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Teaching Aboriginal curriculum content in Australian high schools

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Teaching Aboriginal Curriculum Content in Australian High Schools

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Abstract

Many misconceptions about Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders stem from Australia's period of colonisation in the 18th and 19th centuries when Indigenous people were believed to be inferior by European settlers. It is disturbing that after 200 years these negative ideas still exist and are often perpetuated through the mass media. Even though schools are well positioned to challenge these colonial values; unfortunately there are many factors which affect the depth and quality of teaching Aboriginal content, such as culture, history and contemporary issues.

The government has aimed to disperse the inconsistencies associated with teaching Aboriginal perspectives by implementing a new Australian Curriculum with prescribed Aboriginal content. However, these changes will only have an impact if teachers are equipped and motivated to implement them. Therefore, understanding what influences teachers' choice of content and approach to teaching Aboriginal Studies was a key aspect of this study. To explore these influences, non-Aboriginal teachers were interviewed at both government and independent schools. A desktop audit analysing the courses at Western Australian universities placed the participants' responses into context of the pre-service and in-service learning available. An audit of the Australian Curriculum explored the expectations placed on teachers and the depth to which Aboriginal perspectives can be taught or avoided in secondary schools.

This study identified four key issues that affected the teaching of Aboriginal curriculum content by non-Aboriginal teachers. These factors are: time management, school culture, teacher interest and preconceived ideas of both teachers and students. These issues must be addressed in order to improve the quality teaching of Aboriginal perspectives by standardising in-service learning and pre-service learning. Furthermore, improving cultural competency and acknowledging Aboriginal culture is critical at every school, regardless of the number of Aboriginal students. This study also revealed that the presence of an Aboriginal and Islander Education Officer could have a big impact in providing support, information and an Aboriginal presence at the school. Without these changes it will be difficult to disperse colonial values and challenge negative stereotypes.

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    (i)   incorporate without acknowledgement any material previously submitted for a degree or diploma in any institution of higher education;

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Chapter 1: INTRODUCTION

1.1 Introduction

Australia has a long history of teaching only superficial and exotic aspects of Aboriginal culture in high schools (Q Beresford, Partington, & Gower, 2012; Clark, 2008; Healy, 2008). The lack of in-depth teaching of Aboriginal perspectives is an indication of a deeper issue in Australian society, an issue of ongoing racism towards those of Indigenous heritage (Dockett & Cusack, 2003; MacNaughton, 2001; McConaghy, 2000; NIPAAC, 2012; Reynolds, 1989). This is in conflict with the view that Australia is a diverse nation of equal opportunity (Moran, 2011). Values stemming from the colonial era and negative stereotypes of Indigenous Australians have prevented this from becoming a reality (MacNaughton, 2001). As this study was conducted in Western Australia, the term Aboriginal will be used when referring to Indigenous Australians unless including Torres Strait Islanders in which case the term Indigenous Australians will be stated.

Education can play a vital role in bringing a balanced perspective to the school system by challenging colonial values and negative stereotypes of Australia's Indigenous peoples and encouraging reconciliation. Steps are already being taken in the form of the new Australian Curriculum (Australian Curriculum and Reporting Authority, 2013) which aims at providing a diverse education for all Australian school students. The history content includes specific aspects of Indigenous issues, traditional culture and different perspectives on Australian history. Much of the document contains content about respecting Australia's Indigenous peoples (ACARA, 2013). While this aspect is important, to implement it effectively, all teachers need to understand its significance and wider impact on society. Furthermore, there are many obstacles to manoeuvre around to ensure this can take place.

According to the 2013 Australian Curriculum, it is mandatory for Society and Environment teachers to teach Indigenous perspectives across Year 7 to 10. Aboriginal curriculum content refers to the compulsory aspects within the history section of the Australian Curriculum. This includes understanding the contemporary issues Indigenous people face

which can often be attributed to the influence of past government policies. It also includes understanding the differences and significance of the diverse Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures. For the purposes of this study, culture "refers to both tangible and intangible aspects of lived realities and expressions of being, knowing and thinking" (Lowe & Yunkaporta, 2013, p. 4). Teaching Indigenous content includes teaching the history of Aboriginal people including traditional way of life, colonisation and modern-day issues. This study will focus on the teaching of Aboriginal content in a Western Australian context.

To teach Aboriginal curriculum content thoroughly and effectively, teachers need appropriate knowledge of Aboriginal perspectives and access to suitable source material. Among the many factors which prevent this from occurring are time management, school culture, teacher interests and preconceived ideas of both teachers and students. This study examines both the external factors, such as the physical resources available and the curriculum itself, and internal factors, such as how teacher beliefs and values impact on approaches to teaching the mandated curriculum.

1.2 Problem

The 1997 Western Australian curriculum (now being phased out) stipulated it be mandatory for all Society and Environment teachers to teach Aboriginal content (School Curriculum and Standards Authority, 2013). Individual teachers were free to decide how and when they did this. As no information about specific aspects of Aboriginal perspectives was available in the curriculum document, teachers could easily and with no adverse ramifications avoid teaching any Aboriginal content. The resultant inconsistent education in Aboriginal curriculum content across all schools was one of the reasons for introducing the 2013 Australian Curriculum. Despite the new prescribed teaching material provided in the Australian Curriculum, teachers can still avoid teaching Aboriginal content especially as it is just one of many topics to be covered in depth. Avoidance of Aboriginal perspectives is a key issue, as it implies Aboriginal content is not important (Q Beresford et al., 2012; Healy, 2008; Partington, 1998).

In 2009 (see Appendix C) education students at all but two Western Australian universities were only offered Aboriginal education units as electives. If teachers and education students wanted to increase their knowledge of Aboriginal cultures, history and issues, they had to organise it themselves. While in 2013, units on Aboriginal perspectives are mandatory for all education students at Western Australian universities, teachers who migrate to Western Australia often have the media, colleagues and any further study they chose as their only sources of information on Aboriginal matters. This may not be adequate for teaching Aboriginal curriculum content.

Teachers with superficial knowledge (Clark, 2008; MacNaughton, 2001) and lacking any opportunity to develop their cultural competency are nevertheless expected to teach Aboriginal perspectives proficiently. Cultural competency is possibly more valuable than content knowledge as it provides the teacher with an informed position of Aboriginal issues, culture and way of life (Gower & Byrne, 2012). Although content knowledge is an essential factor in teaching any topic, the approach is just as important when teaching a topic such as Aboriginal curriculum content.

1.3 Purpose

The purpose of this study is to identify the support needed for non-Aboriginal teachers to improve the quality of their teaching of Aboriginal curriculum content. To identify these needs, this study investigates non-Aboriginal teachers' beliefs, attitudes and understandings of the teaching of Aboriginal perspectives in Western Australian high schools. This study also discusses the impact of these beliefs, attitudes and understandings on their teaching of the mandated Australian Curriculum.

1.4 Rationale and Significance

1.4.1 Rationale

There are many factors affecting quality teaching of Aboriginal curriculum content. These factors come from outside of the school environment (such as the political sphere) and inside the classroom. The need to improve quality teaching across all learning areas has been discussed extensively by Australian governments in recent years (Connell, 2009; Dinham, 2013). The weakness in the discussions of these proposed solutions is the lack of "recognition of the need to provide ongoing effective professional learning for teachers to enable them to continue to develop and upgrade their skills, and to be recognised and rewarded for this growth" (Dinham, 2013, p. 93). To understand other factors in relation to quality teaching, the motives behind individual teacher decisions need to be explored. The backgrounds of teachers, their beliefs, attitudes and values play key roles in the choices they make about teaching this topic. This study investigated a range of areas which impact on teacher's practice in their choice of content and approach to delivery. The areas investigated included teacher's background, professional experience and teaching experience.

As it is mandatory to teach Aboriginal curriculum content in Society and Environment (ACARA, 2013), this study has focused on teachers from this learning area. In order to gain an understanding of the Australian context in which these teachers teach, it was important to understand the Australian Curriculum, the teachers' preconceived ideas, time management skills, beliefs about their teaching practices in addition to school culture and media environment. This exploration enabled identification, investigation and analysis of the gaps in the Australian Curriculum that allow Aboriginal curriculum content to be avoided or approached in an insensitive and unproductive manner. Analysis of these areas then informed the development of recommendations to improve the quality of teaching Aboriginal curriculum content in Western Australian high schools.

1.4.2 Significance

In order to create a civil society, it is imperative that people from different backgrounds understand and respect each other. This mutual respect is particularly important in multicultural societies such as Australia (Q Beresford et al., 2012; Dockett & Cusack, 2003; MacNaughton, 2001). Despite Indigenous Australians playing an important role in Australia's national identity, Australia's school systems have been inconsistent in acknowledging the significance of Indigenous cultures (Harrison, 2008). This study has therefore explored how a teacher's personal beliefs impact the quality and the teaching of the mandated curriculum regarding Aboriginal perspectives. Quality teaching comprises more than just following a curriculum document. It involves teachers engaging in reflective practice in their skills and knowledge, accessing professional development and becoming active members of their learning communities (AITSL, 2013).

To truly understand teacher needs in teaching Aboriginal curriculum content appropriately, it is important to understand teacher values, attitudes and beliefs. If students learn to understand, value, and accept Aboriginal perspectives through the inclusion of sensitively and appropriately taught Aboriginal content, it may help to further reconciliation.

1.5 Research Questions

1. What are non-Aboriginal teachers' beliefs, attitudes and understandings of teaching Aboriginal curriculum content?

2. What impact do these beliefs, attitudes and understandings have on their teaching of the mandated curriculum in Western Australia?

3. What support is needed to improve quality teaching of Aboriginal issues, culture and history for non-Aboriginal teachers?

The next chapter discusses literature surrounding the teaching of Aboriginal curriculum content in Australia. It also puts it into a national identity perspective and examines the impact of colonial values on the teaching profession along with teachers' preconceived

ideas, beliefs and values. The data chapters which follow explore responses by teachers to the Aboriginal curriculum content and their attitudes. It also examines the curriculum document along with professional development available to teachers in order to present a holistic view of what teachers must contend with.

The discussion chapter brings four key issues to light which resulted from examining the data. From this exploration recommendations on how to support and improve the teaching of Aboriginal curriculum content was explained. It is first important to understand the current state of education in Australia and the interconnecting factors which affect it.

Chapter 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Introduction

The literature highlights four key areas surrounding the teaching of Aboriginal curriculum content in Australian high schools. The first area of importance is the teaching of Aboriginal curriculum content in schools. The teaching of Aboriginal curriculum content in schools is important to the development of an understanding of national identity and the Aboriginal perspective on national identity. The second area addressed in the literature is Aboriginal content in the school curriculum which is affected by the expectation of teachers, professional learning, the Australian Curriculum, and the coverage of Aboriginal content in the Australian Curriculum. The challenge of implementing Aboriginal curriculum content in the classroom is the third issue, and is influenced by the impact of Australia's colonial history on teaching Aboriginal curriculum content, cultural discomfort and the knowledge base of both teachers and students. The fourth area discussed in the literature reflects on teacher beliefs and values looking specifically at the media and preconceived ideas of both teachers and students and how these factors impact on the teaching and learning about Indigenous cultures.

2.2 The Importance of Aboriginal Curriculum Content in Schools

The priority and prominence given to Aboriginal curriculum content within Australian high schools is influenced by history and the political climate. The status, or the lack of status of Aboriginal culture is evident in the way Australia's national identity is depicted in the mainstream media and government policy (Sarra, 2011). Teachers also play their part in either sustaining colonial values or providing cultural change where the uniqueness of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures are celebrated not dismissed and ignored (K. Price, 2012). To understand why there is still so much negativity toward Aboriginal people one must look at the cycle of ignorance where Aboriginal curriculum content is taught by people who have little understanding of the topic nor how to teach it (Rose, 2012).

A lack of teacher understanding of the Aboriginal perspective has ramifications for both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal Australians. Rose (2012) explained this impact:

> Education overtly suppressed and devalued all aspects of Indigenous knowledge. The ramifications of this cultural and historical suppression embedded in a regenerative curriculum overflowed, affecting not only Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, but also non-Indigenous people, who were denied access to significant knowledge of the land on which they now live. (Rose, 2012, p. 68)

It is therefore clear that an understanding of Aboriginal perspectives is beneficial for all Australians regardless of their background. Education is particularly important as Australia still holds colonial values which oppress Aboriginal people (Dunn, Thompson, Hanna, Murphy, & Burnley, 2001; MacNaughton, 2001; Sarra, 2011). Price (2012) went further to suggest that Australia is becoming more racist as Aboriginal cultures are trivialised or ignored in the classroom.

Before the introduction of the Australian Curriculum, Aboriginal curriculum content was uneven and varied widely depending on the school and teacher (Clark, 2008; Harrison, 2008). This was partially due to the lack of consistent teacher education in Aboriginal perspectives. As a result, Aboriginal curriculum content was often taught in a superficial manner which perpetuated negative stereotypes. The new Australian Curriculum was designed to address this through a greater inclusion of more Aboriginal curriculum content (ACARA, 2013). Anderson and Atkinson (2014) expressed the importance of a greater inclusion of Aboriginal perspectives as, "the reconciliation process cannot go forward successfully unless we address this intellectual *terra nullius* or absence of true Indigenous input into the curriculum" (p.136). However, appropriate teaching of Aboriginal curriculum content is highly dependent on the individual and school perspective of Aboriginal curriculum content (Anderson & Atkinson, 2014).

Understanding the Aboriginal Australian's perspective on Australian history and contemporary issues is vital to improving education for all Australians regardless of their backgrounds. In 2010 a paper titled *Aboriginal Education - 25 Years Approach: The Way Forward* described the importance of bringing Aboriginal identity to the national identity. It stated:

> The positive reinforcement of Aboriginal identity in the wider community and in educational institutions is a necessary prerequisite to achieving improved educational outcomes. Educational institutions exist in a national context but not all have recognised that Aboriginal peoples have a distinct and inalienable set of rights within this society, this must be addressed. (NSWTF, 2010, p. 32)

Indigenous Australians are an integral part of Australian society and this has been acknowledged by various groups for decades. For example, in 1982 the National Aboriginal Education Committee (NAEC) stated that "Aboriginal studies must become an integral part of education for every Australian. It must be taught with a high degree of respect and understanding to develop an accurate knowledge of Australian history" (NAEC, 1982, p. 1). Acknowledging the contributions of Indigenous people has not only been recognised by groups within Australia but also around the world, including the United States, Canada and New Zealand (K. Price, 2012).

Thaman (2003) discussed the benefits of understanding Indigenous peoples in any society. She stated that:

> Indigenous knowledge can contribute to the general knowledge base of higher education and enrich the curriculum by considerations of different perspectives of knowledge and wisdom. Incorporating aspects of indigenous education into course curricula helps make university study more meaningful for many students. Valuing indigenous ways of knowing usually results in mutually beneficial collaboration between indigenous and nonindigenous peoples, and improves their treatment of each other as equals. (p. 11)

An understanding of different cultures such as Aboriginal cultures also helps us understand our own culture and understand that we make assumptions based on our cultural context (Bintz, 1995). Therefore, not only does the understanding of Indigenous cultures provide an understanding of Australian history but it also assists in the development of multicultural understanding and a respect for cultures different from the majority. Through this understanding Indigenous cultures also play a significant role in Australia's national identity.

2.3 National Identity

Australia's national identity is in a constant state of flux and has changed considerably since the days of early European settlement (Clark, 2008; DeJaeghere, 2006; Moran, 2011).

This is explained further by Moran (2011) who stated, "Australia's national identity has shifted from a racially-based white, British Australia, to a diverse, multiethnic, and officially multicultural Australia since the 1970s" (p. 2156). The figure below shows the steep increase in Australia's population due to overseas migration which has impacted heavily on Australia's move to a more multicultural society.
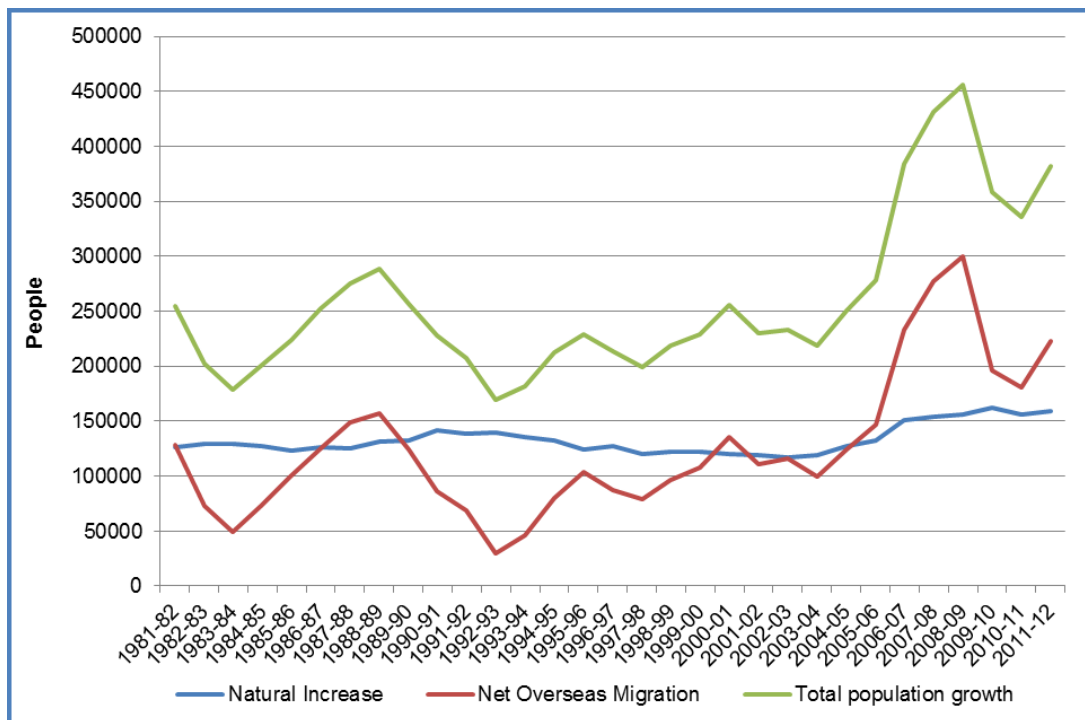
Figure 1: Components of population growth 1981–82 to 2011–12 (Australian Government Department of Immigration and Border Protection, 2013)

Many factors impact on how people perceive Australian culture to be; these include government policy, the portrayal of Australia by the media both at home and overseas, and the increasing number of immigrants (Moran, 2011). Defining Australia's national identity is thus very complex and perpetually changing. National identity for any country refers to belonging to a political community separate to other nations and a personal identity in belonging to that community (Parekh, 2008). How Australian society identifies itself in terms of which aspects of history are deemed significant impacts the values and attitudes collectively held. These aspects impact what content is included in the Australian Curriculum. This is particularly the case with Aboriginal content in the Australian Curriculum; as the shift in government policy towards greater acknowledgement of Australia's

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Indigenous peoples and the role they play in Australia's identity has increased, so has the prominence of Aboriginal content in the Australian Curriculum.

Including Aboriginal content in the curriculum comes with difficulties, as colonial values and attitudes still exist in society and consequently Aboriginal people are still considered outsiders and the 'other' by many Australians (MacNaughton, 2001; Sarra, 2011). At a local council level this has been evident. Dunn, Hanna and Thompson (2001) examined many local councils and came to the conclusion that "Some Australian councils celebrated and responded to the diversity of their citizenry. However, many failed to recognise heterogeneity and constructed certain minorities as a problematic 'other'" (Dunn et al., 2001, p. 1593). This suggests Aboriginal people are outsiders in Australia's identity rather than being a part of it. Triandafyllidou (1998) described how this 'othering' of people defines national identity. She stated:

> National identity is defined not only from within, namely from the features that fellow-nationals share in common but also from without, that is, through distinguishing and differentiating the nation from other nations or ethnic groups. National identity becomes meaningful only through the contrast with others. (p.593)

Australia is a nation becoming more and more culturally diverse as an increasing number of people migrate from non-English speaking countries (DeJaeghere, 2006). The view of the nation as multicultural has become an integral part of Australia's national identity. This is explained by the Civics Expert Group (1994) who stated, "Australia is frequently extolled as a society that recognizes, or even encourages, diversity … Diversity is held to be a national strength" (p. 4). This shift from a "white Australia" policy to one of diversity is recognised in the new Australian Curriculum. Wenger (1998) suggested this re-evaluation of the national identity is ongoing. According to DeJaeghere (2006) Australia is undergoing two simultaneous transformations. She explained as follows:

> (1) an internal shift in the diverse composition of its population and (2) changing economic, political, and social relations influenced by globalization. Internally, immigration has changed the composition of Australia's population, forming a more diverse multicultural society. Nearly 24 percent of Australians are born overseas (Australian Bureau of Statistics 2005). In the 1990s, immigrants from non-English speaking countries constituted 14 percent of the population (Jupp 1997). Aborigines compromise approximately 2 percent of the population, speaking 170 different Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander languages. (Ainley, Malley, and Lamb 1997 cited in DeJaeghere, 2006, p.293)

This change in Australia's identity due to the increase in migration to Australia and increased globalisation has shaped the content of the new Australian Curriculum. A clear example is the focus on Asian Studies in the curriculum reflecting Australia's ties with Asia. Australia became a member of the Asian-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) and a dialogue partner in the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) (DeJaeghere, 2006). For example, "In the Australian Curriculum: History, the priority of Asia and Australia's engagement with Asia provides rich and engaging content and contexts for developing students' historical knowledge, understanding and skills" (Australian Curriculum Assessment and Reporting Authority, 2013, p. 12). This focus on Asia could impact the extent to which other content, such as Aboriginal perspectives, is taught.

Australia is still in the process of shifting from a monoculture where the dominant culture overshadows the minorities, to one closer to multiculturalism where all cultures are considered equal (P. A. Price, 2012). The difficulty with this shift is that cultural differences will always exist. How individuals, communities and nations respond to cultural differences will impact the treatment of minorities (Burnett, 2004). Consequently, education plays a key role in developing values and the teaching of values to produce informed citizens.

Dockett and Cusack (2003) concurred on the vital role schools play in developing the Australian national identity to lead to a civil and just society. They stated:

> To shape a social and just society, children need to become well-informed citizens, capable of thinking critically about their place in society and the ways that they can effect change. This process can start with discussions of national identity and belonging. (p.368)

Furthermore, there are inbuilt barriers in the education system which can prevent this critical look at Australian society. DeJaeghere (2006) suggested that "while some curriculum documents take a critical approach, some educators and students may not feel comfortable with this approach" (p.310). She explained that teachers may feel uncomfortable teaching sensitive issues which affect the national identity. These issues can include the view of Indigenous Australians. She also stated that:

> The system of national assessments seems to influence what and how teachers teach, and a critical approach to citizenship was important, [a particular teacher] felt that the curriculum and testing pushed him to teach in noncritical ways. The larger societal discourse also influences teachers' and students' ways of constructing these topics from a minimal or critical perspective. (p.311)

There are many contradictions in Australian society which both students and teachers must face. These contradictions are often learned early on. Dockett and Cusack (2003) suggest, "On the one hand, they are learning to value equality and justice; on the other hand, they are beginning to accept racist ideologies and the unequal distribution of resources" (p.367). Dockett and Cusack (2003) also debated the impact of taking a critical perspective on internal issues by stating: "Policymakers, as one educator stated, may have more to lose if internal issues are contested" (364). Therefore, discussing what Australia's national identity is and where Aboriginal people fit into it may be ignored by teachers if it is not clearly stipulated in the curriculum.

Understanding national identity is not only important in understanding Australian culture and cultures within Australia and their impact on society, but also in shaping a society that people want to live in. Dockett and Cusack (2003) described the qualities of a civil society as follows:

> Members of a civil society are committed to working together, based on respect for self and others. Underpinning such a society are constructive notions about identity, relationships with others, difference and diversity, and social justice and equity. (Dockett, Cusack, 2003, p.364)

If this is the ideal then a greater understanding of all aspects of Australian society needs to be understood. This includes developing a national identity which is multicultural and consequently inclusive of all minorities in Australian society. This could then lead to a greater respect and understanding of Australia's Indigenous peoples.

2.3.1 Understanding of the Aboriginal Perspective

As Australia purports to be a multicultural society, it is important for all its members to respect and accept the diversity multiculturalism brings. Understanding minority perspectives such as the Aboriginal perspective will not only promote an understanding of the position of Aboriginal people in Australia, but will also enable people to understand a variety of different perspectives and embrace diversity (Osborne, 2001a). Understanding a different perspective helps us to understand that our own beliefs and attitudes are shaped by society, culture and experiences and are not necessarily universal. This is highlighted by

Bintz (1995) as he explained how being involved in a multicultural setting is beneficial. He said:

> To this end, I have come to believe that schooling is an opportunity for teachers and students to see, hear, and think differently about themselves and about each other as learners, for as Burke (1992) reminds us, it is only by hearing the voices of others that we are better able to hear our own. (p.42)

Bintz also posited that schools should be based on a diversity model as opposed to a consensus model of education. A diversity model would "recognize, value, and support individual differences" (p.40). This would not only support Australia's growing multiculturalism but encourage acceptance of differences between people.

Without an education system which celebrates and embraces multiculturalism there is a continued dichotomy of 'us' and 'them' (non-Anglo-Australians and Anglo-Australians). MacNaughton (2001) explored the ideologies of young Australians and from her study found that, "Not one child shared any information that suggested that Aboriginal-Australians and Anglo-Australians have anything in common or that there were differences in how Aboriginal-Australians lived their lives" (p.88). MacNaughton highlights that 'othering' was reinforced throughout the curriculum. She stated:

> This othering was also reflected in the resources and curriculum practices used by practitioners to 'teach' about indigenous Australians and their cultures. The practitioners displayed and discussed Aboriginal people and their cultures as consisting only of ceremonial dance and/or corroborees, as loving animals, as valuing art and craft, e.g. stick painting and weaving, having dark, brown or black skin, the production and use of boomerangs, living in stick type huts and being linked to their 'Dreamtime'. (p.88)

She believes that in order to neutralise the power of 'othering', stereotyped misconceptions must be analysed and challenged. MacNaughton concludes by saying:

> Irrespective of how these Anglo-Australian children learnt about indigenous Australians, they can and do construct knowledge from an early age about indigenous Australians. More significantly, much of the knowledge being constructed recreates a colonial 'othering' of indigenous Australians. In this process, they also create a colonial self-identity based on a binary opposition between 'black' and 'white' as signifiers of who they are. (pp.91-92)

Craven (2011) reinforces this notion by acknowledging the failure of the education system to "address fundamental issues to do with recognising the validity of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander histories and cultures and their rightful place in Australian society (Craven, 2011, p. 4). The New South Wales Teachers Federation also highlighted this by stating:

> The Australian nation must move to establish in Australian law, an inclusive relationship between the Australian state and Aboriginal peoples, and in so doing, formally show both respect and acknowledgement of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander culture and history, rights and identity. (2010, p. 32)

Learning about Aboriginal culture ties in with Australia's view of itself as a country which embraces cultural diversity. With an increase in globalisation, Australia has positioned itself as a country which not only embraces diversity but one where, "Diversity is held to be a national strength" (cited in Civics Expert Group, 1994, p.4). Nevertheless, Australia cannot be truly multicultural without an understanding and acceptance of minority groups.

Cultural competency is therefore an important aspect of teacher education. If teachers are to teach in an increasingly multicultural society they will need to have an awareness of how their approach is received by a variety of cultures. One definition of cultural competency is:

> to develop an informed position based on an understanding and appreciation of Aboriginal issues, culture and way of life that enables confident and effective interaction with Aboriginal people and the wider society. (Gower & Byrne, 2012, p. 380)

Partington (1998)   suggests that without understanding minority groups' situations, values, goals and actions, members of the dominant group will often view people from other groups in negative terms.

There is evidence this understanding is not reaching the majority of the population. Research by National Indigenous Postgraduate Association Aboriginal Corporation (NIPAAC, 2012) is one example which highlights this issue by looking at undergraduate and postgraduate students in Australia. The research findings proposed that Australian students "do not tend to have a deep understanding of Indigenous-Australian culture and histories, or of the factors that have put Indigenous-Australians in positions of socio-economic disadvantage" (p.2). The impact this has, as Partington (1998) explains, is that "explanations of difference will be based on assumed deficits" (p.16). For Aboriginal students this affects their perceived value. Anderson and Atkinson (2014) discuss this:

> Indigenous children go to school to gain an education so they can participate in all aspects of today's society, not to be turned into white Australians. Indigenous children know their identity and are strong and proud of their identity, and this needs to be acknowledged and supported by the schools and teachers, not devalued. (Anderson & Atkinson, 2014, p. 139)

If university students do not have an understanding of the Indigenous perspective it is clear that schools are not providing their students with this information (NIPAAC, 2012). Giroux

(1992) explained that ignoring Indigenous cultures can negatively affect the lives of Indigenous students outside of the classroom (cited in Osborne, 2001). The NIPAAC (2004) paper again provides evidence that "Indigenous-Australian students regularly report racism on campus" (p.2). Partington (1998) stated that by ignoring Aboriginal cultures "the message is conveyed to other students that the characteristics of Indigenous people which set them apart from the dominant group should be ignored as of no value, or, at worst, as contemptible" (pp.20-21). However Partington (1998) believed this can be countered by implementing strategies for incorporating Aboriginal content into the school curriculum (p.20). Partington (1998) stated:

> Positive approaches to instructing Indigenous students will result not only in reduced alienation and improved performance, but also they will help to eliminate the widespread racism that persists in society. Such change requires, on the part of teachers, the acquisition of a body of knowledge, skills and values which supports cultural and social difference in the classroom. If teachers are unaware of such matters, it is likely that Indigenous students will continue to be treated as second class while in school. (pp.20-21)

The need to impart knowledge, skills and values to teachers has continued to be a recommendation in various reports since the 1980s. One report in 2000 on *Positive Self–Identity for Indigenous Students and its Relationship to School Outcomes* included ten recommendations. One of these recommendations detailed:

> that schools implement Indigenous studies as perspectives across the curriculum in all years of formal schooling and in the form of modules and discrete subjects in the secondary years of schooling. (Purdie, Tripcony, Boulton-Lewis, Fanshawe, & Gunstone, 2000, p. 12)

This report was not the first document to recommend implementing an Indigenous Studies unit into schools and universities (Q Beresford et al., 2012; Partington, 1998). In the 1980s the importance of Aboriginal studies became more prominent in literature as it was believed to benefit both Indigenous and non-Indigenous students (NAEC, 1982). It was argued to be a means of promoting self-identity among Aboriginal students, while increasing the level of cross-cultural understanding among non-Indigenous students. Although this recommendation was made in 2000 after extensive literature review, and consultation with members of the Indigenous community and non-Indigenous teachers and principals, only in 2013 have teaching standards been introduced. This was through the Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership which included knowledge and

understanding of the Indigenous perspective (AITSL, 2013). While specific units in Aboriginal content have been included in the Australian Curriculum, it has not yet addressed the lack of teacher knowledge related to cultural competency. It's only when teachers can teach Aboriginal content appropriately that they can effectively challenge colonial values.

Knowledge of the Aboriginal perspective could also have a positive impact on the wider community. Not only would greater knowledge of Aboriginal perspectives improve students' and societal attitudes towards indigenous cultures and people, but it may also have a positive effect on environmental issues (Johnson, 2000, p. xvi). This belief is reinforced as, "Many groups recognize that traditional indigenous knowledge and thought holds critical answers for some contemporary societal issues" (Johnson, 2000, p.xvi). The issues including those related to the environment are continually in the news and looking to Indigenous cultures could be a source of understanding. As Johnson explains, "s*ustainability,* was always an integral part of most indigenous cultures. As indigenous cultures grow in strength, it is predicted that there will continue to be other answers that will help ensure the survival of Earth, and us" (Johnson, 2000, p.xvi). Therefore, learning and understanding Australia's Indigenous cultures is beneficial for all Australian regardless of their background.

Despite the shift in thinking and the acknowledgement by both current and past governments that there is a need for a greater understanding for Indigenous cultures, history and issues to be taught in schools, there is still a gap in the education system. Although aspects of Indigenous studies have been added to the curriculum, the majority of states have not had Indigenous studies as a separate unit or specified content to teach (see Appendix B).

Affecting the quality teaching of Aboriginal curriculum content is the inconsistent knowledge base of teachers. However, addressing this alone is not enough to improve quality teaching of Aboriginal curriculum content. On the other hand cultural awareness and a sensitive approach to Aboriginal perspectives play a huge role in challenging colonial attitudes and values. Cultural competency therefore plays a vital role in teaching practices. It is imperative then that teachers teaching Aboriginal curriculum content are aware of "their own and/or others' practices that would devalue Aboriginal students and their

culture" (Gower & Byrne, 2012, p. 397). Addressing the content in the Australian Curriculum is only one step towards a curriculum which is inclusive of Indigenous cultures.

2.4 Aboriginal Content in the School curriculum

2.4.1 Expectations of teachers

In 2008 the quality of Australian history had been described by Professor Macintyre as "'uneven' with great differences between states and territories and between the government, Catholic and independent school sectors" (Harrison, 2008, p.2). The expectations of teachers have changed throughout history with more emphasis in recent years on the mandatory teaching of Aboriginal curriculum content. An increasing amount of professional learning has also been made available online across learning areas. One of the biggest changes since 1997 has been the implementation of the Australian Curriculum which has explicitly stated what is to be taught in Society and Environment. This includes Indigenous content across years 7 to 10. However, the coverage of Aboriginal curriculum content is still subject to the individual teacher.

Australia has recently undergone some big changes in the education system. The introduction of a new Australian Curriculum is one, and the updated version of the Australian professional teaching standards is another. The standards include three areas which teachers are expected to address at differing levels depending on their experience. These levels include: Professional Knowledge, Professional Practice, and Professional Engagement. These changes included an Indigenous component which all teachers are expected to implement.

In the 1997 curriculum for the Society and Environment Learning Area in Western Australia, the Aboriginal perspective was only mentioned in two of the seven Learning Area Strands. These seven Strands areas included: Investigation, Communication and Participation, Place and Space; Resources; Culture; Time, Continuity and Change; Natural and Social Systems; and Active Citizenship. Aboriginal perspectives, however, were only mentioned in two of these learning areas: culture and time, and continuity and change. Under the heading *The*

Scope of the Curriculum (CC, 1998, p. 263) two important elements were identified, one of which was essential knowledge. Essential knowledge included Indigenous perspectives: for example, "the experiences, achievements and contributions of all cultural groups in Australia, including Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders ... the cultures, beliefs and practices of indigenous groups since human occupation" (CC, 1998). *The Scope of the Curriculum* document also stated that:

> This essential knowledge will be addressed in different ways from kindergarten to year 12. Teachers will make judgements about the particular emphasis they will give, the specific examples they choose, and where the knowledge is placed in the different phases of development. (CC, 1998, p. 263)

Thus, it was up to individual teachers to "make judgements about the particular emphasis" (p.263) and it would also depend on the particular interests of the teacher as to how much they taught and to what depth they would teach it.

