

**Teaching Pre-service Teachers Aboriginal Studies: What Really Works?**

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The study was commissioned by the Department of Education, Science and Training (DEST) under its Indigenous Education Strategic Initiatives Programme (IESIP). The project goals were supported by the New South Wales Aboriginal Education Consultative Group Inc.; New South Wales Teachers Federation, New South Wales Primary Principals' Association; New South Wales Department of Education and Training (NSW DET); the national Aboriginal Studies Association; and the Australian Council of Deans of Education. This paper reports on the quantitative component of the study. The aims of this component of the study were to: a) critically evaluate the impact of mandatory Aboriginal Studies subjects on preservice primary teachers' perceived abilities to appreciate, understand and effectively teach Aboriginal Studies and Aboriginal students in Australian schools; b) identify key content being addressed in mandatory Aboriginal Studies subjects; and c) identify potential new strategic directions to strengthen the teaching of Aboriginal Studies in teacher education courses. Mandatory subjects impacted more positively in comparison to elective or perspectives courses on preservice teachers' knowledge of subject matter, Aboriginal Studies teaching self-concepts in a range of desirable self-concept facets, values in regards to teaching both Aboriginal Studies and Aboriginal students, preservice teachers' perceptions of the extent to which they intend to teach their future students Aboriginal Studies, and their perceived ability to implement departmental requirements. Preservice teachers who have undertaken mandatory subjects compared to preservice teachers who undertake perspectives courses, feel they are more capable of teaching Aboriginal students and Aboriginal Studies and furthermore are more likely to enjoy doing so. Given the consistency of these results across a diverse number of variables considered in this study, these results suggest that mandatory subjects can have a powerful positive effect on desirable educational outcomes. Preservice teachers participating in teacher education courses with a mandatory Aboriginal Studies subject were also more likely to be taught a diverse range of Aboriginal Studies content. In addition, preservice teachers also offered a number of useful suggestions in relation to possible content and modes of delivery that could strengthen future teacher education courses.

### **Background and Context**

Educators have emphasised the need to reform the teacher education curriculum to adequately prepare student teachers to teach Aboriginal Studies and Aboriginal children effectively (e.g. Craven, 1999a; 1999b, 2000, in press). For three decades the majority of reports have also recommended that there is a dire need to introduce mandatory Aboriginal Studies subjects into the teacher education curriculum (e.g. Aboriginal Consultative Group, 1975; National Aboriginal Education Committee, 1986; Johnstone 1991; the Schools Council of the National Board of Employment, Education and Training (NBEET); 1992; Australian Council of Deans of Education, 2001).

Over the years 1992-1996, the 'Teaching the Teachers: Indigenous Australian Studies' project (Craven, 1996a; 1996b; 1996c, 1996d, 1996e, 1999c) was funded as a Project of National Significance by the Commonwealth Department of Employment, Education and Training. The purpose of this project was to develop Aboriginal Studies teacher education resources that could serve to assist and encourage teacher education institutions to develop mandatory Aboriginal Studies teacher education subjects specific to their needs. Resources developed included: Guidelines to assist teacher education institutions to develop a mandatory Aboriginal Studies subject; a model mandatory Aboriginal Studies teacher education subject that included detailed lecture and tutorial notes, a teacher-oriented text; and sample support resources for preservice primary teacher education courses (see Craven, 1996e; 2000 for an overview). These resources were developed based on extensive national consultation, were endorsed by the National Federation of Aboriginal Education Consultative Groups, and distributed to all Australian teacher education institutions by the Council for Aboriginal Reconciliation.

The 'Teaching the Teachers: Indigenous Australian Studies' Project of National Significance has provided an impetus for more Australian teacher education institutions to consider preparing preservice teachers to teach Indigenous Australian Studies. This is evidenced by a recent historic change, taking place in Australian teacher education courses whereby a dramatic shift has occurred in the number of teacher education institutions requiring student teachers to undertake a mandatory Aboriginal Studies teacher education course. For example, in 1994 Bourke, Dow, and Lucas (p. 20) found that even though most teacher education courses include Social Studies units, "very few specify Aboriginal Studies as a core component of the course" (p. 31). Whereas recently, Dunkin (2002) has ascertained that "Among the 36 Australian institutions, there are 54 teacher education programs other than those designed specifically for Indigenous students. Twenty six (approximately 48%) of those programs include compulsory units of Indigenous Studies" (Dunkin, 2002, p. 21). Whilst this increase is dramatic and attests to the success of the 'Teaching the Teachers' project it is also important to note that in 2002 some 50% of teacher education programs have not heeded calls for the introduction of mandatory Aboriginal Studies courses. Such statistics suggest that many of our teacher educators may be unaware of calls for the introduction of mandatory subjects or may not be convinced of the value of introducing such subjects.

