

## Indigenising the practicum program in teacher education

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This paper will outline a range of strategies that seek to 'make sense' of Aboriginal Studies for participants in teacher education programs through co-requisite, experiential learning opportunities in educational and community settings. The paper outlines the author's undertaking over several years to Indigenise the practicum program that has been operating within the B.Ed. (primary) courses at UTS and to frame its potential relationship to the teaching of Indigenous Australian studies.

This paper will also discuss some of the constraints and dilemmas that have been encountered in the process of Indigenising the practicum program at UTS including the implications of tertiary access 'demarcations', issues surrounding funding and resources, awareness of the current level of demand that exists upon Aboriginal communities and, as a perceived consequence of this, efforts to 'in-build' principles and manifestations of reciprocity between the university and the schools/communities.

This paper poses the question "If pre-service teacher education programs do not deliberately 'in-build' opportunities for participants to work with Aboriginal students or communities, how can those programs meet the outcomes of national and/or state/territory Indigenous education policies?"

This paper will add to discussion surrounding advocacy for the mandatory status of Indigenous Australian studies within teacher education programs by providing complementary initiatives within 'practice teaching' programs.

In order to secure and optimise learning in mandatory Aboriginal Studies perspectives within teacher education programs it is appropriate and necessary to focus upon the quality, nature and extent of the content within dedicated subjects as well as perspectives that exist across a range of mainstream subjects. The findings in research by Craven, Marsh & Mooney (2003) confirm that 'pre-service teachers who have undertaken mandatory subjects compared to pre-service teachers who undertake perspective courses, feel they are more capable of teaching Aboriginal students and Aboriginal Studies and furthermore are more likely to enjoy doing so' (p57). Additionally, the

authors suggest that there remains 'much to be done' and that 'existing mandatory subjects also need to be critically examined and refined to maximize their potency' (p66).

It is from this position that the work of Indigenising practicum programs within teacher education becomes particularly relevant. While the term implies a major transformation of a conventional program it can, in fact, be through a range of minor but strategic interventions in assessment tasks, online support and sites visits that can accelerate pre-service teachers' awareness of and responsiveness to

Aboriginal community aspirations and their own future professional obligations.

The emerging role of the NSW Institute of Teachers in regard to state-based teacher and course accreditation provides a timely opportunity to explore how mandatory Aboriginal Studies perspectives are being delivered in NSW tertiary education teacher education programs. Teacher registration boards across other Australian states having previously embarked upon this process provide NSW with insights into an array of core procedural enquiries and findings.

The precedent set by the Board of Teacher Registration, Queensland (2004) in providing a report that summarises the approaches taken by Queensland teacher education programs to accommodating Aboriginal Studies as well as presenting summaries of consultations with the Queensland education community is useful for the current NSW process (pp25-32). The BTRQ report identifies patterns in the delivery of mandatory Aboriginal Studies perspectives in teacher training as well as providing valuable insight into perceptions from within the teaching profession.

Finally, and significantly, the BTRQ report in 2004 re-visits the recommendations from the 1993 Board of Teacher Registration Report - Yatha: Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies in Teacher Education Conference Proceedings (pp20-23).

The Yatha report, formed from the proceedings of the conference of the same name, encapsulates the experience, aspirations and advocacy of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander educators. It provides recommendations across pres-

service teacher education, inservice teacher education, research in teacher education, representation on decision-making bodies and selection, recruitment and promotion among others.

Turning to the role of the NSW Institute of Teachers and the significant task before it, educators can see Aboriginal education identified explicitly within the 'Professional Teaching Standards' (2005) as a mandated component. While each of the elements and aspects could incorporate knowledge/s that will potentially impact Aboriginal learners and the effective teaching of all NSW students K-12 about Aboriginal Australia some are more explicit. Element 2 in the NSW Institute of Teachers 'Professional Teaching Standards' is *Teachers Know Their Students and how they Learn* (NSWIT, 2005 p5). One aspect of Element 2 is *Knowledge of and respect for the diverse social, cultural, ethnic and religious backgrounds of students, and the effects of these factors on learning*. It requires that graduate teachers:

- 2.1.1 Demonstrate knowledge, respect and understanding of the social, ethnic, cultural and religious backgrounds of students and how these factors may affect learning.

