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WILL THE REAL EVIDENCE PLEASE STAND UP:

POLITICISING QUALITATIVE RESEARCH

Balancing the Books: Indigenous Australian Perspectives

in Teacher Education

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Protocol

We acknowledge the Gimuy-Yidinji people of the Cairns region on whose land the conference was held and also the Boonwurrung and Wurundjeri peoples of the Kulin Nation on whose land the authors live and work. We offer our respect to the Elders past and present.

Abstract

Social Science, History, Geography and Economics school and university curricula, are renowned for giving unbalanced presentations of Indigenous Australia. Pre-service teachers (PSTs) come to university with little knowledge of historical and contemporary Indigenous circumstances. In the Bachelor of Education (B.Ed.) at Victoria University (VU) we are working towards restoring the balance. In 2009 in a fourth-year Unit the authors encouraged PSTs to include Indigenous themes in curriculum planning through Civics and Citizenship education. Currently we are implementing a new second-year Unit, Re-Thinking Australian Studies, which encourages the establishment of decolonised classrooms.
At VU PSTs engage in year-long school placements, one day per week, plus two 2-week blocks, which allows exploration in University tutorials of school-based experience in curriculum development. PSTs are encouraged to question, investigate, reflect on and theorise their own and their students’ learning experiences. In *Re-thinking Australian Studies* we seek to articulate and analyse questions regarding appropriate content and criteria for reviewing resources for the inclusion of Indigenous Australian themes in learning and teaching activities.

Our paper explores the collaboration between Indigenous and non-Indigenous teacher educators working towards the implementation of policies whereby

> All young Australians become…Active and informed citizens…[Who] understand and acknowledge the value of indigenous (sic) cultures and possess the knowledge, skills and understanding to contribute to, and benefit from, reconciliation between Indigenous and Non-Indigenous Australians. (Ministerial Council on Education, Employment, Training and Youth Affairs 2008, Goal 2).

**Education Policy**

For the past twenty years bi-partisan State and Commonwealth education policies have been developed to support Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students and also to advocate the inclusion of Indigenous history and contemporary themes in the education of all students. In 1989 the National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Policy wanted schools to enable Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students at all levels of education to have an appreciation of their history, cultures and identity; and too provide all Australian students with an understanding of and respect for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander traditional and contemporary cultures.

The National Report on the *Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody* in 1991 acknowledged the power of education to bring about positive social change, and included the following recommendations

> 295 (a) All teacher training courses include courses which will enable student teachers to understand that Australia has an Aboriginal history and Aboriginal viewpoints on social, cultural and historical matters, and to teach the curriculum which reflects those matters;
(b) In-service training courses for teachers be provided so that teachers may improve their skill, knowledge and understanding to teach curricula which incorporate Aboriginal viewpoints on social, cultural and historical matters; and

(c) Aboriginal people should be involved in the training courses both at student teacher and at in-service level.

In 2000, the objectives of the education strategy of the Council for Reconciliation’s National Strategy to Sustain the Reconciliation Process hoped that:

- Australians increasingly understand Australia’s history including perspectives of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, acknowledge the past and value the wealth and diversity of our shared cultures and heritage.
- Governments, organisations and individuals increasingly identify and remedy behaviour and practices that disadvantage Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples on the basis of race.
- Schools, institutions, governments and organisations increasingly operate in ways that respect the cultural values of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.

Victoria University supports the Council for Aboriginal Reconciliation's vision for a 'united Australia which respects this land of ours, values the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander heritage and provides justice and equity for all' (Victoria University 2011).

The Bachelor and Post-Graduate Units in the VU School of Education all place acknowledgement of traditional Indigenous ownership of country at the beginning of their Course Guides. Over the past ten years the School has developed policies and considered how to include Indigenous history and contemporary themes in Units of Study; but in the same way as primary and secondary schools have been patchy in their implementation of policy, so too have universities. Indigenous history and contemporary circumstances, and the work of Indigenous educators, are not widely known, explored or valued in the academy.