Craven (2000, p. 72) has noted that: "Given most core Aboriginal Studies teacher education courses have been introduced only recently, no systematic evaluation of these courses has as yet been undertaken". It seems timely to evaluate the presumed benefits of such courses to: Test the value of introducing mandatory courses as a strategic direction for teacher education courses; elucidate key strengths of existing courses that can be emulated by other institutions; and identify current weaknesses of existing courses to enable institutions to strengthen recently introduced courses or avoid potential pitfalls. To begin to address these issues, two studies were commissioned by the Commonwealth Department of Education, Science and Technology. The first study was designed to evaluate the impact of preservice primary teacher education Aboriginal Studies courses on practising teachers' self-perceived abilities to effectively teach Aboriginal Studies and Aboriginal students in primary schools (Craven, Halse, Marsh, Mooney and Wilson-Miller, in press a, in press b). The second study (Craven, Halse,

Marsh, Monney and Wilson-Miller, in press c) was designed to parallel the objectives of the first study but focussed on elucidating the impact of mandatory subjects on the self-perceived abilities of preservice primary teachers. Importantly the second study featured a broader research scope than the first study such that a primary objective of this study was also to elucidate successful features of existing mandatory courses that could be emulated by other institutions as well as to identify barriers to success to serve as potential pitfalls to be avoided by teacher education institutions. The purpose of this report is to report the results emanating from the quantitative component of this latter study.

### **Aims**

The aims of the quantitative component of the study were to:

1. Critically evaluate the impact of mandatory Aboriginal Studies subjects on preservice primary teachers' perceived abilities to appreciate, understand and effectively teach Aboriginal Studies and Aboriginal students in Australian schools in order to test the effectiveness of this delivery mode;
2. Identify key content being addressed in mandatory Aboriginal Studies subjects in order to provide other institutions with examples of subject matter; and
3. To identify potential new strategic directions for strengthening the teaching of Aboriginal Studies in teacher education courses.

### **Overview of Research Design**

Participating preservice primary teachers completed a survey which was designed by the research team to: characterise participants' preservice teacher education courses, elucidate preservice teachers' self-perceptions of their ability to teach Aboriginal Studies and Aboriginal students effectively; and glean preservice teachers' insights in relation to desirable Aboriginal Studies content and delivery approaches that could be incorporated in future teacher education courses.

Participants were preservice teachers ( $n=797$ ) from 16 universities (9 with mandatory Aboriginal Studies subjects ( $n=408$ ), 3 offering electives ( $n=160$ ), 5 offering perspectives across the teacher education curriculum ( $n=229$ )) from five Australian states. Students participating in mandatory and elective subjects were invited via a written invitation to complete the survey on 2 occasions - before commencing their subject and after they had completed their subject - whereas students enrolled in courses incorporating Aboriginal perspectives across the teacher education curriculum were invited to complete the survey on one occasion.

A series of oneway Analysis of Variance (ANOVAs) were undertaken to test for differences in responses to selected items and scale scores across the 3 different types of teacher education courses (mandatory, elective and perspectives). Post hoc analyses were undertaken to elucidate significant course type effects. Statistically significant differences between core and elective courses were further scrutinised by undertaking Analysis of Covariance (ANCOVA) to control for T1 effects. Breakdowns of response frequency distributions were examined in relation to preservice teachers' suggestions for future teacher education courses.