Another aspect of Element 2 is *Knowledge of strategies for addressing student needs*. It requires that graduate teachers:

- 2.1.6 Demonstrate knowledge and understanding of specific strategies for teaching:
  - Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students

- Students with Special Education Needs
- Non-English Speaking Background students
- Students with Challenging Behaviours (NSWIT, 2005, P5)

In addition to the NSWIT teaching standards, a goal of the NSW Aboriginal Education Policy requires that 'Aboriginal Communities and the Department of School Education will become partners in the whole educational process' (NSWDET, 1996, p 9). Specifically, outcomes expect that:

- Aboriginal people are empowered to become active partners
- the knowledge held by Aboriginal communities is recognized and valued
- educational policies and programs are developed in consultation with Aboriginal communities (p14).

In the focus area 'All staff-all students-all schools: All DSE staff and students will have knowledge and understanding of and respect for Aboriginal Australia' an outcome is that 'Knowledge and understanding of Aboriginal Australia is evident in all schools and throughout the public school system' and that 'policies and programs reflect the views and aspirations of Aboriginal Australia' (DET, 1996, p15). There is much to be undertaken in teacher training to achieve these appropriate and necessary outcomes.

Under the focus area of 'Aboriginal Students: Curriculum Teaching and Assessment Programs will be

challenging and culturally appropriate' outcomes require that:

- Educational outcomes for Aboriginal students P-12 are enhanced so that they are comparable with those of the rest of the student population
- Teaching and learning programs reflect the diverse needs of Aboriginal students
- Culturally appropriate teaching strategies and assessment methods are implemented and
- Aboriginal languages are maintained, revived and reclaimed (NSWDET, 1996, p10-11)

At a national level the requirement of school educators to be able to work with Aboriginal parents and community members is expressed in the Department of Education, Science and Training National Goals for Indigenous Education (1990) under the category of 'Involvement of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in educational decision-making'. Educators are expected:

1. To establish effective arrangements for the participation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander parents and community members in decisions regarding the planning, delivery and evaluation of pre-school, primary and secondary education services for their children.

In an educational environment that is increasingly standards based, it is important to focus upon how, in the NSW context, the aforementioned outcomes are to be achieved. How can

accrediting institutions and tertiary education providers certify that graduate teachers can demonstrate their achievement of the aforementioned state and national goals and outcomes if the opportunity to assess such capacities at professional sites does not take place pre-service? Additionally, who judges the success of pre-service teachers or initial teacher capacities to work effectively in embarking upon partnerships with local Aboriginal communities and in their maintenance of such partnerships?

Add to this the challenges presented by the fact that students in some mainstream teacher education programs are socially disconnected from local Aboriginal communities. In the UTS primary education context, approximately 85% of students surveyed (over several years) at the commencement of the mandatory Aboriginal Studies subject indicated that they have never met (consciously) an Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander person. This in itself makes the task of supporting teacher trainees to meet the professional expectation of forming partnerships with Aboriginal communities all the more significant.

As mentioned earlier Craven, Marsh & Mooney identify that 'There also remains much to be done' (2003, p66). Solutions to the mandating of Aboriginal Studies in tertiary institutions will be localized and varied. At UTS, in addition to and arising out of mandatory and past elective Aboriginal Studies subjects within teacher education programs, a range of complementary experiential learning opportunities have emerged that have helped to 'make sense' of

Aboriginal Studies subjects and topics in primary education students.

In the UTS primary education context, three experiential approaches have been employed to enhance learning in Aboriginal studies beyond the conventional delivery of the existing mandatory Aboriginal Studies subject.

Firstly, students for several years have been required as part of their mandatory Aboriginal Studies subject to make connections with Aboriginal community members coinciding with subject content on the topic of Aboriginal Self-Determination. Students generally approach a representative of an Aboriginal organizations or an Aboriginal unit within a mainstream organization and identify the role of that person. This ensures that every UTS graduate has, at the minimum, autonomously 'had a yarn' with an Aboriginal community member away from the university before they have graduated. Data collected from interviews within this undergraduate fieldwork is used solely for assignments within coursework and is not a part of any formal research. The significance of teacher trainees traveling to the Aboriginal community members' preferred site as opposed to a formal educational setting would not be lost on a number of Aboriginal education colleagues.

