

June blog – Embedding Indigenous Perspectives 25 - 29 June 2007

Guest Blogger Jean Phillips, Oodgeroo Unit QUT

How to participate

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Embedding Indigenous perspectives

Welcome to the LTSU blog site. The June blog is titled '**Embedding Indigenous perspectives**' and our **guest blogger is Jean Phillips, Oodgeroo Unit, QUT.**

Jean Phillips is a Murri woman from the Wakka Wakka and Goreng Goreng language groups of south-east Queensland. Originally trained as a primary school teacher, Jean has been working in the Oodgeroo Unit at the Queensland University of Technology, Kelvin Grove Campus, Brisbane, since 1996: providing student support and teaching in the area of critical culture studies, education, Indigenous literature and politics. Jean's central research and personal interest is the interaction between Indigenous knowledge systems and the Western colonial tradition particularly with regard to colonial identity construction, intellectual authority, pedagogy and spirituality.

Reply: The Embedding Process

Hi Marilyn,

Thank you for your questions. In response to your first one regarding Graduate Capabilities, please note the attachment. It is an excerpt from a graduate attributes table I developed for the subject I've mentioned. Each attribute was aligned with the objectives of the subject, as per standard practice, but what I wanted to do was to have the pedagogy and philosophy of the subject guide their re-interpretation rather than using the attributes to direct how the subject responded to them. In effect, Indigenous knowledge and perspectives do not have established 'scaffolding' (please excuse my use of this jargon!) to support their delivery and uptake by students. For example, at the foundational level, there are words and phrases readily accepted by the academy, and elsewhere, for which meanings or understandings are presumed to be universal: research, science, history, maths, education, australia, Aborigine, house, freedom, social services to name but a few. So in a sense "generic" skills as they apply to particular disciplines is very often absent of any presumption

of Indigenous knowledge, presence or perspectives. Take this graduate attribute for an Information Technology course for example: "IT21 graduates will be capable of: Critically assessing, designing or creating, analysing and solving problems appropriate to the field of information technology". Is there a natural and immediate assumption that Indigenous perspectives has anything at all to do with this generic capability? If you consider such questions as - What is knowledge? how is knowledge known, shared and authorised? by whom? who has a right to speak? who has a right to know? who has no right to know? - and consider through which culture they are defined and mediated then this attribute becomes anything but 'generic'. It's possible reinterpret any graduate capability through a lens where Aboriginal peoples' knowledges and experiences are visible and considered important. This means that there are SO MANY spaces to consider as ripe for re-centralising Indigenous perspectives/knowledge into what we understand to be general Australian, discipline specific course content.

See attachment below

2005 Selected Graduate Practitioner Attributes (or Education Practitioner Attributes) – Bachelor of Education. (NB: The Faculty is in the process of changing these – again – in 2007)

- I. gathers, forms, critiques and constructs new knowledge from a variety of sources (1.1)
- II. retrieves, evaluates and presents information using appropriate technologies and demonstrates personal proficiencies in multi-literacies (1.3)
- III. as a scholar-educator-researcher, adopts a problem-solving and inquiry-based approach to your own learning and that of others (1.4)
- IV. demonstrates an awareness of how to create supportive learning environments that meet the learning and developmental needs of a diverse range of students (3.3)
- V. develops skills and knowledge to work within legal and ethical frameworks that promote and celebrate diversity, equity and inclusivity (4.1)

Objective and EPA	Integration and Critique
<p>Knowledge of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander history and contemporary issues and how they impact on students in the classroom.</p> <p>EPA 1.1, 1.3, 1.4</p>	<p>Research <i>about</i> Indigenous Australian peoples and communities has been constant, and often inappropriate. Through situating the development of ideas about the position of Indigenous peoples socially, historically and culturally, students will develop basic critical research skills that respect, value and observe Indigenous protocol. They should also be encouraged to integrate the developing understandings about themselves – as culturally and historically located producers of knowledge – into their critique of the selected EPA.</p> <p>Critique: Does the production of knowledge about Indigenous people reflect and/or reproduce historical Indigenous/non-Indigenous relationships based on <i>terra nullius</i>?</p> <p>Evaluation: Students will be encouraged to evaluate 'standard' modes of enquiry particularly relating to the inter-subjectivity of 'knowledge' development.</p> <p>Review: In the context of these EPA it will be necessary to consider how students reproduce dominating research paradigms which themselves reflect a colonial imperative. Students will be encouraged to think deeply about what <i>caring, understanding</i> and <i>effective relationships</i> actually mean in practice.</p> <p>Questions for classroom review: <i>What effect does your own cultural and historical position have on the development and enactment of these EPA?</i></p> <p><i>How might these attributes be acted upon to demonstrate your knowledge and attitudinal development?</i></p> <p><i>As a teacher, how could you integrate this knowledge/ understanding to frame these attributes to reflect more 'equitable' approaches to curriculum development and teacher-student interactions?</i></p>