## Results and Discussion

### The Impact of Mandatory Subjects (Aim 1)

#### *Impact on Self-concept*

Comparison of self-concept scores for the participating groups of preservice teachers demonstrated that significant differences were present between groups for all facets of self-concept with the exception of general teaching self-concept (see Table 1). The results for core vs elective courses were also statistically significant when T1 self-concept scores were controlled for in a series of ANCOVAs, offering further support for these findings (see Table 1). Whilst students from different types of Aboriginal Studies teacher education courses had significantly different scores in relation to all facets of Aboriginal Studies teaching self-concept measured, these groups did not differ in relation to their perceptions of their teaching self-concept in general. These results are important in that they offer strong support for the validity of the findings and demonstrate the context specificity of the results. Students who had undertaken mandatory Aboriginal Studies subjects had statistically significant higher knowledge, teaching Aboriginal students, teaching Aboriginal Studies, Aboriginal community consultation, and total Aboriginal Studies teaching self-concepts compared to either students who had undertaken elective or perspective courses (see Table 1). Students who had undertaken elective courses had higher self-concepts in all facets compared to students who had undertaken perspective courses. The results for mandatory vs elective subjects were also statistically significant when T1 self-concept scores were controlled for, offering further support for these findings. These results suggest that core courses in comparison to either elective or perspectives courses have a stronger impact overall on preservice teachers' self-concepts and specifically in relation to the highly desired educational goals of feeling positive about their abilities to understand Aboriginal Studies content matter, teach Aboriginal Studies, teach Aboriginal students, and consult with Aboriginal communities compared to the other categories of teacher education courses considered in this study.

**Table 1: Levels of significance for post hoc multiple comparisons of teacher education courses for self-concept**

Self-Concept Facet	Core Vs Elective (ANOVA)	Core Vs Elective (ANCOVA)	Core Vs Perspective	Elective Vs Perspective
Knowledge of Content	p<.001	p<.001	p<.001	p<.001
Aboriginal Studies Teaching	p<.001	p<.001	p<.001	p<.001
Teaching Aboriginal Students	p<.001	p<.001	p<.001	p<.003
Aboriginal Community Consultation	p<.001	p<.001	p<.001	p<.001
Total Aboriginal Studies Teaching	p<.001	p<.001	p<.001	p<.001

A good self-concept has been demonstrated by a respected body of international research to be an important outcome of education in itself and to have a causal impact on a range of desirable educational outcomes (see Craven, Marsh and Burnett, in press, Marsh 2002). As such, these results offer important empirical evidence supporting the value of mandatory Aboriginal Studies teacher subjects in enhancing preservice teachers' Aboriginal Studies self-concepts in facets of teaching self-concept considered as important prerequisites to facilitate successful implementation of Aboriginal Studies in the classroom. The higher self-concept scores for students undertaking mandatory subjects in comparison to students undertaking electives is interesting in that it might be expected that the self-selected sample of students

undertaking elective courses would have both higher course entry and course exit self-concepts in comparison to students required to, rather than choosing to undertake a mandatory subject. As such these results, offer further support for the validity of the findings and attest to the strength of mandatory subjects in being effective in enhancing preservice teachers' self-concepts. Elective subjects were demonstrated to have a higher impact than perspectives courses on preservice student teachers' self-concepts. These results suggest that elective subjects are more effective than perspectives courses in producing a desirable impact on preservice teachers' self-concepts but not as effective as mandatory courses.

#### *Impact on Cognitive and Affective Facets of Self-Concept*

Parallel analyses were also conducted separately for cognitive and affective components of self-concept. Significant differences were present between groups for all cognitive and affective self-concept scales with the exception of the general teaching affective scale and the general teaching cognitive scale. Post hoc analyses examining cognitive components of self-concept demonstrated that students who had undertaken a core course had statistically significant higher knowledge, teaching Aboriginal students, teaching Aboriginal Studies, Aboriginal community consultation, and total Aboriginal Studies teaching cognitive self-concepts compared to either students who had undertaken elective or perspective courses. The results for core vs elective courses were also statistically significant when T1 cognitive self-concept scores were controlled for in the ANCOVA, which offers further support for the validity of the findings. In addition, students who had undertaken elective courses had higher self-concepts in all facets compared to students who had undertaken perspective courses (see Table 2).