The new additions to the teaching standards which came into effect in 2012 (AITSL, 2013) have given more specific guidelines as to what is expected of teachers. These expectations include a greater understanding of students' background and how this affects their learning. This is illustrated under the Professional Knowledge section *Standard 1: Know students and how they learn* which stated:

> 1.3 Students with diverse linguistic, cultural, religious and socioeconomic backgrounds

> 1.4 Strategies for teaching Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students

The figure below explains the differing levels of knowledge expected of teachers from different stages in their careers for teaching Standard 1.4.

Graduate	Proficient	Highly Accomplished	Lead
Demonstrate a broad knowledge of, understanding of the impact of culture, cultural identity and linguistic background on the education of students from Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander backgrounds	Design and implement effective teaching strategies that are responsive to the local community and cultural setting, linguistic background and histories of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students	Provide advice and support colleagues in the implementation of effective teaching strategies for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students using knowledge of and support from community representatives	Develop teaching programs that support equitable and ongoing participation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students by engaging in collaborative relationships with community representatives and parents/carers.

Figure 2: Australian Professional Standards for Teachers, Standard 1.4 (AITSL, 2013)

This standard focuses on the teaching of Aboriginal students, cultural sensitivity towards them, and understanding that their needs may differ from those of other students from different backgrounds. This standard expects a high level of understanding of Aboriginal issues for which training is now being offered at universities in Western Australia (Appendix C). Conversely, many teachers currently practicing will not have had the benefits of these tertiary units, even though they could be senior teachers. Senior teachers are expected to have a deep understanding of the local community; however, for teachers without an Aboriginal and Islander Education Officer (AIEO) at their school this could prove difficult. An AIEO not only support Aboriginal students they also assist in programing and resourcing for teachers. Content knowledge is therefore not always easily accessible but essential as stated in Standard 2.

Standard 2: *Know the content and how to teach it* also has some similar difficulties attached as it focuses on reconciliation. Standard 2.4 states that teachers should:

> Understand and respect Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people to promote reconciliation between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians.

Below are the expectations for each of the career stages of teachers:

Graduate	Proficient	Highly Accomplished	Lead
Demonstrate a broad knowledge of, understanding of and respect for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander histories, cultures and languages	Provide opportunities for students to develop understanding of and respect for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander histories, cultures and languages	Support colleagues with providing opportunities for students to develop understanding of and respect for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander histories, cultures and languages	Lead initiatives to assist colleagues with opportunities for students to develop understanding of and respect for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander histories, cultures and languages

Figure 3: Australian Professional standards for Teachers, standard 2.4 (AITSL, 2013)

Standard 2 is obviously an important aspect that needs addressing and yet it remains up to the individual teacher to decide what professional learning they will undertake to gain knowledge in this area. If the teacher's interests lie elsewhere, he or she may not take the opportunity to extend his or her knowledge in this area.

The new Australian Curriculum also provides teachers with *content descriptions* for what must be taught at each year level. This gives teachers a more prescribed curriculum and contains specific units on Aboriginal content which were not in the previous Western Australian curriculum. These content descriptions are a resource for teachers to organise and plan what they are to teach. The Australian Curriculum history paper describes these content descriptions as follows:

> The Australian Curriculum: History includes content descriptions at each year level. These set out the knowledge, understanding and skills that teachers are expected to teach and students are expected to learn. However they do not prescribe approaches to teaching. The content descriptions have been written to ensure that learning is appropriately ordered and that unnecessary repetition is avoided. However, a concept or skill introduced at one year level may be revisited, strengthened and extended at later year levels as needed. (ACARA, 2013, p. 5)

The curriculum document also provides content elaborations to "assist teachers in developing a common understanding of the content descriptions. They are not intended to be comprehensive content points that all students need to be taught" (p.5). The content the

curriculum document provides the teachers is useful but as stated above "they do not prescribe approaches to teaching" (p.5). Therefore, teachers who may not be confident teaching Aboriginal content must look elsewhere for support. Professional development days are the one place where they can access this along with online resources.

2.4.2 Professional Learning

With recent changes to the education system due to the implementation of a national curriculum the need for extensive professional learning is particularly relevant. Many learning areas are undergoing significant changes and the expectation of teachers is also becoming more specified (ACARA, 2010). Professional learning enables teachers to keep updated on these changes and improve their practice resulting in better student outcomes. This is especially significant for teaching Aboriginal curriculum content as there is likely to be a gap in teachers' knowledge due to a lack of opportunity at university to expand their knowledge (see Appendix A).

The Australian Charter for the Professional Learning of Teachers and School leaders (AITSL, 2013) describes professional learning as:

> the formal or informal learning experiences undertaken by teachers and school leaders that improve their individual professional practice, and a school's collective effectiveness, as measured by improved student learning, engagement with learning and wellbeing. At its most effective, professional learning develops individual and collective capacity across the teaching profession to address current and future challenges. (p.2)

The Charter also states all teachers and school leaders "actively engage in professional learning throughout their careers" (p.2). The Australian Professional Standards for Teacher (AITSL, 2013) includes professional learning under Standard 6: Engage in Professional Learning. This statement is not accompanied with how teachers are to do this but it is up to the teacher, the department and school to implement effective professional learning. This choice is influenced by the focus and support of the school and senior staff along with teacher interests.

Although there is consensus of the importance on professional learning for teachers there has not been an increase in funds (Dinham, 2013). Dinham (2013) explains that the changes

made to improve education have not included "recognition of the need to provide ongoing effective professional learning for teachers to enable them to continue to develop and upgrade their skills, and to be recognised and rewarded for this growth" (p.93). Aboriginal curriculum content appears to suffer greatly from this lack of 'effective' professional learning. There have however, been improvements in recent years to information available in this area. The Australian Professional Teachers Association website contains a calendar of professional learning dates for all learning areas. It also contains a section specifically on professional learning including Aboriginal education. The page lists websites to help teachers engage Aboriginal students in school and also resources for teachers to implement in their classroom.

The variety of resources available is evident as the page provides links to websites which include programs to engage Aboriginal students. As these resources are readily available it is the prerogative of staff and schools to access materials such as *Western Australian Indigenous Participation and Achievement Standards Directorate,* programs which support leadership initiatives in schools such as *Dare to Lead* (Australian Professional Teachers' Association, 2010). *What Works* is a website which provides professional development materials designed to help teachers and school administrators facilitate action in their schools (Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations, 2014). This site is aimed at improving outcomes of Indigenous students.

For teachers who are interested in expanding their knowledge and approach to teaching Aboriginal curriculum content there are many resources available. Below are such sites and a description of what they offer (APTA, 2010):

> The Department of Education and Training of Western Australia's Curriculum Materials Information Services CMIS Resource bank support the implementation of Indigenous education by providing description and evaluations of relevant materials.
>
> The Education Network Australia provides information on and links to a constantly updated range of resources which have identified and contributed by Australian educators and networks the bodies responsible for education. Resources dealing specifically with Indigenous Education can be found here. Whilst resources specific to Aboriginal Education are listed here. Indigenous education resources can also be accessed from the Government Education Portal.

An excellent collection of online teaching resources about Indigenous Australians has been developed by the teacher-librarian of the P. L Duffy Resource Centre, Trinity College, Western Australia. (APTA, 2010)

The AITSL website also includes a small range of resources (AITSL, 2014a). The site stated, "The revised resource offers a sequential program of study (with online and blended learning opportunities) specifically targeted at supporting teachers in meeting Focus Area 1.4" (AITSL, 2014). These Resources included *Illustrations of Practice* "which have been developed to help teacher situate their own practice within the Australian Professional Standards for Teachers. Specific illustrations have been developed to support teachers in meeting Focus areas 1.4 and 2.4" (AITSL, 2014a). However, there is only one illustration for Standard 2.4 *Understand and respect Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people to promote reconciliation between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians*, which is an example from a Remote school in Alice Springs at a graduate level. There are no illustrations for Standard 1.4 Strategies for teaching Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students, at any level.

The *Initial Teacher Education and Professional Learning Unit Outlines and Content* have been developed with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people (APTA, 2010). There are two resources under this heading which included: *The Respect, Relationships, Reconciliation-Initial teacher education,* although there is only access to a prototype of this course. It contains three units: 1. Know Yourself, 2. Know your Students, and 3. Know What you teach. The second resource is, *A unit outline and content for professional learning units,*

"This document is intended as a guide to the development of professional development and learning options for all Australian teachers, Aboriginal, Torres Strait Islander and non-Indigenous"(AITSL, 2014a). This document appears to be a self-guided professional learning program and there is no evidence on the AITSL website of professional learning workshops scheduled.

Although these resources are readily available for teachers, it is not mandatory for teachers to access them. Simply providing the information is not enough to ensure teachers use this resource. If teachers do access the information it does not address the issue of how they will

teach the material. This is significant as prescribed content in Aboriginal perspectives is an important inclusion in the new Australian Curriculum.

Ma Rhea, Anderson, and Atkinson (2012) recognised the lack of professional learning and have made suggestions for how to develop proficient teacher knowledge in teaching standard 1.4 and 2.4. Although, this does not address the funding issues raised by Dinham, (2013) they suggested that professional learning for standard 1.4 would need to:

- Be focused
- Be practical
- Acknowledge what the teacher already knows
- Provide opportunity for understanding of the international Indigenous rights
- framework
- Offer clear interpretations of the links between international undertakings, national policies, systemic policies, local policies, and practice for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander education in schools
- Provide a means for existing teachers who have not done so, to demonstrate knowledge and skills development, at both the Graduate and Proficient levels, and
- Provide advanced options for already experienced teachers to enable them to demonstrate skills appropriate to the new Highly Accomplished or Lead Teacher levels. (Ma Rhea et al., 2012, p. 61).

Similarly in Teaching Standard 2.4 they have compiled another list for teachers to demonstrate their formal knowledge. Therefore, to be proficient in Standard 2.4 professional learning would need to:

- Be explicitly anti-racist
- Provide opportunity for understanding of the international Indigenous rights framework
- Offer clear interpretations of the links between international undertakings, national policies, systemic policies, local policies, and practice for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander education in schools
- Include opportunity for understanding the history between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander and non-Indigenous Australians
- Include intercultural or cross-cultural skills development involving the development of, or changing of, teachers' personal attitudes, expectations and understandings of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures
- Include strategies to create inclusive / intercultural classrooms or schools, and
- Link issues relating to the preservation and maintenance of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander identity and lifeways, including languages and traditional practices to contemporary Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander aspirations and practices. (Ma Rhea et al., 2012, p. 62).

Ma Rhea et al. (2012) have also pointed out that the major issue with implementing any kind of professional learning is in convincing teachers there is a need for them to train or update their knowledge. This is especially difficult as the study undertaken by Ma Rhea et al. (2012) uncovered fear and resistance from teachers about the new Focus Areas. One of the issues contributing to teacher fear and resistance for teaching Standards 1.4 and 2.4 was "that professional development opportunities are patchy, ad hoc and lacking in cohesiveness" (p.58). In order to convince teachers they suggest the whole school needs to take responsibility starting with the principals. Without this homogenous approach they stated, "A lack of consensus for teachers to do this work, and the lack of dedicated resources to do so, will also mean that teacher professional education providers will have little motivation to develop programs that support this work" (Ma Rhea et al., 2012, p. 53). Without faith in professional learning for Aboriginal curriculum content it is likely the Australian curriculum document will be the main guide for teaching these standards.

2.4.3 Australian Curriculum

The Australian Curriculum was developed to standardise Australian schooling, and so improve the quality of education for all Australian students which would lead to "maintaining Australia's productivity and quality of life" (ACARA, 2010, p. 1). In 2008 all Australian governments agreed on an Australian Curriculum which has been implemented in stages from 2011, of which History was amongst the first. The Australian Curriculum – although it will standardise much – will still rely on the individual teacher to implement the content. For example, the information sheet states:

> Whilst the Australian Curriculum will outline the scope of what is to be learned, it will be teachers in classrooms who will make decisions about how best to organise learning, the contexts for learning and the depth of learning that will be pursued for each child in their class. (ACARA, 2010, p. 1)

It is therefore important that every teacher has a high level of cultural competency and understands how to approach the teaching of Aboriginal content in a way which is respectful and doesn't reinforce negative stereotypes.

The Australian Curriculum will also include specified Aboriginal perspectives units across Years 7 to 10. The rationale for the history curriculum focuses on the importance of history to understand the world, Australia and the people in it. It states that:

> Awareness of history is an essential characteristic of any society, and historical knowledge is fundamental to understanding ourselves and others. It promotes the understanding of societies, events, movements and developments that have shaped humanity from earliest times. It helps students appreciate how the world and its people have changed, as well as the significant continuities that exit to the present day. (ACARA, 2013, p. 3)

The aim of the curriculum is to develop in students a critical understanding of the world around them and an appreciation of it. Two aims of the History component are to ensure that students develop:

- Knowledge, understanding and appreciation of the past and the forces that shape societies, including Australian society
- Understanding and use of historical concepts, such as evidence, continuity and change, cause and effect, perspectives, empathy, significance and contestability (ACARA, 2013, p. 3)

A focus of the History curriculum is Australian society within a world history context. This understanding is developed from the Foundation years to Year 10. This study examines the teachers' views of the Australian curriculum covering Years 7-10. Therefore, understanding the structure of the curriculum is essential in understanding the expectations placed on teachers.

The course from Years 7-10 are divided into overviews which take up 10% of the total teaching year and three depth studies which include up to three electives. The depth studies take approximately 30% of the total teaching time each per year (ACARA, 2013, pp. 4-5). The curriculum focus for these years includes: world and Australian history, the analysis and use of sources and historical interpretation. The curriculum aims to take into account the developmental stage of the students and the "important physical, cognitive, emotional and social changes" (p.6) they are undergoing. The curriculum acknowledges:

> Students in this age range increasingly look for and value learning that is perceived to be relevant, is consistent with personal goals, and/or leads to important outcomes. Increasingly they are able to work with more abstract concepts and are keen to explore the nature of evidence and contestability of ideas. (p.6)

The curriculum is trying to be sensitive to student developmental stages by including curriculum content which will take into account what interests students at different stages. By taking the student's developmental stage into account the following curriculum structure has been developed:

Curriculum Structure: Years 7 -10

- The Year 7 curriculum focuses on history from the time of the earliest human communities to the end of the ancient period (approximately 60 000BCE – c.650CE); a period defined by the development of cultural practices and organised societies
- The Year 8 curriculum focuses on history from the end of the ancient period to the beginning of the modern period (c.650 – 1750); a span of human history marked by significant economic, religious and political change
- The Year 9 curriculum focuses on the marking of the modern world and Australia from 1750 to 1918 to the present; an era of industrialism, nationalism and imperialism
- The Year 10 curriculum focuses on the history of the modern world and Australia from 1918 to the present; the twentieth century was an important period in Australia's social, cultural, economic and political development. (The Australian Curriculum: History, p.7)

The curriculum ties in with Australia's national identity ideal of a multicultural country which accepts and celebrates diversity. This is reflected in the curriculum document as it acknowledged this aspect of Australia's ideal society it stated:

> Australian students have multiple, diverse, and changing needs that are shaped by individual learning histories and abilities as well as personal, cultural and language backgrounds and socio-economic factors. (The Australian Curriculum: History, p.7)

The Australian Curriculum takes into account that students learn differently and understanding student backgrounds helps this. The Australian standards of teaching reinforce this aim of the curriculum by highlighting the importance of understanding student's backgrounds in Standard 1: Know students and how they learn. This can only be achieved if the teacher has the appropriate cultural competency.

The curriculum is taking a holistic approach to teaching history as it aims at implementing general capabilities which should be covered in most if not all subjects. These include: Literacy, Numeracy, Information and Communication Technology (ICT) capability, Critical and Creative Thinking, Personal and Social Capability, Ethical Understanding, and Intercultural Understanding. The intercultural understanding is particularly relevant for

understanding Australia's Indigenous peoples. The description of intercultural understanding discusses the importance of students understanding their own cultures, languages and beliefs and those of others. They learn to understand how identities are shaped and how these change and recognise commonalities and differences. There is also specific mention that students "recognise the significance of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples' histories and cultures" (p.11). It is also important for the teacher to provide a range of sources portraying different cultural perspectives in order to develop historical understanding" (The Australian Curriculum: History, p.11) for the students to refer to.

The curriculum contains three cross-curriculum priorities which are to be embedded in the curriculum "and will have a strong but varying presence depending on their relevance to each of the learning areas" (p.11). These priorities are:

- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander histories and cultures
- Asia and Australia's engagement with Asia
- Sustainability. (ACARA, 2013, p. 11)

In the description of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander histories and cultures, there is a strong focus on the importance of understanding the Indigenous people and valuing their cultures and also accepting their history as part of a shared Australian history. It also states that:

> Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities are strong, rich and diverse. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Identity is central to this priority and is intrinsically linked to living, learning Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities, deep knowledge traditions and holistic world view. (ACARA, 2013, p. 11)

The curriculum aims to accomplish this as:

> Students will examine historical perspectives from an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander viewpoint. They will learn about Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples prior to colonisation by the British, the ensuing contact and its impacts. They will examine key policies and political movements over the last two centuries. Students will develop an awareness of the significant roles of Aboriginal and Torres Strait islander people in Australian society. (ACARA, 2013, p. 12)

In order to accomplish this, teachers must have a broad knowledge of Aboriginal cultures and a respectful approach to the topic. It will also be important for teachers to understand

the misconceptions of Aboriginal culture many students may have and also the misconception they themselves might have. This must be addressed if students are to gain a broad understanding of Aboriginal people and the effects of history on Australian society. Therefore culturally competent teachers are vital in teaching Aboriginal curriculum content.

2.4.4 Coverage of Aboriginal Content in the Australian Curriculum

The inclusion of prescribed Aboriginal content in the curriculum was a major drawcard of the new Australian Curriculum. An examination of the document has revealed it is not as extensive in its coverage of Aboriginal perspectives as initially promised (Lowe & Yunkaporta, 2013). The majority of content regarding Aboriginal perspectives were found in content Elaborations which is not considered core content.

Aboriginal content in the Australian Curriculum is structured as whole units and topics within units prescribed information on what is to be taught. The units containing Aboriginal content in Years 7-10 are shown in appendix B. It is clear Aboriginal curriculum content is taught in more depth in Year 10, whereas Year 8 contains no Aboriginal content at all. Aboriginal curriculum content is also offered in elective units making it possible for teachers to avoid teaching it if they wish.

Lowe and Yunkaporta (2013) have also made observations on the amount of Aboriginal curriculum content in their article, *The inclusion of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander content in the Australian Curriculum: A cultural, cognitive and socio-political evaluation.* In their analysis of the document they found electives where teachers had to choose between Aboriginal content and Asian or other cultures. They broke the curriculum document into items and found only five which included Aboriginal perspectives. Lowe and Yunkaporta (2013) explain "'Aboriginal content' was either largely ignored, or addressed through the addition of additional non-mandatory content to the *Content Elaborations*" (Lowe & Yunkaporta, 2013, p. 1). As much as it is non-mandatory, it will be down to the individual teacher to decide if they will include it or not.

By exploring all topics covered from Year 7 to 10 an understanding of the amount of Aboriginal content can be put into context. A key criticism of the curriculum document by

Lowe and Yunkaporta (2013) is it "seemed to deal more with simple factual content rather than Aboriginal ways of thinking and doing" (p.4). This is clearly seen in the content descriptors.

The Year 7 curriculum content focuses on *The Ancient World.* The overview content includes Aboriginal perspectives through factual content as it looks at: "Migration out of Africa to other parts of the world including Australia" (ACARA, 2013, p. 15). This unit also includes a mandatory depth study *Investigating the ancient past.* This unit includes aspects of the Aboriginal perspective as it looks at the "nature of the sources for Ancient Australia and what they reveal about Australia's past" (p.17). There is also a component which focuses on "the importance of conserving the remains of the ancient past, including the heritage of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples" (p.17).

The Year 8 curriculum focuses on *The Ancient to the Modern World.* The time period it focuses on is *c.*650 AD (CE) – 1750 and it contains no Aboriginal content in the overview or the depth studies. The curriculum describes this time period as follows:

> This was when major civilisations around the world came into contact with each other. Social, economic, religious, and political beliefs were often challenged and significantly changed. It was the period when the modern world began to take shape. (p.24)

The depth studies take a world history approach by looking at Europe, Asia and Africa at this time. The reasons behind these units are to give students a greater understanding of world history and understand the peaceful and conflicting relationships between differing cultures.

The Year 9 curriculum's theme is *The Making of the Modern World.* In the first depth study *Making a better world,* teachers can choose between three electives: The Industrial Revolution (1750 -1914), or progressive ideas and movements (1750 – 1918), or movements of peoples (1750 – 1901). *Movements of peoples* is the only elective in this unit which contains an Aboriginal perspective and this unit looks at the effects of colonisation on Indigenous peoples. The second unit, *Australia and Asia*, contains only two electives and teachers must choose between *Asia and the world* and *Making a Nation*. *Making a Nation* includes the effects of European settlement in Australia including the Stolen Generation. The third depth study is *World War 1* and includes no electives. It does however stipulate

that the experiences of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples during the war are to be explored. Aboriginal curriculum content could be avoided in the first two depth studies suggesting Aboriginal perspectives could effectively feature only in the last unit on *World War 1*.

The Modern World and Australia is the theme for the Year 10 curriculum. This course has the largest component of Aboriginal curriculum content. The overview contains the following; Identifying the major movements for rights and freedom in the world (including the US Civil Rights movement, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander movements, women's movements (p.43). The first depth study on *World War 2* does not contain any Aboriginal curriculum content and the second depth study *Rights and Freedoms* has no elective units. This unit examines the experiences of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples in their struggle for rights and freedoms. It also includes the civil rights movements and reconciliation up to the present day. The third unit *The Globalising World* contains three elective units none of which include Aboriginal content.

Although these units are much more explicit in their descriptions of Aboriginal curriculum content than the previous curriculum, there are still areas where teachers can avoid teaching the topic. The approach to Aboriginal curriculum content is left up to the individual teacher with nothing stipulated in the curriculum document as to how to sensitively address Aboriginal perspectives. This issue is compounded if the teacher does not feel comfortable teaching this particular area.

2.5 Challenges in Implementing Indigenous studies

2.5.1 The Impact of Australia's Colonial History on Teaching Aboriginal Content

In the past many issues restricted the implementation of Indigenous studies in Australia. These issues stem from Australia's colonial past and colonial ideologies which still exist today but in a more subtle form (K. Price, 2012; Sarra, 2011). From the 1980s the government both federal and state began a greater inclusion of Aboriginal studies in the

curriculum (Q Beresford et al., 2012). To change the culture of a school and to change people's view of Aboriginal culture, history and issues there needs to be more than just policy direction.

Australia's colonial history has led many people to feel cultural discomfort when it comes to interacting with Aboriginal people and Aboriginal studies (Yunkaporta & McGinty, 2009). This discomfort is often displayed in terms of separating Aboriginal people into the binary of 'other' or 'us' and 'them' (McConaghy, 2000). This is a continuing ideology within Australian society despite a greater acknowledgement of the contemporary issues Aboriginal people face. However, being aware of the disparity between Aboriginal people and the Anglo majority has not quelled people's fear of offending Aboriginal people. This can be attributed to a lack of deeper understanding of Aboriginal people and their history. Avoidance is often how people respond to this fear (Healy, 2008; K. Price, 2012; Sarra, 2011). But by avoiding these issues in the classroom and therefore not challenging them, colonial values are sustained (Dockett & Cusack, 2003).

Australia's history between its settlers and Indigenous population has been turbulent with ramifications still visible in 2014 (Fredericks, Maynor, White, English, & Ehrich, 2014). A lack of understanding of Australia's first peoples by the dominant Anglo population has led to destructive and oppressive policies and negative portrayals in the mass media (Anderson & Atkinson, 2014; Q Beresford et al., 2012; Fredericks et al., 2014; Healy, 2008; Langton, 2008). This in turn has constrained Aboriginal curriculum content and how it is taught in Australian schools (Q Beresford et al., 2012). Distrust and contempt for the education system by many Indigenous Australians has arisen due to policies which have treated Indigenous people like children and the government presented as a domineering parent (Anderson & Atkinson, 2014; McConaghy, 2000; Partington, 2012). This attitude has also had its effect on teachers teaching Aboriginal students with many teachers developing negative perceptions of Aboriginal students (Sarra, 2011).

Many negative perceptions of Aboriginal students are due to the way Aboriginal people are perceived by Anglo-majority (K. Price, 2012; Sarra, 2011). These perceptions have been developed from the colonial era and the poverty in which many Aboriginal people live in today (Q Beresford et al., 2012; MacNaughton, 2001; Partington, 1998; Sarra, 2011).

Education is a key factor in bringing people out of poverty (McNaughton, 2011; Randel, German, & Ewing, 2013). Since the 1980s federal and state governments have recognised this and pushed to improve educational outcomes. The latest being the *Closing the Gap* commitment (Q Beresford et al., 2012). Despite this government initiative, the assimilation policy is no longer in effect; this policy promotes the idea that to be a contributing and valued member of society one must adhere to the dominant Anglo culture. Jenkins (2012) explained the role of the dominant culture in education further:

> Education in Australia, however, is tied to white culture, the industrial economy and the means through which white culture survives, so accepting these places may also have a shadow side in relation to multiple levels of loss and possible cultural alienation. (p. 1)

This impact of cultural alienation can be linked to resistant theory which views society as being composed of conflicting groups (Partington & Beresford, 2012). This could explain the negative attitudes many Aboriginal students have towards school and their teachers as they see themselves in opposition to the dominant Anglo group. Furthermore, this can reinforce negative stereotypes teachers might have of Aboriginal students being disruptive, lazy and troublemakers (Sarra, 2011). A major challenge for teachers understanding Aboriginal students is that students come to school with learned negative stereotypes from home. Ma Rhea and Anderson (2011) explained this negative impact, they said:

> All Indigenous children enter the schooling system with preconceived negative stereotype learned from grandparents, parents and their wider Indigenous community, due to the historically destructive force that schooling has been in the lives of many Indigenous Australian. Recent improvements in education provisions for Indigenous students are insufficient to render past educational experiences of Indigenous Australians as null when developing a solution for the future success of Indigenous people. (Ma Rhea & Anderson, 2011, p. 2)

Pastoral Welfarism, according to McConaghy (2000), refers to the tradition of the government taking on the role of caretaker for the Indigenous population. The role involved "doing for, and speaking for, Indigenous people, both children and adults" (p.127). McConaghy (2000) suggests there have been various forms of Pastoral Welfarism which in the past included the policies of segregation, assimilation and more recently, self-determination. These policies were in response to the "notion of Indigenous incapacity" (p.129). Segregation was replaced with assimilation and was seen as a way to integrate the

Indigenous population into the wider community and "make Indigenous people like non-Indigenous people" (McConaghy, 2000, p.158).

The notion of the right to be equal has recently gained support from the Commonwealth government. According to Dobson (1996) this idea of liberal equality is designed to satisfy the colonial government in believing they are doing the right thing by Indigenous people which will in turn reflect well on them. Dobson (1996) also stated that "in great part, the success of assimilation lies in its claims to provide the social conditions necessary for the creation of a just and democratic society" (cited in McConaghy, 2000, p.152). This "just and democratic society" is therefore "perceived in terms of sameness and uniform rights" (Dobson, 1996 cited in McConaghy, 2000, p.152) and "Social justice is perceived as the right to be equal, to be treated the same. Difference is presented as the enemy" which doesn't take into account the "strategic limitations within colonial practices and discourses which act to self-regulate against the achievement of equality for Indigenous Australians" (McConaghy, 2000, p.158). To create real change it is clear that there needs to be a collective change in society's view of its Indigenous people.

During World War II change came about in Australia for the status of its Indigenous people. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders fought side by side with non-Indigenous soldiers and as a result of the war a shortage of workers, job opportunities for Indigenous people with reasonable wages became available. This meant that Indigenous people were working and living alongside non-Indigenous Australians and people became used to seeing them in towns (Partington, 1998, p.46). Changes in America and around the world also had its effect on Australian schooling. Partington (1998) stated, "[d]esegregation in the United States marked the beginning of the end of separate schooling for Aborigines and Torres Strait Islanders" (p.46). Partington (1998) highlighted the impact of the world community on Australia. He stated:

> Publicity surrounding the process of desegregation [in America] contributed to changing attitudes in Australia and State Education Departments gradually introduced changes. In New South Wales, for example, Indigenous schools began to close in the 1960s and by the 1970s they were nearly all gone, their students integrated into the State schools. (p.46)

Pressure from the international community pushed the Australian government to make changes. Partington (1998) explained this by saying "Furthermore, Australia developed a

higher profile in world affairs and the existence of an obviously oppressed group in the midst of relative wealth became an embarrassment for successive governments" (Partington, 1998, p.46). This outside pressure made the acceptance of Indigenous culture into the mainstream Australian culture an important political move.

In the 1970s there was an attempt to reform Indigenous education along with developing a greater awareness of Aboriginal rights and ongoing disadvantages by sections of the Australian community (Q Beresford et al., 2012). However, Milbes (1985) criticized the change in policy and suggested, "The change in policy was not accompanied by greater acknowledgement of Indigenous culture, language or desires" (cited in Partington, 1998, p.47). In the 1970s in Western Australia an Education Department policy stated only English should be spoken in the playground. This lack of acknowledgement is an issue also raised by Beresford (Q Beresford & Partington, 2003). He suggested schools often regarded the problems of their Indigenous students was due to their "home backgrounds and general living environments" and not "an outcome of weakness in school organisation or policy" (p.58). By ignoring any fault on the school's part, there was a "failure to develop relationships between the school and Aboriginal homes the lack of culturally appropriate curricula, and the lack of staff training in Aboriginal culture and learning styles"(Q Beresford & Partington, 2003). The effects of which are still evident in the school system today.

A change in global perspectives was not the only factor to influence political decisions when including Aboriginal culture into the education policy. Internally the Australian public affected what was prioritized in education. When the government looks for re-election at any time it tries to gage what the population believe is important. In this respect "[e]very education policy can be seen as being, in some sense, a political issue" (Connelly, Fang He et al., and Phillion, 2008, p.8). As governments aim to be re-elected this often entails doing what voters want. It is therefore the voter's beliefs which are "more important than what may actually be true" (p.13). Furthermore, if voters did not view Aboriginal cultures as important in their children's education it is unlikely to be pushed through despite research expressing the benefits of its inclusion in the curriculum. An explanation from Connelly, Fang He et al., and Phillion (2008) suggested, "[f]rom a political perspective, however, evidence and experiences are not enough to drive decisions, and they may be among the

less important factors" (p.13). Consequently, for change to occur there must be a change in society's perception of Indigenous perspectives.

Australian colonial history is still evident today and although education policy is being implemented to combat negative stereotyping, it is clear policy alone is not enough. The teachers implementing it need to have confidence in their knowledge of Aboriginal curriculum content. Additionally, there are many issues which restrict this. One of these issues is highlighted in the discomfort people face when they're teaching about the 'other'. This is a colonial perspective which has been perpetuated throughout history and still exists in the present day (MacNaughton, 2001; Sarra, 2011).

2.5.2 Cultural Discomfort

Australia's colonial history and government policies have led to a culture of guilt and avoidance of Aboriginal issues in society; which may explain why Windschuttle's (2011) ideas and beliefs about inaccurate accounts of settler wrong doings, got so much attention and support from the elite and media when it was first published. His ideas absolved the government for Australia's past wrongs to its Indigenous peoples. Although these views were held by a minority, it reflected Australia's conservative past which also permeated to the school culture. These colonial values had a huge negative impact on Indigenous people, the effects of which are still clear today.

Although a variety of programs were developed to bring the life expectancy and quality of life for Australia's Indigenous people up in the most recent form of *Closing the Gap* (Australian Government Department of Social Services, 2013), there are still many hurdles to overcome. MacNaughton (2001) explained the problem is partially due to a set of ideologies perpetrated by the majority. He stated, "In Australia, as in many other colonies, the realities of cultural and economic exploitation that rested on an ideology of race continue to extract a high cost from its indigenous peoples" (MacNaughton, 2001, p.92). As Australians are becoming more socially aware of these issues there is a sense of wanting to leave the past in the past. Because of the discomfort caused by confronting the past, colonial ideologies have often gone unchallenged.

Colonial values have continued throughout Australian society through an 'us' verses 'them' attitude. By seeing Aboriginal people as 'outsiders' it helps justify why they are treated differently and therefore not viewed as part of the community. Dunn, Hanna and Thompson (2001) drew attention to this problem by looking at rural shires where this seemed prevalent. They stated:

> The national survey results suggest that some rural shires continue to have difficulties addressing Indigenous Australians as citizens. The language used by respondents often drew upon a dichotomy of `us' versus `them'. This mode of writing suggests an understanding of `them', as being people outside of the local ``imagined community'' (Anderson, 1983, page 15). The `them' are seen as creating special difficulties and/or enjoying particular benefits. (p.1589)

MacNaughton (2001) in a paper about young Anglo-Australian children's view of Indigenous Australians, noted these ideologies start at a young age. MacNaughton (2001) further explained in order to challenge this ideology, practitioners must have an "understanding of how colonialism and the ideology of race that sustained colonial Australia still lives on despite the end of our colonial status" (p.92). She also discussed the importance of programs "which challenge rather than recreate colonialism" (p.92). To challenge this ideology which so many young children have learned, MacNaughton suggested practitioners need to "find ways to successfully and respectfully prevent and/or challenge the 'othering' of indigenous peoples and their cultures by young Anglo-Australian children" (p.92). She suggested five areas which need to be addressed by teachers. Teachers need to:

- avoid homogenising indigenous Australians into a collective 'they';

- avoid building knowledge of indigenous Australians that always positions them as different to the centre;

- help practitioners develop teaching frameworks and/or strategies that do not build on identities on the binary of black/white;

- help Anglo-Australian children build identities that do not rely on a binary between 'black' and 'white'; and

- seek to identify and to challenge any traces of colonialism in our presentation of indigenous Australian cultures to Anglo-Australian children.(MacNaughton, 2001, p. 92)

One particular issue raised by MacNaughton (2001) suggested a greater knowledge base alone in Aboriginal curriculum content is not enough to challenge this 'othering'. School

culture must become more inclusive, reflective and critical of its practice and past practices if this issue is to be addressed. To bring about this change is not simple. Connelly, Fang He et al, and Phillion (2008) say "it is easier to adopt a decision than to put it into practice, and it is easier to make changes in the structure than to re-culture, which gets at the heart of behaviors and beliefs" (p.114). Spillane (2004, cited in Connelly, Fang He, Phillion, 2008) highlighted the fact that even when educators are willing to implement change, superficiality prevails because they don't have the support from the institution.

This is also evident in the classroom as superficiality within teaching Aboriginal curriculum content persists (McConaghy, 2000). McConaghy further explained suggesting "many contemporary approaches to Indigenous education incorporate Indigenous values and cultural practices in superficial or exoticised ways" (p.182). Popular examples include western deserts and 'dot' paintings; however, these 'celebrations', McConaghy said, "usually serve to do little more than re-enforce cultural stereotypes" (p.182). Approaches to multiculturalism are conducted in such a way so as to pose no threat to the dominant cultural practices.