better futures

Hello to Jean and fellow users, I'd like to add that I see embedding Indigenous perspectives as the enhancing of Australian history and the putting in of Indigenous knowledges issues and experiences that were for so long disregarded and misunderstood. I'm just wondering how most non-indigenous educators thought about my teaching of non-indigenous students and whether I was well prepared enough coming from a background and history of peoples who were made to disengage from their own culture and Histories.

Reply: better futures

Hi Terry,

Definitely, Australian history will be enhanced with the inclusion of Indigenous knowledges, issues and experiences. What also happens is that it will be re-configured necessarily as a consequence. This is why it becomes such a perilous journey for some. If there is a transformation with some of the fundamental understandings about who 'we' are as Australians, our assumptions about what 'we' are entitled to, and what 'we' expect from the world as it has evolved from a particular, limited understanding of this history these 'shifts' can be quite violently experienced.

I'm not sure about the point you are making with regard to non-Indigenous educators thoughts? Can you clarify because I sense it's an important one? Thanks! Jean

Lifelong learning

Joining in the circle ... good to catch up with you (virtually) again, Jean. For the benefit of other bloggers, I worked with Jean on a couple of research projects she led as part of QUT's Embedding Indigenous Perspectives initiatives. Now I lecture in journalism here. Mostly, in the lectures, tutes and online sites I teach into, non-Indigenous Australian knowing is the starting point -- and that's where I am, too. So, nutshell point for me is being aware of/learning what's appropriate for me to do and what is not. And that's a lifelong prospect, too.

Some basic questions to start the discussion ...

I have given a brief overview of what I feel embedding Indigenous perspectives entails and would now like to officially kick off the discussions for the week by posing these initial questions:

What does embedding - as a process - mean to you?

What is/are "Indigenous perspectives"?

Where do you believe this 'embedding' of Indigenous perspectives should take place?

What might you need to think differently about - and *do* differently - in order for 'embedding' to be achieved in the most beneficial and sustainable ways?

I look forward to chatting and evolving these discussions over the week.

Curriculum development

Was just thinking about Henk's post yesterday and the reply, and the effect of implementing strategies in one course, rather than across a program or built into the marking criteria. Say for journalism, we would want to assess how students are developing a critical capacity and an ability to seek out and find information from sources. I don't need to say much about what the media can often do through absence of, or imbalance in, source selection and the idea of "objectivity". So I guess this post is about seeing Embedding Indigenous Perspectives as part of how we develop graduate attributes of critical thinking and global citizenship. That's kind of handy for journalists.

Reply: Curriculum development

That's kind of handy for teachers, architects, nurses, engineers, scientists too(to name a few more)! Yes, the original plan with the development of the core unit in education here was for it to establish/strengthen their foundation for critical thinking around issues of their own culture positioning, Australian history, Indigenous perspectives Indigenous issues. Often the media is the only source of information students have - 13 week semesters are not enough to evolve professional competencies when this foundational work can be so confronting - NECESSARY, but confronting. For many a lifetime of thinking gets re-configured! Embedding across the rest of the curriculum would ensure that students were able to continue their thinking and professional development through 'engaging' within their whole degree and not just in a one-off subject. I know you're very familiar with what happens here at QUT J.