Post hoc analyses examining affective components of self-concept demonstrated that students who had undertaken a core course had statistically significant higher knowledge and total Aboriginal Studies teaching affective self-concepts compared to either students who had undertaken elective or perspective courses and these differences were also statistically significant when T1 scores were controlled for in the ANCOVA (see Table 2). Students who had undertaken a core course did not have statistically significant higher affective self-concept scores in the domains of teaching Aboriginal students or Aboriginal community consultation in comparison to students who had undertaken an elective course. However, after controlling for T1 scores students who had undertaken a core course had significantly higher Aboriginal Studies teaching affective self-concepts in comparison to scores for students who had undertaken an elective course (see Table 2). Students who had undertaken a core course also had statistically significant higher scores ( $p < .001$ ) on all affective facets of self-concept in comparison to students who had undertaken perspective courses. Students who had undertaken an elective course had statistically significant higher scores compared to students who had undertaken elective courses for knowledge of content, Aboriginal Studies teaching, Aboriginal community consultation, and total affective self-concept domains (see Table 2). No significant differences were present for teaching Aboriginal students affective self-concept scores for students who had undertaken an elective course in comparison to scores for students who had undertaken a perspective course.

**Table 2: Levels of significance for post hoc multiple comparisons of teacher education courses for cognitive and affective components of self-concept**

Self-Concept Facet	Core Vs Elective (ANOVA)	Core Vs Elective (ANCOVA)	Core Vs Perspective	Elective Vs Perspective
<b><i>Cognitive Self-Concept Facets</i></b>				
Knowledge of Content	p<.001	p<.001	p<.001	p<.001
Aboriginal Studies Teaching	p<.001	p<.001	p<.001	p<.001
Teaching Aboriginal Students	p<.001	p<.001	p<.001	p<.003
Aboriginal Community Consultation	p<.001	p<.001	p<.001	p<.001
Total Cognitive	p<.001	p<.001	p<.001	p<.001
<b><i>Affective Self-Concept Facets</i></b>				
Knowledge of Content	p<.044	p<.045	p<.001	p<.030
Aboriginal Studies Teaching	p<.121	p<.019	p<.001	p<.001
Teaching Aboriginal Students	p<.310	p<.108	p<.001	p<.274
Aboriginal Community Consultation	p<.186	p<.156	p<.001	p<.026
Total Affective	p<.049	p<.042	p<.001	p<.017

The results based on analyses of cognitive and affective components of self-concept are also interesting. These results demonstrate that core courses in comparison to elective or perspective courses and elective courses in comparison to perspective courses impact more positively on student teachers' cognitive facets of Aboriginal Studies self-concept. These results suggest that core Aboriginal Studies teacher education courses are most effective in enhancing preservice teachers' perceptions of their capabilities in understanding and teaching Aboriginal Studies and Aboriginal students effectively and elective courses achieve more positive outcomes in relation to cognitive domains of self-concept in comparison to perspectives courses.

In relation to affective domains of self-concept the results suggest that core courses facilitate students' appreciation and enjoyment of: learning more about Aboriginal Studies content, and teaching Aboriginal Studies in comparison to elective courses and all affective aspects measured by the study instrumentation in relation to perspectives courses. It would be reasonable to assume that teachers who appreciate and enjoy a specific subject are more likely to be committed to and actually teach such subjects. Hence these results offer important empirical support for the value of core courses in relation to impacting positively upon affective self-concept domains.

#### *Impact on Values*

Results based on ANOVAs indicated that for all 5 facets of values measured statistically significant differences ( $p<.001$ ) were present for the different types of teacher education courses (see Table 3). Multiple comparisons of the different types of teacher education courses based on post hoc analyses demonstrated that student teachers who had undertaken a core course had statistically significant higher scores for all values measured compared to students who had undertaken either an elective or perspective course (see Table 3). Significant differences between scores for student teachers undertaking core courses compared to scores for student teachers undertaking elective courses were also present for 4 of the 5 values areas measured when T1 scores were controlled for. Significant differences between these groups were not present for the importance of teaching Aboriginal Studies when T1 scores were controlled for (see Table 3). Students who had undertaken an elective

course also displayed statistically significantly higher scores on all value areas measured with the exception of valuing teaching Aboriginal Studies in comparison to scores for students who had undertaken perspectives courses.

These results suggest that mandatory courses have a significant positive impact on preservice teachers' values in relation to: Appreciating the rationale for teaching Aboriginal Studies, their commitment to doing so, their appreciation of the value of teaching Aboriginal Studies, high regard for departmental Aboriginal Studies education policies, and the extent to which they feel it is important to teach Aboriginal Studies well. This impact is stronger for core courses in comparison to elective courses for all areas perhaps with the exception of the perceived importance to teach Aboriginal Studies well, which is held by both groups in high regard.