Secondly, students in elective Aboriginal Studies subjects have undertaken project-based work in primary schools with significant populations of Aboriginal students. These have covered an array of topics that have usually been negotiated with Aboriginal Education Assistants or Aboriginal teachers. In an

effort to implement these experiences along principles of reciprocity, recognizing that students are professionally benefiting from their time spent with Aboriginal education staff, the types of projects students undertake are often those that, ideally, are, at the point of contact, already identified within the school/ community site and needing human resources to implement. Clearly, they also need to be achievable and accessible from the subject participant perspective. Projects have included NAIDOC week post-school event displays, units of work from the Aboriginal languages syllabus, initial stages of website design, transition program participation.

Thirdly, an Aboriginal Education Practicum Placement (AEPP) option has evolved over several years whereby trainee teachers have undertaken a practicum placement in a school with a significant population of Aboriginal students. The location could be in a metropolitan, suburban, rural or remote setting. This is very popular with Aboriginal students in teacher education and a percentage of non-Aboriginal students. The practicum has a range of specific features, including where ever possible, a visit by students on the first day of practicum to Aboriginal organizations within the community as a means of induction. Students undertake the AEPP after having successfully completed a sequence of initial practicum placements.

The following student reflections upon their AEPP provide valuable insights into the impact such placement can have in permitting scope for students to employ theoretical understandings in professionally significant sites.

I would like to say that my practicum experience has without doubt changed my view on teaching and opened my eyes to a world I never knew existed. Textbooks and classes are one thing but a real life experience is a valuable tool that every up and coming teacher should access. I highly recommend the prac. to other students. (Submission 1; 2004)

I thoroughly enjoyed my practicum experience at school 'W'. The staff and community were warm and welcoming and I learnt so much both about teaching in a rural school and teaching Aboriginal students. I believe that this prac. has shaped my views on teaching and has increased my confidence as a teacher, as well as my ability to be culturally inclusive in my teaching strategies. As a result of my practicum experience, I have applied to teach in a rural school through the Department of Education and Training. Because of my experiences, I am confident that I will have the skills necessary to accomplish this.

(Submission 2; 2004)

In conclusion I look back at University and am grateful that I chose to study the Aboriginal electives but all the study and research could not give me what I got from actually going to 'W'. I am confident in saying that the experience has made me not only a better person but also a better teacher, not only in preparing me to teach Aboriginal students but also for all students in multicultural

Australia. Why will I remember 'W', definitely because of the local elders and community members I was fortunate to meet and also the children: not because of what I taught them in the classroom but because of what they taught me in and out of the classroom.

(Submission 3;  
2004)

Each of the three experiential approaches to providing Aboriginal studies perspectives within teacher education, fieldwork, project-based course work and the AEPP, have been significant in helping students 'make sense' of their theoretical/historical studies in the field while simultaneously aligning their professional capacities with policy expectation. Field experience, practicum or professional experiences are opportunities where education students are invariably motivated by the school/community site as providing approximations of their future professional lives.

Through the examination of literature arising out of the evolution and nature of the practicum in teacher education it becomes evident that an alignment of Aboriginal educators' aspirations and recurrent, community-centred research themes provide a practical union. Firstly, it is useful to appreciate the evolution of the practicum itself.

According to Turney, Cairns, Eltis et al (1982) 'ideally conceived the practicum is a purposeful series of supervised professional experiences in which student teachers apply, refine and reconstruct theoretical learnings, and through which they develop their teaching competencies' (p1). In the local

context, Turney in 1975 identified three main phases that historically the practicum in teacher education has progressed through. These phases include the pupil-teacher system from 1850 to 1900; the training college system from 1900 to 1960; and the phase that commenced with a reconstruction of teacher education from 1960 to the present day (Turney, Cairns, Eltis et al, 1982, xi).

