEENSLAND				
B Ed (Primary)	<i>Australian Indigenous Peoples – Past and Present</i> (Indigenous history, culture, contemporary issues, racism, protocols of involvement in Indigenous communities, understanding of significance of Indigenous studies).	SOSE - students focus on learning outcomes which look at Australian History from an Indigenous perspective and study culture and identity in terms of Indigenous Australians. <i>Teaching & Classroom Management</i> - students are encouraged to plan and present lessons based on Indigenous culture and/or history. <i>Nature & Development of Language</i> - Indigenous Language issues in study of Dialects of English and Differences vs Deficit theories of language development.	<i>Mathematics Education 3</i> - included in this unit as Mathematics in other Cultures. <i>Environmental Studies</i> - Indigenous history included in a field study.	Various including Indigenous presenters, Visits Lectures, Student presentations.
Grad B Ed (primary) *	<i>Australian Indigenous Peoples - Past and Present</i> (see above).	<i>Teaching & Classroom Management</i> - (see above).		
Grad B Ed (secondary)	<i>Australian Indigenous Peoples - Past and Present</i> (see above).			

* Students with prior knowledge in area may undertake alternative unit.

PROGRAM	CORE UNIT	EMBEDDED COMPONENTS – LEARNING OUTCOMES/TOPICS	ELECTIVES/STRANDS	TEACHING APPROACHES
<p>BEEd (Primary) (Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies)</p>	<p>The Diploma in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education articulates into this course. The Diploma includes 3 specific Indigenous units: <i>Indigenous Lifestyles Past and Present</i>; <i>Postcontact Indigenous History</i>; and <i>Contemporary Issues in Indigenous History</i>.</p> <p>The B Ed includes 1 specific Indigenous unit: <i>Australian History in an Indigenous Context</i>.</p>	<p>Student outcomes include: Knowledge & understanding of:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - key features of Indigenous cultures and lifestyle in traditional and contemporary society; - the interrelationships between past, present and future Indigenous cultures; - changes in traditional cultures and societies and the effects of these changes on Indigenous communities; - the process of culture contact and change in Australia before the 1960s; - the relationship between indigenous and non-indigenous Australians since 1967; - theoretical concepts in relation to land rights; - ATTSIC system and related Indigenous political issues; - the main general trends in Australian history and the impact of these trends on Indigenous communities; and - the impact of Indigenous cultures on the general Australian community. <p>Ability to research written and oral sources of their people's history.</p>	<p>Indigenous Spirituality 1 and Indigenous Spirituality 2.</p>	<p>Reading tasks. Self-directed study. Lectures and workshops in residential schools. Oral presentations. Minor written assignment. Major written assignment. Timeline project. Self and peer assessment activity. Compilation of reflective journal about Indigenous Australians of the present time.</p>

AUSTRALIAN CATHOLIC UNIVERSITY QUEENSLAND

PROGRAM	CORE UNIT	EMBEDDED COMPONENTS – LEARNING OUTCOMES/TOPICS	ELECTIVES/STRANDS	TEACHING APPROACHES
<p>BOND UNIVERSITY</p> <p>Master of Educational Practice</p>		<p>Embedded components to achieve the BTR professional standards and additional identified capacities, including workshops on:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - literacies, & engagement with education; - history of education and curriculum design; - equity and inclusion, communities, parents and schooling, alternative approaches to education , including visit to an Indigenous cultural centre; - inclusive learning activities and learning environments; - student diversity and school-home partnerships; - intercultural communication and ethical issues; - engaging and caring for all learners, and duty of care. <p>All participants engage with all topics and must demonstrate achievement of related objectives.</p>		<p>Approach to development of the standards is based on students' participation in learning tasks. Indigenous issues are embedded within broad tasks and activities. Staff with relevant expertise. Visit to Indigenous cultural centre.</p>

PROGRAM	CORE UNIT	EMBEDDED COMPONENTS – LEARNING OUTCOMES/TOPICS	ELECTIVES/STRANDS	TEACHING APPROACHES
CHRISTIAN HERITAGE COLLEGE Bachelor of Education (Primary and Secondary)		Cultural Influences Upon Education; The Inclusive Classroom <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - education in different cultural settings; - comparative views; - Indigenous as a social justice target group, individual needs. 		Various including Audio-visual and visiting speakers. Emphasis on cultural understandings.
CENTRAL QUEENSLAND UNIVERSITY Bachelor of Learning Management	Several of the graduate standards for the BLM require demonstration of appropriate knowledge in context and a variety of courses provide students with opportunities to do this.	Sustainable Communities (SOSE).	Racial Formation Courses for Indigenous students.	Various including Audio-visual and visiting speakers.