**Table 3: Levels of significance for post hoc multiple comparisons of teacher education courses for values**

Values	Core Vs Elective (ANOVA)	Core Vs Elective (ANCOVA)	Core Vs Perspective	Elective Vs Perspective
Valuing Rationale	p<.038	p<.006	p<.001	p<.045
Commitment to Teaching	p<.002	p<.004	p<.001	p<.001
Valuing Teaching	p<.001	p<.003	p<.001	p<.278
Importance of Aboriginal Studies	p<.024	p<.100	p<.001	p<.002
Valuing Departmental Policy	p<.042	p<.046	p<.001	p<.002

#### *Impact on Other Outcomes*

Results based on ANOVAs indicated that for teachers' self-perceptions of their ability to implement departmental requirements and perceptions of predicted student knowledge statistically significant differences were present for the different types of teacher education courses. Multiple comparisons of the different types of teacher education courses based on post hoc analyses demonstrated that student teachers who had undertaken a core course had statistically significant higher scores for predicted student knowledge compared to students who had undertaken either an elective (p<.018) or perspective (p<.001) course. Results based on ANCOVA also demonstrated that students who had undertaken core courses had higher predicted student knowledge scores (p<.030) compared to students undertaking elective courses after controlling for T1 scores. Students who had undertaken an elective course also had significantly higher predicted student knowledge scores (p<.001) compared to students who had undertaken perspectives courses. Students who had undertaken core courses also displayed higher implementation of departmental requirements scores compared to both elective (p<.001) and perspective (p<.001) groups and the result for comparisons to elective courses was significant (p<.001) after controlling for T1 differences. Students who had undertaken elective courses also had higher implementation of departmental requirements scores (p<.001) compared to students who had undertaken perspective courses.

These results suggest that core courses impact more positively than elective or perspective courses on student teachers' determination to ensure their future students are taught Aboriginal Studies and their perceived ability to implement departmental requirements. These results offer strong support for the value of introducing core Aboriginal Studies teacher education courses to ensure preservice teachers are committed to both implementing departmental requirements and teaching Aboriginal Studies.

## Key Content Addressed (Aim 2)

Results based on ANOVAs indicated that for all 21 topics measured by the survey, statistically significant differences ( $p < .001$ ) were present for the different types of teacher education courses (see Table 4). Multiple comparisons of the different types of teacher education courses based on post hoc analyses demonstrated that for all 21 topics student teachers who had undertaken a core course had statistically significant higher scores in regards to what they reported learning about each topic compared to students who had undertaken either an elective or perspective course and students who had undertaken an elective course reported learning more about each topic compared to students who had undertaken a perspective course (see Table 4). Results based on ANCOVA demonstrated that scores for students who had undertaken a core course in comparison to students who had undertaken an elective course were statistically significant after controlling for T1 scores which offers further research support for the validity of the findings. Similarly the results of analyses based on the scale scores of learning pedagogical skills to teach Aboriginal Studies and Aboriginal students, learning about Aboriginal history, and learning about current issues were all statistically significant ( $p < .001$ ) for ANOVAs testing for differences between courses and for post hoc comparisons based on both ANOVAs ( $p < .001$ ) and ANCOVAs ( $p < .001$ ) (see Table 4).

**Table 4: Levels of significance for post hoc multiple comparisons of teacher education courses for amount taught about topics**