Later in this paper we will examine the development of initiatives in the VU School of Education, in particular the work the authors have been doing in the second and fourth years of the B.Ed. But firstly we wish to explain our political commitments, our epistemological perspectives and our understandings of the contexts of power, discourse and resistance.
Epistemological perspectives

Whitehess is constitutive of the epistemology of the West; it is an invisible regime of power that secures hegemony through discourse and has material effect in everyday life. Moreton-Robinson, A. (Ed.) (2004). *Whitening race: essays in social and cultural criticism*. Canberra: Aboriginal Studies Press, p.75.

All peoples live by their cultures and all Indigenous cultures are under attack by the multiple tentacles of an intruding white society which positions its own cultural paradigms as the ‘norm’ to which all other peoples must aspire. Dé Ishtar, Z. (2005). *Holding Yawulyu: White culture and Black women’s law*. North Melbourne, Vic., Spinifex Press, p. xxvi.

These two Australian researchers, Geonpul scholar Professor Aileen Moreton-Robinson, whose country is Minjerribah (Stradbroke Island), and non-Indigenous scholar and activist Zohl dé Ishtar, point to a powerful paradigm that camouflages the continuing, though often unconscious, attempts by the ‘mainstream’ to continue to assimilate the Indigenous peoples of Australia.

In our work we are striving to develop together, and with our students, ways to challenge this paradigm. We provide opportunities for PSTs to research and to develop activities for their own students which challenge the idea that Indigenous peoples did not, and do not, combat attempts to appropriate their lands and cultures; for example

- the resistance of Indigenous warriors and leaders such as Pemulwuy and Yangan, William Barak, Bill Ferguson, Geraldine Briggs, Margaret Tucker, Pearl Gibbs, Oodgeroo Noonuccul, Lisa Bellear, Jacqui Katona, Mick and Patrick Dodson.
- the meaning and significance of the lyrics of songs such as *From Little Things Big Things Grow* (Carmody and Kelly 1993) and *Treaty* (Yothu Yindi 1996)

We understand that the involvement of non-Indigenous educators in teaching about Indigenous history and contemporary issues is contested ground. Many Indigenous scholars and activists question whether non-Indigenous educators should be involved in presenting material that involves Indigenous knowledge and pedagogies. We note Torres Strait Islander
Professor Martin Nakata’s warning that the power and integrity of Indigenous epistemologies may be diluted ‘in the rush to engineer a quick resolution of the intersection of these different knowledge systems’ (Nakata, 2004, p.11).

And we are mindful of critiques by scholars such as Maori Professor Linda Tuhiwai Smith, who reject western hegemony whereby ‘research…is imbued with an ‘attitude’ and a ‘spirit’ which assumes a certain ownership of the entire world’ (Tuhiwai Smith, 1999).

In his chapter on the Repercussions of Representation, under the heading of Ethics in the Classroom, Gordon Chambers insists that Indigenous peoples must be allowed to represent themselves in classrooms, not through exotic displays of Indigenous “culture” but by ‘opening up the space for the voice of Indigenous peoples to speak the truth of who they really are’:

This does not divest teachers of the responsibility to use their position to overcome negative and limited presentations of Indigenous peoples through the limited view that only Indigenous peoples should represent Indigenous peoples. Rather it entails an understanding of the importance of both approaches and a use of the two in a complimentary manner (Chambers, 2005, p.162-164).

We see power of working together, as Indigenous and non-Indigenous colleagues, as a contribution to the struggle to challenge the hegemony of the dominant discourse that ‘white is ‘right’ so that PSTs can recognise the co-existence of Indigenous and non-Indigenous histories, contemporary experience, ways of knowing and ways of being which include aspirations for the future:

… Indigenous pedagogy, properly analysed, explored and theorised on the basis of Indigenous values, philosophies and methodologies, has great potential to effect positive educational change for all learners (Biermann & Townsend-Cross 2008, p.146).