PROGRAM	CORE UNIT	EMBEDDED COMPONENTS – LEARNING OUTCOMES/TOPICS	ELECTIVES/STRANDS	TEACHING APPROACHES
B Ed (Secondary)		Indigenous Perspectives on Australia – a topic within <i>People and Environment</i> in SOSE teaching strand; an issue in <i>Teaching to Difference</i> .	<i>Indigenous Australian Studies</i> (core in SOSE teaching area). Reconciliation is a topic within <i>Media Literacies</i> (for future English teachers).	Indigenous content taught by Indigenous academic staff. Emphasis on cultural understandings.
B Ed (Primary)		Topic within <i>Socio-cultural Understandings of Education; Introduction to Education; Arts II; HPE Major</i> ; addressed in all SOSE units; an issue in <i>Teaching to Difference</i> .		Indigenous content taught by Indigenous staff. Meeting between Indigenous staff and first year students.

GRIFFITH UNIVERSITY

PROGRAM	CORE UNIT	EMBEDDED COMPONENTS – LEARNING OUTCOMES/TOPICS	ELECTIVES/STRANDS	TEACHING APPROACHES
<p>JAMES COOK UNIVERSITY</p> <p>B Ed (EC, Primary, Secondary)</p>		<p>Graduate outcomes include commitment to working with students, families, communities including Indigenous, working in non-racist and non-discriminatory ways, responding to difference, promoting social justice. Topics within number of courses including curriculum, Ed foundations studies, Art Ed, child and adolescent development, Inclusive Ed.</p>	<p>8 subject major teaching area - Aboriginal & TSI Studies - available to Secondary students.</p>	<p>Lecture topics tied to Indigenous issues through content, ATSI speakers, resources. Assessment allows an Indigenous focus.</p>
<p>QUEENSLAND UNIVERSITY OF TECHNOLOGY</p>				
<p>B Ed (EC, Primary, Secondary)</p>	<p>Culture Studies: Indigenous Education – foundational understandings in culture construction and with a particular focus on the historical and contemporary relationships between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians; a pathway to future specialisations; and a range of critical tools to enable students to apply concepts should they not specialise.</p>		<p>Specialist pathway in Indigenous Education.</p>	<p>Academic staff with expertise in Indigenous studies teach core unit.</p>

PROGRAM	CORE UNIT	EMBEDDED COMPONENTS – LEARNING OUTCOMES/TOPICS	ELECTIVES/STRANDS	TEACHING APPROACHES
B Ed (Secondary graduate entry and dual degree)		<p>Core course on <i>Educational Issues</i> includes readings and seminar discussion on issues facing Indigenous students.</p> <p>Embedded in curriculum areas: social, cultural and equity issues; intercultural communication skills; knowledge and awareness of Indigenous history, cultural identities.</p> <p>Recognition of need to consult Indigenous communities re teaching about Indigenous issues.</p>	<p>Studies of Aboriginal peoples and Torres Strait Islander peoples may be selected as one teaching area.</p> <p>Unit on Indigenous knowledge and education (Dual degree students).</p>	
B Ed (Middle Years of Schooling)		<p>Course on supporting learners with diverse needs – strategies to meet needs of Indigenous students.</p>		
B Music/B Ed		<p><i>Educational Issues</i> addresses relevant issues.</p>	<p><i>Indigenous Knowledge & Education, Ethnomusicology.</i></p>	

THE UNIVERSITY OF QUEENSLAND

PROGRAM	CORE UNIT	EMBEDDED COMPONENTS – LEARNING OUTCOMES/TOPICS	ELECTIVES/STRANDS	TEACHING APPROACHES
UNIVERSITY OF SOUTHERN QUEENSLAND				
B Ed (Secondary)	<i>Australian Indigenous Studies</i> (contested views of contemporary Indigenous cultures, societies identity; Indigenous social & political structures; education policies & practices, racism).	Embedded in curriculum courses, topic within <i>Youth Studies</i> elective.	Elective module – incorporating Indigenous perspectives in KLAs.	Major in Australian Indigenous and TSI Studies.
B Ed (Primary)		Embedded in courses such as <i>Variable Teaching Contexts & Beginning Professional</i> ; topics within SOSE.		
B Ed (FET)		Embedded into Current Issues courses.		
B Ed (EC)		Embedded within a number of courses such as health, music, arts, emerging literacies, SOSE, diversity in EC.		

APPENDIX 4

Interview Questions

School Principals and District Office Personnel

1. What sort of knowledge, skills, experiences and understandings about Indigenous education do you want teachers to bring with them from their preservice preparation?
2. What types of learning and skills do you help or encourage teachers to develop at your school(s)?

Teachers

1. What knowledge, skills and understandings about Indigenous education did you have before you went to (name of school)?
2. Based on your experiences, what knowledge and skills would you like to have had?
3. What knowledge and skills have you gained 'on the job', and how has this been achieved?

Teacher Aides and Community Education Counsellors (CEC)

1. Tell me about some teachers you've worked with who were really successful in teaching Indigenous children. What made them so good?

Parents/Community Members

1. What knowledge and skills do you think teachers need in order to work successfully with your children?



BOARD OF TEACHER REGISTRATION
QUEENSLAND