Practicum, also known as professional experience, practice teaching and field experience, has, in past decades, formed an integral component of teacher education. Presently, it is a core stream throughout teacher education programs. Glancing across a time-line of mainstream literature arising out of the practicum program within teacher education, it can be identified that support exists, theoretically, to accommodate professionally relevant interactions between students in practicum placements and the broader school community. Logically, local Aboriginal community constituencies should be represented within that accommodation. It follows then that opportunity exists for an Indigenisation of practicum programs in various capacities.

Significantly, Turney, Eltis, Towler & Wright (1985) noted the tendency of schools and teachers to be isolated from the parents of students 'and, more generally, from the community they serve' (p102). Clearly, state and federal policies expect this to be addressed. At the physical site level, the document 'Welcome to Country & Acknowledgement of Country' (NSWDET, NSWAECC & NSW Teachers Federation, 2004) requires

NSWDET school staff to be knowledgeable about and able to demonstrate awareness of localised issues of land custodianship and contemporary protocol.

Turney, Eltis, Towler & Wright, state that:

Teacher education programs must not just talk about the value of improved, closer teacher-parent relationships and of fuller and more genuine community participation in schools. Student teachers must come to understand the many possibilities and the great potential value of such relationships and participation through experience in the practicum; they must learn of the teacher's roles in initiating & pursuing such aims; and have opportunities to develop some competence in the tasks needed for the performance of such roles (1985, p105).

Stevens (1988) explores the role of placements in in-service education. Specifically, these pertain to a Diploma of Education (in the secondary school age, UK context) and, significantly, include non-school settings. For project-based electives in Aboriginal studies subject suites and in community site-based assessment tasks this supports again an experiential modality within which trainee teachers can operate and potentially be assessed by both Aboriginal academics and site-based community members as required.

Tom (1997) in 'ReDesigning Teacher Education' maintains 'multiculturalism throughout the program' as a key

principle 'to include previously excluded voices' (p121) or risk educational programs becoming 'too neat, too clean, too elite'.

It follows from literature snapshots such as these that the Indigenising of practicum programs as a means of recognizing and representing Indigenous Australians as the first community and a founding stream within contemporary multicultural Australian society is, in various capacities, desirable, necessary and logical. The more complex task remains in conceiving of the implementation of such an initiative.

In terms of identifying means of Indigenising a central program in teacher education such as the practicum there are numerous factors to contend with. Logistically, it is prohibitive to expect to provide annually and reliably for the vast numbers of state-based teacher trainees an opportunity to teach in a school with a significant number of Aboriginal students despite the fact that the latter potentially represents foundational opportunities to accelerate students' capacities to work successfully with Aboriginal learners and with Aboriginal communities. University access to schools, based upon geographic parameters, makes this even more of a challenging proposition. On another level, existing demands upon Aboriginal communities and organisations can make the widespread application of this approach prohibitive. Finally, resources (financial & human) to manage the implementation of initiatives need to be available and secure to ensure sustainability of an initiative such as this.

In response to the continued gap in achievements of educational outcomes between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal students K-12, state and federal policies in Aboriginal education require that solutions be found to better prepare teachers for working with Aboriginal learners and in the inclusion of Aboriginal studies and perspectives within teaching.

The annexation of theoretical Aboriginal studies subjects with teacher education practicum programs might be explored as one possibility of meeting some of the state and federal policy expectations and professional goals in Aboriginal education. This desire to provide opportunities for trainee teachers to commence, at least at an elementary level, partnership opportunities with Aboriginal communities has been implemented as mentioned in mandatory Aboriginal Studies subjects at UTS over several years.

It is from this platform that I turn to more recent means of Indigenising the practicum placement in teacher education. The following extract is from an assessment task in the current mandatory Aboriginal education subject in primary education at UTS. The task is deliberately annexed to the practicum (known as professional experience) that students would be undertaking concurrently with the mandatory subject. Significantly, because students invariably target practicum placements in regions where they reside, the outcomes from the task below extend to providing enhanced learning about a local Aboriginal presence in the area where they live.