Osborne (2001) showed that many teachers struggle with implementing such a design as they have had little exposure to successful models during their teacher education programs and also as when they were themselves students. Therefore, the majority of teachers "at best, poorly conceptualize as they start working in cross-cultural or multi-ethnic schools" (p.71). This then sets up a cycle of a continuation of the same practices.

Osborne (2001) also discussed the 'neutrality' of schooling. He suggested that it alleviates the challenge the school system and teachers have to face "making special provisions for anyone who does not fit the glove schooling is supposed to provide. Clearly schools were not set up to serve ethnic minorities despite slogans of encouraging advancement, employability or self-management" (pp.103-104). He also explained that 'cultural isolation' impedes people from understanding other cultural groups. He stated:

> Cultural isolation means here that many of us do not mix across cultural groups. This may be a function of preferring to socialize within one's own group; unfamiliarly with other languages, registers or codes and so not feeling comfortable trying to interact with people who use them; lack of opportunity to mix across cultural groups; or feeling too uncomfortable about appropriate etiquette in a new setting. Underlying all these reasons

could be factors related to colonisation and superiority or failure to challenge the myths of society about those who are culturally different from us. (Osborne, 2001b, p. 104)

Furthermore, this lack of challenging colonial stereotypes reinforces to the students that these stereotypes are acceptable and the cycle therefore continues. Gaining cultural competency is crucial to breaking this trend and must be done through teacher education. Practicing teachers would therefore benefit from professional development in multicultural classrooms.

Professional development days however, can have a number of problems. An American model highlights some of the issues faced. Cohen (1999) argued that, "Although a good deal of money is spent on staff development in the United States most is spent on sessions and workshops that are often intellectually superficial, disconnected from deep issues of curriculum and learning, fragmented and noncumulative" (pp.3-4, cited in Connelly, Fang He, Phillion, 2008). The quality of the professional development needs to be monitored and reinforced through subsequent sessions if it is to have a positive impact.

In summary, the literature indicates that there is a culture of cultural discomfort that needs to be addressed in schools and the wider community. Teachers can have an impact on this from how they approach their teaching practice. From the continuation of colonial values it is also clear that there is not enough teacher education on this matter. Knowledge base also needs to be increased in Aboriginal perspectives for these changes to begin to take place.

2.5.3 Knowledge Base

One criticism of Australian's schools had been the inconstancy when it came to teaching Australian history. Part of the problem was the varying levels of knowledge among teachers. This links to the lack of importance placed on teaching Aboriginal curriculum content by government policy which affected the teaching units at Australian universities. There are now units in Aboriginal Education at Western Australian universities which are mandatory for all education undergraduates but it doesn't address the "291,000 teachers who currently have very little formal knowledge of theory, pedagogical practice, and curriculum in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander education and Australian Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander studies" (Ma Rhea et al., 2012, p. 53). Due to the large number of teachers without

a strong knowledge base there is a major logistical problem in educating each one (Ma Rhea et al., 2012). This along with the belief many teachers have that teaching Aboriginal curriculum content is not a high priority is restricting its quality teaching.

Although Thaman's (2003) research is specifically Pacific studies, much of what Thaman says can be applied to Aboriginal Australians. She suggested, "centres and programs need indigenous cultural knowledge in order to validate and legitimize their work, particularly in the eyes of indigenous peoples" (p.11). As a result, she stated, "Institutions of high education must recognize ownership and control of indigenous knowledge by indigenous peoples rather than by the academy" (p.11). Thaman (2003) explained the importance of the Indigenous perspective in higher education. Thaman stated:

> Indigenous knowledge can contribute to the general knowledge base of higher education and enrich the curriculum by considerations of different perspectives of knowledge and wisdom. Incorporating aspects of indigenous education into course curricula helps make university study more meaningful for many students. Valuing indigenous ways of knowing usually results in mutually beneficial collaboration between indigenous and nonindigenous peoples, and improves their treatment of each other as equals. (p. 11)

Up until recently, units on Aboriginal Education at tertiary institution in Perth have been elective units (see appendix C) only. As a result, many Education students have finished their degree with little knowledge and understanding of Aboriginal perspectives. Teachers who have been teaching for many years have also not had the advantage of formal education in Aboriginal curriculum content at a tertiary level. Even though Aboriginal education units are now mandatory at all Western Australian universities there are only between one and four core units, see appendix D. This may not be enough to improve cultural competency which leaves professional learning as the only space for formal learning and understanding of Aboriginal perspectives. The disadvantage of leaving it up to the individual teacher to decide how they will improve their practice, means they may not choose Aboriginal studies at all.

MacNaughton's (2001) study of approaches to teaching young Australians about Aboriginal culture is particularly relevant to understanding how teachers' knowledge impacts what and how they teach. MacNaughton found that all practitioners in her study had knowledge of Aboriginal Australians and their cultures but despite this "not all practitioners found it necessary or important to incorporate this knowledge in their curriculum planning" (p.86).

Not surprisingly only two practitioners from 24 attempted a teaching approach which "challenged colonial understandings of Australia's Indigenous people and their cultures" (p.86). As many as 10 "thought it unnecessary and/or inappropriate to discuss current issues facing Australia's indigenous people with the children in their centres" (p.86). Their attitude had a direct impact on their students' attitudes and values. The lack of importance placed on Aboriginal perspectives by the teacher was reflected in their students' attitudes.

Half of the children displayed an understanding of Aboriginal people "belonging to the past and practising exotic and/or primitive lifestyles (what we have termed 'colonial understandings')" (p.85). MacNaughton explained "nine Anglo-Australian children used a black–white binary as a conceptual tool for thinking about difference between Aboriginal people and cultures and themselves" (p.85). Again only two children "were capable of producing contemporary, political understandings of being Aboriginal and a nascent understanding of its implications in current race relations in Australia" (p.85). This indicated that children are capable of this higher level of understanding and it is the opportunity to explore these ideas which is lacking.

An informed knowledge base and continued learning in Aboriginal perspectives are essential to improving quality teaching of Aboriginal curriculum content. This is covered in teaching standards 1.4 and 2.4 which all teachers in Australia must adhere to. However, due to the sheer numbers of teachers without an informed knowledge base and cultural competency enforcing these standards, it will not be possible solely through professional learning. The difficulty is not only ensuring Aboriginal curriculum content is taught but it is also ensuring a high quality of teaching.

2.5.4 Teacher Quality

Teacher quality is a critical factor in the teaching of any topic, and in preparing students to become active members of society. However, deciding what constitutes a quality teacher is not straightforward. It varies over time and "differs between cultures, and within cultures" (Connell, 2009, p. 214). In Australia, the definition of a 'good' teacher has been under debate in recent years and the focus of policy makers (Connell, 2009; Dinham, 2013). This

has put pressure on teachers as they deal with changing curriculum and increasing expectations of what their profession entails (Herbert, 2012).

To define quality teaching, it is imperative to understand the purpose of education and whether teachers support this purpose. The purpose of education is not only to educate people for the workforce and to function appropriately in society "but more fundamentally still, education is a process of *forming* a culture" (Connell, 2009, p. 225). In this regard Connell (2009) described the direction of education in terms of the goals society sets it. She stated:

> Questions about the goals of education are questions about the direction in which we want a social order to move, given that societies cannot avoid changing. This is where questions of privilege and social justice in education arise; they are fundamental to the project, not add-ons. (p. 225)

As education shapes society, for Australia to be truly inclusive of minority cultures as in its perceived national identity (CEG, 1994) these ideals need to be reflected in the teaching which takes place in the classroom. To embrace cultural diversity teachers need to have cultural competency which requires a whole school approach to be effective (Gower & Byrne, 2012). This is especially important with the increase in curriculum content where topics including Aboriginal curriculum content may be skimmed over or not covered.

There is pressure on teachers to cover more content without more time given which prevents quality teaching of the curriculum. This was reflected in research conducted in American schools where the overcrowded curriculum dictated that teachers focus on covering curriculum content over the learning needs of their students (Whittaker & Young, 2002). Creating an environment where student's culture feels respected is essential for promoting meaningful student learning. Herbert (2012) explained the role of mutual respect in promoting an inclusive culture in the classroom. She said:

> Research evidence clearly shows that 'good' teachers create respectful learning environments that not only earn them the respect of their students but also enable them to bring out the best in those students. (Herbert, 2012, p. 45)

Many factors affecting teaching practice come from outside of the teaching profession such as from policy makers (Dinham, 2013; Herbert, 2012). As education is about society and the

way in which people interact and position themselves within it, it's not surprising it comes under much political scrutiny. Connell explained:

> Therefore how teacher professionalism is defined, and by whom, is important. If teachers' occupational identity is defined from outside, by the power of the state or the pressure of the market, it is likely to be limited in important ways. The capacity to talk back to management, to dissent, or to follow independent judgment, is not likely to bulk large in such definitions of teaching. Yet this may be crucial on educational grounds, allowing teachers to pursue the interests of the pupils they actually have in front of them. (Connell, 2009, p. 222)

This consequently, impacts heavily on the quality of teaching and the quality of the teaching environments.

In Australia the perception of ideal teacher has changed and developed over time. The good teacher model in the colonial era involved the teacher as an obedient servant teaching a "tightly-controlled school curriculum" (Connell, 2009, p. 215). This evolved to a more humanistic role of the teacher described by Connell (2009) as the Scholar-teacher model. She said:

> This provided a basis for an idea of the good teacher who not only knew how to run a classroom but also had learned how to think for herself, apply disciplined knowledge, and act as an agent of cultural renewal. The quality of teaching and the purposes of democracy were linked by a kind of mass humanism, embedded in common-learnings curricula, and translated by a workforce of intellectually autonomous, university-educated teachers. I call this the 'scholar-teacher' model. (Connell, 2009, p. 216)

In contemporary Australia a different model has taken an overriding position which Connell (2009) calls the "competent teacher" model. The competent teacher model is labelled as such because it describes good teachers in terms of a list of competencies attributed to them (Connell, 2009). These teacher standards are outlined in the Australian Charter for the Professional Learning of Teachers and School Leaders (AITSL, 2013). They were developed to create more unified expectations of teachers where teachers can be assessed on their quality according to a set of descriptions.

Connell (2009) and Dinham (2013) although acknowledged the benefits of having standards both criticised this model. Dinham (2013) was particularly scathing of the current state of teacher assessment and stated:

> Rather than careful, collaborative planning and constructive, improvement-oriented feedback, we see arbitrary, unfocussed, impressionistic teacher 'assessment', with an overall demand to lift performance, while simultaneously cutting education budgets and removing specialist assistance provided by people such as literacy and numeracy coaches and regional network staff. (Dinham, 2013, p. 94)

Even with current developments in programs to strengthen and reflect the importance of the teacher such as the National Assessment Program – Literacy and Numeracy (NAPLAN), the Australian Curriculum and Reporting Authority (ACARA), National Partnerships, the Australian Government Quality Teaching Program (AGQTP) and the Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership (AITSL) it is still the individual teacher who decides how they will teach (Dinham, 2013). Hattie (2013) described how even with all these bodies to assess teachers and students the teaching practice itself is still unscrutinised. He stated:

> For most teachers, however, teaching is a private matter; it occurs behind a closed classroom door, and it is rarely questioned or challenged. We seem to believe that every teacher's stories about success are sufficient justification for leaving them alone. (Hattie, 2013, p. 1)

Hattie (2013) reinforced this further by suggesting how easy it is to "invent solutions" and as a result there are many solutions all with their own evidence which are unchallenged. He explained, "Indeed, we have created a profession based on the principle of 'just leave me alone as I have evidence that what I do enhances learning and achievement'" (Hattie, 2013, p. 6). This focus on the individual teacher leaves out other influences on students and their education. Connell (2009) explains that even in the conventional single-teacher classroom teachers don't work in isolation. They are "part of a structured institution the school, and the teacher is part of a local staff. School and staff are parts of larger institutional systems and workforces" (Connell, 2009, p. 221). Therefore, good teaching according to Connell is largely collective labour and she also highlights the need for diversity. She stated:

> A well-functioning school needs a range of capabilities and performances among its teachers. Given the diversity of the pupils and their communities, a school should have among its teachers a range of ethnicities, class backgrounds, gender and sexual identities, age groups and levels of experience. Any definition of teacher quality, any system of monitoring or promotion that tends to impose a single model of excellence on the teaching workforce – whatever that model may be – is likely to be damaging to the education system as a whole. (Connell, 2009, p. 223)

Issues in developing and improving teaching practice consist of the lack of funding and time available for teachers to invest in professional learning. Dinham (2013) criticises the fact that although teachers are recognised as the biggest in school influence, they have not been given an increase in investment in professional learning. Not only that but they are "being blamed when students fail to learn or to reach the standards set for them individually and collectively" (Dinham, 2013, p. 92). It is clear a good teacher can only perform at their best when they have the support from the school and wider society. Connell (2009) explained that education is a 'joint labour' involving all staff and students and influenced by "their social class backgrounds, gender, ethnicity, regional culture, religion; and their current peer group life, hierarchies and exclusions, bullying, cooperation, and so on" (pp.221-222). Quality education is a collective process and the assessment of the quality of teachers needs to be assessed within a wide context. Connell (2009) discussed the gap in the teachers' standard descriptions in assessing the quality of a teacher, she stated:

> So whether an individual teacher appears to be performing well depends a great deal on what other people are doing. The Standards documents, and the new generation of teacher evaluation schemes, elaborately define the 'accomplished teacher' as an individual – but say nothing about the 'accomplished department' or the 'accomplished school'.(Connell, 2009, pp. 221-222)

Currently, Australian teachers are judged by the National Professional Standards for Teachers. These standards "present a common understanding and language for discourse between teachers, teacher educators, teacher organisations, professional associations and the public" (Moreton-Robinson, Singh, Kolopenuk, Robinson, & Walter, 2012, p. 24). The standards are designed to make it clear and explicit what is expected of teachers in order to improve educational outcomes for students (Moreton-Robinson, Singh, Kolopenuk, Robinson, & Walter, 2012).

The definition of a quality teaching according to AITSL (2014b) is explained in the organisation of the standard. It stated, "An effective teacher is able to integrate and apply knowledge, practice and professional engagement as outlined in the descriptors to create teaching environments in which learning is valued" (2014b). These standards are broken down under three domains of teaching with variations depending on the career stage of the

teacher. The table below illustrates where the standards are placed within the domains of teaching.

Table 2.1: Domains of teaching and Standards (AITSL, 2014b)

Domains of Teaching	Standards
Professional Knowledge	1. Know students and how they learn 2. Know the content and how to teach it
Professional Practice	3. Plan for and implement effective teaching and learning 4. Create and maintain supportive and safe learning environments 5. Assess, provide feedback and report on student learning
Professional Engagement	6. Engage in professional learning 7. Engage professionally with colleagues, parents/ carers and the community

How these teachers will be assessed as being effective once they have graduated and by who is unclear. The only evidence of an assessment process comes through a certification process for teachers to become lead teachers or self-assessment which is likely to be bias (AITSL, 2014b).

Teachers clearly need the support of staff and the school to be effective. Furthermore, when it comes to their teaching approach it is still largely unscrutinised. As they are left to their own devices, a large influence on their approach and decision on what content takes priority is based on their preconceived ideas which influence their beliefs and values. This is particularly evident when teaching Aboriginal curriculum content.

2.6 Teacher Beliefs and Values

> Who we are, how we understand, how we come to believe what we believe and to value what we value is at the very heart of education. (Osborne, 2001, p.42)

No teacher can teach in a purely objective manner therefore values and beliefs are an integral part of any learning experience (Fives & Buehl, 2008). Values can be taught in two different ways; one where the teacher purposefully teaches values; and the second where values are revealed through their actions and speech but not explicitly taught. Values implicitly taught inevitably have the biggest influence on students (Brady, 2011). For example, "Some of the most important lessons pupils learn about social relationships are derived from the ways teachers behave towards them and towards others" (Cairns, Gardner, & Lawton, 2013, p. 148). Values impact behaviour and belief thus teaching values is an essential part of developing a civil society.

The Curriculum Council of WA acknowledges the significance of developing students' beliefs and values by including a 'values' component in the Curriculum Framework. The Curriculum Framework stipulates that all students must acquire "knowledge, understandings, skills, values and attitudes" (SCSA, 2013). Each and every teacher is required to impart values and attitudes through the Learning Outcomes (SCSA, 2013). Not only is it required for values to be taught but they are unavoidable. Therefore the depth of Aboriginal content taught and the approach a teacher takes will depend heavily on the teachers' beliefs and values.

In the classroom the teacher has the opportunity to question deeply held beliefs by students which may have been previously unchallenged or to reinforce their beliefs. Bintz (1995) explained the importance of challenging previously held beliefs:

> To this end, I have come to believe that schooling is an opportunity for teachers and students to see, hear, and think differently about themselves and about each other as learners, for as Burke (1992) reminds us, it is only by hearing the voices of others that we are better able to hear our own. (p.42)

Brady (2011) went further to suggest teachers are responsible for accepting diversity in their classrooms and encouraging students to be proactive in their development of their beliefs and values. He stated there is a need for "teacher tolerance and neutrality in values education, and accenting the need for student participation and pro-action" (p59). As

Australia has had a heavy influence of colonial values it is imperative that teachers take steps to challenge this. Teaching Aboriginal curriculum content if done appropriately creates an environment which "may help to eliminate the widespread racism that persists in society" (Partingtion, 1998, pp.20-21). In order to meet this task, teachers need to have a high level of cultural competency.

Cultural competency for teachers will ensure Aboriginal curriculum content is taught appropriately in order to prevent the reinforcement of colonial views. Partington (1998) explained that "[s]uch change requires, on the part of teachers, the acquisition of a body of knowledge, skills and values which supports cultural and social difference in the classroom" (pp.20-21). By acquiring these skills it will indicate that the teacher values Aboriginal perspectives because of their inclusion and knowledge.

When the teacher does not recognise they are placing their individual beliefs and values in the classroom they may teach in a bias manner. Weiler (1988) describes beliefs, values and attitudes, as 'subjectives' which have originated from "our classed, gendered and raced backgrounds" (cited in Osborne, 2001, p.42). We cannot escape our backgrounds but we can be aware of our own bias. The danger of this bias is that sometimes a teacher can ignore the "subjectivities of some students and [run] with other students' subjectivities which [are] similar to their own" (Weiler, 1988, cited in Osborne, 2001, p.42). Weiler also argued that if we "are to work to create a counter-hegemonic teaching, [we] must be conscious of [our] own gendered, raced and classed subjectivities as they confirm or challenge the lived experiences of [our] students" (p.145). She intimated that this is difficult and that we are often unaware of them even though these subjectives are often strongly held.

These strongly held beliefs are also attributed to students who may not yet have gained the skills to examine and understand why they hold such views. Shulman (1986) discussed the importance of teaching students to understand their own subjectivities or preconceptions. He stated:

> If those preconceptions are misconceptions, which they so often are, teachers need knowledge of the strategies most likely to be fruitful in reorganising the understanding of learners, because those learners are unlikely to appear before them as blank slates. (pp.9-10)

These subjectives, preconceptions and a variety of values, have been brought from home (Brady, 2011). He stated, "These will include varying expressions of tolerance, respect for others, social conscience and personal responsibility" (Brady, 2011, p.57). The approach a teacher accepts or challenges the beliefs of their students can impact negatively or positively on individual students. This is especially so if students are from a different cultural background. Byrne (2009) expresses the significance of acknowledging and accepting diversity within schools. He stated, "teachers and schools who do not see the need to affirm and accept cultural diversity, and/or who do not have the capacity to do this, risk further marginalising students from a diverse background" (Byrne, 2009, p.44). This could explain the low attendance rates of Aboriginal students in schools and the low literacy and numeracy levels of Aboriginal students (NSWTF, 2010).

A study of teachers teaching in Aboriginal communities highlights the importance of acknowledging subjectives and the impact this has on teaching. Yunkaporta and McGuinty (2009) stated, "[i]n the struggle to unpack their own subjectives many entrenched beliefs were revealed" (p.63). Some of these entrenched subjectives became a big issue as "One concept that emerged regularly was a perceived intellectual deficit in the Aboriginal community" (p.63). This impacted on the teacher expectations of the students (which were lower than that of non-Indigenous students) and also the respect they afforded the Indigenous culture.

Fear of political incorrectness has also played a part in the exclusion of Aboriginal content in the classroom. Rose (2012) has a rather scathing explanation into the use of political correctness by teachers as a way of avoiding teaching the sensitive topic of Aboriginal perspectives. He stated:

> A pronounced derivative of the 'silent apartheid', 'racism by cotton wool' is connubially tied to the phenomenon of 'political correctness'. … What it does is to exclude or even excuse professionals afflicted by it from full professional engagement with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in case their attempts at engagement may cause offence. Rose (2012, p. 70)

He blamed the lack of teacher exposure to Indigenous insights for the widespread avoidance of Indigenous content. Subsequently, this has led to a "cycle of ignorance" perpetuated by

educators. It is these educators which Rose (2012) calls "social architects" who craft the national psyche.

If teachers are to have a positive impact on their students' beliefs and values they must first acknowledge the impact beliefs and values have on their teaching strategies. Cronin-Jones' study (1991 cited in Northcote, 2005) investigated the link between teachers' learning beliefs and the impact this had on the choice of instructional strategies and, consequentially, on students' learning. This was evident with social studies (society and environment) teachers where the link was consistent between teachers' beliefs and their decisions when linked to a reader-based, process-centred approach (Wilson et al., 2002, p. 17 cited in Northcote, 2005, p.35). For example, "the study reports that those teachers who believe factual knowledge is the most important outcome of learning tend to teach in a way that employs drill and practice strategies" (p.34). If teacher beliefs have an effect on the structural approach to teaching, then it is possible that teacher beliefs have an effect on what content is taught particularly when the teacher has a choice. Furthermore, if the teacher believes certain topics are not as important as others then they will not necessarily give them the same in depth discussion and investigation as other topics which they deem more important.

If the teacher does not have a strong grounding in a particular area such as Aboriginal perspectives, their beliefs and attitudes towards Aboriginal curriculum content are likely to be shaped by the media. This is because the media has a strong influence on society, and peoples' social realities are a product of the society they inhabit (Ball-Rokeach and DeFleur, 1976). This is particularly the case with urban-industrial societies with a high level of dependence on the mass media to gain information (Ball-Rokeach and DeFleur, 1976). Dependence on the mass media for information can therefore alter beliefs, feelings or the behaviour of the audience (p.4). In a study about primary students' ideas of identity and belonging, Dockett and Cusack (2003) found that "It seems clear that the children's communities influence their sense of identity and their ability to consider the identities of others" (Dockett & Cusack, 2003, p.368). These children will then take their beliefs about identity with them through to high school and their teachers will challenge or reinforce these values.

2.6.1 Media and Preconceived ideas

The media both reflects societal ideals and influences them. This can be due to an absence of information or the way in which it is presented (McCombs, 2002). Aboriginal culture and people have been presented to the Australian public in ways which have been both detrimental and patronising (Meadows, 2001). As the media has such a big impact on viewer's beliefs and values, many teachers and students come to the classroom with preconceived ideas shaped by the media (McCombs, 2002). In terms of Aboriginal curriculum content the media has in the past and present portrayed Aboriginal people in a negative light (Meadows, 2001).

With Australian journalism having a questionable reputation and the persistence of colonial values being shared on television there are many difficulties in overcoming negative stereotypes of Australia's Aboriginal peoples (Meadows, 2001). However, Bandura (2001) explained that through the social cognitive theory people do not simply take on everything they see in the media; it needs to be reinforced elsewhere to effect change. He suggested that one-way mass communication is limited without individualised guidance from a trusted source such as an authoritative figure. The social cognitive theory states people are not simply products of social systems but also contribute to them and "personal agency operates within a broad network of sociostructural influences" (Bandura, 2001). This theory suggests that colonial beliefs have been reinforced elsewhere and are not purely coming from the media.

For the media's misconstrued symbolic representations of particular groups of people to shape viewers responses, there needs to be contributing factors simultaneously controlled. Teachers (as models) can reinforce or challenge the media's colonial attitudes through social cognitive theory. With the widespread use of social media, personalised mass communication is now possible (Bandura, 2001). This is especially relevant for high school students as, "Using social media Web sites is among the most common activity of today's children and adolescents" (Fernández, 2011, p. 800). In this regard, peers can also be models for adolescents as being accepted and in frequent contact with their social groups

"is an important element of adolescent life" (Fernández, 2011, p. 802). Therefore, stereotypes could be reinforced on a daily basis from multiple sources.

The misconceptions and stereotypes of minority groups promoted within the media can affect the national consciousness. It does so by the emphasis it places on particular topics and also in the topics it doesn't present. McCombs (2002) described the power the media has on the national agenda as follows:

> The power of the news media to set a nation's agenda, to focus public attention on a few key public issues, is an immense and well-documented influence. Not only do people acquire factual information about public affairs from the news media, readers and viewers also learn how much importance to attach to a topic on the basis of the emphasis placed on it in the news .(McCombs, 2002, p.1)

In this way commercial television also helps to propagate certain political views. For example the One Nation Party received high exposure in the late '90s which portrayed a very narrow view of the nation. Meadows (2001) explained that the mainstream media was to blame. She stated:

> In the mid -1990s in Australia, a new wave of stereotyping was promulgated by a handful of independent federal politicians, largely creations of the mainstream media. They perpetrated a destructive and divisive "debate", which saw their ill-chosen and often ignorant words spread beyond Australian shores. [Pauline Hanson] (Meadows, 2001, pp. 1-2)

The ideas presented by the party supported negative stereotypes and Meadows suggested that "among its supporters was a significant number of those conditioned by more than 200 years of media misrepresentation of race relations" (p.2). The demise of the party appeared to be largely due to international political pressures particularly from Asia. However, the racist attacks on Aboriginal people "went largely unchallenged" (p.3). Meadows also stated that "Indigenous people continue to be the target of an increasingly conservative political elite" (p.3). These views are often portrayed in the media and so it can appear that these beliefs are wider spread than what is actually the case. Therefore:

> What we know about the world is largely based on what the media decide to tell us. More specifically, the result of this mediated view of the world is that the priorities of the media strongly influence the priorities of the public. Elements prominent on the media agenda become prominent in the public mind. (McCombs, 2002, p.2)

This has a significant impact on the public perception of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures where often negative images of Aboriginal communities are presented. Bandura

(2002) suggested the televised world is not an accurate representation and to see it as the media portrays it is to harbour some misconceptions. These misconceptions "are at least partly cultivated through symbolic modelling of stereotypes" which extend to occupational pursuits, ethnic groups, minorities, the elderly, social and sex roles, and other aspects of life. Meadows (2002) reinforced this by explaining:

> The commercial media in Australia continue to perform poorly in reflecting the reality of Australia's culture diversity – evidence of the problematic nature of the creation of identity, a process in which the media play a vital role. (Meadows, 2001, p.5)

There is extensive evidence "Australian journalism has been and remains complicit in creating and sustaining the current environment of uncertainty and division in Australian race relations through its systematic management of information" (Meadows, 2001, p.5). Meadows also suggested that commercial television current affairs programs play a more significant role than other institutions such as schools, universities, clubs, societies or churches in "creating ideas and assumptions about Australia and Australian society" (p.5). Meadows (2001) also expressed the lack of cultural diversity in the media which impacts on the acceptance of people from different backgrounds in the wider Australian community.

The mass media promote particular people and through this exposure they have a greater influence on society. Bandura (2001) referred to these people as models. He explained the influence these models can have on society:

> Thus, the types of models who predominate within a social milieu partly determine which human qualities, from among many alternatives, are selectively activated. The actions of models acquire the power to activate and channel behaviour when they are good predictors for observes that positive results can be gained by similar conduct. (p.138)

To combat the influence of the role models in the media which are negative, teachers need to themselves be a role model. This would require teachers to show the positive results of including Aboriginal curriculum content in the classroom.

Teachers also have the opportunity to analyse colonial values with their students and break down stereotypes. This can be instrumental in challenging preconceived ideas. Valenzuela (2008) discusses the positive impact this can have:

> Even educators who have not experienced internalized oppression themselves have been affected by the pejorative meanings that are assigned to racial and ethnic groups in the United States. By reflecting with students on how these ideas circulate inside schools or in

the media, educators can help students dissect the multiple ways that such societal institutions condition all people to hold harmful stereotypes and blanket judgements and condition many to take the oppressor role against members of their own group. (p. 53)

It is therefore imperative that teachers already have a critical understanding of how negative stereotypes are still in use. Teachers in this way can have a big impact on their students' attitudes which have been shaped by the media.

If a teacher holds beliefs that Aboriginal curriculum content is unimportant and their students respect their teacher they will also be more likely to believe that it is unimportant. Alternatively, if the teacher places emphasis in the importance of learning about Aboriginal curriculum content, then their students may be more likely to value it as well. For the teacher to have maximum influence in challenging negative stereotypes of Aboriginal people they need to be seen as a model to their students.

The media has a big impact on the national consciousness and individual beliefs. However people are not solely reliant on the mass media for information. It is clear that to combat the negative portrayals by the mass media people need to have strong role models who challenge colonial beliefs and values and people can see a positive result from this challenge.

2.7 Summary

The four key factors discussed in the literature have pointed to a gap between what is expected to be taught in Aboriginal curriculum content and what *is* being taught. These factors include: the importance of teaching Aboriginal content, the school curriculum, challenges in teaching Aboriginal content, and teacher beliefs. All these factors reflect a need for a greater understanding of the issues surrounding the teaching of Aboriginal content.

These issues have formed the basis for this study and data collection. The ideology surrounding national identity and Aboriginal perspectives provides a broad context for this study. An examination of the Australian Curriculum positions the data collected from participants within the context of the expectations of teachers. This encourages an understanding of where teachers are positioned in teaching Aboriginal curriculum content.

A look at the historical context of Australian education provides an understanding of the challenges and the deep rooted beliefs relating to colonial ideologies. This impacts what teachers have learnt and what beliefs they have been brought up with and the importance, preference and prominence they give Aboriginal content in the classroom.

The concept map below in Figure 1.2 highlights key issues found in the literature and the factors which influence them. These issues have informed the structure of the research design and subsequently the research questions. Figure 1.2 illustrates the influences on teacher beliefs and values and how this can enhance their understanding of Aboriginal curriculum content which would positively impact their teaching practice.

2.8 Concept Map
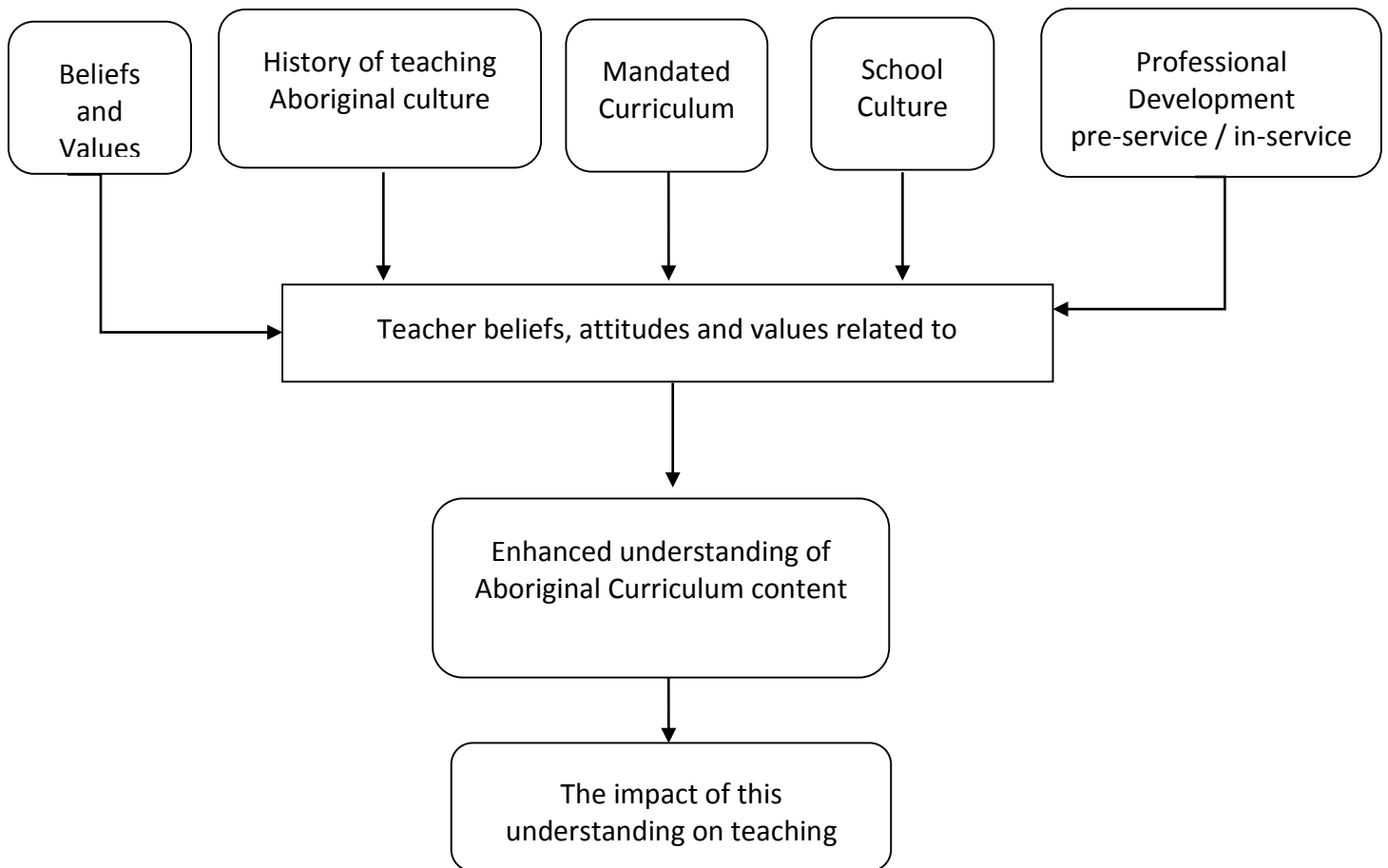
Figure 4: Concept map of issues affecting the teaching practice of Aboriginal curriculum content.

This concept map outlines the initial factors found in the literature which shape teacher beliefs, attitudes and values relating to Indigenous content. These factors include: teacher beliefs and values, the history of Aboriginal education, the curriculum, school culture and professional development available both pre-service and in-service. From the literature it was clear that a deeper understanding of teacher beliefs and attitudes and where they developed would affect their perceptions of Aboriginal curriculum content.

Beliefs and values are fundamental to every teacher's practice. Their beliefs and values dictate what information is important and how they should teach that information (Fives,

2008). The cultural background of the teacher may also affect how the teacher relates to students who are from a different culture (Osborne, 2001).

The history of Aboriginal education affects the emphasis placed on Aboriginal curriculum content today. In the past it was considered unimportant and Aboriginal people were expected to assimilate into the wider community by ignoring their own culture (Beresford, 2003). Although that idea is now strongly disputed the effects have left their mark on both the Aboriginal and the wider Australian communites.