Topic	Core Vs Elective (ANOVA)	Core Vs Elective (ANCOVA)	Core Vs Perspective	Elective Vs Perspective
Rationale	$p < .001$	$p < .001$	$p < .001$	$p < .001$
Community Involvement	$p < .001$	$p < .001$	$p < .001$	$p < .001$
Teaching Resources	$p < .001$	$p < .011$	$p < .001$	$p < .001$
Teaching Strategies	$p < .001$	$p < .001$	$p < .001$	$p < .021$
Units of Work	$p < .001$	$p < .049$	$p < .001$	$p < .003$
Perspectives	$p < .001$	$p < .001$	$p < .001$	$p < .001$
Teaching Aboriginal Children	$p < .001$	$p < .001$	$p < .001$	$p < .001$
History of Aboriginal Education	$p < .001$	$p < .001$	$p < .001$	$p < .001$
Culture	$p < .001$	$p < .001$	$p < .001$	$p < .001$
Precontact	$p < .001$	$p < .001$	$p < .001$	$p < .001$
Early Settlement	$p < .001$	$p < .001$	$p < .001$	$p < .001$
Government Policies	$p < .001$	$p < .001$	$p < .001$	$p < .001$
Aboriginal/Australian History	$p < .001$	$p < .001$	$p < .001$	$p < .001$
Comparative Studies	$p < .001$	$p < .025$	$p < .001$	$p < .001$
Reconciliation	$p < .001$	$p < .001$	$p < .001$	$p < .001$
Rights/Issues	$p < .001$	$p < .001$	$p < .001$	$p < .001$
Culture Today	$p < .001$	$p < .001$	$p < .001$	$p < .001$
Misconceptions	$p < .001$	$p < .001$	$p < .001$	$p < .001$
Stolen Generations	$p < .001$	$p < .001$	$p < .001$	$p < .001$
Native Title	$p < .001$	$p < .001$	$p < .001$	$p < .001$
Disadvantage	$p < .001$	$p < .001$	$p < .001$	$p < .001$

These results suggest that students undertaking mandatory courses report being taught significantly more about 21 Aboriginal Studies topics compared to students who undertake either elective or perspectives courses. These results offer strong support for the value of mandatory courses in ensuring student teachers are taught about a range of key Aboriginal Studies topics that focus on teaching teachers: how to teach Aboriginal Studies and Aboriginal students; understandings of key themes and events in Aboriginal history, and understandings of key contemporary issues of concern. Hence these results offer empirical support to calls advocating the introduction of mandatory Aboriginal Studies teacher education courses to ensure preservice teachers are taught a broad coverage of key Aboriginal Studies topics. The higher scores for students who have undertaken a core course in comparison to scores for students who have undertaken elective courses are particularly interesting. It is possible to surmise that elective courses should produce higher content coverage scores given that this is a self-selected and therefore a positively biased sample in that students are intrinsically motivated to learn more about Aboriginal Studies, choose to do elective courses, and are attracted to such courses by the content they contain. It is also possible to surmise that elective courses may contain content that is more narrowly focused on specific topics (e.g. Teaching Aboriginal children) in comparison to core courses which may explain why core courses clearly cover more content than elective courses. However, given content coverage scores for elective courses in comparison to perspective courses are higher and that perspective courses are by their very nature espoused to cover a range of topics, the results suggest that elective courses are clearly more successful in content coverage than perspective courses but clearly not nearly as successful as core mandatory courses.

Participating preservice teachers were also asked to characterise their teacher education course in relation to content covered by choosing one of 7 options (not taught very much about Aboriginal Studies and teaching Aboriginal students, mostly history, mostly about issues, mostly how to teach Aboriginal Studies, mostly about Aboriginal culture, mostly how to teach Aboriginal students, taught most of the previous areas listed). The majority of participants enrolled in mandatory subjects ( $n=321$ , 58.1%) characterised their course as teaching them about most content areas listed (see Table 5). Some participants undertaking a mandatory subject characterised their course as teaching them mostly about Aboriginal issues ( $n=69$ , 17.2%). It was also interesting to note that some participants undertaking mandatory subjects ( $n=38$ ) categorised their teacher education courses as not really teaching them much about Aboriginal Studies and teaching Aboriginal students. These results suggest that whilst the content focus in mandatory Aboriginal Studies courses is diverse, mandatory subjects are likely to have a more comprehensive Aboriginal Studies content coverage in comparison to other teacher education course types. The results also suggest that some mandatory Aboriginal Studies subjects may be perceived by preservice teachers to be inadequate in conveying key Aboriginal Studies content matter.

The results in relation to content coverage from participants engaged in elective courses were mixed. Many participants enrolled in elective subjects ( $n=68$ , 43.3%) indicated that they were not taught very much about Aboriginal Studies and teaching Aboriginal students in their teacher education course (see Table 5). However, many participants enrolled in elective subjects ( $n=50$ , 31.8%) also characterised their course as teaching them about most content areas listed. These results suggest that the content coverage in elective subjects can vary markedly as to quality and coverage.