Task: You are required to undertake (via ethical procedures outlined in your professional practice handbook) a situational analysis of the school you are conducting your professional practice within in regard to Aboriginal education. This might include:

- identifying the traditional owners of the land the school community is located upon (if in border country name both);
- the making of a draft 'acknowledgement of country' that could be used in that setting;
- enquiring about, via school management, and recording the number of Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander students and staff (academic & support) attending the school;
- identifying who the NSWDET Aboriginal Education consultant is for that school (or Aboriginal consultant within a diocese if in a Catholic school) and their role ;
- identify the NSW Aboriginal Education Consultative Group Inc. local representatives and their role;
- identify which Local Aboriginal Land Council(LALC) serves the region the school is situated upon and name those staff (and their contact details) who can support school programs;
- identify other Aboriginal organizations (eg Aboriginal medical services), or organizations that support Aboriginal education (eg reconciliation groups);
- identify particular community events that celebrate Aboriginal culture;



- explore the Commonwealth Department of Education, Science & Training website to identify 'ambassadors' who are NSW-based;
- enquire with your co-operating teacher about Aboriginal perspectives within programs/Aboriginal studies units of work and record/document response/s

Your analysis should be presented in the form of a report (including relevant material in appendices). (UTS Subject No. 029310, 2006, p7)

The outcomes of this task, similar to those of the other experiential learning opportunities identified in this paper, respond directly to outcomes contained in current state policies and workplace documents in the field of Aboriginal education as identified earlier. The process provides a valuable professional template that pre-service primary and secondary teachers can apply in any school setting. It is also supported by online learning opportunities to manage large numbers of students accessing a number of organizations within a time constraint. Future expressions of this task and other opportunities in both the B.Ed (primary) and B. Teach at UTS will ensure that teacher education graduates will have a means of professionally connecting with Aboriginal education and Aboriginal studies networks before they enter the teaching

profession. This work contained to one subject stream of teacher education also points to the need to constantly work collegially to identify the nature, extent and quality of Aboriginal perspectives across all primary and secondary teacher education subjects.

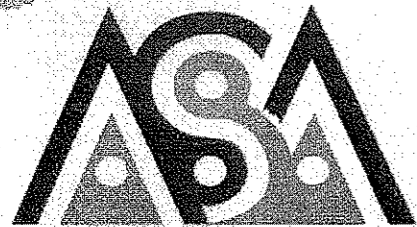
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SYDMAC Academic Press  
Sydney, Australia

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**ABORIGINAL  
STUDIES  
ASSOCIATION**

***Aboriginal Studies:  
Making the  
Connections***

**Collected Papers of the  
12th National ASA Conference,  
Bankstown Sports Club  
Thursday 2<sup>nd</sup> and Friday 3<sup>rd</sup> November 2006**

Artwork and Designs by Greg Weatherby

*Aboriginal Studies:  
Making the Connections*

Collected papers of the 12<sup>th</sup> National ASA Conference,  
Bankstown Sports Club  
Thursday 2<sup>nd</sup> and Friday 3<sup>rd</sup> November 2006

Edited by Nigel Parbury & Rhonda Craven

**EDITOR'S NOTE:**

All refereed conference papers have been subjected to blind external peer review. All non-refereed papers have been edited by the Aboriginal Studies Association 2006 Conference Papers Editors. The opinions and statements published are the responsibility of the authors, and such opinions and statements do not necessarily represent the policies of the ASA or views of editorial staff. Conference Papers are published annually.

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**2006 Aboriginal Studies Association**  
**ISSN: 1834-402X**

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## Conference Report

### Aboriginal Studies: Making the Connections

Our conference was held at the Bankstown Sports Club on Thursday 2<sup>nd</sup> and Friday 3<sup>rd</sup> November. This 12<sup>th</sup> national conference of the ASA was a joint partnership effort between the ASA, the AECG, the NSW Aboriginal Education Council and the SELF Centre (Self-Concept Enhancement Learning Facilitation) of the University of Western Sydney.