Due to this lack of acknowledgement of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander culture in the past, many teachers have not been taught Aboriginal perspectives (Clark, 2008). The curriculum states that Indigenous issues must be taught Western Australia (Curriculum Council, 1998). Without a solid background knowledge in Aboriginal curriculum content it is imperative to understand how teachers cope with teaching this often sensitive topic.

The number of Aboriginal students in a school, and in a class, can influence the emphasis placed on teaching Aboriginal curriculum content. If a school has few or no Aboriginal students there is little support such as and AIEO (Aboriginal and Islander Education Officer) and often no or little access to the Aboriginal community. Although there are resources available to teachers, it is not compulsory for them to access them.

As highlighted in the literature teacher beliefs and attitudes heavily influence teachers understanding of Aboriginal curriculum content. Therefore, to gain an enhanced understanding of Indigenous issues, culture and history, teachers must examine their beliefs and attitudes and what have influenced their perceptions of Aboriginal perspectives. The factors which impact these were both internal such as preconceived ideas, and external like the mandated curriculum.

Teacher knowledge in Aboriginal curriculum content can only be improved once we have a greater understanding of the teacher beliefs, values and understandings which inhibit teachers from effectively teaching Aboriginal curriculum content. The methodology used to examine these factors involved an approach which allowed an exploration of the research questions. As these questions aim to explore what impacts teachers' understanding of Indigenous issues, a qualitative study was conducted.

2.9 Research Questions

1. What are non-Aboriginal teachers' beliefs, attitudes and understandings of teaching Aboriginal curriculum content?

2. What impact do these beliefs, attitudes and understandings have on their teaching of the mandated curriculum in Western Australia?

3. What support is needed to improve quality teaching of Aboriginal issues, culture and history for non-Aboriginal teachers?

Chapter 3: METHODOLOGY

3.1 Introduction

To understand the impact of teacher beliefs and values related to teaching Aboriginal curriculum content in secondary schools, a qualitative study was conducted. This study involved working with high school teachers of Society and Environment at the early secondary years in the Perth metropolitan area in Western Australia. Teacher beliefs and values are multifaceted, and influenced by many different factors. This study therefore explored the effects of the media, teacher experience and government policy on teachers and the curriculum through the lens of social cognitive theory.

3.2 Strategy and design

This study focused on the various factors which affect a teacher's views regarding teaching Aboriginal curriculum content. These factors included: mass media, teacher background and government policy. Therefore, social cognitive theory was taken as the appropriate epistemological view for this study. This theory is explained as follows by Bandura (2001):

> Human behavior has often been explained in terms of unidirectional causation, in which behavior is shaped and controlled either by environmental influences or by internal dispositions. Social cognitive theory explains psychosocial functioning in terms of triadic reciprocal causation (Bandura, 1986).In this transactional view of self and society, personal factors in the form of cognitive, affective, and biological events; behavioural patterns; and environmental events all operate as interacting determinants that influence each other bidirectionally. (p.121)

As the study aimed to understand teachers' beliefs and values, a social cognitive theoretical view helped to understand influences both internal and external on teacher beliefs and how these beliefs influence their students. The study also acknowledged external influences such as the government policy and mass media and how all these factors interact, affect each other and impact education.

As the study was aimed at understanding the influences on teacher beliefs and values, a qualitative approach was relevant. Quantitative studies analyse numerical values of the data

and although this is valid for research which aims to understand a broad view of its subject, it is not appropriate to this study (Punch, 2005). By taking a qualitative approach this study analysed the issues individual teachers faced and built an understanding of the factors which affect them. It was decided that a survey or questionnaire would be too shallow as the responses are limited. Open-ended interviews allow an understanding of the meaning behind a respondent's answers which are often complex and need to be contextualised to be understood (Punch, 2005).

Punch (2005) explained qualitative research is naturalistic as it focuses on the study of people, things and events in settings which are natural to them. Miles and Huberman (1994) discussed a variety of ways this can be done and several of these were employed in this study. One such aspect includes prolonged contact with a 'field' or life situation. Miles and Huberman (1994) explained these situations as normal and as reflecting everyday life. This study took place in three separate schools with prolonged contact involving unstructured observation of the school culture. Observation tied into gaining a holistic overview of the context of the study. Understanding the context also links to explaining how participants account for their actions in teaching Aboriginal content in the curriculum. During analysis, Miles and Huberman (1994) explained, there are many interpretations possible but some are chosen for theoretical reasons and for consistency. The analysis is also conducted with words as opposed to numbers and these words are broken down and organised to allow for contrast, comparison, analysis and the discovery of patterns.

A key aspect in qualitative studies is interpreting data: consequently an interpretive study informed by grounded theory methodology was used. This allowed the researcher to explore motives behind decisions made by the teacher in and out of the classroom. Kaplan and Duchon (1988) explained the benefits of an interpretive approach as follows:

> Interpretive researchers attempt to understand the way others construe, conceptualize, and understand events, concepts, and categories, in part because these are assumed to influence individuals behaviour. (p.572)

Accordingly, interpretivism was the theoretical perspective undertaken in the research. O'donoghue (2006) explained that interpretivism focuses on how people interpret and understand their world based on meanings they give to situations and behaviours. This is

particularly relevant to this study as its focus was on individual teachers and the factors which influence them in their choices in teaching Aboriginal content in the curriculum.

This interpretive approach was applied to the data analysis to understand the motives behind the participants' choices when teaching Aboriginal content in the curriculum. This study was informed by grounded theory which allowed for understandings of the issues surrounding the teaching of Aboriginal content to emerge. As Tuckman (1972) explained:

> By providing access to what is 'inside a person's head', … makes it possible to measure what a person knows (knowledge or information), what a person likes or dislikes (values and preferences), and what a person thinks (attitudes and beliefs). (cited in Tuckman & Harper, 2012, p. 244)

By understanding the motives behind teacher practices one can understand the challenges teachers face, which will therefore lead to discovering how best to assist teachers in teaching this content area.

3.3 Research Method

Due to the exploratory nature of the research, the data collection is informed by grounded theory. Punch (2005) explained grounded theory in stating, "[t]he essential idea in grounded theory is that theory will be developed inductively from data" (Punch, 2005, p.130). A grounded theory approach allowed theories to emerge from the data rather than using preconceived theories (Cohen & Manion, 2007, p.491). Grounded theory accepts and works with the notion that everything is integrated and interrelated and allows the data to pattern itself rather than having the researcher pattern the data. In this study, context played a key role in understanding teacher attitudes, values and beliefs.

The context for the study included historical context, political context in terms of education policies, and school culture. Flick (1998) stated that "the aim is not to reduce complexity by breaking it down into variables but rather to increase complexity by including context" (cited in Cohen, Manion and Morrison, 2007, p.491). The context of this study included: the history of Aboriginal curriculum content in Australia, the teachers' backgrounds, including pre and in-service training they may or may not have received and the mass media and government policy.

As the research was focused on teachers' values and beliefs, it was important to allow for participants to explain the context of their beliefs and discuss aspects of them in an unstructured manner. Furthermore, the method was informed by grounded theory which allows for theories to emerge from the data rather than what existed before it (Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2011). To answer the research questions about teachers' understandings of Aboriginal issues, culture and beliefs, teacher challenges on the subject and the best support for both pre and in-service, an open method such as grounded theory was used. This allowed for responses outside of those prescribed in the interview questions to occur while still enabling the context to be considered.

3.4 Sample

The focus of this study involved understanding the approach teachers took in teaching Aboriginal curriculum content and the associated factors that could impact this approach. Because the study required an in depth approach to understand the influences on teachers, only a small sample was chosen. There were some difficulties in finding participants for the study. The unwillingness of participants was due in part to lack of time (as teachers are notoriously time-poor) and likely also to the sensitive nature of the topic though verifying this proved to be difficult.

Due to the specific requirements for the participants, purposive sampling was the most appropriate technique. Purposive sampling is "a type of sampling in which, 'particular settings, persons, or events are deliberately selected for the important information they can provide that cannot be gotten as well from other choices' "(Maxwell, 1998, p. 235). Therefore, lower high school teachers of Society and Environment, where it was mandatory to teach Aboriginal curriculum content, were targeted.

As a variety of participants and contexts was required for this study both government and independent schools were examined. In this sample three schools were involved; two government schools with Aboriginal and Islander Education Officers (AIEOs) and one independent girls school with no AIEO. Teachers were approached to participate by the researcher in person. Those participants who were comfortable teaching Aboriginal

curriculum content were most enthusiastic in taking part. Only two participants expressed reluctance to teach it. Therefore, the sample is not aimed at being an accurate representation of the majority of teachers in Western Australia but an insight into the influences of a few. In all, seven teachers participated, three from one school and two each from the remaining schools.

The specific criteria for the sample consisted of the following:

- Schools within the Perth Metropolitan area

- Schools with an AIEO and without

- Non-Aboriginal teachers of Society and Environment curriculum (lower high school)

- Participants who had taught Aboriginal curriculum content

The table below gives a brief overview of the participant demographic. From the data it was clear that gender had no obvious influence on the participants' response. Those participants with low exposure to Aboriginal students said they had only taught a handful of Aboriginal students throughout their careers.

Table 3.1: Participant demographics

(*table removed*)

3.5 Data collection

There were four elements involved in the interpretive approach of this study. These were: semi-structured interviews, document analysis, observation and a desktop audit of university courses in Western Australia and the Australian Curriculum. The primary mode of collection was semi-structured interviews with the other modes used to support these findings.

The table below signifies how the variety of data-collection methods helped explore the research questions.

Table 3.2: The positioning of data within the research questions

Research Question	Data collection	Specifics
(1)What are non-Aboriginal teachers' beliefs, attitudes and understandings of teaching Indigenous issues?	Semi-structured interviews	Interview questions related to background (professional and personal)
(2)What impact do these beliefs, attitudes and understandings have on their teaching of the mandated curriculum in Western Australia?	Document analysis Observation Semi-structured interviews	Teacher resources Observing the school culture and the involvement of an AIEO
(3) What support is needed to improve quality teaching of Aboriginal issues, culture and history for non-Aboriginal teachers?	Semi-structured interviews Audit of university courses	Questions about their education (pre and in-service) What Aboriginal perspective? units/courses are available at universities in Western Australia

(1) The semi-structured interview approach was undertaken for all participants. The semi-structured interview utilises aspects from unstructured and structured interviews. Denzin and Lincoln (2008) explained the difference in the following statement:

> [Structured interviews aim] at capturing precise data of a codable nature so as to explain behaviour within pre-established categories, whereas [unstructured interviews] attempts to understand the complex behaviour of members of society without imposing any a priori categorization that may limit the field of inquiry. (Denzin & Lincoln, 2008, p. 129)

The interviews for this study were semi-structured as the study investigated some specific aspects of teaching such as the focus on Aboriginal content in the curriculum but it also needed important contextual information that related to these responses. Participants were therefore encouraged to discuss matters relating to the question or other aspects of the

broad topic that were not necessarily a direct answer. This method of interviewing allowed for some structure without limiting the responses to the prescribed question. Therefore, a semi-structured approach suited the current study as it gave the participants structure for their answers but they were encouraged to expand on their answers and discuss anything else they thought was relevant. The analysis of the semi-structured interviews provided some insight into the possible impact of teacher beliefs, attitudes and understandings on teaching Aboriginal curriculum content. This process allowed insight into the reasons behind the participants' choices in teaching Aboriginal curriculum content but also allowed for specific information to be sought where appropriate (see Appendix F).

The first interview was aimed at understanding the knowledge the participant had in Aboriginal perspectives and the challenges in teaching this topic. The second interview was aimed at understanding the context of the participants' responses. This was achieved through questions which looked at the role of a teacher and how they can impact their students' lives. These interview questions were adapted for each participant depending on his or her response.

The participants' responses often informed further questions to explore particular issues or to gain further explanation of comments. For example, some participants elaborated on their experiences by describing a particular incident or event. To understand the context of the incident and its significance more questions were asked. Questions were also asked to clarify particular viewpoints and experiences. Some questions were also specific to the participant due to the context of the school environment. For example, those at schools without an AIEO were asked different questions from those with an AIEO. To understand the context of the interviews it was important to observe the school culture. Therefore, observation was included in the methods of data collection.

(2) The *observation* technique employed in this type of data collection was unstructured. It was important to observe the schools in a naturalistic fashion to give greater context for the participant responses. Punch described this type of observation as follows: [i]n naturalistic observation, observers neither manipulate nor stimulate the behaviour of those whom they are observing" (2005, p.154). Observations took place at the participating schools in order to gain insight into the school culture. They occurred over an extended period between one

and two years with observations occurring between one and three days a week for one to six hours. The purpose of this observation was to gain information about the following: Aboriginal cultural events such as NAIDOC and Harmony week, the involvement of the AIEO(s) in the school and staff and student attitudes toward Aboriginal curriculum content. Documents also gave evidence of the school's culture, for example, the resources available, as did the sharing of resources.

(3) *Document data* was significant for this study as it gave context to the interviews and evidence to support the interview data. Denzin (1989) supports the use of document data by saying "[i]n conjunction with other data, documents can be important in triangulation, where an intersecting set of different methods and data types is used in a single project" (cited in Punch, 2005, p.159). The document analysis in this study consisted of examining textbooks which many of the participants said they used as a main source of information in preparing to teach Aboriginal curriculum content. It also included other documents and resources the teachers used to assist with their teaching of Aboriginal content. Few teachers kept lesson plans therefore the resources teachers did use, whether shared or used by the individual teacher, were documented. It was also important to understand what the Australian Curriculum expected of teachers to put into context their attitudes towards its implementation. Therefore, an analysis of the curriculum content for History for Year 7—10 was conducted (Appendix C). The Australian Curriculum stipulated the content in History throughout the school years. The curriculum document did not explain where the teachers were to get their knowledge from or how cultural competency was to be developed.

(4) *A desktop audit* of Aboriginal content in university courses in Western Australian was conducted (see Appendix C). This helped put into context the level of education the teachers were likely to have and illustrated what new graduate teachers were leaving tertiary education with from the time this study was taken. The focus of the audit was education units but it was not limited to them. An audit of the Australian Curriculum was also undertaken as previously stated (Appendix A). The table at Appendix A examined when Aboriginal curriculum content is taught and if it was an elective. This analysis found gaps in the curriculum where the teaching of Aboriginal curriculum content could be avoided. For example, in Year 9 the only mandatory unit where Aboriginal content is featured is a unit on

World War 1. There is only one small aspect of Aboriginal perspectives which looks at Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander experiences in the war. The depth to which this is taught would depend on the interest and expertise of the teacher.

3.6 Data analysis

This study was informed by grounded theory and utilised an interpretive approach and thus interpretive analysis was undertaken. Gall, Gall and Borg (2005) described this, saying "Interpretational analysis involves a systematic set of procedures to code and classify qualitative data to ensure that the important constructs, themes, and patterns emerge" (p. 315). The data was coded with the use of the computer program NVivo9 as this software can assist in pursuing new understandings and theories about the data (Richards, 1999, p.4).

In grounded theory there are three types of coding used to deconstruct the data: open, axial and selective coding. Axial coding aims at exploring the interrelationships between codes and categories and comparing them to existing theory. Selective coding includes identifying a core code and how it relates to the other codes when compared with an existing theory. For this study, open coding was used, which involves exploring the data and identifying units of analysis to code for meaning, feelings, actions, events and so on (Cresswell, 1998; Ezzy, 2002). Cohen, Manion and Morrison (2007) described open coding as where the "researcher codes up the data, creating new codes and categories and subcategories where necessary, and integrating codes where relevant until the coding is complete" (p.493). The coding of this data was informed by the research questions and then developed from the responses from the semi-structured interviews, observations and document analysis.

A three-step method of analysing the data taken from Creswell (2005) influenced the data analysis. Creswell suggested that "[t]his analysis initially consists of developing a general sense of the data, and then coding descriptions and themes about the central phenomena" (p.231). Creswell's strategies included the following:

- Develop a matrix or table of sources that can be used to help organise the material (p.234).
- Make a preliminary exploratory analysis in qualitative research consisting of:
  - exploring the data to obtain a general sense of the data,

- o memoing ideas,
- o thinking about the organization of the data, and
- o considering whether you need more data (p.237).
- Use codes to segment and label the transcriptions to form descriptions and broad themes in the data (p.237).

This analysis method was undertaken using NVivo 9. Transcriptions were coded into 'nodes' in NVivo with annotations. Parent nodes were developed which formed the broader themes and the child nodes were a breakdown of those themes. A matrix relationship table was developed to analyse the similarities and differences between nodes and what may have influenced them (Table 3.3).

Below is a summary of the coded data which are broken up into the parent nodes with child nodes underneath. There are some repetitions amongst the child nodes as the parent nodes drew evidence from the same sources.

- Time Management
  - o Resources
  - o Professional development
  - o New Australian Curriculum
  - o Qualities of a good teacher
  - o Difficulties in teaching Aboriginal content
  - o Aboriginal studies in the curriculum

- School culture
  - o Student opinions
  - o Connection with Aboriginal community
  - o Comfort levels with Aboriginal students
  - o Colleagues

- Preconceived ideas
  - o Student opinions
  - o Parent opinions

- Media and Education

- Background

- Interest
  - Why teaching as a career?
  - Resources
  - Beliefs and Values
  - What makes a good teacher?
  - Background
  - Is there an AIEO and to what extent are they accessed?
  - Colleagues
  - Professional development

The matrix developed from these nodes formed the findings and conclusions of this study. The matrix displayed a summary of the relationships between nodes such as the participants' background and their attitudes towards teaching Aboriginal students and curriculum content. Comparisons between participants were made along with similarities in attitudes and other factors. The findings drew on the data collected from all methods of data collection including the semi-structured interviews, observation, document analysis and the desktop audit of university courses/Australian Curriculum.

Table 3.3: Matrix of nodes and data collected

Parent Nodes	Interviews	Observation	Document Analysis	Desktop Audit of University courses/ Australian Curriculum
Time Management	• All participants expressed issues • Too much content to cover • A reliance on colleagues for information • Those interested found more time to look for resources	• Difficult to find time to conduct the interviews as teachers were busy	• Main resources were textbooks • Dependent on individual teachers	• Australian Curriculum included a vast amount of content to be taught in depth
School Culture	• Involvement of AIEO in the classroom and in school based activities • Aboriginal cultural centred excursions	• Student artwork around the school depicting Aboriginal designs • Aboriginal dance groups coming to the schools • Use of the Noongar language in the playground • A lack of acknowledgement of	• Variety of Aboriginal cultural resources available • More traditional outlook focused on	

		Aboriginal culture outside of the classroom		
Preconceived Ideas	• The effect of past experiences • The impact of the media on staff and students • Teachers can challenge these preconceived ideas		• Many resources were deemed too difficult for students by some	• Without good background knowledge many teachers' preconceived ideas were not challenged and therefore would not challenge their students ideas
Interest	• Those with an interest in Aboriginal culture tended to be more confident in teaching it • Past experience also impacted interest in the topic and confidence in teaching it.	• Enthusiasm in talking about teaching Aboriginal content	• Those interested produced a wider variety of documents • Personalised documents	• Lack of courses teaching Aboriginal content (2009) • Only those interested would take the elective units • Easy to avoid teaching Aboriginal content in Year 9

3.7 Validity and reliability

Methods to ensure validity and reliability are essential in any research study as they address "the truth status of a research report" (Punch, 2009, p.360), and "the dependability of the data" (p.359). As this study was informed by grounded theory, triangulation was implemented to help validate the findings. The constant comparison method was also used in verifying new data and developing themes. This method involved comparing themes from the first interviews and using them to inform second interviews. Information from the desktop audit and document analysis were also compared with the interview data.

Triangulation consists of substantiating evidence from different individuals, types of data, or methods of data collection in descriptions and themes (Creswell, 2005, p.252). In this study evidence was accrued through the following methods: (1) interviewing participants at both government and independent schools. The participants included heads of department, senior teaches and junior teachers. (2) Collecting documents from teachers including: textbooks, created teaching resources and analyses of the Australian Curriculum in History. (3) Long term observation in the school environment. (4) The final method of data collection consisted of an audit of the universities in Western Australia regarding the extent to which Aboriginal curriculum content was included in their units and courses (see appendices A, B and C). The variety of data collected supported the findings of the study which "ensures that the study will be accurate because the information draws on multiple sources of information, individuals, or processes" (Creswell, 2005, p.252). The variety of data was important as some themes emerged more strongly from different forms of data. For example, although there was evidence of plenty of resources relating to Aboriginal curriculum content, the interviews highlighted the limited use of them by many of the participants in the sample.

Through the analysis and data collection process the constant comparison method was used. The constant comparison method is described in the following: "[a]s events are constantly compared with previous events, new topological dimensions, as well as new relationships, may be discovered" (Goetz & LeCompte, 1981, p. 58, cited in Dye, Schatz,

Rosenberg & Coleman, 2000). This allowed for relationships to emerge by comparing the interview data with that of the observation and document analysis. NVivo9 was used to assist the relationship discovery with similar themes coming up from interview and observation but also recognising the differences between schools and participants. By comparing participants with their backgrounds an insight into their beliefs and attitudes was gained. Constant comparison, as described by Cohen, Manion and Morrison (2007), involves developing new and emergent categories "in order to be able to incorporate and accommodate data in a good fit, with no discrepant cases" (p.493). As the data aimed to explore teacher beliefs and understandings which were not always explicit in participant responses, it was important to use the constant comparison method to extract these beliefs and what influences them.

3.8 Limitations and Ethics

There were three major limitations for this study which were potential bias, time and sampling. Although it was not possible to eradicate all limitations from the study, each one was addressed to minimise its effect and acknowledge its impact on the data.

Potential bias had the most impact on data collection. This came in many forms as bias can be both on the part of the interviewer and the interviewee (Cohen and Manion, 1994). The majority of the participants agreed to the interview because they were enthusiastic about the topic and recognised the importance of it. However, through building a rapport with the participants through long term observation at the school there were a few participants who did not appear to have the same level of comfort and confidence with the topic as others, but they agreed to be interviewed regardless. The participants appeared to answer the questions as honestly as they could and a second interview was conducted which allowed for greater depth of understanding of participants' beliefs and influences. As the participants were busy throughout the year, setting up times for the interviews was not always easy. This sometimes led to some shorter interviews though all participants appeared to be comfortable sharing their views.

The small sample size was both a limitation and a benefit. The limitation was that a wider sample size would have provided a wider scope of data to draw from. The benefits of a small sample size included building a closer relationship with the participants and therefore building trust which resulted in honest and detailed responses to some sensitive questions. Despite the small size the sample included participants from diverse backgrounds and experiences including both government and independent schools.

The sample included both men and women with diverse teaching experience within metropolitan schools and Aboriginal communities. Participants included young teachers who had graduated in the last five years and those who had been teaching for decades. This variety reflected the differences and similarities in the teaching of Aboriginal curriculum content at school and the universities in which they completed their degrees and diplomas of education. The participants included those who were fresh and excited about what they could teach their students and those who had taught for many years and still loved it. Not all teachers interviewed were still passionate about their work which gave a greater scope of opinions and perceived influences to the interviews. Two participants were immigrants and therefore their teaching of Aboriginal curriculum content was not influenced by their own school experience. The sample size although small still provided a wide variety of responses and influences which affected the participants' teaching of Aboriginal curriculum content. The length of time spent at each school allowed a rapport to be established which enabled participants to give their honest opinions and prevent bias having too much influence. This rapport also allowed for the ethical considerations to be established quickly and effectively.

Ethics must be a part of any research which involves human subjects. Mason (2002) stated that, "qualitative researchers should be as concerned to produce a moral or ethical research design as we are to produce an intellectually coherent and compelling one" (p. 41). Therefore as part of this study ethics approval was ascertained from both Edith Cowan University and the Department of Education (Western Australia).

Information and consent letters (see Appendices F and G) were signed by principals and teachers at the participating schools. This indicated an understanding of the research being conducted and a willingness to participate. All participants were assured of their

confidentiality through the aggregate of data and no school or teacher was identified by their real name. All interview data and data analysis with identifying marks are stored in a locked filing cabinet and on a password protected computer. These will be kept in storage at Edith Cowan University for five years after which time they will be destroyed.

All data gathered has been used for this study only. Participants were given the opportunity to modify their responses and withdraw from the study. Participants will also be provided with a summary of findings.

3.9 Summary

As Aboriginal curriculum content is mandatory in the new Australian Curriculum it is important to understand the approaches teachers take in teaching it. Thus, this study examined the factors which affect the teaching of Aboriginal perspectives in Western Australian high schools by utilising an interpretive analysis informed by grounded theory. The methods of data collection consisted of: semi-structured interview, observation, document analysis and a desktop audit of West Australian universities and the Australian Curriculum. This allowed for a greater depth of understanding of the participants and the context of the study. The interpretive analysis gave room for codes to emerge from the data.

A variety of sources validated the findings to give reliability to the study through triangulation. The limitations of the study were potential bias and small sample size. Potential bias was a factor as there was a possibility of participants hiding their true beliefs in order to come across in the best light. This was addressed by developing a rapport and trust with participants where they felt they could speak their mind honestly and openly. The small sample size was acknowledged and so the findings are not representative of the majority of teachers but provide an in-depth insight into a small number of teachers. From the data collected and coded two main themes emerged which influenced teachers' approaches to teaching. These themes were; School Culture and Teaching Practice. Each theme is broken down into key issues and explored further in Chapters Four and Five.

Chapter 4: SCHOOL CULTURE

4.1 Introduction

Five key issues emerged from the qualitative data concerning school culture and the effect this had on teacher confidence and the quality of teaching of Aboriginal curriculum content in the Australian Curriculum. These issues were: 1) a connection with the Aboriginal community; 2) the teachers' background including their personal experience, professional experience and teaching experience; 3) resourcing; 4) the teachers' reasons for becoming a teacher; and 5) student influences. According to the data analysed school culture affects the emphasis placed on Aboriginal curriculum content both in and out of the classroom. To appreciate the factors which affect teaching practice of Aboriginal curriculum content the context of the school culture needs to be better understood.

4.2 School Context

4.2.1 School Information

To understand the school culture around Aboriginal perspectives the demographics of the school must be examined. The demographic information which had the biggest impact included the number of Aboriginal students at the school. This decided the presence of an Aboriginal and Islander Education Officer (AIEO). The AIEO was responsible for the implementation of various cultural programs for both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal students. Attendance rates at a school affect teachers' attitudes towards their teaching practice as they impact the level of engagement students have in schools. Therefore, the demographics described below give an overview of the context in which the participants in this study undertake their teaching.

'School 1' is a government, co-ed secondary school in the metropolitan area. According to the *My School* website, the year range at the school was Year 8 to Year 12 and the total number of enrolments was 833. The number of full-time teaching staff was 71. Of the

student population 2% were Aboriginal and 59% had a language background other than English. The student attendance rate was 91% and the School ICESA value sat at 955 which was five below the average.

At the time the study was conducted, the school had eight staff who taught Society and Environment (SOSE). As the school had a 2% Aboriginal student population they had a part-time AIEO. The AIEO had been part of the PALS (Partnership Acceptance Learning and Sharing) program which involved working with a Year 9 class to produce creative works of art with an Aboriginal influence which had been placed in the school. The Year group programs are decided at the beginning of the year with input from all SOSE staff. Both senior and junior staff taught Year 9 classes which included five weeks of Aboriginal curriculum content. Teachers used relevant textbooks and their own resources to teach the program developed at the beginning of the year. Each teacher had a ring-bound folder with information on Aboriginal culture and language.

'School 2' is also a metropolitan co-ed government secondary school. The total enrolments are just over a thousand students and the years range from Year 8 to Year 12. The teaching staff comes to 86. Students with a language background other than English make up 5% and 4% are Aboriginal. The student attendance rate is 86%. The school ICSEA is just below the average of 1000. The above information was taken from the *My School* website.

The department of Society and Environment employs eight staff and has four Year 10 classes where Aboriginal content is taught. The classes are taught by four teachers. Due to the number of Aboriginal students there are two full-time AIEOs, one of whom teaches a Noongar language course to all Year 8 classes. There is also a cultural class for all Aboriginal students in the school. The school curriculum program is organised by all the staff but how it is implemented is up to individual staff members. The subject is taught by both senior staff and junior staff. Staff use their own resources including gaining information from AIEOs and school textbooks.

'School' 3 is a metropolitan non-government combined girl's school. The total number of enrolments is 1160 and the year range is pre-primary to Year 12. The number of teaching staff is 117. The school has a 1% Indigenous population and 15% with a language

background other than English. The student attendance rate is 95% and the school has an ICSEA of 1172 which is well above the state average.

As there are only one or two Aboriginal students in the school at one time there is no AIEO employed at the school. Aboriginal content is embedded into the curriculum and it is up to the individual teacher to implement it. Aboriginal curriculum content is taught at varying year levels at the school but mainly in Year 7 and Year 8. The development and acquisition of resources are up to the individual teachers and many resources are online. The subject is taught by both senior and junior staff.

The demographics referred to above begin to piece together the participants' environment. However, these environmental factors do not describe fully why some teachers teach Aboriginal content more readily than others. To gain a greater insight into the factors impacting the teaching of Aboriginal content this study examined the connection each school had with the Aboriginal community.

4.2.2 Connection with the Aboriginal Community

The level of interaction teachers in this study had with the Aboriginal community varied widely. For some participants their only meaningful interaction with Aboriginal people came from a handful of students they had taught throughout their teaching career. This did not put them in a strong position to teach Aboriginal perspectives. To fill the gaps in their knowledge they had the support of their colleagues and their own initiative. Furthermore, they did not have an AIEO to ask about their experiences growing up in Australia or about the local Noongar culture.

According to the Aboriginal and Islander Education Officer (AIEO) Program Guidelines, schools are allocated AIEOs by the number of Aboriginal students, the year level of the Aboriginal students and the socio-economic index of the school (Department of Education, 2013). The program is primarily aimed at assisting schools in implementing culturally inclusive programs and supporting Aboriginal students (DoE, 2013). The various components of this role include: supporting Aboriginal students, liaising with the community; ensuring that the culture of the community extends into the teaching and learning program and

providing classroom support to assist teachers in the delivery of planned education programs (DoE, 2013). The AIEOs in this study were active members of the school community providing teachers with the opportunity to participate in cultural programs.

The teachers involved in these programs had positive experiences and saw it as a benefit for both themselves and their students. Guest speakers were particularly valuable in bringing another perspective within the Aboriginal community into the school. The significance of having access to the Aboriginal community through the AIEO is described by a participant below:

> She's from Queensland so she's not Noongar, but she's still, I mean she's obviously made lots of connections with the Noongar community and brought them into the classroom so they can share their knowledge of what things were like growing up … And I wouldn't be able to do that without her, simply because I don't have those contacts. (T. Umber, S. Jarrah, Interview 1)

This access to the Aboriginal community provided him with more culturally centred programs for his students. An AIEO with knowledge of the local Noongar language provided a huge benefit to her school through the inclusion of a language course she taught. Studies have shown that to understand another culture learning the language is fundamental (Hall, 2013). The impact of this course was evident when students began using some of the Noongar language during recess and lunch.

This deeper understanding of Aboriginal culture is essential for teaching and supporting those who teach Aboriginal perspectives. Furthermore, the AIEOs may understand the culture of the school and the best fit for cultural programs. As a result teachers with their own connections to the Aboriginal community can still benefit from their presence. One such participant when asked about the AIEO remarked, "I know she's there to help" (T. Magenta, S. Karri, Interview 1).The support of the AIEO in finding resources allows teachers more time to write lessons and programs and also can provide extra help in the classroom.

AIEOs are a valuable resource for their knowledge and connections, and developing culturally inclusive programs. Conversely the presence of an AIEO does not guarantee they will be approached for assistance. One teacher at a school with a part-time AIEO remarked that Aboriginal people were hard to get hold of. This participant also did not feel confident teaching Aboriginal curriculum content and had reservations about bringing Aboriginal

people into the classroom. He expressed the difficulty of judging the credibility of their traditional Aboriginal knowledge. He also believed that as a 'white person' you could never truly understand Aboriginal customs. Despite the presence of an AIEO he felt he could not access people from the Aboriginal community.

Not all participants had an AIEO for support. This often left them to find their own resources which they had to judge as appropriate based on their knowledge and experience or that of their colleagues. The quality and relevance of the resource could therefore not be guaranteed due to the varied understanding of Aboriginal perspectives. Guest speakers from the Aboriginal community could have filled an important gap in knowledge especially for migrant teachers but many teachers did not know who to ask. This left the Aboriginal students and their caregivers as the only direct link to the Aboriginal community for teachers in that particular school.

This could be problematic depending on the relationship the teacher has with both the students and their caregivers. These students also made up a very small proportion of the student population (one to four per cent of the participating schools) and therefore, many teachers at these schools may not have had the opportunity to teach any Aboriginal students. Therefore, a school without an AIEO is likely to be very disconnected from the Aboriginal community.

This disconnection could also have led to a higher rate of negative reactions by students to topics containing Aboriginal perspectives. To challenge such strong opposition one participant believed a personal account by an Aboriginal person was particularly effective and relied on written personal accounts to portray this. The responses to this from students were emotional and the account appeared to have a positive effect on the students' negative preconceived ideas. She did concede that a guest speaker would have a more powerful effect and gave an example of a holocaust survivor who came to speak at the school and the profound impact this had on the students and staff. Another participant from the same school also agreed with the positive effect an Aboriginal presence in the school would have. This participant believed challenging students' negative views was most successful when an Aboriginal student was present in the class. Teachers cannot rely on the

presence of an Aboriginal student in class to disprove negative stereotypes though an AIEO could be relied upon.

To gain and sustain a connection with the Aboriginal community the data suggested the presence of an AIEO was fundamental. Not only did their presence have a positive effect on the school culture, but an AIEO had connections within the community to create culturally inclusive programs for the school and help with the teaching of Aboriginal content in the Australian Curriculum. The data suggested that without an AIEO in the school, the connection a school has to the Aboriginal community is found through second hand or third-hand experiences found in literature and digital resources. This was due to lack of a sustained connection teachers had with Aboriginal communities. Therefore AIEOs were invaluable to those teachers with little or no background in Aboriginal perspectives both professionally and personally.

4.3 Background of Participants

As evident in the data, the participants' experience professionally, personally and within their teaching practice all affected the confidence they had in teaching Aboriginal curriculum content. Professional experience included the content they had been taught throughout their schooling both primary and high school, along with tertiary, post graduate and professional learning. Personal experience included experiences outside of the school environment and in a social setting. Teaching experience also included past and present placements which may have involved working in Aboriginal communities. The impact of these experiences is explained further below.

4.3.1 Professional experience

Every teacher in Australia is expected to teach Aboriginal curriculum content (ACARA, 2013). The Australian Curriculum has ensured that every teacher knows which aspects of the Aboriginal perspectives to teach. The curriculum however, does not address *how* to approach the topic and this is left up to the individual teacher. As a result, teachers from the Australian school system may model their approach on the teachers they had when at

school, which could be disastrous depending on their teacher. This is also especially worrying as many participants claimed their schooling as the primary source of education on Aboriginal perspectives. For example one participant when asked about any formal background in Aboriginal perspectives responded, "Besides the usual curriculum you would have got through primary school and high school... er not really" (T. Umber, S. Jarrah, Interview 1). This was a teacher who had less than five years' teaching experience.