Embedding in skills based courses

I am interested in the concept of embedding across the program curriculum. Most of my experience has been in skill-based courses (for want of a better description) such as mathematics. Should these courses be targetted for embedding when embedding in a program. I would be interested in any examples where you have seen this done effectively.

best wishes Janet

Reply: Embedding in skills based courses

Hi Janet,

Interesting question and a difficult one. There are a few discipline areas where it is thought that embedding Indigenous perspectives is not really relevant. My view is yes, maths and science for example should be 'targetted' for embedding as those disciplines are (re)constitutive of the power-base of Western knowledge in many respects. An indepth knowledge of the discipline is required (which I don't have) as well as an understanding of the different levels through which 'embedding' can occur. To date, most of the focus in the literature with regard to this area concerns itself with cultural differences which impact on the ways in which Indigenous children/people learn Mathematics. I think there is a lot of terrain yet to be covered.

It's getting quite late in the week - and the blog session for this topic is almost over - but I'd be interested to know what you think, given your discipline knowledge, with regard to the different approaches to defining Indigenous perspectives as posted earlier in the week. What would these perspectives look like in Maths if seen, e.g. as "non-Indigenous perspectives on non-Indigenous knowledge" in relation to the assumptions of universalism in Mathematics. What types of critiques

of Mathematics would occur as a result? Have a look at the article through the following link:
<http://www.springerlink.com/content/p7054325k3055227/fulltext.pdf>

It throws up some interesting questions and analysis which might serve as a good starting point for thinking through the complexities surrounding your initial question.

Jean

A multi-layered process

The embedding of Indigenous perspectives is a multi-layered process. The clarification of what is understood by the term "Indigenous perspectives" is an essential starting point before even considering the actual process of embedding. In my view Indigenous perspectives include, but are not limited to:

- 1) Indigenous perspectives of, and on, non-Indigenous knowledge, issues and experiences;
- 2) Indigenous perspectives of, and on, Indigenous knowledge, issues and experiences;
- 3) Non-Indigenous perspectives of, and on, Indigenous knowledge, issues and experiences, and
- 4) Non-Indigenous perspectives of, and on, non-Indigenous knowledge, issues and experiences.

From 'adding' to 'embedding'

Hi Jean,

Thank you for your clear definition and I totally agree that it is a multi-layered process. I think the most challenging aspect of this is that there is always a danger of just adding one layer, as you note. For example, in a film studies course it is easy to just add an Indigenous film to the content of the course, and leave it at that. I think it is really important to 'embed' not only Indigenous knowledge itself, but also develop an understanding of Indigenous knowledge creation and dissemination. This is part of your 4 point definition, but could you expand a little on how you think this could be achieved in an everyday teaching context. Can you give some examples of courses/units (or programs) at QUT which have done this really well?

Henk

Reply: From Adding to Embedding

Hi Henk,

Yes, definitely, embedding requires much more than adding content. It is easier to use a resource with an Indigenous 'flavour' than it is to re-work the curriculum to the depth necessary for effective and sustainable 'embedding' to occur. With embedding as content, students may walk away with a different information set about Indigenous peoples (albeit fitting into standard archetypes: artists, performers, spiritual etc, but rarely as knowledge constructors/producers/intellectuals as you allude). Whether this content allows for transformed personal and professional approaches is debatable. Under these circumstances it is generally left up to the individual's own sense of compassion and goodwill to make the links between this WHAT (the content) and the more significant HOW and WHY.

An example I could cite of an attempt to do it differently is a core unit offered within our Faculty of Education but written, and until 2006, delivered mostly by staff in the university's Aboriginal studies unit. The first two modules focus on students discovering how they position themselves as knowers, what they 'see' as consequences of that, often limited, positioning and what the historical and social trajectories are of the knowledge construction (i.e. What do they know? How do they know? What are the limitations of their knowledge and why?). In this way students are prepared to know. Giving information to individuals unprepared to 'know' is disrespectful to the knowledge and the knowledge holder. The final module is focussed on students reconsidering their professional practice as a result. The modular approach to the teaching is not ideal, given the circular processes of Indigenous knowledge construction and sharing.

Before this turns into an essay I'd be interested in hearing how you approach the teaching/learning of Indigenous perspectives/ knowledge in your courses?

Jean

Knowledge Creation

Thanks for that lengthy reply Jean, and it would have been fine by me if it had turned into an essay! In a general sense my approach and understanding are very similar to Janine's. My main concern is always about the gap you identify between information about Indigenous peoples and/or 'issues', and Indigenous knowledge creators. In my view, it is the second bit which is the most challenging, but which also has the most potential in terms of developing a 'preparedness to know'.