Convened yet again by Professor Rhonda Craven, Acting Director of the SELF Centre, the conference was a huge success, with more than 130 delegates over the two days. Dave Ella said you could tell it was a good conference from the moment you walked into the foyer area by the atmosphere and enthusiasm of the delegates. A number of educational publishers set up shop in the foyer area, including Gleebooks, with a huge range of Aboriginal Australia books, Indij Readers, ANTaR and Juno Gemes, with copies of the education resource of her *Proof: Portraits from the Movement* travelling exhibition.

Aunty Noeline Holten of the Local AECG performed the Acknowledgement of Country, giving an eloquent address to set the mood. Professor Michael Atherton welcomed delegates on behalf of the university. ASA president Nigel Parbury also welcomed all present and paid tribute to Rhonda Craven whose drive and inspiration had kept the ASA going. There was a minute's silence for Paul Behrendt, inaugural president of the ASA, who had passed away the previous week.

First keynote was Linda Burney, Member for Canterbury and Parliamentary Secretary for Education and Training: the diversity of the local Bankstown-Canterbury area is what modern Australia is all about; the federal government's culture wars are against everything people have worked so many years for. An Aboriginal Studies forum of Kevin Lowe (Board of Studies), Dave Ella (AECG), Barry Smith (St Ignatius, independent schools), Renette Townsend (DET, Aboriginal Studies) and Lisa Buxton (Catholic Education). Then David McRae, of the *What Works* program, on 'The State of Play'. Afternoon of the first day was 'The Wisdom of Elders' panel and question-and-answer sessions, moderated by James Wilson-Miller, with Aunty Beryl Carmichael, Uncle Charles Moran, Uncle Norm, Newlin, Aunty Mae Robinson and Aunty Ruth Simms.

National ALP president Warren Mundine spoke at the conference dinner, telling us of a national Aboriginal lawyers' conference attended by over 140 Aboriginal lawyers (not even all the Aboriginal lawyers in the country), more and more Aboriginal doctors and teachers and other professionals, and how resource companies are now happy to negotiate with Aboriginal people – this was all thanks to the work of educators like the ASA mob. Legend Jimmy Little entertained us with the story of his life in song. Our deadly MC for the night was the legendary Dave Ella.

Day 2 opened with a fabulous cultural performance by Mick Baker, performing as Dhinawan (emu) Dreaming. Absolutely a class act, and so generous with his time – what was timetabled as a 10-minute performance ran over half an hour. Next Professor Gary Partington of Edith Cowan University: how Aboriginal education projects in schools show what the barriers are and how to overcome them. Andrea Harms told of the successes of Dare To Lead, followed by a co-launch of Dr George Morgan's new book *Unsettled Places: Aboriginal People and Urbanisation in New South Wales*. Final keynote and the end of the conference was Rhonda Craven: 'What research tells us' – lessons on self-concept.

It is impossible in a short space to do justice to the many exciting and important papers presented. Dr Paddy (aka Pat) Cavanagh's 'What Are We Doing Wrong in Aboriginal Studies?' was in such demand that rooms had to be changed to fit the audience in. The Dare To Lead team gave four papers, as well as a keynote, and could not do enough for our conference – heartfelt thanks to Andrea Harms, Brian Giles-Brown and the team!! Students from Picton and Wyong High Schools gave their perspectives on HSC Aboriginal Studies, and in another session three successful teachers spoke of Aboriginal Studies 'at the coalface', while Debra Wray's paper 'Making A Difference' was also about the HSC. AECG mother-and-daughter team Rosalie Neve and Laura Richards spoke of intergenerational learning and transferring cultural knowledge and the issues involved.

There was more, much more – but not enough space to fit it all in here. Check the summary of conference evaluations. What was so inspiring about the whole conference was not just the quality of the program and the presentations, but the enthusiasm of the delegates, the continual 'buzz' of the foyer, and the way everyone was so fired up to get on with the job of lifting Aboriginal Studies. And sharing knowledge and experience. Special thanks to Paul Atkins for the smooth running of the program, and to Lisa Car who did so much of the work to get the conference up and running, And of course to the one and only Rhonda Craven – who made it happen.