Participants young enough to complete a degree containing an Aboriginal Education unit should be in a much better position to teach Aboriginal perspectives. This would be the case if the unit was compulsory but the data suggests this is not the case. One participant, when asked if the unit gave her more knowledge of Aboriginal content said, "No, not a lot of it, it wasn't such a particularly well developed course, we did it for one semester and while it was enjoyable it didn't really look at teaching [Aboriginal content]" (T. Zinc, S. Karri, Interview 1).This highlights the need for quality education so it can produce quality teaching. She also stated the unit focused on how to teach Aboriginal students rather than how to teach Aboriginal perspectives. This illustrates the fact that Aboriginal Education wasn't compulsory for all education students and those that did complete the unit may not have enhanced their knowledge of Aboriginal perspectives.

Three participants who completed their degree before a diploma of education also completed units containing Aboriginal perspectives in various fields. Although these units were not directly related to education they added to their knowledge base. These units were particularly important for migrant teachers who had had no exposure to Aboriginal curriculum content from their schooling. A migrant teacher, when asked about her background in Aboriginal culture said, "The background knowledge that I have is only through teaching the curriculum over the last thirty years in Perth. I have no study in Aboriginal affairs at all" (T. Cadmium, S. Gum Tree, Interview 1). From the data it is clear there are opportunities for migrant and Australian teachers to gain more exposure to Aboriginal perspectives at university. The data suggested that through undergraduate degrees such as sociology, anthropology and law, the units that are offered can provide a variety of aspects of Aboriginal culture, contemporary issues and history. One participant explained the importance of this opportunity. She said:

I haven't had any personal experience [in Aboriginal culture], but at University I probably did a couple of units at second and third year level on anthropology with a focus on Aboriginal cultures. Part of it was because I didn't have any understanding of Aboriginal culture myself being a migrant, and I was quite keen to find out what Aboriginal culture was. Because when you come in as a migrant you only ever hear the negatives" (T. Marine, S. Gum Tree, Interview 1).

Therefore, with no links to the Aboriginal community, this teacher's understanding of Aboriginal culture and history came from "study more than anything else" (T. Marine, S. Gum Tree, interview 1). Despite her interest and study this teacher had no access to the Aboriginal community and therefore missed out on enriching her knowledge of Aboriginal perspectives.

Professional learning days are available to all teachers and it is mandatory that all teachers complete them throughout the year (AITSL, 2013). Participants explained professional learning gave them the opportunity to develop their understanding of Aboriginal culture, though this was not mandatory. The data suggested that many professional learning seminars consisted of one day events in understanding Aboriginal perspectives on Australian history. The amount of professional learning available (including online professional learning) has increased in recent years. Conversely, just because it is available it doesn't guarantee teachers will use it. An interest in Aboriginal perspectives appears to be a major motive for taking professional learning in Aboriginal curriculum content. A teacher's interest is clearly linked to their personal experiences as evidenced in the data.

4.3.2 Personal experience

Exposure to the Aboriginal community within a social setting was linked by the data to a person's attitude towards teaching Aboriginal curriculum content. Those who had positive childhood experiences also had an interest in teaching the topic. But this was not always the case, as experiences which happened so long ago as to seem irrelevant can lower the level of involvement. The data suggested that positive involvement with the Aboriginal community can lead to an interest in teaching Aboriginal curriculum content.

This was clearly the case for one participant who had a strong connection to the Aboriginal community through her own contacts and positive personal experiences. She had a strong

commitment to teaching Aboriginal perspectives and many of her friends were also involved in Aboriginal health issues. This interest led her to describing her specialty as Aboriginal Studies. Therefore this participant had continuing positive experiences within the Aboriginal community which enhanced her interest in teaching the topic.

The data revealed interest in the topic or acceptance in teaching this topic could also be enhanced by positive childhood experiences. This is illustrated by a young participant with less than five years' experience in teaching who said, "My earliest memories were of playing with kids, lots of Aboriginal kids" (T. Umber, S. Jarrah, Interview 1). This participant also conveyed he had no issues with teaching Aboriginal curriculum content or Aboriginal students. He also noted that when he moved to a more populated area, the negative perceptions of Aboriginal people came as a shock. He also appeared quite aware of the negativity portrayed of Aboriginal people by the media and did his best to challenge these perceptions in class through written assignments and class discussion.

A positive childhood experience does not guarantee confidence in teaching Aboriginal content. This discrepancy in the data is attributed to the time frame with which these two experiences took place. An example can be found in the lack of confidence in teaching Aboriginal curriculum content by a teacher who also spoke of having childhood Aboriginal friends. This occurred whilst Reserves (where Aboriginal people were placed when they weren't accepted in towns) for Aboriginal people were still in place and his connection to the Aboriginal community appeared to stop at childhood. The gap between his childhood and the present day consists of many decades. Although he was aware of the importance of teaching Aboriginal curriculum content, he didn't feel "as a white person" he could ever really understand the Aboriginal perspective nor did he have the knowledge to teach it effectively. He also believed the Year 9 students he taught didn't have the capacity to understand the issues relating to Aboriginal people today. He believed they did not have the maturity to handle the issues surrounding Aboriginal people. His lack of enthusiasm with the teaching profession may have influenced his reluctance to present difficult topics to his class.

The data supported the link between positive experiences with the Aboriginal community and confidence in teaching Aboriginal curriculum content. It is important that this link be

ongoing as a lack of connection to the community for extended periods of time can negate the positive experiences. Those teachers without personal experience with the Aboriginal community must rely on their professional and teaching experience for knowledge of Aboriginal culture, history and issues.

4.3.3 Teaching experience

Positive teaching experiences within Aboriginal communities was a key issue emerging from the data attributing to confidence in teaching Aboriginal curriculum content. These experiences included working closely with the Aboriginal community and gaining their support. Cultural competency was an important factor though many did not have formal training in this area. Those participants who had positive experiences and a positive attitude to the challenges associated with working within an Aboriginal community felt comfortable teaching Aboriginal curriculum content. This comfort in teaching Aboriginal curriculum content was also linked to an interest in teaching the topic.

Evidence from two participants who worked in an Aboriginal community described their teaching experiences as really positive. This had a big impact on a particular participant and his attitudes towards teaching Aboriginal curriculum content. He had the support of the community and assistance in developing a program which incorporated Aboriginal culture. At the end of his time he had a sense of appreciation and achievement. Not all teachers had the same positive experience. He noted that not everyone's experiences in Aboriginal communities were as positive as his and that some of his colleagues had negative experiences in the south of the state.

As indicated by the data another participant who worked in a highly populated Aboriginal town did not have the same community involvement in creating programs specifically for Aboriginal students. However, her experience was still positive. There was a big focus on engaging the students to stay at school although engaging them in any subject appeared to be a challenge. There was also a high percentage of racism amongst the students within different Aboriginal communities. She stated, "It was quite funny to see the cultural differences from the city Aboriginal kids to the ones who have been on the camps and stuff"

(T. Zinc, S. Karri, Interview 1). She also noted the difference between the kids who came from difficult backgrounds and those that were "trying it on". But despite these difficulties she enjoyed her time working with the students. Therefore, the overall experience was positive which led to an appreciation of Aboriginal perspectives.

An issue raised by one of the participants was the similarities between teaching Aboriginal students and teaching other minority groups. One teacher also mentioned that her experience teaching overseas and experience of teaching refugees had parallels to teaching Aboriginal students. It was thought that minority groups whether they were refugees or Aboriginal had similar responses to education aimed at the majority cultural group. Therefore the same skills can be applied to Aboriginal students. Cultural competency is important not just for understanding and teaching Aboriginal students but also for all minority groups (Bintz, 1995).

From the data it is clear that a high level of exposure to the Aboriginal community can lead to feeling more confident and comfortable teaching Aboriginal curriculum content. Childhood experiences in large Aboriginal populated areas generally appeared to have had a positive effect on the participants' confidence in teaching Aboriginal curriculum content and Aboriginal students. Many participants' formal knowledge of Aboriginal culture came from their primary and high school education. As evident in the literature (Clark, 2008; Harrison, 2008; Rose, 2012) this has been very inconsistent across schools often with only a superficial view point being taken. As a result this would by and large be a very inadequate source of knowledge to draw upon. Thus, to produce quality teaching of Aboriginal content the quality of the teaching needs to be addressed.

4.4 Quality Teachers

A contemporary quality teacher as defined in the literature consists of developing mutual respect for their students, good management of time and their classroom, and extensive knowledge of their subject (Connell, 2009; Herbert, 2012). A teacher also needs support from their colleagues and school to teach effectively (Connell, 2009). The data reflected the literature as three components which make a quality teacher based on the participants'

responses are very similar. These were: a good rapport with the students, extensive content knowledge, enthusiasm and humour were synonymously important amongst all participants. Good behaviour management skills were also considered essential by many participants. The data also suggested that the participants believed that quality teachers were confident and enthusiastic in teaching any topic including topics they had little background knowledge in such as Aboriginal curriculum content.

4.4.1 Teacher knowledge

To ensure quality teaching of the curriculum, content knowledge was a key factor evident from the data. Many teachers placed a high priority on content knowledge; as one participant stated it was really important to "know their stuff". This came into conflict with teaching Aboriginal curriculum content as many participants had little or no background knowledge in this area. The participants gave mixed responses in how to teach a topic with little or no background knowledge. A few participants appeared uncomfortable in teaching it due to the sensitive nature of the topic and believed it difficult to teach. The participants who felt this way included an immigrant and a senior teacher. Those participants who believed a quality teacher should be able to teach anything were in the majority of participants. They believed enough knowledge could be gained for any topic to teach students at a Year 8—10 level. This suggests Aboriginal curriculum content can be taught without extensive background knowledge. Therefore, according to this study the issues affecting what is taught are largely based on the confidence of teachers. One participant also stated that some teachers may not teach it at all due to a lack of interest in the topic.

The sensitive nature of the topic was an issue raised by many of the participants both for those who had confidence in teaching Aboriginal curriculum content and those that did not. Without background knowledge on the topic, one participant believed that it could not be taught with cultural sensitivity and the emotion it required. She stated "Otherwise … I think you've got to think about what's the point of teaching it" (T. Magenta, S. Karri, Interview 2). This opinion differed greatly from that of another participant who believed it should be taught like any other topic such as Asia, with no more or less emphasis. Another participant stated she would always find background on the topic she was to teach. This was in order to

continue to make things interesting. However she also said, "but not every teacher would. I suppose that's what makes a good teacher as well, that always looking to get more knowledge about the subject" (T. Magenta, S. Karri, Interview 2).This again suggests personal preference and interests proves a key factor in teaching Aboriginal curriculum content.

Teachers who immigrated to Australia as adults found they were not required to have background knowledge in Aboriginal culture in order to teach in Australian schools. Consequently, it was only a personal interest and curiosity in Aboriginal culture which led to one participant pursuing further study in the topic. There was no requirement for these migrant teachers to undertake learning in Aboriginal perspectives. Thus, if their interests lay elsewhere they would only learn what was needed on the job. For teacher knowledge to be expanded upon, teacher interest, attitudes and enthusiasm towards a particular topic were key factors.

4.4.2 Teacher interest, enthusiasm and attitude

Teacher interest, enthusiasm and attitude are all important in keeping students and teachers engaged in their work. The data revealed a strong link between teacher confidence in teaching Aboriginal curriculum content and perspectives and their attitudes towards the topic. Interest and enthusiasm for the topic also gave teachers more energy for finding resources and tackling sensitive issues. Many participants recognised the energy they put into their lessons was reflected in their students' attitudes. This was highlighted by one of the younger participants when he said, "If I'm teaching with enthusiasm, then they'll be enthusiastic" (T. Umber, S. Jarrah, Interview 1). Interest in the teaching profession and wanting to excel was as important for many participants as a personal interest in the topic.

After explaining that as a student at school some of his teachers were very ineffective, this particular participant discussed how this drove him to constantly improve his practice. This meant he wanted to be good at teaching everything and anything. He said, "I want kids to learn a lot in my class as simple as that, so I'll make any, any directive from any government work, I'll teach them in spite of it or because of it, whether it's good or bad curriculum" (T.

Umber, S. Jarrah, Interview 1). A teacher who is enthusiastic with a positive attitude is willing (as evident in the data) to teach anything. The difference between teachers with a positive attitude and those without was explained by one of the younger teachers in the following way:

> A lot of teachers at the school are going through the motions. Sadly they're counting the days to their retirement … I'm always interacting all the time, over there, at the front entertaining them. You know, humour, doing different things getting kids up the front challenging me whatever it might be it's always different it's always with a level of interest for me. Otherwise I'd go insane. (T. Umber, S. Jarrah, Interview 1)

Three participants explicitly stated the importance of a positive attitude in teaching any topic regardless of their previous knowledge. Although this may contradict an earlier statement regarding the importance of teacher knowledge, many teachers agreed subject material can be learnt on the job. An explanation by two participants is as follows:

> Because you learn on the way. I'm teaching something that I've never learnt before, but of course I have to learn it before. I don't know it strongly but I know it enough for their level to be able to teach it. (T. Magenta, S. Karri, Interview 2)

> I still read up on things and check, check my materials so that I know what I'm talking about…. So even though you might not [know it], it comes across as if you know. (T. Cobalt, S. Jarrah, Interview 2)

The importance of teacher interest and enthusiasm in teaching practice was expressed by one participant in particular. She suggested that often a teacher will come across subjects outside of their expertise and may not have much content knowledge; however she stated, "if you're smart enough to get to university well, you know the level that we're teaching at" (T. Zinc, S. Karri, Interview 2). This suggests teaching is a skill and sits outside of content knowledge therefore: "a good teacher should be able to teach anything" (T. Zinc, S. Karri, Interview 2). A lack of content knowledge then should not be a major issue in teaching a new or unfamiliar topic. This is particularly relevant for teaching Aboriginal curriculum content as background knowledge is very limited for most teachers. However, there is the issue of cultural competency which involves the approach a teacher takes when teaching Aboriginal curriculum content. This often cannot be self-taught and impacts on understanding which resources are suitable. Therefore, resourcing this topic can be difficult due to its sensitive nature and finding material that is appropriate. Below is a description by a participant on resourcing and learning:

I'm not an expert but what's important is that you need to know, you need to know where to find them. So you need to have enough savvy about you to ask the right people to find the right resources … be aware enough to know what is culturally insensitive and what's not culturally insensitive too, and you can construct an excellent programme on something you're not an expert on. And I've learned a great deal myself in that process, you know, working with [the AIEO] and working with the Aboriginal people who've come in from the community to teach the kids. (T. Umber, S. Jarrah, Interview 2)

All participants recognised teaching Aboriginal curriculum content required sensitivity to teach the Aboriginal perspective appropriately. Participants also recognised the significance in responding appropriately to strong negative views by students. One participant in particular highlighted this importance and stated, "It's a topic though that requires … people to be empathetic to the situation. So I guess that's a topic that has feeling involved. Attitudes about it" (T. Magenta, S. Karri, Interview 2). Because it's a topic which often involves strong feelings by both staff and students, it is perceived as sensitive and many teachers feel they must proceed with caution. Those from the independent school tended to have a stronger negative reaction from the students when it came to teaching the topic. As a result one teacher stated she preferred to teach a diversity of opinions and therefore not take an emotional stance. By teaching the topic like any other she hoped to negate the student opinions that this topic was worth less than any other.

If a teacher has an interest in Aboriginal perspectives they are more likely to find resources and look to improve their knowledge. Relevant resources also need to be coupled with an increase in cultural competency as teaching Aboriginal curriculum content involves more than just relaying content (Gower & Byrne, 2012). As learning new content is not an issue due to the relatively low level needed to teach lower high school it is clear that other factors are preventing Aboriginal curriculum content from being taught. One reason is Aboriginal curriculum content is seen as an option rather than mandatory which means teacher interest and enthusiasm in the topic plays a key role into the depth at which it is taught. Teachers are also affected by their relationship with their students and their perceptions of their students' abilities and maturity. To teach effectively teachers need to understand their students' needs and cater to them.

4.4.3 Relationship with students

A student's trust and respect was a key aspect of effective teaching revealed in the data and supported in the literature (Herbert, 2012). All participants believed that fostering a good rapport led to gaining the respect and trust from their students. This positive relationship allowed students to trust and listen to their teachers when strongly held preconceived ideas were challenged. This is highlighted by one of the participants who stated:

> A good teacher has a good relationship with her kids. Because once you foster a friendly positive atmosphere, but one that has some very clear boundaries. So that kind of balance between firm discipline but in a relaxed atmosphere. If you can achieve that then what you can do with the kids is out of this world. (T. Marine, S. Gum Tree, Interview 1)

Creating this relationship takes time but can have a big impact on how students respond to their teacher. One participant suggested it was also the time you take to learn about your students that will help foster a positive relationship. He said, "You just need to show an interest in what they do or what they like and they respond really positively" (T. Cobalt, S. Jarrah, Interview 2).This can also lead to respect for the teacher and the students responding positively towards their lessons.

The impact teachers have on their students is often felt long after they leave school. These experiences can be both positive and negative. Participants have explained the effects bad teachers have had on them which have also influenced them in their decision to become better teachers. Also one participant explained that students have expressed their appreciation long after they've graduated. He said:

> And it's interesting, kids who've given you a hard time will later on in life will meet you and say 'I wish I'd listened', I appreciate now what you were trying to do but at the time I wasn't ready for it. So that means you've had an impact on them and even though at the time it wasn't positive or maybe it was positive because now in hindsight they can say "yeah I can see now what you wanted to do but I wasn't ready and I apologise for being you know, an asshole in class to you". (T. Cobalt, S. Jarrah, Interview 2)

Furthermore, the impact a teacher has on his or her students may not just affect them whilst they are at school but also long after they leave. This is echoed by the sentiments a teacher expressed when talking about teachers he/she had had when he/she was at school. Therefore, negative school experiences encouraged these participants to actively strive to become good teachers.

In order to gain their students' confidence and challenge their preconceived ideas, the data suggested that teachers need to have a good relationship with their students. This was particularly evident at the independent school where the students had very strong negative attitudes towards learning Aboriginal curriculum content. One teacher expressed that because of the trust she had built and because she gave them an opportunity to have a voice in class they were open to the idea that their opinion was not the only one. This enthusiasm for her profession was influenced by her reasons for becoming a teacher. In this regard the reasons behind becoming a teacher impacted the participants' attitudes towards their teaching practice.

4.4.4 Reasons behind becoming a teacher

According to the data, confidence, enthusiasm and interest can be linked to the reasons people become teachers. These reasons varied greatly within the sample group but a commonality among the most enthusiastic and confident teachers were they were drawn to the job. These participants also had the confidence to teach topics outside of their expertise. Another common attitude among the confident teachers was the drive to be better than the teachers they had had as students. Other factors also came into the choice of becoming a teacher: such as choosing the profession because it was a stable job and wanting the opportunity to learn more about their subject, themselves and their students.

Not all teachers however, felt happy in their job, with one participant feeling he had limited options when it came to work. He also said he chose the profession not because it was something he wanted to do, but because he felt obliged to pay back the government for a scholarship he received for completing his teacher training. He said:

> My father worked for the government. I followed him in working for the government and felt I had limited options. There were no other influences, it was a matter of getting a wage in the 50s… In Year 11 and Year 12, I got money to help pay for my education, but I had to pay it back. (T. Prussian, S. Jarrah, Interview 1)

He also didn't have as much faith in his students' ability to understand difficult content and blamed the curriculum for making the subject difficult to teach. As a result he didn't feel confident in teaching Aboriginal curriculum content.

Emerging from the data was the impact of a teacher's own schooling experience on their teaching practice. Two participants explained the positive impact of incompetent teachers on their career choice. When asked why they wanted to become a teacher one participant responded, "I guess mine was a combination of enjoying school but also having really bad teachers. And I was a bit competitive" (T. Zinc, S. Karri, Interview 2). This competitive nature also led to these participants explaining how they constantly looked for ways to improve their practice and the importance of listening to their students.

Those participants who felt comfortable and confident in their teaching practice also chose the profession because they believed it complemented their personality and believed they could learn a lot from it. One participant also mentioned he thought he was suited to teaching more than any other job. He said:

> I thought being a teacher, the skills that I had were much more suited to it. I like talking … I like to see the importance of things. I've always enjoyed that. And seeing links between things and patterns and all of that stuff and I think that's the essence of teaching and to guide kids through and say what's important out of all of this. And … so I think I've got a knack for that and, yes so I decided to become a teacher basically on the basis that I think I could become a good one. (T. Umber, S. Jarrah, Interview 2)

Two participants explained how their love of learning kept them in the profession. An example is a statement by one participant, "I liked learning, reading and learning, I liked history and geography" (T. Marine, S. Gum Tree, Interview 1). A positive relationship with their students and interactions with them were also seen as a positive 'perk' of the job. An example of this is as follows:

> I like the idea of constantly learning and constantly being able to improve. … I don't see it as I could make a huge change in people's lives, at all. It would be nice but I don't think that's the case. And yeah, I just like working with kids. (T. Magenta, S. Karri, Interview 2)

From the data it is clear those participants with a love of teaching felt they could not only get more out of the job for their personal fulfilment but also they had more energy to find better ways to teach. The reasons why people choose the teaching profession therefore influences how they respond to their students' attitudes and approaches to being taught Aboriginal curriculum content.

4.5 Student attitudes and what influences them: Media and parents opinions

The data exposed the difficulty teachers have in challenging students' preconceived ideas. As evident from the interviews many participants believed a teacher could have a positive effect on student attitudes which have been developed from the influence of parents and the media. A number of participants also believed the developmental stage of the student also had an effect on how receptive they were to being challenged. In the data a clear distinction between the students at the independent school and those at the government school was evident. The participants at the independent school claimed their students had very negative attitudes towards learning Aboriginal curriculum content, whereas those students at the government schools appeared to complain no more than about any other subject. Therefore, two key issues when looking at student attitudes consist of: negative preconceived ideas and media influence.

4.5.1 Negative preconceived ideas

Evidence from all the participants supported the notion there is a discrepancy between students' preconceived ideas at the independent school and government schools. Those students at the independent school had strong opinions against learning Aboriginal curriculum content believing it was irrelevant, boring and something they had covered more than enough times. Whereas the teachers at the government schools reported no difference in the opinions of learning Aboriginal curriculum content compared with any other topic.

One teacher at the independent school stated, "As soon as you say to them, we're going to do Aboriginal people, then there's an issue" (T. Marine, S. Gum Tree, Interview 1). This teacher also suggested these negative views were born from ignorance; so despite the students claiming they had 'done this before' many still didn't understand the issues Aboriginal people faced and where they originated. She highlighted this by saying:

> But I found having taught, that the response comes from ignorance and that they don't actually know what Aboriginal people experience in the 20th Century so it's actually quite

fascinating, because I had one girl say to me at the end of the course, 'oh, I didn't realise that they were just fauna and flora before that, that's really rude." … That sort of thing has been quite, for them, an eye opener because they assumed they knew everything there was to know. (T. Marine, S. Gum Tree, Interview 1)

A specific example of how deeply ingrained these negative preconceived ideas can be is evident from a Year 10 girl from the independent school who was outraged about all the benefits Aboriginal people were getting. This tirade included, "how they got handouts, they get more money than everyone else, they're lazy, they drink they smoke … every stereotype you can imagine that comes from the news right there" (T. Marine, S. Gum Tree, Interview 1). Although this aggression was not the norm, the ideas she expressed appeared to be shared by many of her classmates. However, the girl was given the opportunity to present evidence for her beliefs and went and researched it and came back with nothing to show that all Aboriginal people fitted the stereotype. In this regard her teacher would have had a positive effect in reshaping her negative preconceived ideas.

Negativity towards learning Aboriginal curriculum content was also present at one of the government schools, according to the data. This negativity however, did not appear to be as prolific as in the independent school. One teacher said, "In the main it's good. But occasionally you get those [negative] comments… why are we learning this? This is boring" (T. Umber, S. Jarrah, Interview 1). Another participant claimed that she also came across strong negativity once. She explained that she tried to dissuade the student from his opinions, but believed his strong opinions also meant he was willing to research to prove himself right. In this act she hoped he would understand his views were a negative stereotyping of Aboriginal people which is not true for everyone. She said, "I think they're willing to go, oh well, I'm going to read this and do this to prove you wrong, that type of thing so I don't know if it worked but I can only hope" (T. Magenta, S. Karri, Interview 1). Allowing the student to come to the conclusions themselves proved to be far more beneficial than imposing a particular stance. Although she had strong emotions about the topic she also said she understood that pushing strong opinions can be counterproductive.

While both independent and government schools come across negative preconceived ideas in their students there is a clear distinction between the two. The school context and school culture may let these beliefs go unhindered for example the lack of Aboriginal students and

staff at the independent school could contribute to these beliefs. One teacher highlighted this notion by explaining how it is easier to combat negative stereotypes when there is an Aboriginal student in the class. The data also revealed that teachers played a key role in challenging these preconceived ideas. There was also a variety of beliefs about the impact the teacher could have in challenging the media's influence on these negative views.

4.5.2 Media influence

An issue which arose from the data involved the negative stereotyping of Aboriginal people in the media and the effect this had on students understanding of Aboriginal curriculum content. One teacher suggested the media presented the "young people stereotype" of young people as hoons and interested in graffiti which the students could recognise as incorrect. Even though they recognised this, they still became caught up in other stereotypes presented by the media believing them to be correct. He said, "But the kids will come to school and say all the Aboriginals are drunk or whatever and don't look after their children. But we all know that's not the case. So the media has a huge influence" (T. Cobalt, S. Jarrah, Interview 2). All participants agreed on the strong influence the media has on their students however they had differing opinions on whether it had a greater influence than students' parents and teachers.

Emerging from the data was a variety of views of how effective teachers could be in challenging these stereotypes. One sceptical teacher suggested that even if the students appear to be sympathetic in class and understand the issues presented to them about Aboriginal people, they may forget it all as soon as they turn on the television. She believed that students would say, "'Oh, that was sad, but look at them now. Look at that dude in jail, geez'" (T. Magenta, S. Karri, Interview 1). This sentiment was not echoed by everyone and there seemed to be a link between those teachers who were highly confident in their teaching practice and the positive impact they had on their students in challenging how the media portrayed Aboriginal people.

The data revealed all teachers believed the media presented mostly negative images and stories of Aboriginal people. In response to a question stating 'do you think students get

their opinions about Aboriginal issues from the media' one teacher said, "Mostly yes. And mostly it's wrong. And mostly they're ill informed. And they will come and say did you see on the news… and you go yeah but what was the other side of the story?" (T. Marine, S. Gum Tree, Interview 1). This teacher also stated the importance of looking at multiple perspectives and asking students to question whatever they see on television which will lead to them becoming informed citizens.

Another perspective on challenging the students' preconceived ideas and media influence was to present them with positive aspects of Aboriginal culture. An example of this from one participant is as follows, "I've had kids write an essay about what is fantastic about Aboriginal culture and some of the kids wrote a superb essay about the marvellous aspects of Aboriginal culture, the sophistication of their culture to survive" (T. Umber, S. Jarrah, Interview 1). He also expressed that although he couldn't know if students actually changed their views they were at least thinking and talking about the positive aspects of Aboriginal culture. "I can't guarantee whether they believe it or if they were writing it to please me, and they actually think that all the negative things the media portrays about the Aborigines are true, but at least they can articulate the other side of the argument" (T. Umber, S. Jarrah, Interview 1). This participant also believed "a student is far more likely to listen to a teacher than they are to listen to a journalist" (T. Umber, S. Jarrah, Interview 1). This sentiment was not shared by all participants with each having varying ideas of the influence they have on their students. However, it was clear their relationship with their students affected the extent of their impact.

Evident in the data was the collective belief of participants that the media played a huge role in affecting and developing students' ideas about Aboriginal culture, issues and history. There was however a wide variety of opinions about whether this can be affected by the teacher. There are of course many other factors which affect students' beliefs and attitudes including parents and other family members and also social groups. However, teachers have found their voices have been heard by at least some of their students and there is evidence in the work students produce that they have understood or at least partially understood the Aboriginal perspective.

4.6 Conclusion

As evident in the data, school culture can have a big impact on how teachers approach teaching Aboriginal curriculum content. The emphasis a school places on Aboriginal culture and the connection with the Aboriginal community can enhance quality teaching of the subject. The presence of an AIEO in the school also provides support and encouragement for teachers. An AIEO can also encourage students and teachers to challenge negative preconceived ideas of Aboriginal people.

The data revealed a teacher's background and experience with Aboriginal culture and communities also plays an important role in how the teachers approach the topic. Positive experiences through personal, teaching and professional experience can also impact on teacher confidence which leads to quality teaching. Quality teaching evidenced in the data involves the relationship teachers have with their student, extensive background knowledge on the topic and behaviour management. The reasons for becoming a teacher also impacts on the effectiveness they believe they have in challenging students' negative preconceived ideas.

All participants acknowledged the huge impact the media has and the negative impact it has on student and teacher perceptions of Aboriginal people. The ability of the school and teacher to challenge these varied from teacher to teacher. The data acknowledged school culture can encourage teachers to challenge their ideas and embrace multiculturalism but school culture can also ignore Aboriginal culture and leave it up to only those teachers who have an interest in the topic to teach it. It is therefore important to examine how teacher beliefs and attitudes impact on teaching practices in order to understand the influence of the curriculum and associated pressures teachers must combat.

Chapter 5: TEACHING PRACTICE

5.1 Introduction

> An effective teacher is able to integrate and apply knowledge, practice and professional engagement … to create teaching environments in which learning is valued. (AITSL, 2014b)

Key issues arising from the data which affect teaching practice comprise; Aboriginal content in the curriculum including the mandated curriculum and the Australian Curriculum, the expectation of teachers and teaching standards through Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership (ATSIL), the teachers relationship with their colleagues which involves cross-curricula teaching and the sharing of resources, an analysis of resources used by teachers and the variety of professional development available and undertaken by the participants.

The key challenges in teaching Aboriginal curriculum content emerging from the data are having time to cover the whole curriculum, the negativity from students and reluctance of staff to teach it and lack of contacts with the Aboriginal community. Some of the more practical challenges included the lack of time to teach the subject. Many participants spoke of an overcrowded curriculum which suggested Aboriginal curriculum content was not always a priority. If the school didn't have an AIEO it was found to be more difficult to get in contact with the Aboriginal community. Resourcing for Aboriginal topics was also an issue for some of the participants though some believed there were more than enough resources available.

5.2 Aboriginal Content in the Curriculum

Aboriginal curriculum content has been included in the mandated curriculum since the 1980s (Q Beresford et al., 2012) though the implementation was up to the individual teacher. With the introduction of the Australian Curriculum there has been a greater emphasis on Aboriginal issues and history and now there is prescribed information on what to teach. Before the Australian Curriculum was introduced all states and territories included Aboriginal curriculum content as part of their curriculum. As discussed in the literature

review (Chapter Two), in Western Australia, Aboriginal content was included in the Society and Environment learning area. The curriculum also stated that it was up to the individual teacher to make "judgements about the particular emphasis they will give, the specific examples they choose, and where the knowledge is placed in the different phases of development" (Curriculum Council, 1998). This is supported in the data where participants have expressed their own interest in the topic and so gave it high priority. Participants have also stated it is easy to avoid teaching the topic. Even with the introduction of an Australian Curriculum there has still been room to avoid teaching Aboriginal content as teachers are given choice through elective units.

5.2.1 The mandated curriculum

Arising from the data were the challenges in teaching the mandated curriculum. Time management was a key issue with the increase in content to cover due to the introduction of the Australian Curriculum. This often resulted in teachers choosing topics over others. As a result, they tended to teach the topics they had the most background knowledge and interest in, which wasn't necessarily Aboriginal curriculum content. Also, when teaching Aboriginal curriculum content, cultural sensitivity affected confidence in teaching an Aboriginal perspective. Some teachers believed they did not know enough about Aboriginal cultures to teach it sensitively and worried about how their Aboriginal students and their parents would react. One participant stated he didn't deal with students' negative opinions well, and it was difficult to justify to a fourteen-year-old why Aboriginal people are treated differently (T. Prussian, S. Jarrah, Interview 1). He also believed the syllabus was too content driven which made the subject dull and difficult students prevented the teacher from making lessons engaging for the rest of the class. Excursions were also difficult to organise and took time away from preparing lessons and marking.

The increase in content, referred to as a crowded curriculum, was an issue raised frequently in the data. In the state curriculum (which is being phased out) a crowded curriculum within Society and Environment was already an issue for participants as it covered a wide range of topics. These learning outcomes included: 1) Investigation, communication and participation, 2) Place and space, 3) Resources, 4) Culture, 5) Time, continuity and change, 6)

Natural and social systems, and 7) Active citizenship. The implementation of the new Australian Curriculum has not made this easier conversely, participants at the two schools trialling it complained it had become even more crowded.

The increase in items added to the history curriculum has not led to more time to teach them. Furthermore, many teachers believed teaching such a large amount of content wasn't practical and as a result some topics had to 'suffer' (reduced time spent on them). This was reiterated in the interviews. "Yeah that word crowded curriculum with the Australian Curriculum coming in … even less time in a sense. Like anything, like the push for Asia" (T. Cobalt, S. Jarrah, Interview 1). One participant from a government school also expressed the difficulty of going into depth when it came to teaching Aboriginal issues. She said she planned to do a lot of activities with the students on the stolen generation however in reality she was looking at only spending one or two days on it.

Teacher interest, as mentioned in Chapter Four, influenced how much a teacher would teach Aboriginal curriculum content. When asked if many teachers would look to teach Aboriginal curriculum content one Head of Department teacher responded:

> Reasonably, yeah a good 70% which is good. Yeah 70% will always look for things to do and do a bit differently some of them won't but that's fair enough they're interested in other areas so they'll do well, they'll do a lot more in other areas so it's the balancing thing. (T. Cobalt, S. Jarrah, Interview 1)

Those teachers with different interests will therefore not put as much emphasis on Aboriginal curriculum content. When asked if she noticed any teachers interested in the topic she responded, "I know [Kim] is very much interested. [Ben] does a bit. I guess because we're S and E there's that interest there" (T. Zinc, S. Karri, interview 1). Hence, those students whose teachers are not interested in teaching Aboriginal curriculum content may not have access to this content and miss the opportunity to develop key understandings as a result.

Two teachers expressed their belief that the Asian perspective was particularly important to Australian students. In the Australian Curriculum a unit of Asia is in direct competition with a topic which includes Aboriginal perspectives (see Appendix A). This focus on Asia was expressed by one participant who said:

> My honest opinion is I am very, very committed to the Asian perspective. Everything I do, so from [Year] 12 down to [Year] 7, … coming from the UK, I've always felt Australia should be aligned to Asia and I've always felt looking forward and the Asian perspective comes and goes a lot.(T. Cadmium, S. Gum Tree, Interview 1).