We explicitly reject any model that situates Indigenous knowledge and experience as part of a deficit theory or practice of learning. We encourage PSTs to reject the colonial discourse whereby Indigenous knowledge and experience is seen as peripheral, rather than critical, to ‘more easily find[ing] each other’ as Australians sharing the land on which we live and learn (Dodson 2009).
Victoria University Praxis Inquiry

We are not only presenting unknown stories of Australian history and encouraging PSTs to see opportunities across the curriculum to put State and Commonwealth education policies into practice. We are also scaffolding opportunities for them to ‘analyse, articulate and reflect on important questions regarding the inclusion within teaching and learning of information about Indigenous Australia’ (Re-thinking Australian Studies Course Aims), both for themselves as teachers and in their curriculum planning for their students – so that they are developing both appropriate content and engaging ways of learning and teaching.

The teacher education curriculum at Victoria University that began in 1985 is based on three fundamental principles:

- Education as practice-theory
- Social justice as the ethical reference point, and as a result
- A commitment to support the work of teachers in schools characterised by socio-economic disadvantage and cultural diversity (Kruger & Cherednichenko 2006, p.2).

These principles inform the Praxis Inquiry protocol, the epistemological underpinning of the B.Ed. at VU. Praxis Inquiry entreats us to start with pre-service teacher’s questions. This means supporting PSTs to reflect on personal observations and school-based experiences and encouraging them to use their questions to support and extend their research, their professional reading and their curriculum planning. The year-long school placements provide great opportunity for this ongoing reflection.

However counterintuitive it may appear, teacher education is authentic when student teachers, teachers and teacher educators focus their collective practices on the learning of school students. Teacher education should primarily be committed to the learning of school students. In the process of taking on a developing responsibility for school student learning, student teachers will generate their own learning and practical understanding and professional competence! (Kruger & Cherednichenko 2006, p.7).

The boxes below, developed in a paper detailing work in the third year of the VU B.Ed., outline the dimensions of the Praxis Inquiry Protocol:
PRACTICE DESCRIBED
Pre-service teachers describe practice (cases, artefacts, anecdotes) and identify questions. What do I wonder about when I think about this event?

PRACTICE EXPLAINED
Pre-service teachers seek to discover professional explanations for their practice (literature, research, mentors & colleagues, teacher education). How can I understand this practice?

PRACTICE THEORISED
Pre-service teachers consider the overriding question: Who am I becoming as an educator as I integrate these understandings and beliefs into my practice? Who am I becoming as a teacher?

PRACTICE CHANGED
Pre-service teachers plan action. How can I act to improve learning for students and improve my capacity as an educator? What are my new questions?

The four dimensions of Praxis Inquiry

(Gudjonsdottir, 2007) This reflection and consideration of future action also connects to Cochran-Smith and Lytle’s insight that

To bring about instructional reform, teacher’s potential to be thoughtful and deliberate architects of teaching and learning in their own classrooms must be tapped and supported (Cochran-Smith and Lytle, 1993, p.101).

Starting with PSTs’ questions also opens authentic spaces for the examination of shameful events from Australian history and contemporary circumstances. In our experience, when PSTs are supported to develop their own questions they not only ask “shouldn’t we be calling the settlement of Australia an invasion?” They also come to understanding the power of providing opportunities for their own students to ask questions, and of providing research opportunities that use multi-literacies.

Curriculum and Innovation

In 2006, the then Head of the VU School of Education, Associate Professor Tony Kruger, approached staff members Claire Kelly and Neil Hooley, whose work had demonstrated an interest and level of knowledge and experience of working with Indigenous colleagues in various educational settings, to write the curriculum for the Civics and Citizenship elements of the fourth year Curriculum and Innovation Unit, responding to the Victorian Essential Learning Standards (VELS), the Preparatory to Year 10 curriculum for Victorian schools. In its Civics and Citizenship domain VELS calls for learning and teaching to enable students to ‘evaluate the impact of colonisation on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities and the fight for civil and political rights and land rights’.