*[Adapted from an article in AECG newsletter Pemulwuy, November 2006.]*

## Conference Evaluations

Nigel Parbury

### **'Really well organised, relaxed & passionate'**

Our survey first asked how delegates found out about *Making the Connections*. Mostly through the 'grapevine' and by mail-outs, faxes to schools, university networks etc; several on the ASA website, more through *Dare To Lead*. Only one through our *Koori Mail* ad, and no one mentioned the *National Indigenous Times*. This suggests that our expenditure on ads was not as effective as we might have hoped.

For future conference publicity, a number thought there was 'not enough out there' and should be more promotion – through DET, the AECG and Catholic Education; one suggested system newsletters. Several suggested a poster or bright-coloured flyer for schools. Other suggestions were Koori Education networks, including *Dare To Lead*, mail-outs, mass emails and flyers to schools, and the internet. Several suggested Indigenous networks and the *Koori Mail*, a couple suggested mainstream newspapers. Koori Radio was also suggested, also teacher unions and subject association networks. A letter or email to past participants was suggested, plus letters or emails to schools or principals, to be directed to the Aboriginal Studies co-ordinator, university bulletin boards and Aboriginal Centres. One delegate suggested targeting education sections within mainstream organisations such as Councils. Another suggested ads in union magazines.

Next question asked what delegates liked about the conference. A number liked the food, and most liked having conference sessions, food and accommodation under the one roof – though some felt we could do without the 'pokies'. Many loved the opportunity to meet and interact with Elders. Displays of resource information were appreciated. People liked having the choice of a variety of workshops to attend. Aunty Noeline Holten's welcome to country was much appreciated. Linda Burney's opening address was also popular. Dhinawan Dreaming's performance was greatly appreciated:- 'Dhinawan – Young chap on didge – humble yet proud, informative, inspiring, motivating to see'. One delegate summed it up for many: 'The whole conference was very, very good, as I can now go back and contribute information and help our kids more'. Other comments were: 'Listening to the Elders, meeting new and enthusiastic fellow teachers and learning from the experienced'; and: 'Learning about resources to use. Gained a deeper insight into the culture and needs of students. I will make changes at my school!!' Many delegates loved the chance to meet people and network. The organisation of the conference and the 'relaxed but efficient proceedings' were appreciated. One comment was: 'The workshop format allowed for more relevant content & more personalised approach'. Interesting guest speakers and discussions with Elders were much mentioned, also the 'diversity of presentations & breadth of issues covered'.

People loved the devotion and the passion for Indigenous education of all present. *Dare To Lead* was deservedly popular; also Indij Readers, Chris Evans, Peter Merrotsy,

George Morgan's book launch and Nigel Parbury's images presentation. Though it is unfair to single out any presenters as there were so many great sessions. People appreciated getting access to up-to-date research and useful HSC information. Also hearing about 'positive strategies that work'. Another comment was: 'Fantastic inspiring presenters with lots of useful ideas & who brought challenging informative research based information'. One delegate loved: 'Hearing stories about positive strategies that work. Provided opportunities to network.' Another summed up: 'The opportunity to come, share & clarify'. Meeting people was nominated again and again as a highlight. One delegate summed it all up: 'Variety of presentations, passion of presenters, access to Elders and community members and networking'. Other summaries were: 'Stimulating relevant material and strategies. Rooms in a central location. Connecting with Elders'; and 'Sitting & listening to Elders and their struggles to come this far! Makes you want to keep going as a teacher.'

Although the organisation was complimented, many delegates, when asked how the conference could be improved, said that keeping to the timetable was a problem, that there needed to be more time for workshops and time allowed for changeover, as well as efficient time keepers. There could be time for discussion or feedback at the end of each day. There was a feeling from some interstate delegates that a more national focus is needed – perhaps add an extra day. Some delegates felt that more hands-on workshops would be good. A couple felt the food was too 'posh'. A map of Bankstown with the location of the Sports Club and how to get there from the station was suggested. One suggestion was to make computers available so that delegates could check out resource websites. Another was more Indigenous speakers telling their experiences at school and 'how we can improve teaching for the kids of today'. More resources focused on the Stage 6 Aboriginal Studies course, and more resources for primary schools for early intervention were both suggested – showing how difficult it is to cater for the whole Aboriginal Education experience!