The vast majority of participants engaged in perspectives courses reported that they were not taught very much about Aboriginal Studies and teaching Aboriginal students in their teacher education course ( $n=162$ , 72%) (see Table 5). Some participants enrolled in perspectives courses also reported that their teacher education course taught them mostly about Aboriginal issues ( $n=24$ , 10.7%), however others characterised their course as teaching them about most content listed ( $n=19$ , 8.4%). These results are important in that they suggest whilst perspectives courses are expected to result in conveying a broad range of Aboriginal Studies content to preservice teachers, the majority of the perspectives courses considered in the context of this study failed to do so.

**Table 5: Content covered in teacher education course within each teacher education course type**

	Not very much	Aboriginal History	Aboriginal Issues	How to teach	Culture	Teach Students	All	Total
Core <i>% within Course</i>	38 9.5%	22 5.5%	69 17.2%	15 3.7%	12 3.0%	12 3.0%	233 58.1%	401 100.0%
Elective <i>% within Course</i>	68 43.3%	12 7.6%	13 8.3%	4 2.5%	8 5.1%	2 1.3%	50 31.8%	157 100.0%
Perspective <i>% within Course</i>	162 72.0%	1 .4%	24 10.7%	3 1.3%	7 3.1%	9 4.0%	19 8.4%	225 100.0%
Total	268 34.2%	35 4.5%	106 13.5%	22 2.8%	27 3.4%	23 2.9%	302 38.6%	783 100.0%

### Strategic Directions (Aim 3)

#### Desirable Content

Preservice teachers reported their insights in relation to desirable Aboriginal Studies content that could be incorporated in future teacher education courses. The majority of respondents (77.6%) agreed ( $n=336$ , 42.2%) or strongly agreed ( $n=282$ , 35.4%) that ideally future teacher education courses should consider teaching student teachers knowledge and understandings about Aboriginal Studies content matter. Respondents (78.3%) also agreed ( $n=293$ , 36.8%) or strongly agreed ( $n=331$ , 41.5%) that ideally future teacher education courses should consider teaching preservice teachers how to incorporate Aboriginal perspectives across the curriculum. Similarly, respondents (81.7%) agreed ( $n=316$ , 36.8%) or strongly agreed ( $n=321$ , 41.5%) that ideally future teacher education courses should consider teaching preservice teachers how to teach Aboriginal Studies and perspectives. Respondents (83.1%) also agreed ( $n=262$ , 32.9%) or strongly agreed ( $n=400$ , 50.2%) that ideally future teacher education courses should consider teaching preservice teachers how to teach Aboriginal students. This finding is important in that it suggests that the majority of preservice teachers are interested in learning how to effectively teach Aboriginal students. Respondents (83.1%) also agreed ( $n=262$ , 32.9%) or strongly agreed ( $n=400$ , 50.2%) that ideally future teacher education courses should consider teaching preservice teachers an awareness of Aboriginal culture. Also respondents (78.4%) agreed ( $n=314$ , 39.4%) or strongly agreed ( $n=311$ , 39%)

that ideally future teacher education courses should consider teaching preservice teachers Aboriginal history, however, a number of respondents ( $n=131$ , 16.4%) also noted that they agreed somewhat. The latter results may reflect that some preservice teachers are somewhat apprehensive in relation to learning about Aboriginal history. Given that misconceptions and stereotypes about Aboriginal history are prevalent in Australia (see Cavanagh, 1999; Craven, 1999; Wilson-Miller, 1999), this result is not surprising but is indicative of the need to ensure potential preservice teacher apprehensions in regards to learning about Aboriginal history are addressed in future teacher education courses.

Preservice teachers were also asked to rate the extent to which they thought it was important for teacher education courses to include content on each of 21 specified topics (see Table 6). An examination of the means for the total sample suggests that preservice teachers consider it is important to include in teacher education courses content in relation to 19 of the 21 specified topics and it is somewhat important to include content on comparative studies and European settlement in teacher education courses.