She also stated that Aboriginal curriculum content was not something she researched and looked for, as her specialist area did not often call for an in depth look at cultures. She said:

> The Aboriginal perspective in the eco education organisation is very good, if you want to go there in the primary school is very good. … So because you can find anything on the web but it's really nice to have a select group. Romworld centre has been brilliant for global ideas and developments and everything you can tell, it's something that I've not really looked for as a person. (T. Cadmium, S. Gum Tree, Interview 1)

A pessimistic view of many teachers reluctance to teach Aboriginal curriculum content was expressed by a participant from a government school. She said, "And if they get the option to not cover it they won't. Or look at it from a perspective that doesn't have emotions attached to it" (T. Magenta, S. Karri, Interview 1). A teacher from an independent school took a more detached approach and believed it best to teach as many opinions as possible. Her opinion is as follows:

> I think that as it's got so many diverse opinions that you can get opinions from the radio you can get opinions from teachers. Opinion's from the Aborigines themselves. So I find it highly controversial topic in that respect and therefore what I tend to do when I'm actually teaching is to take as many different viewpoints as possible.(T. Cadmium, S. Gum Tree, Interview 1)

As a result, some teachers believe Aboriginal curriculum content is a topic which needs an emotional response and others believe being unbiased is more important.

Although Aboriginal curriculum content is part of the mandated curriculum the data suggests teacher interest and the choice to teach it affects how much Aboriginal curriculum content is taught at a particular schools. These choices are affected by the teacher's background knowledge of Aboriginal curriculum content and their confidence in teaching the topic. The Asian perspective is a topic which teachers tended to choose over Aboriginal curriculum content because teachers felt there was not enough time to cover everything and Australia's relationship with Asia made it very relevant. It is the teacher's interest which drives their decision to teach particular topics; if the school provides cultural programs then

those who wish to be involved can be and those who don't won't impede their students access to learning about the Aboriginal perspective in this way.

5.2.2 Aboriginal cultural programs

From the data, two government schools offered cultural programs for their Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal students which fell outside of the mandated curriculum. A successful approach to engage students in these programs involved cross-curricula activities with other departments such as the Art Department. The AIEOs of the school were key players in implementing these programs and motivating teachers to take part.

One school offered a cultural class for all their Aboriginal students run by the AIEOs where the focus was to engage their Aboriginal students in school. The cultural class was important for raising students' cultural awareness and engaging them in school. This school was unique as it also offered the Noongar language to all students (Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal) in Year 8. The result of this program was that students were heard to be using some of the Noongar language outside of the classroom amongst themselves.

The data also revealed the importance of positive reinforcement of student learning through displays of cultural activities exhibited around the school. The PALS program discussed in Chapter Four was a clear example. One teacher involved described it as very successful as the students appeared to have gained a lot from the experience. Although only one or two classes were involved in the program, it impacted the whole school when it was recognised by the school during a presentation at an Assembly where an Aboriginal elder painted a dot painting representing the class. One of the paintings from the class was also turned into a Christmas card used officially by the school. Murals and totem poles students made were also displayed around the school reminding students of their lessons on Aboriginal cultures. The teacher involved believed this program had a positive impact on the students and himself. He was pleased with the result and expressed his wish to continue and improve the program in subsequent years.

Although the program was run by one teacher and an AIEO, it had a positive effect on the whole school and not just from making the school population aware of Aboriginal culture

through artwork. Money from the program was also used to take all the Year 9 students on a cultural experience in Mundaring. Learning the local Aboriginal language has a positive impact on all students as well as an Aboriginal role model to challenge negative preconceptions of the Aboriginal stereotype. These cultural programs are independent of the mandated curriculum and rely on enthusiastic staff and the presence of an AIEO. The Australian Curriculum attempts to incorporate Aboriginal perspectives across the majority of learning areas but the success still appears to be dependent on motivated staff.

5.2.3 Australian Curriculum

According to the data many participants met the Australian Curriculum with a degree of scepticism. Most agreed the idea was good in theory but the practicalities of covering three in-depth studies and covering the overview content in one year was very difficult. Consequently, time management was an overarching issue. Other key issues included; prescribed and mandatory teaching of Aboriginal curriculum content; a lack of motivation for teachers because they have to implement yet another program; too much content and depth studies (which also falls under time management); and although the Australian Curriculum prescribes teaching Aboriginal content it also restricts how much can be taught due to the amount of content to cover.

The history curriculum provides specific units on Aboriginal perspectives and aims to take a world history approach in order to equip students with local, regional and global understanding of where they live. The Australian Curriculum states, "It enables them to develop an understanding of the past and present experiences of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, their identity and the continuing value of their culture" (ACARA, 2013, p. 3). Aboriginal curriculum content is broken down into units and distributed from Year 7 to Year 10 however it is up to individual teachers to decide on how much they teach.

Time management was an issue which surfaced a number of times in the data when participants spoke of implementing the Australian Curriculum. The content expected of teachers to implement appeared to be huge. One teacher described the issue in the following:

> And in there we've got to squeeze in economics, Asian studies, Aboriginal studies and it's just, it's too broad and each depth study we get five weeks assuming there's no exams so it's really, really tough. And if you think we've got a ten week term there's no way you can include all that in one term. So in two terms of twenty weeks you know,[week]five, ten, fifteen for each of your depth studies, five for your overview plus exams, excursions, long weekends, it's nuts. (T. Zinc, S. Karri, Interview 1)

Another teacher explained there was too much content in the Australian Curriculum and as a result some topics will be missed. She expressed her frustration that her program on Aboriginal history was likely to be overlooked because war history was being taught first.

With the introduction of a new curriculum teachers will have to write and resource new programs. This often takes up time outside of school hours intruding on time teachers would spend with their families. This was emphasized by one participant who stated: "And that's the reality of it. If you're creating programs year in year out for ten years then eventually you're gonna go, no my family is missed out on time" (T. Marine, S. Gum Tree, interview 1). An overcrowded curriculum therefore has wider consequences not just for content covered but for time taken away from other areas of teachers' lives.

More than one participant spoke of the constant flow of new programs which needed to be introduced and resourced. This can be time-consuming and energy-sapping on each teacher. One Head of Department explained how change can leech a teacher's enthusiasm which can deter even the best teachers. She said:

> Because the changes that we've had to go through in the last fifteen years is too much and you just get to a point where you're just fed up of change and you don't have the enthusiasm or the energy to go back and write another new program and resource another new program. (T. Marine, S. Gum Tree, Interview 1)

One participant reinforced this by explaining her own trial of the Australian Curriculum where she found one topic would take the same time allocated for two topics. She appeared frustrated and deflated as a result.

According to the Australian Curriculum (ACARA, 2013), by including prescribed Aboriginal curriculum content in, all teachers will teach Aboriginal curriculum content. Conversely, as the data stipulates, not all teachers have been teaching this as it has been easy to avoid. There are also opportunities to avoid it in the new Australian Curriculum as it is still up to

the individual teacher. This issue was highlighted by one participant in particular, who stated:

> If curriculum is just left up to the individual teacher you will have some fantastic teachers who do a fantastic curriculum and you will have some lazy teachers with a substandard curriculum and so therefore you get a massive difference between the quality of education. (T. Umber, S. Jarrah, Interview 1)

Three more participants spoke of the lack of interest by some teachers in teaching Aboriginal content. This was because their passions lay elsewhere as did their background knowledge (discussed in Chapter Four).

The Australian Curriculum does not teach Aboriginal curriculum content in Year 8 (see Appendix A) and although there is a large component in Year 10 on human rights relating to contemporary Aboriginal issues, there are no sections on Aboriginal culture itself. Teachers therefore do not have the opportunity to teach other aspects of Aboriginal perspectives even if they have the motivation to do so. The qualitative data reinforces this as one participant stated:

> But with the Australian Curriculum coming on board, the Australian curriculum, and we won't be doing virtually any in year 8,9 and 10, maybe in Year 10 some globalisation issues. But no Aboriginal studies at all because we're doing medieval world in Year 8. (T. Cobalt, Jarrah, Interview 2)

At first it may appear that although Aboriginal curriculum content will be taught less by some teachers at least all teachers would be compelled to teach it. However, the Australian Curriculum comprises of electives allowing Aboriginal curriculum content to be avoided.

It is possible Year 9 students would only learn Aboriginal curriculum content in one topic for that year. This topic is *World War 1* which is mandatory and includes four units yet only one of those units contains a section on Aboriginal content. This section involves exploring the experiences of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples during the war. The table below explores the most Aboriginal curriculum content a student can receive and the least amount during their compulsory high school years. The Year 9 curriculum illustrates the biggest difference between the most and least with only one small aspect of the Aboriginal perspective being taught. It is therefore possible students could only be exposed to

Aboriginal perspectives a little in Year 7 and their main source of information coming in Year 10.

Table 5.1: The Amount of Aboriginal curriculum content a student can receive.

Most			Least		
Year Group	**Aboriginal Content**	**Unit code**	**Year Group**	**Aboriginal Content**	**Unit code**
Year 7	The Ancient World	ACDSEH031 ACDSEH148	Year 7	The Ancient World	ACDSEH031 ACDSEH148
Year 8	*None*	*None*	Year 8	*None*	*None*
Year 9	Movement of Peoples Making a Nation World War 1	ACDSEH084 ACDSEH085 ACDEH020 ACDSEH096	Year 9	World War 1	ACDSEH096
Year 10	Rights and Freedoms	ACDSEH104 ACDSEH105 ACDSEH134	Year 10	Rights and Freedoms	ACDSEH104 ACDSEH105 ACDSEH134

Despite the intentions of the Australian Curriculum to be more inclusive of Aboriginal perspectives, some participants felt its implementation would restrict their teaching of Aboriginal curriculum content. Principally these participants also believed they were already teaching an appropriate amount of Aboriginal curriculum content. One participant explained the teachers at his school were insulted by the assumption the government made about a lack of Aboriginal curriculum content taught in schools. These teachers were proud at the amount of content they taught and their links with the Aboriginal community. One teacher said that it felt like the praise for the Australian Curriculum "promoted an image of schools today ignoring Aboriginal culture. And that's not true" (T. Umber, S. Jarrah, Interview 1). This is further evidence that the amount taught was dependant on the school and its teachers.

An aim of the Australian Curriculum is to ensure Aboriginal curriculum content is taught by all teachers. However, because there is so much content to cover it may face similar issues to that of the state curriculum where teachers were faced with a lack time to cover all content expected of them. Teacher interest still plays a big role in how much Aboriginal curriculum content is taught as many units are elective units. The curriculum document is only one component of teaching the curriculum. Teachers also need resources to suit their style of teaching and support from their colleagues. Due to the lack of background knowledge teachers often rely on their colleagues for content and resources which will be explored in the next section.

5.3 Relationship with Colleagues

Schools are social environments not only for students but also for staff. The data highlighted the significance of a positive collegial relationship for both general support and assistance when teaching topics outside of teachers' expertise. A good relationship with colleagues was particularly important for those teachers who had immigrated to Australia and depended on their colleagues for information about Aboriginal curriculum content. It was clear from the data that despite working as the sole teacher in a classroom staff engaged with each other regularly. One form of engagement involved cross-curricula collaborations which were valuable in keeping students engaged and gave staff support in teaching outside of their subject area. The AIEO was particularly valuable for assisting teaching staff as time management was an issue all participants found difficult to resolve.

5.3.1 Cross-curricula collaborations

Cross-curricula collaborations have proved beneficial for teachers and students though not all teachers become involved. Cross-curricula teaching consist of teachers from different departments working together on the same topic or program. The reinforcement of the topic for students as well as a variety of different learning perspectives were the advantages of a cross-curricula approach detailed in the data. It also allowed students to look at a topic in differing mediums such as writing and art. One teacher spoke about a cross-curricula

lesson between SOSE and English. The topic was ancient Rome but the benefits presented would benefit Aboriginal curriculum content if it was taught across the learning areas. This example involved the SOSE teacher marking the cultural aspects and the English teacher marking the students' writing ability. While classes were not combined the topic was reinforced through two separate subjects. On the other hand, teachers working together with differing teaching styles can create problems.

As evidenced in the data, gaining support from staff to teach across learning areas was a challenge. One participant discussed the difficulty in engaging different departments in teaching Aboriginal curriculum content. Another teacher expressed gratitude for the teachers in other departments who had made it possible to complete a cultural program in Aboriginal culture. Time was another factor in gaining support from different departments to be involved in cultural programs. One teacher stated that a particular challenge was "Liaising with the different departments and getting time that's convenient for everyone, I'm lucky that I've got [a good art teacher] um who is wonderfully cooperative" (T. Umber, S. Jarrah, Interview 1). Money was also an issue when producing artwork and DVDs with the media department.

From the data, the implementation of the Australian Curriculum gave one school a greater opportunity to develop cross curricula programs. Evidence of this comes from one participant, who stated:

> I guess for us this is the first full year we've had common programs from 8 to 10, so we're still developing. Middle schools are better at cross curricula because they've a more team environment than what we [senior school] are at the moment. (T. Zinc, S. Karri, interview 1)

Although they included cross-curricula activities with a variety of topics, Aboriginal curriculum content was not one of them. A participant explained it was also difficult to get staff involved in teaching Aboriginal perspectives across their learning areas as they stated they were too busy. Spotting links that can be made across the learning areas were often not obvious until after the fact. An example of this came from one participant who said, "There was a nice link with geography in first term that we could have done with science but we didn't see it until we started doing it" (T. Zinc, S. Karri, Interview 1). Therefore, having an

opportunity to teach across topics and learning areas is not enough without recognising it early and having enthusiastic staff to implement it.

The Australian Curriculum could thus encourage more cross-curricula activities with Aboriginal curriculum content. This would give teachers the opportunity to have student knowledge consolidated in more than one subject area. Teachers would also have the opportunity to gain knowledge from other teachers who cover the same topic from a different perspective. Resources and knowledge could then be shared across learning areas. The sharing of resources is an issue which will be explored in the next section.

5.3.2 Sharing Resources

Sharing resources plays a key role in a teacher's time management and program development. An advantage of sharing resources which emerged from the data is an expansion and variety of narratives, texts, images and documentaries which assist in keeping students engaged in the topic. Sharing also aids in helping reduce the amount of time spent looking for appropriate resources. One teacher described the importance of sharing resources. He stated:

> Sometimes I'll go wow I didn't think of that and I'll adopt it. And so a good teacher will be like that. I think it was described to me at university that you've got to be like a bower bird and collecting all the good stuff for your nest feathering your own nest… and once you have the nest, obviously, I think it's immoral not to share it… some teachers take and there's no give. (T. Umber, S. Jarrah, Interview 2)

Some staff appeared to be more comfortable with sharing resources than others. This was sometimes due to a lack of confidence in the quality of the resources they produced. When asked about sharing resources one teacher said:

> Not all the time, people who do … there's a couple of staff that share everything which is great there are some who don't share anything, that's fine and sometimes I think they feel a bit embarrassed with some of the quality of some of the staff who share. No one says anything. There're a couple of staff who whatever they do they run off and give to everyone else we have a special file you can put it in so you've got something to go to and say I like that I can modify that. (T. Cobalt, S. Jarrah, Interview 1)

Support from colleagues is extremely valuable in saving time especially when resources are offering a different perspective on a topic. Sharing can also add to a positive teaching

environment where staff feel supported. This is particularly useful when teaching topics like Aboriginal curriculum content which many teachers have a limited background knowledge and access to quality and appropriate resources.

5.4 Resources

A recurrence in the data suggested teacher content knowledge was deemed essential in their teaching practice. Resources play a crucial role in adding to this knowledge when they do not have a strong background in the topic. Yet, increasing content knowledge can be time consuming, not only in looking for resources but adapting the information into a suitable format for their students. Most participants' resources relating to Aboriginal content came from the schools AIEO, textbooks, DVDs and the internet. Two key issues arising from the data were availability and the quality and variety of resources.

5.4.1 Availability

Availability was an important issue which arose from the data as many participants complained about the continuous resourcing changing programs forced upon them. Because of this, teachers tended to use readily available resources such as textbooks as these also included activities. From the data there was a large amount of discrepancy amongst participants as to whether they felt they had enough resources relating to Aboriginal curriculum content. Even participants within the same school had differences in opinion about the amount of resources available. Some teachers felt they had more than enough whilst others felt they could not find sufficient resources for their programs.

Heads of Departments from each school felt they had enough resources. One HOD said, "Resources, I think we're reasonably stocked with resources the photocopier is used nonstop so there's always the opportunity for people to run off stuff for their own classes and cut and paste and all of that sort of thing" (T. Cobalt, S. Jarrah, Interview 1). Although all participants believed in the importance of a large variety of resources one teacher did suggest having too many resources could also be a problem. "Sometimes the more resources you have sometime it's not good because you have too many to choose from" (T.

Cobalt, S. Jarrah, Interview 1). Although, he did believe that having a lot of resources was a good thing not just for the staff but also for the students.

Finding specific material was a problem for one participant who had a strong personal connection with the Aboriginal community. She said, "because even just some activities I want to do in the class, you know I would love to have the freedom where I use film and take parts out of it because I think it would be interesting for the kids but there's just not that information" (T. Magenta, S. Karri, Interview 1). It was clear from the data many participants felt there were enough resources. Those who felt there weren't were often looking for specific material relating to Aboriginal curriculum content. Most teachers trusted the textbooks which were readily available to provide appropriate teaching material which limited the variety they used.

5.4.2 Quality, variety and document analysis

Resources need to consist of a wide variety and be of a high quality in order to be effective and enhance student understanding of a topic. Resources in Aboriginal curriculum content should involve teaching contemporary issues and understanding the past. It should not solely rely on traditional stereotypes for cultural understanding. A variety of resources is therefore essential in teaching a range of perspectives. The data exposed the heavy reliance teachers have on textbooks for their content.

The textbooks available to the participating teachers cover a range of topics dealing with Aboriginal issues however, they are limited. Despite this reliance, the data revealed other resources available which offer a greater in depth look at Aboriginal culture specific to the Noongar people. Some of these resources include a resources package "Nidja Noongar Boodjar Noonook Nyininy", consisting of, posters, large story books and a binder containing:

- Teachers' resource manual
- Books and games
- Small book set
- Maps
- Art poster sets
- Picture card set
- Elders set (posters and plays)
- Southwest study tour [includes a map, and a journal, and journal and a tour] (see Appendix

E)

The resource incorporated the traditional way of life and cultural aspects broken down for students and a teachers' manual to give an overview and details. It also consisted of a variety of activities which are mostly worksheets. This resource was available to all teachers from one government school. Despite the variety within this package and ready-to-use activities, the participants still tended to gravitate toward textbooks. Many teachers were comfortable with textbooks as they believed them to be reliable and clear although they often included only a paragraph on certain aspects of Aboriginal curriculum content, such as *Indigenous communities and the environment* (see Appendix E). Consequently, if a teacher wished to explore something further they would need to supplement it with other resources. These textbooks included a good range of Aboriginal curriculum content from traditional way of life and the impacts of colonization through to the Stolen Generation and reconciliation.

Two of the preferred textbooks chosen by the schools were the Jacaranda series and Longman (see Appendix E). These textbooks covered a wide range of issues relating to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures and history. Some of the books in the series do not cover much in-depth content or background content for the teacher. For example, the Jacaranda books included a chapter with two paragraphs on *Indigenous communities and the environment* and also include an Aboriginal Calendar and the north-custom of Arnhem Land. There are also learning activities included (see Appendix E). The Longman Framework textbook however was available at the same school but includes a much more specific look at the impact of settler settlement on the Aboriginal people in the 19th Century. This includes, The First Impact, The Black War, Aboriginal fighting forces, Reserves, Racism and Aborigines. Case studies of Aboriginal people are included in addition to learning activities and assessment tasks. The later Jacaranda series includes chapters on Dreaming, the Stolen Generation and the Bringing them Home Report as well as a section on reconciliation. There is also a page on Australian prehistory and exploration in a separate book of the same series. Although these books are comprehensive, teachers would still need assistance in understanding the right approach to presenting some of these issues. This is where AIEOs could be particularly helpful.

The data suggests AIEOs are the best resource a school can have in terms of teaching Aboriginal curriculum content. This is due to their extensive knowledge of Aboriginal culture and their access to the Aboriginal community. One participant highlighted this advantage and stated, "There aren't any local groups around this region as such that wanted to come in and it's just not theirs so it's good to at least have her" (T. Cobalt, S. Jarrah, Interview 1). One AIEO also had knowledge of Aboriginal art which she shared during cultural activities and programs. Not only can an AIEO impart their knowledge but they can be involved in the classroom to share their experiences directly with the students. This was particularly important as one teacher explained that challenging students' negative preconceived ideas was easier for the students to accept if there was an Aboriginal person in the class.

The data revealed the heavy reliance many participants had on textbooks for their knowledge and this was particularly evident in the independent school. A comment by a participant stated:

> Textbooks are quite well resourced. The textbook that we're using at the moment and the ones that look at Australian History have a lot about the stolen generation and the 40 000years ago before the European settlement. And some of the books that have a WA focus look at the massacres and the battle of Pinjarra and that kind of thing. And they look at ways of life of the Indigenous people. (T. Zinc, S. Karri, Interview 1)

One participant who was a geography specialist was "highly selective" in resourcing her program because it was specialised and the resources needed to link directly to geography. She commented, "I'm highly selective on the resources I use because of the program. I'm not the best person to talk to about that, because my implementation of this is really, um limited" (T. Cadmium, S. Gum Tree, Interview 1). Two participants expressed their preference for older textbooks which focused on the more traditional aspects of Aboriginal life. One such participant said, "Yes, there's a couple of very old texts that I've enjoyed very much because it seemed to be a more of an old fashioned perspective in actually how they lived in the desert. And that I've enjoyed very much and that's kind of the like a personal desire to know" (T. Cadmium, S. Gum Tree, Interview 1). As a result, personal interest plays a key role in the aspects of Aboriginal curriculum content they teach teaching. The school culture and the importance they placed on Aboriginal perspectives also played a role in the

amount of resources available. This can also impact any access to excursions which were culturally appropriate for Aboriginal curriculum content.

These excursions were explained by participants as extremely valuable not only for the students but also the teachers. While the students appeared to enjoy the hands on aspect of particular cultural experiences, the teachers gained knowledge and experience also. The independent school however, did not have any Aboriginal centred excursions at the time of the interviews. The participants from the independent school expressed interest in cultural excursions but there were no plans in the immediate future to embark on one. The government schools also included cultural events held at the school. One participant spoke of the success of excursions and the in school cultural events. She said:

> We've been to Baldivis Children's Forest. And they've got an Aboriginal, I guess sections, components to it. Because, it's all woven together, and that's quite good that the kids have gone there ... The WA museum. I haven't taken kids there for a while. To the Kargina display. And then we've had some, before I had groups come in and they've done like a play or a role play with the kids. Usually during Harmony Week but you know the kids do like a little section, like a little weapons [display] and a food [display]. (T. Zinc, S. Karri, Interview 1)

This participant also noted the role the AIEO plays in organising these events. However, it was clear that these excursions were not necessarily an annual event.

Despite the vast amounts of resources available, textbooks were still a primary source of information for Aboriginal curriculum content. These books covered a range of topics including traditional Aboriginal cultures (though they tended to only look at one such as those in Arnhem Land) and social issues including the stolen generation. However, for those participants interested in the topic they tended to go searching for more resources. All participants saw the value in their students engaging directly with Aboriginal people and their stories yet there also appeared to be reluctance amongst them to put time and energy into finding them.

5.5 Professional Learning

The Australian Professional Standards for teachers includes a section on Professional engagement. Under this heading is 'Engage in Professional Learning' which includes four focus areas teachers are to incorporate (AITSL, 2013). One of these areas is 'Engage in

professional learning and improve practice'. One way of accomplishing this is to engage in professional learning. As evident in the data, all participants had varying forms of professional learning at different times throughout the year. The data revealed four key issues relating to professional learning. These were: professional learning for Aboriginal curriculum content as an elective; it should be noted that one day of professional learning is not enough to make a substantial effect; often the focus is on getting Aboriginal students into school rather than on teaching the content; and teachers often complained that the person leading the professional learning workshops was often too far removed from the classroom environment.

The data illustrated teachers have had opportunities to take a professional learning day in Aboriginal perspectives yet participants revealed the lack of interest by their colleagues to take it and or another topic would always take precedence. This was explained by one participant who stated:

> The school organises sometimes to have options where people can choose different things. And I'm sure there's been opportunities for people to choose Aboriginal culture. But there's not been a whole lot no. (T. Zinc, S. Karri, Interview 1)

At this particular school a number of teachers were interested in the topic but this interest may not have led to structured professional learning. At the independent school one teacher expressed that most of her professional learning for Aboriginal curriculum content stemmed from her colleagues rather than structured professional learning. She said, "And certainly without my colleagues I would have had far less exposure [to Aboriginal content]" (T. Cadmium, S. Gum Tree, Interview 1). If those colleagues had had a very superficial understanding of Aboriginal curriculum content this would perpetuate the uncritical view of Aboriginal history and colonial values.

Participants who specialised in history tended to have a greater interest and more exposure to Aboriginal professional learning days. When asked when she went to professional learning days, one teacher responded, "… mostly through the history teachers association so conferences are more likely to be an Aboriginal component there than one that would be run separately that I would go to" (T. Marine, S. Gum Tree, Interview 1). As HOD this teacher was also available to go to professional learning interstate. These teacher conferences gave

her an Aboriginal perspective from different regions in Australia. Conversely, not all participants felt they had the same opportunities with professional learning relating to Aboriginal curriculum content.

Within the data some professional learning days were more helpful than others. One participant explained the focus was often in providing a different perspective and hearing Aboriginal people's stories as opposed to learning specifically about Aboriginal cultures. Although it was engaging and interesting it was only a small part of learning about Aboriginal curriculum content. The focus has therefore been on teaching content which hasn't dealt with the issue many teachers face which is *how* to teach it. This has been a particular problem because many people see it as a sensitive issue and would rather avoid it than risk offending Aboriginal students and their parents.

Time was another issue revolving around professional learning which arose from the data. One teacher said, "There will never be enough time for PD [professional development]" (T. Cobalt, S. Jarrah, Interview 1), but he also expressed the importance of putting a local perspective on Aboriginal curriculum content by using local resources. Another teacher illustrated that teachers wanted the work done for them when it came to implementing a new program because teachers didn't have enough time to be always creating lessons and programs. She explained a teacher's ideal professional learning day:

> So it's kind of workshop and when they leave they're leaving with a program, they're leaving with resources, they're leaving with ideas. And they'll do it but it's got to be…. It's got to be literally handed to them modelled and then they'll do it. And that's what teacher are like because they're time poor. (T. Marine, S. Gum Tree, interview 1)

Not only did many participants explain the importance of time but also the relevance of the person leading the professional learning day. One teacher expressed the importance of this:

> I think what teachers like in professional developments, is actually a practicing teacher not someone who retired for 50 years, or so been to university doing umpteen amounts of research without having contact with real children. (T. Marine, S. Gum Tree, Interview 1)

Therefore according to the data, for a successful professional learning day teachers need to be exposed to relevant content and someone with an active interest and current experience on the topic.

This 'active interest' is reflective of a teacher's personal teaching practice. If the teacher is interested in Aboriginal curriculum content this will come through in their lessons in the form of more interesting resources and can often lead to a greater engagement by their students. Therefore the person running professional learning must also be enthusiastic in what they are providing to teachers in order for the professional learning to be effectively translated into classroom practice.

This issue was raised in the data as participants complained that often the person giving the seminars for the professional learning days was clearly out of touch with the practicalities of the teaching profession. One participant also believed a more useful professional learning would involve a readymade program and teaching aids that can be adjusted to their teaching style. Professional learning day could provide vital content and confidence for teachers to teach quality Aboriginal curriculum content. Teachers avoiding Aboriginal curriculum content professional learning is an issue which needs to be addressed. For this to take place teachers need to see the relevance of teaching Aboriginal curriculum content.

5.6 Conclusion

There are many challenges when it comes to teaching Aboriginal curriculum content in the classroom. Although it is mandated in the curriculum this has not ensured all teachers will teach it. Evidence of which comes from avoidance of the topic in the past and present. The introduction of a new Australian Curriculum has sought to correct this but there are still issues it has not addressed. By including an in-depth study of the Aboriginal human rights issues in the new Australian Curriculum Aboriginal curriculum content cannot be avoided in Year 10. However, as Aboriginal curriculum content units are electives in all previous Year groups it can easily be avoided. Furthermore, the Australian Curriculum will not give the flexibility for teachers with a passion for Aboriginal perspectives the opportunity to develop this topic further.

The support of colleagues and sharing resources will help support teachers with little or no background knowledge in Aboriginal curriculum content yet this can be detrimental if their colleagues still hold colonial values. The data has also indicated there are many resources

available which deal with a variety of themes and issues relating to Aboriginal curriculum content. Nevertheless, teacher access to these resources does not guarantee they are used. Textbooks are still the predominantly preferred resource which although they include a variety of Aboriginal contemporary and historical issues, do not appear to go into any great depth on issues. The themes highlighted in the data chapters reveal the numerous issues which prevent the quality teaching of Aboriginal curriculum content. In the following chapter these themes are broken down and examined under four key issues which are time management, school culture, interest and preconceived ideas.

Chapter 6: DISCUSSION

Introduction

The aim of this study was to understand what factors affect the teaching of Aboriginal curriculum content in Australian high schools and also focus on the issues which influence teacher involvement in the topic. The data collected revealed four key issues which affected teachers, they consisted of: time management, school culture, teacher interest and pre-conceived ideas. Each issue impacts teacher beliefs, attitudes, understanding and their approach to teaching Aboriginal curriculum content. A strong theme emerging from the data was an enhanced understanding of the topic led to greater confidence in teaching Aboriginal curriculum content. It is only when all four issues are addressed can an enhanced understanding of the topic can occur which will boost teacher confidence lead to quality teaching of the curriculum in Aboriginal curriculum content.

6.1 Key Issues

6.1.1 Time management

A teacher's role consists of more than just classroom teaching, it includes assessing, resourcing, planning, pastoral care of students, sharing with colleagues and also being continuously engaged in professional learning among other duties (Crump, 2005). It is not surprising that this study found time management to be a key challenge in teaching Aboriginal curriculum content. Almost all participants voiced their concerns on the lack of time to cover curriculum content in addition to their other duties. The Australian Curriculum is particularly guilty of an overcrowded curriculum which was a major concern for participants. This is a key issue as an overcrowded curriculum can shift the focus of teaching away from the students' learning needs to simply covering curriculum content (Whittaker & Young, 2002).

Obviously the idea behind including so much content in the new Australian Curriculum is to provide students with an education that exposes them to multiple perspectives and to

understand Australia's position in a world history context (ACARA, 2013). However, the participants in this study believed the curriculum content was too exhaustive in addition to the appropriate time required for each component. During the course of a year, teachers are expected to include overview content which "identifies important features of the historical period at the relevant year level and provides an expansive chronology that helps students understand broad patterns of historical change"(ACARA, 2013, p. 4). This is on top of three depth studies which the curriculum document stated, "The content in each elective is designed to allow detailed study of specific aspects of the historical period" (ACARA, 2013, p. 4). Thus teachers found they had to choose some particular topics to the exclusion of others.

The Australian Curriculum states that Year 9 students must complete an overview component making up 10% of the total teaching time and three in depth studies consisting of 30% of the total teaching time. The Year 9 curriculum covers a wide range of aspects which constitute the modern world and there are components which are expected to be taught in depth (ACARA, 2012). The practicalities of teaching all components effectively have their difficulties. From the data it was clear that squeezing all this content into one school year would be a challenge not easily met. One teacher described the issue in the following way:

> And in there we've got to squeeze in economics, Asian studies, Aboriginal studies and it's just, it's too broad and each depth study we get five weeks assuming there's no exams so it's really, really tough. And if you think we've got a ten week term there's no way you can include all that in one term. So in two terms of twenty weeks you know, [week]five, ten, fifteen for each of your depth studies, five for your overview plus exams, excursions, long weekends, its nuts. (T. Zinc, S. Karri, Interview 1)

As a result some topics will have to be missed entirely or skimmed over. It appeared from the data that Aboriginal curriculum content was in contention for space over Asian studies as more aspects of Asian history and culture are brought into the curriculum. For example, in the topic *Asia and Australia,* "Students investigate the history of Australia OR an Asian society in the period 1750 – 1918 in depth" (ACARA, 2013, p. 38). They choose between *Asia and the world* or *Making a Nation. Making a Nation* included:

The extension of settlement, including the effects of contact (intended and unintended) between European settlers in Australia and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples (ACDEH020) (ACARA, 2013, p. 39)

Furthermore, teachers who choose *Asia and the world* will not teach the impact of settlement on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. This may be preferable to teachers who feel uncomfortable with the topic. Healy (2008) and Sarra (2011) suggested many people feel uncomfortable confronting Aboriginal issues because it makes them feel bad about the treatment of Aboriginal people in the past and the continuing social issues this has caused. Another reason emerging from the study is the notion that teachers like to teach what they know and as many do not have extensive knowledge in Aboriginal curriculum content they may prefer to teach a topic they are more comfortable with. Teaching standard 2: *Know the content and how to teach it* (AITSL, 2013) reinforces the expectation that teachers must know their content therefore if they teach a topic they feel is outside of their teaching ability they may feel inadequate. This could be an issue of a lack of cultural competency which would require professional learning to rectify.

It is mandatory for teachers to continue learning and improving their professional knowledge throughout their careers (AITSL, 2013). For those who teach Society and Environment there is a huge variety of professional learning available. From the data it is clear there would never be enough time to take all the professional learning available to cover every topic. Consequently, a teacher has to be selective and as a result not all teachers would select Aboriginal curriculum content as a professional learning option. According to the data, teachers would often choose their professional learning depending on their specialised area, such as history, law or economics or their personal interests. As evident in the study teachers have the opportunity to choose Aboriginal centred professional learning but many do not. This then perpetuates the lack of knowledge in this area which decreases the likelihood of teachers teaching it, or teaching it effectively. Without appropriate understanding and cultural competency in teaching Aboriginal curriculum content, colonial values are likely to be perpetuated instead of being challenged (Q Beresford et al., 2012; MacNaughton, 2001).

Addressing Aboriginal issues respectfully can be enhanced by finding the appropriate resources that will assist teachers to effectively teach Aboriginal curriculum content.

Conversely, teachers who have a good grounding in cultural competence will be well placed to find appropriate resources. Teachers who have not had the opportunity to improve their cultural competence will be at a disadvantage in finding culturally sensitive material. Finding resources can also eat up huge amounts of time outside of school hours. One participant pointed out the time taken to resource meant they were losing time with their family.

> If you're creating programs year in year out for 10 years then eventually you're gonna go, no my family has missed out on time or I heard someone say the other day. I really wished I hadn't worked between these years because I've missed out on my kids and now they're in their 20s and they've gone and I never ... I've lost that time, I've lost them. (T. Marine, S. Gum Tree, Interview 1)

This participant also noted that with each new program many of her colleagues became less enthusiastic and had less energy for teaching to the best of their abilities. This is reflected in a study which Connell (2009) drew attention to where teachers who were considered 'good' "were steadily burning themselves out, becoming exhausted trying to respond to the endless demands of total involvement" (pp. 220-221). If this is the case then quality teaching is not sustainable therefore shortcuts would be made and the obvious choice is resourcing.