One delegate felt a bit on the outer as a newcomer hearing people 'drop names' and talk of 'remember when' – perhaps an isolated complaint, but something to bear in mind. Another wanted 'more exciting workshops for engaging/creating a stimulating environment within Aboriginal Studies or perspectives'. More practical hands-on tips on how to engage all students was another suggestion. Though research data was welcomed, it was suggested that 'some researchers need to consider their audience'. One delegate was 'frustrated' by having to miss other sessions when choosing options – and was looking forward to publication of the papers (apologies for the delay!!). Finally it was suggested that some thought be given to how some of the presentations could be marketed, for example Juno Gemes' photographs, and Nigel Parbury's 'pictureshow'. It was also suggested that a future conference might separate Aboriginal educators, who know the issues, from the teachers, who really need the professional development.

Most felt that the conference was appropriate for their needs, and gave lots to think about and to take back to schools and workplaces. One comment was: 'Very stimulating – a lot of good feedback for me as a teacher educator'. More time for networking with delegates 'would be good'. One other would have liked more on statistics in Victoria; another said

'less Sydney-centric'. More focus on classroom education, with more presentations by classroom teachers; also 'more ideas for primary teachers to engage the Aboriginal students within their schools'. Another comment was that the conference was, understandably, school-focused and it would be good to have more adult and community education. The conference was said to be great but far too much for two days. Summing up, one comment was: 'Yes, very much so. Great conference, highly professional and well delivered'.

'Other Comments' were generally extremely favourable, for example: 'Thoroughly enjoyed, thank you to the organisers, well done! Hopefully see you next year.' Dhinawan Dreaming ('an excellent way to begin the day'), Sophie Constable's talk, Linda Burney's opening and the Welcome to Country were mentioned, as well as the *Dare To Lead* presentations, Merv Bishop's photo session and George Morgan's book launch. 'Thank you for the experience' and 'Thank you for a great two days' were typical. Plus, 'Thank you for the great 2 days! We are so lucky to have such a great organisation to organise/arrange such a huge event (P.S. The food was good too)'. And, 'It was wonderful to meet Aboriginal people and other people dedicated to promoting Aboriginal education – inspiring.' The conference theme, *Making the Connections*, was appreciated 'because it gives people the choice to meet and further enhance the good work they are doing in schools'.

However, one delegate commented: "I came to the conference to learn (as a white person) and lots of the time I felt marginalised because of the 'in' comments that were made. I want to work with the people and learn about their needs – white people must be 'let in' to do this." Another felt there was a bit of content overload and it 'should have been a 3-4 day event'. There was also the feeling, again, that the conference needed to be less academic and more focused on what teachers can do in class to engage their students. There was a suggestion of some form of cultural excursion, perhaps in the first day.

This aside, comments were overwhelmingly positive, summed up by: 'Really well organised, relaxed & passionate conference! Thanks!' and 'Great friendly feel. Need more direct engagement – I know it is a conference, but teach teachers how to engage Aboriginal style.' One comment was: 'I really appreciated the intimate/friendly atmosphere combined with professional approach to conference workshops & keynote addresses'. Another heartwarming and illuminating comment was: 'I was so nervous doing the welcome, but once I mingled amongst the group and talked to some of our Elders it made me feel proud of what I had to do'. 'Thank you for the privilege', and 'Congratulations', and 'A lovely range of speakers' were typical. Perhaps the comment that best sums up how delegates felt at the end of the days was: 'There was literally no time to just chat so maybe this could be programmed in but I'm probably just trying to fill in an otherwise blank space. Thanks to the organisers.'

Speaking for the conference team what made all the work, and a sometimes difficult gestation period, all worthwhile was not just the response of the delegates but the passion and commitment and the 'total buzz' of the whole two days. To repeat what Dave Ella said, you could tell it was a good conference as soon as you walked in. A heartfelt tribute

to Rhonda Craven who, as Linda Burney said in another context years ago, 'drove the team to a wonderful conclusion'. Deepest thanks to Lisa Car for her mountain of work done with smiling efficiency and to Paul Atkins for the smooth and friendly organisation of the conference. And, of course, thanks to Bankstown Sports Club.