I am currently working closely with Rhonda on a Tertiary Preparation course at USQ, and we're attempting to embed Indigenous perspectives in this course (which is entirely taught by distance). The course has two broad themes: sustainable development & welfare reform. There is a book of readings attached to the course, many of which are used for student writing exercises. In our discussions, we identified early on that it is vital to select readings that come from an Indigenous knowledge base. We are also considering incorporating other media formats such as videotaped interviews or film/tv excerpts, as this would also incorporate an awareness of and engagement with different modes of knowledge creation and dissemination. I think this is the vital part, because this is where a potential conflict arises with a university tradition of particular ways of writing and disseminating 'knowledge'. In other words: do we select readings that have a particular structure and therefore easily fit the pre-determined exercises, which are geared towards teaching 'academic writing'? Or do we select readings (or other media forms) that force us (and students) to re-think what constitutes academic knowledge and how this is disseminated? I clearly lean towards the latter option.

The process of doing this is in itself interesting and useful, and we are hoping to work through some of these issues and eventually end up with a course (and process) that can serve as a template for other courses (and programs) to follow.

I'll leave it there before this turns into an essay...

Henk

Reply: Knowledge Creation

Hi Henk,

As students have had their 'knowledge' about Indigenous peoples and issues formed (and entrenched) in various ways: media, the 'kitchen-table', urban myths, the un-noticed absence and/or mediated presence of Indigenous peoples in their history books, classrooms, soap operas, etc, then it is not necessarily helpful to just use a chapter from a dusty textbook written in inaccessible language. However, students do need to realise how the theory relates to 'common-sense' knowledge, but there can be a great distance to be bridged between the two. The critical pedagogy that I think needs to be employed in Indigenous studies focusses theory after individuals understand how they are implicated in the everyday constructions of knowledge about themselves in relation to Indigenous peoples and issues and vice versa. Also, there are many 'academic' texts being written by Indigenous people so I think you can't necessarily deem it to be an either/or, that is, Indigenous knowledge from non-academic sources or non-Indigenous knowledge from academic sources. Having said that students themselves have in our subject been very keen to delineate "fact" (non-Indigenous sources including the media) from "opinion" (Indigenous sources including academic/theoretical essays!) - this is a powerful form of resistance to learning. So as with everything concerned with embedding - each aspect of course development and delivery needs to be carefully considered and the linkages between classroom management, course content, structuring of classroom activities, questions to be asked etc all link in a deliberately conceived holistic design, rather than a compartmentalised topic by topic coverage (e.g. Week 1: Indigenous History; Week 2: Indigenous education; Week 3 Indigenous health etc). Students in the subject I'm referring to here have indicated how uncomfortable they felt not just with the content but with the course design because they were really sure what was happening until later in the semester when everything - all the preparation to know - had started to gel for them. The learning is much deeper this way. When it's knowledge an individual has no deep resistance to gaining then I think the gap between what is known and what is to be known is a less problematic journey.

In fact, we find that the path that creates the most conflict, confusion, confrontation (and dare I say conflagrations!) turns out to be the most effective in creating knowledge and understanding. Of course, it takes an experienced teacher to be able to manage this. Deliberate planning is required to counter the natural and sometimes violent resistance to Indigenous knowledge and perspectives. These take many forms, e.g. "We are all human" to "Aboriginal people are all alcoholics". AND, it doesn't matter if you are analysing critical race theory, as soon as you mention the word "Aboriginal" it taps into a deep, deep well. Unless you neutralise the ignorance, theory will be planted in unfertile ground. Multi-dimensional foci creates major shifts in our students; concrete attitudes such as, "I already know it all, and need to know no more" are turned around to "I don't know it all, and there are some things that I may never fully understand or have a right to know, but I am now willing and open to continue my un-learning and re-learning". This seems to be especially so for those students with very entrenched views. This is why, as Janine said, the embedding process needs to be implemented across whole degrees - students otherwise end up being prepared to merely witness/notice the enactment of 'terra nullius' in their curriculum.

My apologies for the length of this reply - I actually started writing it this morning but have had numerous interruptions so have only now just finished it well enough to post!