It is interesting to note that preservice teachers consider it is most important to include pedagogical content in teacher education courses and specifically content in relation to useful teaching strategies, teaching Aboriginal children, and available teaching resources. Preservice teachers also considered it was important to include content about contemporary issues in teacher education courses, and specifically in relation to misconceptions and stereotypes, Aboriginal people and cultures today, and Aboriginal rights and issues. These results suggest that preservice teachers consider it is particularly important to include content about how to teach Aboriginal Studies and Aboriginal children in teacher education courses as well as content about contemporary society and current issues but consider a broad range of specific topics to be useful inclusions in teacher education courses.

**Table 6: Means for ratings of importance of including Aboriginal Studies topics in teacher education courses for the total sample**

	Mean	N	Std. Deviation
Teaching Strategies	4.3848	777	.7409
Teaching Children	4.3136	778	.8066
Teaching Resources	4.2523	773	.7884
Misconceptions	4.2416	778	.8341
People Today	4.2286	783	.7900
Issues	4.1731	780	.8120
Australian History	4.1679	780	.8349
Reconciliation	4.1009	783	.8649
European Settlement	4.0693	779	.8349
Disadvantage	4.0677	783	.8886
Perspectives	4.0385	779	.8384
Stolen Generations	4.0384	782	.8742
Government Policies	4.0257	778	.8531
Community Involve	4.0244	778	.8629
Rationale	4.0077	779	.8253
Native Title	3.9052	781	.9093
Units of Work	3.8852	775	.8662
Culture	3.8524	779	.8128
Aboriginal Education	3.8397	780	.8440
Comparative Studies	3.6957	782	.8600
Precontact Society	3.6193	767	.8988

### Suggested Structure of Teacher Education Courses

Preservice teachers were asked to rate the extent to which they agreed that future teacher education courses could be best structured to teach primary preservice teachers about Aboriginal Studies in relation to incorporating mandatory subjects, offering elective subjects, teaching Aboriginal perspectives across the teacher education curriculum, and incorporating all of these features into future courses. An examination of the means for the total sample suggests that preservice teachers strongly agree that elective subjects would be useful to incorporate in teacher education courses and agree that mandatory subjects, perspectives across the curriculum and incorporating all the features listed would be useful to include in future teacher education courses (see Table 6). These results suggest that preservice teachers consider that it is useful to implement a multifaceted approach to strengthen the teaching of Aboriginal Studies in future teacher education courses whereby Aboriginal Studies is taught as a mandatory subject, elective subjects are offered, and Aboriginal perspectives are taught across the teacher education curriculum.

**Table 6: Means for ratings of the ideal structure for future teacher education courses for the total sample**

	Mean	<i>n</i>	Standard. Deviation
Elective subjects	5.10	771	.93
Mandatory subjects, elective subjects, and perspectives	4.83	765	1.21
Perspectives across the curriculum	4.80	766	1.17
Mandatory subjects	4.71	773	1.27

### Summary

Clearly the results of this study suggest that what works in relation to teaching teachers teach Aboriginal Studies is mandatory subjects. The results clearly demonstrate that mandatory Aboriginal Studies subjects do make a positive difference to desirable educational outcomes for preservice teachers in terms of both perceived knowledge gained and importantly attitudes. As such, the study findings support the validity of calls for Australian teacher education institutions to introduce mandatory Aboriginal Studies subjects. The findings also suggest that no one delivery approach alone is desirable, rather teacher education courses should be designed to incorporate Aboriginal Studies in the teacher education curriculum in a multi-faceted manner facilitated by the inclusion of mandatory subjects, elective subjects and perspectives across the curriculum.

There also remains much to be done. A number of Australian teacher education institutions still need to appreciate the rationale for infusing Aboriginal Studies content into the teacher education curriculum. Existing mandatory subjects also need to be critically examined and refined to maximise their potency. Further research needs to be undertaken to evaluate current courses and elucidate key features of successful Aboriginal Studies teacher education courses that can be emulated by other institutions. Despite the fact that teacher education in regards to Aboriginal Studies is not as yet ideal, Australia's recent progress whereby half of all primary teacher education courses include a mandatory Aboriginal Studies subject (Dunkin, 2002), is testimony that teacher education can be responsive to and make a difference in tackling the big educational issues. The results of the study described above attest to the benefits of mandatory Aboriginal Studies teacher education subjects and demonstrate that in at least half of Australian primary teacher education courses a new dawn in teacher education is breaking.

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