Due to the issue of time management many teachers relied heavily on textbooks as their main source of information. Although many participants also use the internet, finding specific information about Aboriginal history still takes time and the search is not always fruitful. The literature highlights the struggle in finding suitable resources as an issue for marginalised Indigenous populations around the world. A case study from a teacher in a remote school in Canada teaching Aboriginal students also revealed similar difficulties in finding "available student level Aboriginal material or time to adapt materials for students" (Kanu, 2005/2006, p. 214). A similar complaint was aired by a participant who discussed the difficulties of adapting resources to the students' level. Although they acknowledged there are vast amounts of information, they did not believe their students could cope with the themes they discussed. However, not all the teachers believed the material was too difficult for their students but in order to deal with sensitive issues it was essential to gain their trust. Teachers with a particular interest in the topic also found more time to research and adapt materials.

For teachers without an interest or background in Aboriginal perspectives an AIEO could shoulder some of the responsibilities especially when it came to resourcing. The data highlighted this as one participant explained developing links with the Aboriginal community would take too much time and the AIEO at his school could provide this. He also acknowledged the benefits of the AIEO's knowledge of Aboriginal culture which he could draw on without looking for it himself. Furthermore, schools without an AIEO (those without the required number of Aboriginal students) had a severe disadvantage when it came to resourcing Aboriginal curriculum content. Even so, not all teachers utilised their AIEO as participants expressed difficulties accessing people from the Aboriginal community despite the presence of an AIEO at the school. The reasons found in the study include a lack of availability of the AIEO (part-time), lack of confidence in the subject and they may feel uncomfortable in asking for information for fear of revealing their lack of knowledge. Also their interest in Aboriginal culture may be more anthropological and therefore, prefer something succinct found in a textbook.

Not with standing some of the limitations to resourcing, access to an AIEO proves to be invaluable for all teachers and particularly for those with little or no previous experience of the issues surrounding Aboriginal people. Gower and Byrne (2012) describe the importance of a variety of sources of information and experience for teachers to gain cultural competency. They stated:

> in teacher education, Western academic knowledge needs to be coupled with Indigenous studies and practical experience of working with Indigenous people so that students develop appropriate levels of 'cultural competence'. (Gower & Byrne, 2012, p. 381)

As it stands, teacher interest holds sway over whether or not they take it upon themselves to develop their cultural competency and this is supported by the data.

For teachers without an Australian education, the data suggests much of their knowledge of Aboriginal curriculum content is supplied by their colleagues. The danger with relying on colleagues is the potential for bias or inaccurate information. Additionally, the knowledge imparted may not enhance quality teaching of the topic but reinforce colonial values. Access to an AIEO would be a more preferable solution.

Working across learning areas could also benefit teachers by giving them a different perspective on Aboriginal curriculum content and reinforce knowledge and understanding for their students. Teachers may gain considerable benefit from teaching outside of their knowledge base and collaborating with colleagues from different learning areas such as Art or Media. It increases interest for their students and also gives the students multiple perspectives on the same topic. Teachers involved in this collaboration also gain support of other staff who may have more knowledge and resources. However, working with colleagues across learning areas proved difficult in arranging a mutually suitable time for planning. Also, to find colleagues willing to put in the extra time for collaboration was a near impossible task.

Time management proved to be a key issue in preventing quality teaching of Aboriginal curriculum content. This was due to the increasing pressures placed on teachers. A major issue which all participants agreed upon consisted of the lack of time required effectively to teach the proposed Australian Curriculum. All but one participant explicitly stated that the curriculum is too crowded and the expectations placed by the government on teachers to cover it all are unreasonable. Many teachers voiced their lack of background knowledge in Aboriginal perspectives and took professional learning to improve it. In an interview between Frederick Brown, Director of Strategy and Development, Learning Forward, and Adam Smith, Founder & Principal Consultant at the Equity Institute, the importance of promoting teachers to take control of their learning was discussed. Adam Smith highlighted "that every teacher has an obligation to improve their practice" (Smith, 2012, p. 1). With the focus on teachers taking control over their professional learning it is likely Aboriginal perspectives will be overlooked in favour of less challenging topics.

Teachers who did not actively seek to improve their content knowledge often relied on their colleagues for sourcing information on Aboriginal curriculum content. This would only be beneficial if their colleagues had a good understanding of Aboriginal people and their culture otherwise it could perpetuate the colonial stereotype portrayed in the media which is developed from negative background experiences. This would restrict the suitability of their knowledge and could impact on the effectiveness of the skills they pass on to their colleagues. Time constraints also restrict when teachers can meet and also restricts cross-

curricular learning. In order to support teachers in this area it is clear that there needs to be a whole school approach which begins with school culture.

6.1.2 School Culture

The focus of student learning in recent times has been placed squarely on teachers shoulders as if they were the sole influence on their students (Dinham, 2013). Teachers do not work in isolation because they are a part of a wider community consisting of staff, students, the school institution and workforce (Connell, 2009). School culture therefore, supports and shapes teacher practice and sets what is valued at the school. This is reinforced by Connell (2009) who stated, "Much of the learning that school pupils do results from the shared efforts of a group of staff, from interactive learning processes among the students, and (as the idea of the 'hidden curriculum' indicates) from the working of the institution around them" (pp.221-222). This 'hidden curriculum' is what is implicitly learned which has a bigger impact on students than an explicitly taught curriculum (Brady, 2011).

Thus, to have an inclusive school where Aboriginal perspectives are accepted, Aboriginal culture needs to become an integral part of the school culture. This was a key finding in the data and to enhance an inclusive culture within a school, the presence an AIEO proves to be invaluable. Not only do they provide a personal understanding of Aboriginal culture but they are a direct link to the Aboriginal community. The Australian Curriculum also affects school culture in relation to Aboriginal perspectives as it dictates the importance placed on Aboriginal curriculum content through the inclusion and exclusion of various aspects of it. The mandated curriculum therefore has a greater influence on the emphasis placed on Aboriginal curriculum content on schools without an AIEO.

The goals and ideals set by society through the Australia government policy are reflected in the curriculum. The history curriculum clearly focuses on multiculturalism as an important aspect of Australian society. The rationale for the History curriculum discussed the significance of students understanding Australian history within a world history context, it stated, "This knowledge and understanding is essential for informed and active participation in Australia's diverse society" (ACARA, 2013, p. 3). There was also specific mention of the

importance placed on Australia's Indigenous people, the document explained that the curriculum, "enables them to develop an understanding of the past and present experiences of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, their identity and the continuing value of their culture" (ACARA, 2013, p. 3). Despite these ideal goals the government has set, there is a clash as cultural diversity whilst upholding many colonial values (MacNaughton, 2001; Rose, 2012; Sarra, 2011).

Dockett and Cusack (2003) explained that in order to create an inclusive and just society "children need to become well-informed citizens, capable of thinking critically about their place in society and the ways that they can effect change" (p.368). School culture through the value placed on Aboriginal culture, issues and history plays an important role in supporting this. Furthermore, the literature indicates there is an inherent difficulty in promoting minority group values as colonial values are still prevalent in Australian society (MacNaughton, 2001; Rose, 2012; Sarra, 2011). According to DeCuir and Dixon (2004), "society constructs social reality in ways that promote its own self-interest or that of the elite" (sited in Kanu, 2005). The elite, in this case are the dominant Anglo Saxon majority and by bringing in stories from minority groups, such as Aboriginal Australians, it disrupts values and attitudes previously established. Therefore, to promote a culture of inclusivity the government "must provide genuine system-wide and ongoing support programs that allow schools and other educational facilities to create an environment that reinforces Aboriginal identity and encourages Aboriginal community involvement" (The NSW Teachers Federation, 2010).

This is a substantial challenge as Fang He et al, and Phillion (2008) point out that, "it is easier to adopt a decision than to put it into practice, and it is easier to make changes in the structure than to reculture, which gets at the heart of behaviours and beliefs" (p.114). Spillane (2004, cited in Connelly, Fang He, Phillion, 2008) highlighted the fact that even when educators are willing to implement change, superficiality prevails. This occurs when Aboriginal culture is an 'add-on' and not imbedded into the philosophical underpinning of the curriculum (Kanu, 2005, 2006).

The data suggests that within the same school culture there are inconsistencies with individual teachers approach to teaching Aboriginal curriculum content. For example, within

one school there are varying set of ideologies as some teachers have a high degree of cultural competency while others do not. The Australian Government has recognised these inconsistencies in the teaching of Aboriginal curriculum content and cultural competency. As a result of the government's aim to ensure that Aboriginal perspectives are covered, the Australian Curriculum employed specified outcomes in Indigenous issues. This has not been as effective as promised due to the majority of Aboriginal curriculum content units being electives and therefore not mandatory (see Appendix A). Lowe and Yunkaporta (2013) heavily criticised the curriculum document as not providing adequate tools for teaching Aboriginal curriculum content. They stated:

> The analysis presented in this paper demonstrates that the curriculum content does not provide teachers with the necessary tools to construct learning experiences that would provide students with the depth and breadth of content needed to acquire a deep knowledge and understanding of the histories and cultures of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and their significance within the Australian state. (Lowe & Yunkaporta, 2013, p. 12)

The implementation of the Standards of Teaching (ATSIL) in 2013 has sort to improve the cultural competency of teachers. These standards cover cultural competency by explicitly stating what teachers are expected to understand about Aboriginal students and their culture. For example, Standard 1.4 *Strategies for teaching Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students*, stated that a proficient teacher is expected to, "Design and implement effective teaching strategies that are responsive to the local community and cultural setting, linguistic background and histories of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students" (AITSL, 2013, p. 2). Standard 2.4 *Understand and respect Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people to promote reconciliation between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians* stated that graduate teachers, "Demonstrate a broad knowledge of, understanding of and respect for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander histories, cultures and languages" (AITSL, 2013, p. 3). Dinham (2013) is not convinced these standards can be implemented and declared that:

> Nowhere in any of these proposed solutions is there recognition of the need to provide ongoing effective professional learning for teachers to enable them to continue to develop and upgrade their skills, and to be recognised and rewarded for this growth. (Dinham, 2013, p. 93)

Without appropriate professional learning for teachers to develop the level of cultural competency required to teach Aboriginal curriculum content the status of Aboriginal

perspectives will not be lifted. The government could argue that there are professional learning resources for teachers on the AITSL website. However, resources for the standards 1.4 and 2.4 consist of illustrations of practice which do not address standard 1.4 and there is only one example of 2.4 and a set of modules which are not yet available. Even if the modules are a great tool once completed, if it is not mandatory for all teachers to access them they will not increase overall teacher cultural competency.

To ensure Aboriginal curriculum content becomes a fundamental part of school culture, a whole school approach is needed. This is because learning is multifaceted and student learning occurs through a combination of factors. Connell (2009) explained the multiple influences on student learning, she stated:

> Much of the learning that school pupils do results from the shared efforts of a group of staff, from interactive learning processes among the students, and (as the idea of the 'hidden curriculum' indicates) from the working of the institution around them. (pp. 221-222)

Therefore to embed Aboriginal curriculum content effectively into the classroom and in a culturally competent manner, a whole school approach is necessary (Gower & Byrne, 2012). The AIEO program is integral to implementing such an inclusive school culture and promoting cultural competency. Gower and Byrne (2012) highlight the value of an AIEO in developing and sustaining cultural competency because they can be the schools link to the Aboriginal community. They described "A key feature of being culturally competent is the ability to develop strong and genuine relationships with Aboriginal people and other cultural groups" (p.387). Often it was the AIEO who approached teachers on how to incorporate Aboriginal culture, issues and history into their lessons. The AIEO was also responsible for implementing and running Aboriginal cultural centred programs. It is therefore evident that schools without an AIEO were disadvantaged because teachers did not have the time to take on additional duties that otherwise could be done by AIEO. Connections with the Aboriginal community would also suffer due to the absence of an AIEO.

The data also suggested the whole school benefited from the AIEO program as evidence of Aboriginal culture and activities could be witnessed through artwork around the school. Money from one of the programs was even used to give all of one year group an Aboriginal cultural excursion. The AIEO at one school was able to offer lessons in the Noongar language

to its students regardless of their cultural background. The AIEOs at the schools in this study were all highly motivated which played a key role in expanding and implementing programs.

Without an AIEO, a school's guide in understanding Aboriginal culture, issues and history resides predominately in the curriculum. The aim of the introduction of the new Australian Curriculum was to see mandatory teaching of Aboriginal curriculum content, which would ensure teachers, can no longer avoid it. However, due to many units containing Aboriginal curriculum content are electives some teachers may still avoid it and those that did embrace it may teach it less due to the inclusion of other mandatory topics. The Australian Curriculum includes Aboriginal curriculum content in Year 7, 9 and 10 but there is no opportunity to teach Aboriginal curriculum content in Year 8. Each year group covers three topics in depth, some mandatory topics and some elective topics.

In Year 9, students study the movement of people to Australia and the impact this had on the Indigenous population and the effects "between European settlers in Australia and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples" (ACARA, 2012, p.30). This is one of three topics to choose from the other two being; The Industrial Revolution (1750 -1914), and Progressive ideas and movements (1750 – 1918). The topic in Year 9 with the biggest coverage in Aboriginal perspectives is *Making a Nation.* This topic covers settlement and the stolen generation, yet it is also an elective unit. The unit which shares the same time is *Australia and Asia* which focuses on the Asian perspective. With Australia's strong economic ties with Asia it is likely this topic will be chosen over the other. The last topic is World War 1 which is a mandatory unit. It includes a small section on the Aboriginal perspective which includes "Exploring the experiences of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples during the war" (ACARA, 2012, p.30). It is therefore possible that this would be the only topic which includes Aboriginal curriculum content taught in Year 9.

Year 10 students have the biggest component on Aboriginal issues and history with a depth study on 'Rights and Freedoms'. This unit consists of: Background to the struggle of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples for rights and freedoms before 1965, including the 1938 Day of Mourning and the Stolen Generations , The significance of the following for the civil rights of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples: 1962 the right to vote federally; 1967 Referendum; Reconciliation; Mabo decision; Bringing Them Home Report

(the Stolen Generations), the Apology, Methods used by civil rights activists to achieve change for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, and the role of one individual or group in the struggle and The continuing nature of efforts to secure civil rights and freedoms in Australia and throughout the world, such as the Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (2007) (ACARA, 2012, p.46). These topics deal with complex issues so it is important that the teacher feels confident in their knowledge and application of the material. This is where cultural competency plays a key role and where colonial values can be challenged as cultural competency positions the teacher in an informed position of Aboriginal issues, culture and way of life (Gower & Byrne, 2012). These topics are mandatory so it is vital teachers have an understanding of the cultural sensitivity and competency required to teach it.

Teachers do not work in isolation therefore cultural competency needs to be part of a whole school approach to teaching Aboriginal curriculum content. Consequently, the success of a teacher and "whether an individual teacher appears to be performing well depends a great deal on what other people are doing" (Connell, 2009, pp. 221-222). School culture can promote and enhance cultural competency through the use of an AIEO and a good support network of culturally competent teachers in any learning area.

The advantages of a good support network of teachers and access to quality resources allow teachers to save time developing programs and implement lessons which have been tried and tested. Additionally, the school needs to promote the sharing of time and resources for it to become part of the school culture. From the data it was suggested that not all teachers felt comfortable sharing their resources and worksheets because they felt that their lessons were substandard. Teachers who enjoyed sharing their resources also appeared to be enthusiastic about their profession and more willing to take on programs such as PALS. Those who blamed the education system for lack of interesting and engaging content appeared to be less enthusiastic about their teaching profession.

6.1.3 Interest

A teacher's interest or lack of interest in Aboriginal perspectives has a huge impact on teaching Aboriginal curriculum content. This was supported in the data and the literature which has discussed the fact that teaching Aboriginal curriculum content is still up to the individual teacher. Aboriginal perspectives is a topic which is surrounded by emotion for many people (Sarra, 2011). It is also an area many people fear to delve in due to an awareness they could offend or teach something which is culturally inappropriate. Therefore, a key finding in the data was the pivotal role a teacher's interest and enthusiasm in Aboriginal perspectives has in the depth and quality to which it is taught. A strong connection with the Aboriginal community both past and present was directly linked to confidence in teaching Aboriginal curriculum content. Although confidence and interest does not directly correlate to quality teaching, it does afford the potential for it, as a teacher searches for ways to deliver and embed Aboriginal curriculum content in their programs.

The inclusion of Aboriginal perspectives is not only important in Australian's gaining a greater understanding of their Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples but it can improve the understanding and acceptance of any minority group. The benefit of including multicultural perspectives in the classroom allows for a critical understanding of one's own culture and how this gives context to one's values and beliefs. Understanding the position of Aboriginal people in today's society is another benefit for a just and equal society. This is because it encourages reflection on how Australian society treats minority groups, which leads to being aware of and challenging the 'othering' of those who are not part of the dominant population (Q Beresford et al., 2012; MacNaughton, 2001; McConaghy, 2000b; Rose, 2012; Sarra, 2011).

The data collected, suggested that teachers most likely to include Aboriginal curriculum content were those who were interested in the subject and therefore saw teaching it as a priority. This is reflected in the literature with regards to teachers taking professional learning as "It was also mentioned often that teachers only really sign up for programs that interest them" (Ma Rhea et al., 2012, p. 54). A number of factors led to a teacher's interest in the Aboriginal curriculum content including their background both personal and

professional and school support. An interest in Aboriginal perspectives also led to a greater motivation to make the time for finding quality resources and developing an involvement of Aboriginal culture throughout the year. Participant interest in the topic came from positive experiences both personally and professionally in places with high Aboriginal populations. One participant also explained that as an immigrant she wanted to understand Australian culture and explore Aboriginal cultures in depth.

As Australia claims to be a multicultural society, it is important for teachers to provide a classroom which is inclusive of cultures different from the dominant group. Osborne's (2001) criticism of Australian classrooms was that teachers themselves were exposed to a highly Anglo curricula through their own schooling and in their teacher education programs. As a result, he outlined the majority of teachers "at best, poorly conceptualize as they start working in cross-cultural or multi-ethnic schools" (p.71). A multicultural classroom described by Kanu (2005) is; "When the integration of Aboriginal perspectives is believed to be a philosophical underpinning of the curriculum," and therefore "it ceases to be an occasional add-on" (Kanu, 2005). The data revealed some teachers believed they are practicing this inclusivity. One teacher understood that Aboriginal curriculum content should not be a separate topic but integrated throughout the curriculum. Another participant conveyed that he was happy with the amount of Aboriginal curriculum content he taught and has evidence through student essays that his students understood aspects of Aboriginal perspectives. All but two teachers interviewed were satisfied with the level at which they taught Aboriginal curriculum content; although there was a consensus that more could be taught, some of their colleagues did not feel comfortable with the topic.

The data revealed that the reason teachers feel unsure about teaching Aboriginal curriculum content is partially because they don't have much background knowledge on the subject and also because they feel it requires sensitivity. The literature suggested teachers have a lack of confidence in the professional learning available for teaching Aboriginal curriculum content. For example, "Teachers reported little or no confidence in the information they were given at conferences and in professional development programs about how to teach Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students" (Ma Rhea et al., 2012, p. 54). This was reiterated in the data as professional learning did not cover how to teach Aboriginal

curriculum content, instead they often focused on listening to Aboriginal stories. Although this was valuable in understanding the Aboriginal perspective, it didn't contain tools which were transferable to the classroom. The literature also stated the reliability of information (Ma Rhea et al., 2012) is also a reason why teachers would prefer to avoid teaching Aboriginal curriculum content.

It is also a topic which generates strong emotions from staff and students and therefore they fear of offending students and their parents. This uncertainty makes some teachers unsure of the best approach to adopt. In order to avoid confrontation some teachers tackle the topic by merely presenting facts without challenging colonial values. The danger of this attitude is revealed by McConaghy (2000) who suggested that when Aboriginal perspectives is approached in a superficial way this tends to reinforce stereotypes rather than challenge them.

All participants believed teaching Aboriginal curriculum content was important yet; those who were most comfortable had either positive experiences in an Aboriginal community, or a personal interest in the topic. The article *Decolonizing Aboriginal Education (Kanu,* 2005*/2006)* revealed similar sentiments from teachers in Canada taking place in a case study of teachers in schools with high numbers of Aboriginal students. One teacher believed it would be unfair to other minority cultural groups to focus too much on Aboriginal culture and he felt uncomfortable with teaching it. *Reclaiming Aboriginal Knowledge* (Yunkaporta & McGinty, 2009) also explained that many teachers avoided Aboriginal perspectives because they felt 'uncomfortable'. One teacher said she was "made to feel that you don't have a right as a non-Indigenous person to explore Aboriginal culture". There was the "fear of overstepping" (p.63). Therefore, the approach of the topic was varied depending on what the teacher felt they had permission to teach. These sentiments were also reflected in the data as one participant believed that as a 'white' person he could never really understand Aboriginal culture.

Evidenced from the data was the notion that teacher enthusiasm for the profession influenced the effort put into the topics taught. This is particularly relevant in covering the AITSL standard 1.4 and 2.4 where teacher interest affected the depth to which Aboriginal curriculum content was covered or if it was covered at all. The AITSL standards which define

what a quality teacher in Australia is through a list of competencies, state in Standard 2 *Know the content and how to teach it* (2014b). However, if teachers have no interest in a topic, it is likely they will not further their education in it. This is especially the case with professional learning as teachers tend to only take professional learning which interests them (Ma Rhea et al., 2012). This lack of knowledge of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander society is recognised in the *Final report: Improving teaching in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander education: National professional standards for teachers: Standards focus areas 1.4 and 2.4* provided on the AITSL website. This report stated:

> There was a consensus that non-Indigenous teachers have little knowledge of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander society whether historical or contemporary and there was concern expressed that without making teachers 'go back to school' there was little hope that they would ever be able to catch up with all the things they didn't know. (Ma Rhea et al., 2012, p. 55)

Rose (2012) discussed the impact this has on perpetuating what he labelled the 'silent-apartheid'; a forced forgetting of history. He explained how the universities provided "very little exposure to Indigenous insights" (Rose, 2012, p. 70) so teachers were leaving with very little knowledge of Aboriginal perspectives. This gap in their education was then replicated in their teaching practice as they avoided it completely or worse, taught "illegitimate or ill-informed Indigenous content" (Rose, 2012, p. 70). This cycle could be broken Rose (2012) explains by a new generation of teachers. If the teaching of Aboriginal perspectives in universities can teach cultural competency to graduate teachers then the challenging of cultural stereotypes can filter into the wider society.

From the data it also appeared that teachers who were enthusiastic about their profession were enthusiastic about teaching any topic. This was particularly apparent by one teacher who was enthusiastic about teaching Aboriginal curriculum content. He revealed he was happy to teach any topic to the best of his ability. It did not matter what the topic was as he would put time into resourcing, understanding and making it engaging for the students. Hence, if the teacher is enthusiastic about their profession then they will be interested in improving their knowledge and approach to any topic. Many participants also revealed that a teacher can learn on the job and often they are teaching outside of their expertise so they are used to resourcing and researching new topics.

What can be derived from this is that an enthusiastic teacher who is good at resourcing cold come across as competent in a topic they have just learned. However, the danger of self-directed professional learning in this topic is that the resources may not be appropriate and the knowledge gained may not develop cultural competency. Interest and enthusiasm although important is not enough to improve quality teaching of the curriculum. Colonial values in the form of preconceived ideas need to be challenged and challenged in a culturally sensitive manner. In order to address these ideas teachers need to have confidence in their content knowledge and their source material (Ma Rhea et al., 2012).

6.1.4 Preconceived Ideas

Preconceived ideas can often go unexamined and yet underpin the importance placed on teaching Aboriginal curriculum content. From the literature review and the data collected it is evident that pre-conceived ideas affect what teachers teach and how they teach it. Students' preconceived ideas also affect the approach they take to sensitive subjects such as Aboriginal curriculum content. Both the literature and the data agree pre-conceived ideas often take the form of colonial values; as found by those teachers in the independent schools whose students had very negative views about Aboriginal people. The literature highlights this as MacNaughton (2001) explained, "In Australia, as in many other colonies, the realities of cultural and economic exploitation that rested on an ideology of race continue to extract a high cost from its indigenous peoples" (MacNaughton, 2001, p.92).These colonial values are perpetuated and reinforced through the mainstream media.

Social media is also having a huge effect on students as much of their social interaction and learning is online (Fernández, 2011). In these online forums they often share ideas which can also reinforce colonial values. As "Acceptance by and contact with peers is an important element of adolescent life" (Fernández, 2011, p. 802) challenging established negative views put forward by other students may not happen. A teacher's role can therefore be even more vital in effecting change. If teachers avoid teaching Aboriginal curriculum content then these colonial values will go unchallenged and continue to promote negative stereotypes of Aboriginal Australians.

As evident in the literature, teachers teach more than just content, they also teach values. Hence, a values component has been added to the Curriculum Framework which stipulates all students must acquire "knowledge, understandings, skills, values and attitudes" (SCSA, 2013). Teachers' personal values impact what they teach and how they approach each topic. Brady (2011) explains that values which are implicitly taught often have the biggest influence on students. This is particularly apparent when teaching a sensitive topic such as Aboriginal curriculum content. How teachers feel about the topic, and if they believe it important or more importantly if they feel they have a valued voice when it comes to teaching Aboriginal issues, comes through their lessons both explicitly and implicitly. This can have a positive impact on the values their students embrace, however, if a teacher expresses their lack of interest in the topic or avoid it then their students may also not value the Aboriginal perspective. Brady (2011) expressed this by suggesting that:

> teachers are faced with taking positions on a variety of social and emotional issues, and are therefore developing values that are informed by these challenges. More generally, a teacher's selection of subject content, and his/her choice of strategies and structures to impart that content are values-laden. (p. 56)

Halstead and Xiao (2010) highlighted the existence of values within a 'hidden curriculum' that "underlines the students' constant learning of values that may not be those that are explicitly taught" (cited in, Brady, 2011, p.56). From the data it was clear some teachers are more comfortable teaching Aboriginal curriculum content than others. It can therefore be inferred that students in classes with teachers who are comfortable, will come away with a greater sense of the importance of Aboriginal curriculum content than those with teachers who ignored the topic or taught only superficial aspects of it. Teachers who do not teach Aboriginal curriculum content at all do not challenge these colonial values and at worst reinforce the negative stereotypes of Aboriginal Australians.

The literature suggested that students come to school with pre-conceived ideas of Aboriginal culture and people learnt from home and the media. Views of minority groups such as Aboriginal cultures, according to Partington (1998) are often viewed in negative terms by the dominant group. This is reinforced by the data from the school with a less than 1% Indigenous student population. The teachers at this school revealed that there was always an issue introducing an Aboriginal curriculum content centred topic. Those schools

with a bigger variety of cultures reported only a few rare instances when they had issues with students being particularly negative about this topic. One school reported the biggest problems with teaching the topic came from another minority group who wanted to have equal time for their own cultural background to be covered. Kay Price (2012) suggested issues like this were derived from the pretence of the dominant culture being inclusive of minority groups. She explained:

> Despite the veil of the 'inclusive classroom', cultural disharmony and unease is still present within the classroom. What this signifies is that a dominant culture can manifest itself and over shadow as well as potentially create tension with other minority cultures that are also present. (K. Price, 2012, p. 12)

Therefore a culturally inclusive classroom would prevent minority cultures vying for the limited space available in the curriculum as they would be embedded in it. This would involve a high level of cultural competency on behalf of the teacher. Cultural competency would also give students the opportunity to acknowledge the effect their own culture has on their preconceived ideas of other cultures.

Shulman (1986) discussed the importance of teaching students to become aware of their pre-conceived ideas. He suggested that students come to class with pre-conceptions which are often misconceptions and the teacher needs to beware of them and know how to "reorganise the understanding of learners"(pp. 9-10). The teacher therefore, has the opportunity to *challenge* or *reinforce* a student's preconceived ideas. Dockett and Cusack (2003) indicate the importance of students becoming aware of their own preconceived ideas and the colonial values Australian society so often promotes. They say; "To shape a social and just society, children need to become well-informed citizens, capable of thinking critically about their place in society and the ways that they can effect change" (Dockett &Cusack, 2003, p.368). The implementation of the new Australian Curriculum is evidence of the government promoting a more inclusive schooling system. However, for real change to take place there must be a cultural shift in the perception of Aboriginal people by the dominant group.

The views and beliefs of the dominant society can come through the media and can be adopted by both staff and students. Negative images of Aboriginal people are often seen on the news and throughout the media whether it's to do with lack of housing or a high crime

rate (Sarra, 2011). This can affect how people feel about teaching and learning about Aboriginal curriculum content. As Australia is a society highly dependent on mass media for information the information received has a huge impact on people's values and attitudes. Ball-Rokeach and DeFleur, (1976) suggested that dependence on the mass media for information can alter beliefs, feeling and the behaviour of the audience (p.4). From the data all participants agreed that the media portrayed Aboriginal people negatively and agreed that the media had a huge influence on their students.

There were varying degrees to which the participants believed they could affect the student's beliefs and attitudes. Most participants believed a teacher could challenge what was seen in the media and students would respect their opinion, dependent on the level of trust and positive student teacher relationship that was in play.

6.2 Conceptual Summary

The conceptual illustration below displays the relationship of the four key issues; School culture, time, interest and pre-concieved ideas, and the direct impact they have on a teacher's enhanced understanding of Aboriginal curriculum content. An enhanced understanding is not enough to improve quality teaching of the curriculum. Before this can occur teachers must develop cultural competency which will direct them towards the best methods and approaches to teaching Aboriginal perspectives. Once a teacher has gained content knowledge and an appropriate method for teaching the topic this will result in improved teacher confidence. Confidence combined with knowledge and a sensitive teaching approach will support the quality teaching of curriculum in regards to Aboriginal culture, issues and history.
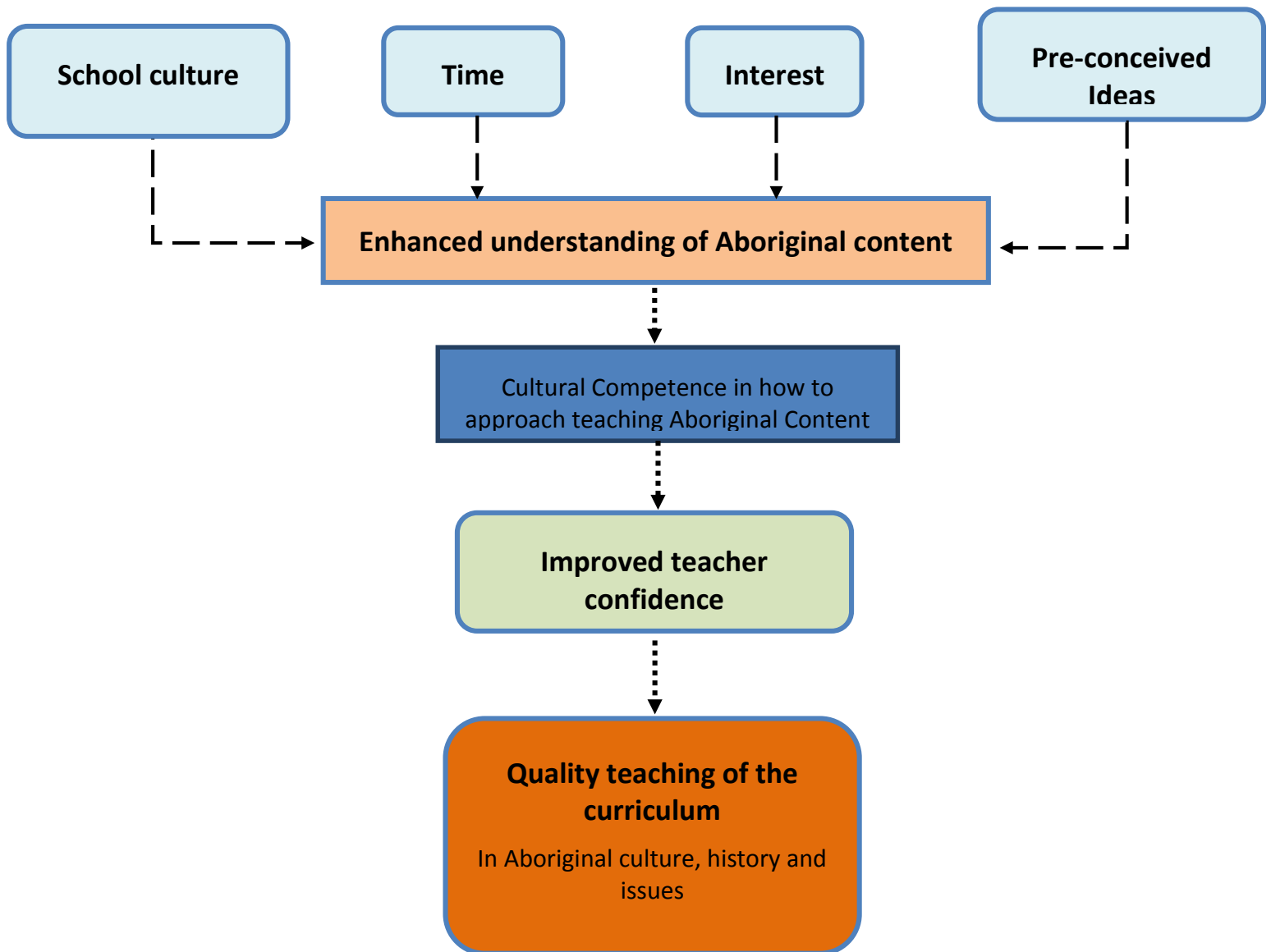
Conceptual Summary

Figure 5: Conceptual summary of key issues

Chapter 7: CONCLUSION

The four key factors which impact the approach a teacher takes in teaching or deciding to teach Aboriginal curriculum content are time management, school culture, teacher interest and pre-conceived ideas of both teacher and students. Efforts to effectively support these teachers must take account of these factors and overall cultural competency, as an enhanced understanding of the topic links to greater confidence and interest in teaching it. Understanding how teacher attitudes, beliefs and values impact on topic choices can thus inform provision of more effective support for teachers.

The first research question focused on non-Aboriginal teachers' beliefs, attitudes and understandings of teaching Aboriginal curriculum content. This study has come to the conclusion that beliefs, attitudes and understanding of teaching Aboriginal issues vary widely between non-Aboriginal teachers. While some teachers feel comfortable and confident in their ability to teach Aboriginal curriculum content there are those who prefer to avoid it or teach it from an unemotional and somewhat superficial perspective. A teacher's attitude towards teaching a particular topic will become clear to their students where it can either reinforce their preconceptions or challenge them. Therefore, the values teachers have developed play a key role in the importance placed upon teaching the topic.

The teachers' values are influenced by their experience both personal and professional and by the media and their colleagues. There is awareness amongst teachers of the sensitivity of the topic and the need to understand how to approach it. Despite this awareness, many teachers do not feel they have enough understanding to teach it without risk of offending someone (parents, students or other staff members from the Aboriginal community). This lack of understanding can have detrimental effects in the choice not to teach Aboriginal curriculum content leaving colonial values unchallenged.