Jean

The embedding process

Marilyn Dorman

Hello Jean,

I am keenly interested in the issues you raise, and in particular, how one might embed indigenous perspectives across programs, while addressing issues such as graduate attributes and generic skills.

Do you perceive particular pitfalls occurring in this process? For example, notions of knowledge, ways of knowing, and demonstrating knowledge and skills? Further, when applying principles in different disciplines, are there particular principles and strategies you might suggest (or instances where you think this has been appropriately and respectfully accomplished)?

Thanks

Marilyn

Reply: Marilyn

Hi Marilyn,

I wanted to add an attachment with my reply to this post so I had to go elsewhere. If you click on recent posts my reply will be there. (You may have found it already, but just in case I thought I would alert you to that alternative pathway).

Thanks

Jean

Graduate attributes etc

Marilyn Dorman

Hi Jean,

Thanks for your response and the examples in the attachment. I agree that there are often assumptions of shared meaning in language which don't necessarily do justice to the possibilities for negotiating a range of meanings, and through that process, increasing learning opportunities. Catherine McLoughlin highlights this aspect as an essential part of constructive alignment in her 2001 article 'Inclusivity and alignment: Principles of pedagogy, task and assessment design for effective cross-cultural online learning'.

Apologies for the hasty response - perhaps we can continue this conversation post-blog, as I'd appreciate the opportunity to explore issues of literacies, values, communities etc?

Many thanks for your insights.

Marilyn

Multi-dimensional focus

Thanks very much Jean for another lengthy reply! I completely agree with the points you make, and it is great to get it synthesised in this way. I agree in particular with your point about embedding

Indigenous perspectives across all programs and degrees. This is certainly the goal, but it is a huge task and the course I referred to earlier is merely a starting point.

With regards to your comment about 'academic texts', I didn't mean to imply that it is an 'either/or' thing. In fact, our aim in incorporating different media through which knowledge is disseminated would be to make students question what counts as 'knowledge' in a university context, what the implications of that are, and how they themselves are implicated in that process. In other words, could this be seen as part of 'neutralising the ignorance'?

I may not get a chance tomorrow to engage any further, so if I don't I just wanted to thank you very much for your great insights, and hopefully we'll be able to meet in another forum in the future.

Henk

Reply: Multi-Dimensional focus

Thanks Henk for getting things started with your comments. Yes, all means necessary to neutralise ignorance - apologies if I put words into your cyber-mouth!

Catch up again soon.

Jean

A multi-layered process

Welcome to this week's BLOG titled Embedding Indigenous Perspectives and thank you for your opening comment Jean.

I would like to acknowledge the traditional custodians of all lands throughout Australia. I pay my respects to our Elders, past and present, and thank them for their knowledge and wisdom. I would also like to pay respect to all Indigenous people participating in this session.

Indigenous perspectives is important to explore as we need to ascertain everyone's knowledge and experiences.

At USQ, EDU1141 Australian Indigenous Studies, is currently offered to students as a compulsory course in most Education programs, and as an elective across the other programs. EDU1141 is an overview of Australian history from an Indigenous perspective. This course does not enable students to explore all the issues in-depth, we would need an entire Bachelor degree of Indigenous Studies to achieve this.

Embedding Indigenous perspectives however allows the individual learner and educator to engage in a journey of self discovery and can lead them into a course of action that will allow for a self-fulfilling pedagogical experience. One of the truly wonderful experiences anyone can take from this journey is the acquisition of new Indigenous knowledge and in the process to develop the confidence to impart that knowledge to fellow students, colleagues, family members in an enlightening and positive way.

Embedding Indigenous knowledge throughout any tertiary institution's curriculum will assist everyone, Indigenous and non-Indigenous, with a sound foundation on which a personal journey into more complex issues can commence.

I look forward to comments and questions over the next week.

Rhonda

As an Australian whose

As an Australian whose ancestors have been here since 1820 (the latest ones arrived around 1850) I have no connections with other countries. My ancestors obviously depended upon Indigenous Australians for survival at times although I know very little about it. So I am keen to learn more about this interaction. A many-layered and intricate pattern of information and knowledge from both sides of the experience will be a welcome way of building understanding.

Best wishes to all involved in this exercise of developing information and understanding.

Rhyl