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Six years ago, in beginning to implement the inclusion of Indigenous themes, non-Indigenous lecturers were faced with a huge task. Earlier, in the Aboriginal Studies program at Northern Metropolitan College of TAFE, Claire had been introduced to resources such as the films *Lousy Little Sixpence* (Morgan 1983) and *Babukiweria* ((Atherden, 1986)) and to the importance of personal life stories as ‘ways of knowing’.

However appointment of Indigenous lecturers to the School of Education in 2008 accelerated this progress but also added a dimension that would not otherwise be possible. Their knowledge and experience of both challenged and supported PSTs to see the reality of the history and contemporary circumstances of the Indigenous peoples of Australia. Claire and another colleague Bill Eckersley began working together with Davina. They saw clearly that Davina’s knowledge and insights from her life experiences as an Indigenous person, as well as her academic qualifications as a teacher and in Aboriginal Studies greatly expanded our opportunities to present meaningful questions and frameworks for PST research, seminar discussions and assessments.

After presentations at School of Education retreats and at seminars of interested colleagues, Davina was charged with the development of a core humanities unit for the second year of the B.Ed., where the PSTs would learn to respect and include Indigenous themes throughout their teacher training, rather seeing these issues as add-ons at the end of their degrees. The Unit would build on the PI Protocol so that the PSTs think about their thinking rather than waiting for knowledge to be bestowed upon them.

Using Australian Indigenous perspectives within the humanities enables students to develop deep and nuanced intellectual positions and to critically and analytically engage with historical and contemporary issues in Australian society. Australian Indigenous Studies has an evolving disciplinary identity that incorporates and acknowledges diverse cultural frameworks, allowing students to consider issues from complex and multifaceted perspectives.

**Re-Thinking Australian Studies**

The development of *Rethinking Australian Studies* has been guided by State and Commonwealth education policies cited earlier, by our experience throughout our lives as teachers, and later teacher educators, committed to challenging the silencing of the stories of invasion, genocide, resistance and survival, the demands for recognition of Indigenous
sovereignty, and the fact that the Aboriginal peoples and Torres Strait Islander peoples are of today and tomorrow not only yesterday.

Self-determination within the parameters of a modern nation state is possible. In international circles such a position is countenanced and was strongly supported by the previous [Keating Labor Government] in discussions and negotiations on self-determination for Indigenous peoples (Dodson 1996, p.13).

Drawing on Australian Indigenous perspectives within the humanities enables students to develop deep and nuanced intellectual positions and to critically and analytically engage with historical and contemporary issues in Australian society. Australian Indigenous Studies has an evolving disciplinary identity that incorporates and acknowledges diverse cultural frameworks, allowing students to consider issues from complex and multifaceted perspectives.

Through our work the authors are politicising teacher education by bringing issues concerning Indigenous Australia to the attention of the pre-service teachers with whom we work. They will be general classroom teachers from preparatory grades to upper High School, or subject specialists in primary or secondary schools. Some will be physical education teachers. These are often our most challenging students. The attitude is sometimes expressed of ‘what has this got to do with us?’ We point to the first sporting team to represent Australia overseas (Australian Aboriginal cricket team in England, 1868), to Peter Norman, Williamstown High school teacher, who proudly supported his fellow medal winners, Tommy Smith and John Carlos in their Black power salute at the 1968 Olympics by wearing an Olympic Project for Human Rights badge with them on the dais. We suggest that a rained-out double period of P.E. would be a great time to play the film *Salute* (Norman, M. 2008), as well as in a general classroom.

We look at photographs from the Australian War Memorial of some of the thousands of Indigenous Australians who fought in all the wars that Australia has been involved in, even though they didn’t get the vote or equal pay or soldier settlement land when they returned. and at Indigenous filmmaker Richard Frankland’s 1991 film, *Harry’s War*, to support student research through hearing Indigenous perspectives. We explore historical events such as the walk off in 1938 from Cummeragunga, the 1938 Day of Mourning, the Freedom Ride, the 1967 Referendum, the Gurindji walk off from Wave Hill station and the Aboriginal Tent Embassy. And we examine the question of ‘whiteness’ through looking at the privileges that
accrue to members of the dominant culture. The hidden curriculum and the conveying of the values of the dominant culture by teachers, is seductive and pervasive, even when all the PSTs may not be ‘white’. VU sits in the western suburbs of Melbourne with high migrant, working class, and indeed Indigenous communities.