The impact of these beliefs, attitudes and understandings on teaching the mandated curriculum is very substantial. The findings of this study indicate the huge impact of beliefs, values and attitudes on whether the subject is taught and to what level. This is reinforced due to the ease with which this topic could be avoided even under the new Australian Curriculum which has prescribed what must be covered. The study also uncovered some of

the detrimental impact of teachers harbouring colonial values when teaching Aboriginal curriculum content.

So, is it better if teachers without an understanding of Aboriginal curriculum content avoid teaching it and therefore avoid reinforcing stereotypes? Perhaps, but what message is that sending to the students? That if you don't know anything about Aboriginal culture then you should avoid it? Or worse, that it is not worth learning? School is a place where students continue to develop their values and understandings and if negative ideas of Aboriginal people and their culture are not challenged then where will they be challenged? High schools and primary schools are the only institutions where it is compulsory to attend and although there are more opportunities to learn about Aboriginal perspectives at the tertiary level, only a very small percentage of people attend them. Therefore, teachers need to be better supported in teaching Aboriginal curriculum content during the compulsory school years.

The third research question this study explored is the support non-Aboriginal teachers need for teaching Aboriginal curriculum content. The need for teachers to develop cultural competency in their teaching practice was a key finding of this study. It may be impractical to have every teacher and staff member take a course in cultural competency and multiculturalism though, there is evidence to suggest that being around different cultures and being exposed to them makes them less alien and therefore more accepted (Osborne, 2001a). In addition, having a continuing connection to the Aboriginal community will encourage ongoing learning through everyday exchanges and participation in cultural activities for both teachers and students.

The AIEO program has given participating schools a link to the Aboriginal community and a push for Aboriginal cultural programs to engage students and staff. They provide help for teachers in organising excursions and events on school grounds and also bringing in guest speakers to the school. Time management will then no longer be an excuse to avoid teaching Aboriginal curriculum content. Therefore, having access to AIEOs for all schools is a key recommendation of this study among others which will be outlined in the next section.

7.1 Recommendations

Change is not easy and challenging colonial values which are being reinforced every day from the media is an especially difficult task. Nevertheless, change can take place by supporting teachers in their educational practices and enhancing the delivery of Aboriginal curriculum content within the school community. This study has uncovered five recommendations to improve quality teaching of Aboriginal curriculum content. These include: Ongoing access to the Aboriginal community by the school through an AIEO; recognition of Aboriginal cultures in all schools; a strategy for better time management by teachers; mandatory professional learning for Aboriginal curriculum content including cultural competency, and mandatory university units on Aboriginal perspectives for all education students.

1. Ongoing access to the Aboriginal community by the school through an AIEO

One key issue which emerged from the study was the significance of the AIEO in assisting teachers to access the Aboriginal community. Ongoing access helps create a school culture which values Aboriginal culture and results in greater teacher knowledge and enables the teacher to feel confident in teaching Aboriginal curriculum content. An AIEO can also assist in creating cultural centred programs for teachers and running classes, taking away some of the tasks usually placed upon teachers. Their knowledge of Aboriginal cultures and access to people within the community can give the topic variety and breadth.

Preconceived ideas from both staff and students are also challenged by the presence of an AIEO. One teacher from the study expressed the opinion that it was easier to challenge the negative stereotypes of Aboriginal people when there was an Aboriginal student in the class as it was clear they did not fit the stereotype. Therefore, the presence of an AIEO at every school would be evidence that the negative stereotypes do not reflect all Aboriginal people. Their role would be to not only support staff but act as a cultural ambassador.

2. Recognition of Aboriginal cultures in all schools

A continuous awareness of Aboriginal cultures is vital in combating the negative stereotypes of the mainstream media. Recognition can come in the form of acknowledgement of

traditional owners at every assembly and cultural activities during NAIDOC (National Aboriginal and Islanders Day Observance Committee) and Harmony week. This is particularly important at schools with low numbers of Aboriginal students as it is a positive reflection of the Aboriginal community.

3. A strategy for better time management by teachers

One clear frustration for teachers emanating from the study was the lack of time for teaching all the content required of them. As suggested earlier, an AIEO can help mitigate this by taking on the organisation of excursions, taking classes, organising guest speakers, and general help with resourcing. The study also found professional learning that explicitly supported teacher programming and could be easily adapted to their teaching style was more beneficial than typical professional learning sessions.

As evidenced in the study many teachers lacked the background knowledge and knowledge of how to approach teaching Aboriginal curriculum content. Therefore, an integrated approach across learning areas could not only help with time management but also give more opportunity for in-depth coverage of Aboriginal curriculum content.

4. Mandatory professional learning for Aboriginal curriculum content

This study found that teachers are severely lacking in Aboriginal curriculum content knowledge base. Knowledge was one of the key areas which the study found would increase teacher confidence in teaching Aboriginal curriculum content. One way to address this issue would be to make professional learning of Aboriginal issues, culture and history mandatory for all teachers. The professional learning would also need to be ongoing, with follow up professional learning to reinforce the information.

Although AITSL have provided some resources there needs to be more rigorous, proactive support and monitoring of these standards throughout schooling systems in order to increase the knowledge base for Aboriginal curriculum content. More training would need to be provided to staff at schools and university to monitor and provide training for teachers.

5. More mandatory university units on Aboriginal culture for all education students

From the study it was clear that teachers had little to no access to units on Aboriginal perspectives during their time at university. Most courses only offered one elective unit on Aboriginal education with a focus on teaching Aboriginal students. Those teachers from the study who had more knowledge of Aboriginal culture had completed Diploma of Education and so their undergraduate degree included units on Aboriginal culture.

During the process of this study all universities in Western Australia now have one to four mandatory units on Aboriginal education. This recognises the importance of understanding Aboriginal perspectives in pre-service learning. The benefits of these units is that the more culturally competent teachers are at the graduate level, the better influence they can have on teaching Aboriginal curriculum content and working effectively with Aboriginal students and communities. They may also bring their knowledge to their colleagues who may not have had the opportunity to take units in cultural competency during their undergraduate degrees.

One unit on Aboriginal education, however, will not be enough to challenge colonial stereotypes which have become deeply ingrained in many Australian's values and attitudes. Students who hold colonial values will need to be challenged multiple times in order to reach cultural competency. Implementing Aboriginal perspectives across many units would not mean it would have to be the primary focus of the unit but could be embedded throughout it. This would require more university educators to have a high level of cultural competency.

7.2 Futures

When we look to the future we hope that it will be better for all of us. To create a society where we are all treated equally involves us looking at where the system fails minority groups. The education system has been guilty of this in the past and unfortunately as found in this study does not yet challenge colonial values widely and consistently in the schools that were involved. While it is left up to the individual teacher to decide what and how they teach Aboriginal curriculum content without adequate support, this will continue to be the case.

Although this study has looked primarily at the Society and Environment department, it is not the only place where Aboriginal perspectives should be communicated. This study found that school culture is vital in developing an environment where Aboriginal culture is not only understood but celebrated. Just the mere presence of Aboriginal staff and students at schools helps break down negative stereotypes. For example, the critical role of the AIEO helps to portray the positive impact of the Aboriginal community. Schools need to take responsibility to create a connection to the Aboriginal community which is ongoing and will allow teachers and students to feel they are part of the wider Aboriginal community. Instances of 'Othering' (MacNaughton, 2001) of Aboriginal people are still taking place in high schools as this study found and until there is no longer an 'us and them' and only 'us' can a more inclusive education be provided. An indication of steps been taken to counter this 'Othering' can be seen when greater equality is represented in the mainstream media.

The mainstream media has the biggest impact on the majority of Australian's perception of Aboriginal people and its interests lie in making money and catering to the dominant group, leaving minorities to be presented as stereotypes. This is unlikely to change until the dominant group wants to see minorities, especially those of Indigenous heritage, portrayed equally. A clear way to facilitate this change is through education, and here lies another difficulty, the lack of teacher education in Aboriginal perspectives. Aboriginal curriculum content has only recently been added to the university teacher training curriculum so there are many teachers who have been through the system with little or no formal training in this area. This raises the concern that few teachers are qualified to teach Aboriginal curriculum

content, and the content may not be something everyone is capable of teaching in a culturally sensitive manner without the proper training.

The implementation of the AITSL standards 1.4 and 2.4 have sought to draw focus to Aboriginal students and understanding Aboriginal perspectives. However, they can only be effective if teachers are trained in cultural competency. New resources are being developed but they will have a minor impact unless they are made mandatory as some teachers who are not interested in Aboriginal perspectives will opt not to teach it given the choice as this study found. The standards are a move in the right direction but unless more is done Aboriginal curriculum content will still be avoided by schools and teachers.

It can be argued that many Australians are missing out on a wealth of knowledge and understanding of new perspectives by avoiding the difficulty of teaching Aboriginal curriculum content. In an effort to not offend we are in fact allowing a culture of avoidance to continue. Learning about Indigenous cultures offers possibilities for a more sustainable future through traditional interactions with the environment, and also it enables the dominant group to look at its treatment and interaction with minority groups. Australia is a multicultural society and it needs to improve its understanding and celebration of different cultures through inclusion of minority groups like our Indigenous Australians.

Australian governments have long recognised the disadvantage many Indigenous Australians face in society. Education has often been seen as the key to breaking this cycle of poverty. However, educating Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders is not enough, if true reconciliation is to take place then non-Indigenous people must be educated too. This means that *all* schools must teach Aboriginal perspectives regardless of the number of Aboriginal students and all teachers should have access to quality resources and the Aboriginal community. This is a benefit to every Australian. Furthermore, the AIEO program is fundamental to facilitating this change and further study into how this can be more effectively incorporated into schools should be explored. This is a clear way forward to developing cultural competency not just in teachers but in school cultures.

Exploring the role of the AIEO program in depth and examining the impact AIEOs could have on schools (with no reason under the current assessment of the need for AIEOs) was beyond

the scope of this study. Going the next step and examining the potential impact of an AIEO program in all schools is a direction which future studies should take and which could have huge implications in Australian schooling and society. Creating a positive perception of Indigenous Australians would surely help create a society we all would be proud to be a part of.

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Appendices

Appendix A: Table of Aboriginal Content in the Australian Curriculum History

Year Group	Focus	Overview Aboriginal Content	Depth Study Structure	Depth study Aboriginal Content
Year 7	The Ancient World	Migration out of Africa to other parts of the world including Australia	**1.Investigating the ancient past**	The nature of the sources for Ancient Australia and what they reveal about Australia's past in the ancient period, such as use of resources (ACDSEH031) • investigating the discovery of Mungo Woman in 1969 and the use of radiocarbon dating to draw conclusions about the longevity of human occupation at Lake Mungo • generating a range of questions to investigate a source (for example a shell midden in ancient Australia – where it was found, how long it was used for, what it reveals about technology and the use of environmental resources) The importance of conserving the remains of the ancient past, including the heritage of Aboriginal and Torres Strait

				Islander Peoples (ACDSEH148) **Mandatory**
			2. The Mediterranean world Choose one of the following: Egypt, **or** Greece, **or** Rome **3. The Asian World** Choose one of the following: India, **or** China	No Aboriginal Content
Year 8	The Ancient to the Modern World	No Aboriginal Content	**1. The Western and Islamic World** Choose one of the following:	No Aboriginal Content

			The Ottoman Empire, **or**	
			Renaissance Italy, **or**	
			The Vikings, **or**	
			Medieval Europe	
			2. **The Asia-Pacific World**	
			Choose between:	
			Angkor/Khmer Empire, **or**	
			Japan under the Shoguns' **or**	
			The Polynesian expansion across the Pacific	
			3. **Expanding contacts**	
			Choose between:	
			Mongol expansion, **or**	
			The Black Death in Asia, Europe and Africa, **or**	
			The Spanish Conquest of	

			the Americas	
Year 9	The Making of the Modern world	No specific Aboriginal Content Could include it in; The emergence and nature of significant economic, social and political ideas in the period, including nationalism	**1.Making a better world** Choose between: The Industrial Revolution(1750 -1914), **or** Progressive ideas and movements (1750 – 1918), **or** **Movements of peoples (1750 – 1901)**	**Movement of peoples (1750-1901)** Changes in the way of life of a group(s) of people who moved to Australia in this period, such as free settlers on the frontier in Australia (ACDSEH084) • Describing the impact of this group on the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples of the region. The short and long-term impacts of the movement of peoples during this period (ACDSEH085) • Evaluating the effects of the movement of peoples on the indigenous and immigrant populations **Elective**
			2. Australia and Asia Choose between: Asia and the world **or** **Making a Nation**	**Making a Nation** The extension of settlement, including the effects of contact (intended and unintended) between European settlers in Australia and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples (ACDEH020) • Explaining the effects of contact (for example the massacres of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people; their killing of sheep; the spread of European

				diseases) and categorising these effects as either intended or unintended.
				• Investigating the forcible removal of children from Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families in the late nineteenth century/early twentieth century (leading up to the Stolen Generations), such as the motivations for the removal of children, the practices and laws that were in place, and experiences of separation. **Elective**
			3. World War I	**World War 1 (1914-1918)** The places where Australians fought and the nature of warfare during World War 1, including the Gallipoli campaign (ACDSEH096) • Exploring the experiences of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples during the war. **Mandatory**
Year 10	The Modern World and Australia	Identifying the major movements for rights and freedom in the world (including the US Civil Rights	**1. World War II** [no Aboriginal content]	No Aboriginal content

		movement, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander movements, women's movements)		
			2. Rights and Freedoms	**Rights and Freedoms (1945- the present)** Background to the struggle of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples for rights and freedoms before 1965, including the 1938 Day of Mourning and the Stolen Generations (ACDSEH104) • Describing accounts of the past experiences of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples who were forcibly removed from their families. The US civil rights movement and its influence on Australia (ACDSEH105) • l outlining the Freedom Rides in the US, how they inspired civil rights campaigners in Australia, and how they became a turning point in the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples' struggle for rights and freedoms The significance of the following for the civil rights of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples: 1962 right to vote federally; 1967 Referendum; Reconciliation; Mabo decision; Bringing Them Home Report (the Stolen

				Generations), the Apology (ACDSEH134)
				describing the aims, tactics and outcomes of a particular event in the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples' struggle for rights and freedoms
				Methods used by civil rights activists to achieve change for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, and the role of ONE individual or group in the struggle (ACDSEH134)
				investigating the role of Charles Perkins in the Freedom Ride of 1965 and the efficacy of television in bringing the struggle for rights and freedoms to national attention
				The continuing nature of efforts to secure civil rights and freedoms in Australia and throughout the world, such as the Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (2007) (ACDSEH143)
				- identifying areas (for example education, health, work) that are the focus for continued civil rights action for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples - investigating the legacy of children's experiences in 'care' (their placement in orphanages, Children's

				Homes, foster care and other forms of out-of-home care), and the significance of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (1990)
			3. The globalising World Students choose one of the following: Popular Culture (1945 – present), **or** Migration Experiences (1945-present), **or** The environment movement	No Aboriginal content

Appendix B: Indigenous perspectives in curriculum

The information in the following table was taken from the curriculum council websites from each state from the society and environment program and/or history program.

State	Includes Indigenous Languages	Separate unit for Indigenous studies	Deals with contemporary issues	Includes Indigenous History and culture	Clear examples of what to teach
WA	No	No	Yes	Yes	Brief examples
SA	No	No	Yes	Yes	
TAS	No	No	Yes	Yes	No examples
QLD	No	No	Yes	Yes	Brief examples
NT	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
ACT	No	No	Yes	Yes	No examples
VIC	No	Includes a unit in Koori history	Yes	Yes	Detailed examples and advice for teachers
NSW	No	No	Yes	Yes	Yes

Appendix C: A map of where and when Aboriginal Content is taught in school and tertiary education

Institution	Postgraduate course	Undergraduate course	Diploma	Minor	Major	Primary Education	Secondary Education	Indigenous Edu. unit	Ind. Language unit	General cultural unit	Indigenous history	Contemporary culture	Indigenous lecturer	Compulsory unit in Edu.	Learning Area SOSE	English	Maths	LOTE	Health and PE	Science	Technology and Enterprise	Art/music/ drama
#ECU	y	y		y		y	y	y		Y	Y	Y		y								
#UWA	y	y					y	y														
#Curtin	y	y	y	y				y		y				y								
#Murdoch	y	y			y	y				y	y	y	y									
#Notre Dame	y	y				y	y	y	Y	Y	Y	Y	y									
DET						y	y			y					y	y	y	y	y	y	y	y
Indigenous Edu. and Intercultural Studies (yr 11, 12)						y				y	y	y										
*Indigenous case studies																						
lower primary (pre-yr5)						y				y					y	y						y
upper primary (yr6, 7)						y					y	y	y		y	y			y			y

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										y	y	y		y	y					y	y
lower high school (yr8-10)										y	y	y		y	y					y	y
upper high school (yr11, 12)										y	y			y	y					y	y

* Details available from: **Indigenous case studies. (n.d). Retrieved September, 2008, from:**

http://www.civicsandcitizenship.edu.au/cce/indigenous_case_studies,9020.html

Taken from the university websites

Appendix D: Number of undergraduate education core subjects with Indigenous content by university

The compulsory Indigenous specific course/unit offerings for pre-service teachers across all Universities are displayed visually in Figure [1]. There are 32 universities offering core units. Macquarie University and the Australian Catholic University are the outstanding performers offering 18 and 16 core units respectively with at least six universities who do not offer any core Indigenous subjects. (Moreton-Robinson, Singh, Kolopenuk, Robinson, & Walter, 2012, p. 21)
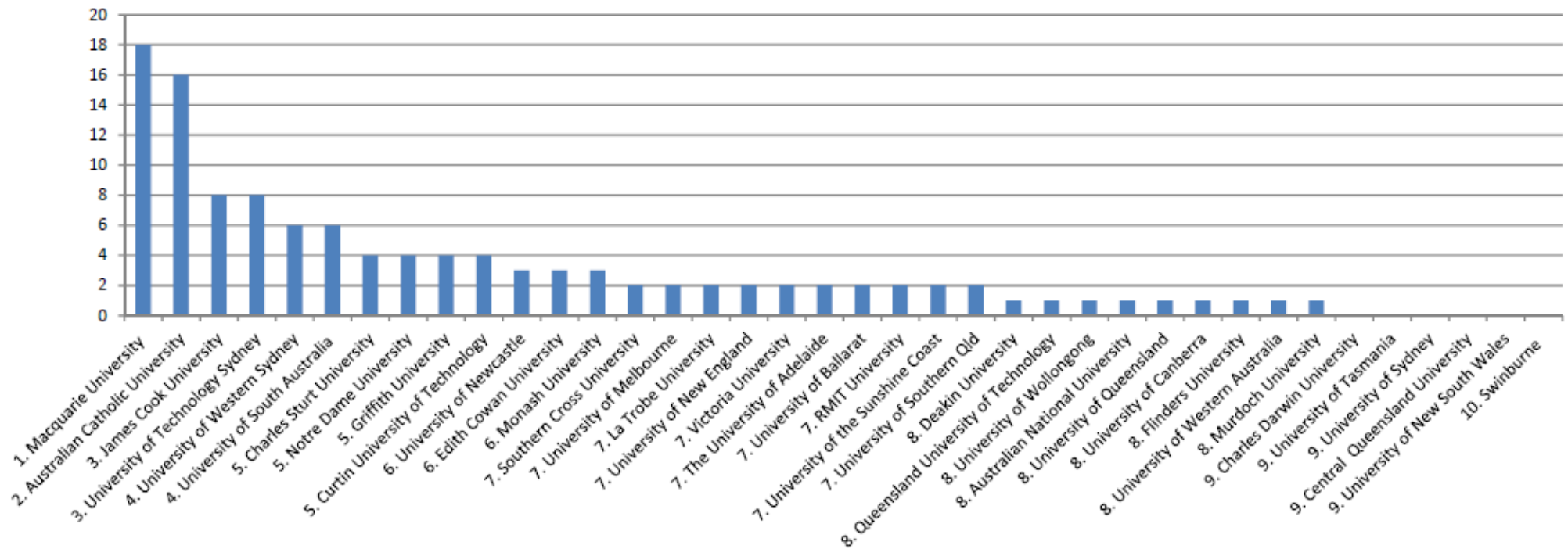
Figure 1.Appendix D: Number of undergraduate education core subjects with Indigenous content by university (Moreton-Robinson et al., 2012, p. 21)

Table 7.1. Appendix D: Western Australian university ranking in Number of undergraduate education core subjects with Indigenous content by university.

Western Australian University	Rank	Core Subjects with Indigenous content
Notre Dame University	5	4
Curtin University of Technology	5	4
Edith Cowan University	6	3
University of Western Australia	8	1
Murdoch University	8	1

Appendix E: Document analysis

Resources:

Some of these resources are directly from the teachers and what they use, others are what was available in the SOSE office but not necessarily used.

Table 1. Appendix E: Document analysis

Document Type	Description	Individual or shared
Resource package includes: Binder, posters, large story books	Nidja Noongar Boodjar Noonook Nyininy. Includes learning about the Noongar language and links into WA Curriculum Framework (the arts, health, Phys. ed, science, S and E) [mostly society and environment] **Contents** - Teacher's Resource Manual - Books and Games (six sets) - Small book set - Maps - Art poster sets - Picture card set - Elders set (posters and plays) - Southwest study tour [includes a map, and journal and a tour]	All teachers in the department had access to this resource and were given a folder containing information on Aboriginal studies.

Text Book	Tourist haven in the Daintree	Shared
Jacaranda SOSE, Studies of society and environment	Includes 2 paragraphs on 'Indigenous communities and the environment' p.225	enough for all students
	Includes Aboriginal Calender, north-custom Amhen Land	
	learning activities	
Text Book	Chapt. 2-8 Aborigines in the 19th century p.75-80	shared
Longman Framework – Society and Environment 2, 2001	- the first impact, the black war, Aboriginal fighting force, Reserves, Racism and Aborigines,	all students
	p.81 Aboriginal – case studies	
	- Reverand Threlkeld and the Awaba people	
	– Myall Creek massacre 1838	
	- Battle of Pinjarra 1834	
	- Fraser killings 1857	
	learning activities, assessment tasks	
As above but second edition 2006.	Includes more tasks and a little on the Aboriginal languages	shared
		all students
Textbook	5-7 p.126	Shared
Jacarander 4 – 2000, SOSE Studies	Uluru, Kakadu and Echoes of the dreaming	All students

- Meriam, Myths and Mabo

- Stolen children, stolen identities, bringing them home

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Towards Reconciliation?

Textbook Jacarander 2003	Internet linked – Atlas of discovery of Earths Societies and Environment	Shared All Students
	p.72 Prehistory [Australian]	
	p.74 Exploration	
Newspaper Article from 1989	Article White Lies – For more than 150 years the extraordinarily savage treatment of Aboriginal people has been hidden.	Individual
Student work essay	Aboriginal and Non –Aboriginal Interaction	Individual
	includes – Conflict, Protection, assimilation, Integration, Lad Rights and Self-Determination	
Planner Topic – Rights and Freedoms	**week 1** – Origins and significance of the universal declaration on human rights	Individual
	week 2 – Us civil rights movement	

	Week 3 – Aboriginal democratic struggles	
	Week 4 – What has been achieved with Aboriginal democratic struggles?	
	Week 5 – Inquiry task	
Student task : In-class essay	Aboriginal Democratic struggles	Individual
	Essay overview : Throughout Australia's hiostry there have been many democratic struggles that have aimed to achieve equal civil right for Aborigines.	
	Essay question: With reference to at least 3 Aboriginal democratic struggles that you have studied in class:	
	'evaluate the extent to which civil rights have been achieved for Indigenous Australians'	
Worksheet with DVD Aboriginal people in the world wars	DVD (Murdoch university production) [Difficult to get hold of not widely distributed]	Shared
	Worksheet Subheadings	

Worksheet Subheadings

- Introduction

- WWI

- ANZAC

- Recruitment

- Motivation

- the frontline

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	- back home - post war - millennium celebrations	
Comprehension	Gurindji Strike Students write a summary of the information	Individual
Article What was Australia's Stolen Generation	After reading the article the students then; - make a Sequence chart - Given a list of the rights of a child and provide evidence from the stolen generation that these rights were not provided. - Research information on the stolen generation and answer questions	Individual
Worksheet Fishbone	Identify the topic or issue and write in the head of the fish. Add relevant detail t the ribs depending on the way you wish to analyse the topic Topic : 1965 Freedom Rides [university students showing that racism stil existed in towns in NSW]	Individual
Multimedia Australian history multimedia collection – Western Australia	Includes: - The story of Australia - the coming of a new order	Shared – Available to all staff in S and E

- The Aboriginal people of Australia

- Australia's Yesterday

- Australian Nation Builders

Includes teachers guides and objectives

- reviews

Book	Contents	Shared – available to all staff
Significant People in Australian History: Volume 1 : Indigenous Australia	- The dreaming, Ancient and sacred sites, Language groups, communication and trade, Impact of invasion, cultural groups	
DVD Indigenous Law in Australia : The Facts and the Issues	The program investigates the long standing battle between traditional law and existing Australian legal system based on the British model	all
Textbook SOSE: Studies of Society and Environment : Australian History, 2000	**Chapter 1** -Aboriginal attitudes towards the Europeans - European attitudes towards the Aborigines - Frontier violence and Aboriginal resistance - Massacre and disease **Chapter 8** - Justice for Indigenous communities - the tent embassy and land rights in the 'lucky country' - land rights, governments and the legal system	shared

- white Australia has a black past

- deaths in custody

- Meriam, myths and Mabo

- a vicious cycle of disadvantage

- stolen children, stolen identities – bringing them home

- towards reconciliation?

- meeting the outcomes

Textbook	Contents

SOSE Alive History 2 : 2005

Chapter 1: First Australians

- stories … links across space and time

- the first landowners

- traditional lifestyles

- only hunters and gatherers

- contract

- deadly encounters

- massacre

- Hobart daily: Truganini now at peace

Appendix F: Interview Questions

Interview 1 Questions:

1. What background knowledge in Aboriginal cultures do you have?
2. How confident do you feel in teaching Aboriginal cultures, issues and history?
3. Do you have Aboriginal students in your class? How does this affect what you teach in terms of Aboriginal culture, issues and history?
4. What role do you think Aboriginal studies should take in the school curriculum?
5. What could improve/assist your teaching of the topic?
6. What training both pre-service and in-service have you had in this area?
7. Have you faced any challenges teaching this topic? Please describe them.
8. Have you had successes in teaching this topic? Please describe them.
9. Do you have Aboriginal colleagues or friends who you can go to for advice on the topic?

Interview 2 Questions:

1. Why did you decide to become a teacher?
2. Do you plan to continue sort of teaching, is that your career plan is teaching.
3. What do you think makes a good teacher?
4. Do you think you can still be a good teacher even if you don't have a lot of background knowledge in the particular subject area?
5. Do you think it's important to work well with other teachers?
6. How important do you think experience is in teaching?
7. Do student attitudes affect what and how you teach?
8. Do you ever have parents talk to you about what they want their kids to learn in the past?
9. Do you believe you can change student's opinions as a teacher?

Appendix G: Information and Consent Letter to Principals

![ECU Edith Cowan University logo]

Ms. Sarah Booth
Research Student
School of Education

Dear Principal,

Teaching Indigenous Content in Australian High Schools

My name is Sarah Booth and I am writing to you on behalf of Edith Cowan University .I am conducting a research project that aims to understand the challenges faced by non-Indigenous high school teachers in teaching Indigenous content, I would appreciate your help in developing this understanding. The project is being conducted as part of a Masters by Research degree at Edith Cowan University.

I would like to invite two of your teachers to take part in the project. This is because your school is in the Perth metropolitan area and your staff includes non-Indigenous teachers. Your school is one of two schools in Western Australia approached for their participation.

What does participation in the research project involve?

I seek access to two teachers who currently teach year 10 Society and Environment.

The teachers will be invited to participate in four interviews over the rest of the 2011 school year and the observation of one of their lessons. The interviews will be approximately one hour in length to take place in a mutually agreed upon location. Teachers will also be asked to provide any materials which contribute to their lessons such as lesson plans, worksheets and other resources.

I will keep the school's involvement in the administration of the research procedures to a minimum. However, it will be necessary for teachers to be interviewed on four separate occasions and the observation of one of their lessons.

To what extent is participation voluntary, and what are the implications of withdrawing that participation?

Participation in this research project is entirely voluntary. Participants may decline to answer any of the interview questions if they so wish. Further, they may decide to withdraw from this study at any time without any negative consequences by advising the researcher. All the participants data can be withdrawn from the study before the end of 2011.

There will be no consequences relating to any decision by an individual or the school regarding participation, other than those already described in this letter. Decisions made will not affect the relationship with the research team or Edith Cowan University.

What will happen to the information collected, and is privacy and confidentiality assured?

Information that identifies anyone will be removed from the data collected. The data is then stored securely in the locked storage facility in the Institute of Education at Joondalup, and can only be accessed by researchers associated with this project. The data will be stored for a minimum period of 5 years, after which it will be destroyed. This will be achieved by shredding hard copies of interviews and notes and deleting computer files.

The identity of participants and the school will not be disclosed at any time, except in circumstances that require reporting under the Department of Education *Child Protection* policy, or where the research team is legally required to disclose that information.

Participant privacy, and the confidentiality of information disclosed by participants, is assured at all other times.

The data will be used only for this project, and will not be used in any extended or future research without first obtaining explicit written consent from participants.

Consistent with Department of Education policy, a summary of the research findings will be made available to the participating site(s) and the Department. You can expect this to be available April 2012.

Is this research approved?

The research has beenreviewed and approved by the ECU Human Research Ethics Committee and has met the policy requirements of the Department of Education as indicated in the attached letter.

Do all members of the research team who will be having contact with children have their Working with Children Check?

Yes. Under the Working with Children (Criminal Record Checking) Act 2004, people undertaking work in Western Australia that involves contact with children must undergo a Working with Children Check. The documents attached to this letter include a list of the research team who will be having contact with children through your school, along with current evidence of their checks.

Who do I contact if I wish to discuss the project further?

If you would like to discuss any aspect of this study with a member of the research team, please contact me on the number provided below. If you wish to speak with an independent person about the conduct of the project, please contact Kim Gifkins at Tel: (+61 8) 6304 2170 or*research.ethics@ecu.edu.au*.

How do I indicate my willingness for the school to be involved?

If you have had all questions about the project answered to your satisfaction, and are willing for the school to participate, please complete the **Consent Form** on the following page.

This information letter is for you to keep.

Yours Sincerely,

Ms. Sarah Booth
Student Investigator
Edith Cowan University
Tel: 043033215
Email:srbooth@our.ecu.edu.au

Edith Cowan University

Consent Form

- I have read this document and understand the aims, procedures, and risks of this project, as described within it.

- For any questions I may have had, I have taken up the invitation to ask those questions, and I am satisfied with the answers I received.

- I am willing for this school to become involved in the research project, as described.

- I understand that participation in the project is entirely voluntarily.

- I understand that the school is free to withdraw its participation at any time, without affecting the relationship with the research team or Edith Cowan University.

- *[Please insert a statement regarding whether and up to what point data can be withdrawn from the study]*

- I understand that this research may be published in as a thesis, in a journal and presented at a conference, provided that the participants or the school are not identified in any way.

- I understand that the school will be provided with a copy of the findings from this research upon its completion.

Name of Site Manager (printed):

Signature: _____

Date: /   /

Appendix H: Information and Consent Letter to Teachers

Dear Teacher,

Teaching Indigenous Content in Australian High Schools

My name is Sarah Booth and I am writing to you on behalf of Edith Cowan University. I am conducting a research project that aims to understand the challenges faced by non-Indigenous high school teachers in teaching Indigenous content, I would appreciate your help in developing this understanding. The project is being conducted as part of a Masters by Research degree at Edith Cowan University.

I would like to invite you to take part in the project. As a SOSE teacher of year 10 I would like to include you in this study. I believe that because you are currently teaching, you are best suited to speak on the various issues involved in teaching Indigenous content. Your school is one of two schools in Western Australia approached for this project.

What does participating in the research involve?

You are invited to participate in four interviews over the rest of the 2010 school year and the observation of one of your lessons. The interviews will be approximately one hour in length to take place in a mutually agreed upon location. With your permission, the interview will be audio recorded to facilitate collection of information, and later transcribed for analysis. Shortly after the interview has been completed, I will send you a copy of the transcript to give you an opportunity to confirm the accuracy of our conversation and to add or clarify any points that you wish. You will also be asked to provide any materials which contribute to your lessons such as lesson plans, worksheets and resources.

Do I have to take part?

No. Participating in this research project is entirely voluntary. This decision should always be made completely freely. All decisions made will be respected by members of the research team without question.

What if I wanted to change my initial decision?

If you wish to participate, the decision will need to be made by the end of term three for you to be included in the project.

Once a decision is made to participate, you can change your mind at any time.

All your data can be withdrawn from the study before the end of 2011.

There will be no consequences relating to any decision you make regarding participation, other than those already described in this letter. These decisions will not affect your relationship with your Principal.

What will happen to the information I give, and is privacy and confidentiality assured?

Information that identifies anyone will be removed from the data collected. The data is then stored securely in the locked storage facility in the Institute of Education at Joondalup, and can only be accessed by researchers

associated with this project. The data will be stored for a minimum period of 5 years, after which it will be destroyed. This will be achieved by shredding hard copies of interviews and notes and deleting computer files.

Participant privacy, and the confidentiality of information disclosed by participants, is assured at all times, except in circumstances where the research team is legally required to disclose that information or that require reporting under the Department of Education Child Protection policy.

The data will be used only for this project, and will not be used in any extended or future research without first obtaining explicit written consent from you.

It is intended that the findings of this study will be published in a thesis and may appear in a journal or presented at a conference. A summary of the research findings will also be made available upon completion of the project. You can access this by emailing or calling the number below, and expect it to become available in April, 2012.

Is this research approved?

The research has been reviewed and approved by the ECU Human Research Ethics Committee and has met the policy requirements of the Department of Education.

Who do I contact if I wish to discuss the project further?

If you would like to discuss any aspect of this study with a member of the research team, please contact me on the number provided below. If you wish to speak with an independent person about how the project is being conducted or was conducted, please contact Kim Gifkins at Tel: (+61 8) 6304 2170
or*research.ethics@ecu.edu.au*

How do I become involved?

If you have had all questions about the project answered to your satisfaction, and are willing to become involved, please complete the **Consent Form** on the next page.

This information letter is for you to keep.

Yours Sincerely,

Ms. Sarah Booth
Student Investigator
Edith Cowan University
Tel: 043033215
Email:srbooth@our.ecu.edu.au

Edith Cowan University

Consent Form

- I have read and understood the information letter about the project, or have had it explained to me in language I understand.

- I have taken up the invitation to ask any questions I may have had, and am satisfied with the answers I received.

- I understand that participation in the project is entirely voluntarily.

- I am willing to become involved in the project, as described.

- I understand I am free to withdraw that participation at any time without affecting my relationship with my Principal.

- *[Please insert a statement regarding whether and up to what point data can be withdrawn from the study]*

- I give permission for my contribution to this research to be *[insert how the findings will be reported, e.g. "published in a journal'],* provided that I or the school is not identified in any way.

- I understand that I can request a summary of findings once the research has been completed.

Name of Participant (printed): _____

Signature of Participant: _____   Date: /   /