On successful completion of *Rethinking Australian Studies*, PSTs are expected to be able to:

- analyse, articulate and reflect on important questions regarding the inclusion within teaching and learning of information about Indigenous Australia;
- use established criteria for the review of resources for the inclusion of Indigenous Australian themes in teaching and learning activities
- identify appropriate content for the inclusion within teaching and learning of information about Indigenous Australia
- implement pedagogy and assessment based on multiliteracies
- reflect upon the influence of teacher and/or student culture on the inclusion within teaching and learning of information about Indigenous Australia
- provide a safe and secure classroom environment when teaching and learning content includes sensitive and/or contentious issues
- establish decolonised classroom environments.

We are trying to encourage PSTs to see the co-existence and harmony of Indigenous and non-Indigenous pedagogies. We explore Howard Gardner’s Multiple Intelligences and the ways in which teachers can value and promote multi-literacies. We also note Gardner’s commitment to the ethics of learning and teaching

> I want my children to understand the world, but not just because the world is fascinating and the human mind is curious.

> I want them to understand it so that they will be positioned to make it a better place. Knowledge is not the same as morality, but we need to understand if we are to avoid past mistakes and move in productive directions.

> An important part of that understanding is knowing who we are and what we can do (Gardner 1999, pp180-181).

We explore with PSTs the *8 Ways* pedagogy framework that allows teachers to include Aboriginal perspectives by using Aboriginal learning techniques. The developers of this
framework, the Western New South Wales Regional Aboriginal Education Team, NSW Education Department staff and James Cook University’s School of Indigenous Studies, encourage all teachers to explore the themes and ways of knowing represented in this framework, so that ‘focus can remain on core curriculum content while embedding Aboriginal perspectives in every lesson. The 8 ways can be used by anyone, to work with Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal students’ (Yunkaporta, T., Shillingsworth, D., Kirby, M. & Turnbull 2010)

8 Aboriginal Ways of Learning (http://8ways.wikispaces.com/)

We also look at the What Works program, which Davina worked on as a consultant, and we note that the principles developed by Indigenous educators working with Indigenous students and families to support literacy and numeracy are universal principles that can be used for all students – the opposite to a deficit model of learning and teaching:

1. All children are capable, resourceful and valuable in their own right

2. All children have the right to realise their potential and all can succeed given the appropriate support and resources

3. Children learn best when their diversity of experience, in home and community is recognised and built upon in other settings

4. The role of the family and community is critical in children’s learning and development

5. Children’s successful development transcends sectoral boundaries and includes children learning and developing in all settings
6. The role of the early childhood educator and the relevance of early childhood curriculum are critical factors in influencing children’s learning and development.

Research

In 2012-13 the authors intend to conduct a major research project using student data to reflect on Re-Thinking Australian Studies, its epistemology and pedagogy, as we continue our discourse for resistance and empowerment.
References


http://www.yothuyindi.com/music/treaty.html


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1 The General Conference of the International Labour Organisation in its 76th Session on June 1989 endorsed the Indigenous and Tribal Peoples Convention, 1989; stating PART I. GENERAL POLICY Article 1

1. This Convention applies to:

(a) tribal peoples in independent countries whose social, cultural and economic conditions distinguish them from other sections of the national community, and whose status is regulated wholly or partially by their own customs or traditions or by special laws or regulations;

(b) peoples in independent countries who are regarded as indigenous on account of their descent from the populations which inhabited the country, or a geographical region to which the country belongs, at the time of conquest or colonisation or the establishment of present state boundaries and who, irrespective of their legal status, retain some or all of their own social, economic, cultural and political institutions.

2. Self-identification as indigenous or tribal shall be regarded as a fundamental criterion for determining the groups to which the provisions of this Convention apply.