

Exploring the potential of Indigenous Australian teaching and learning practices within tertiary coursework to contribute to improved professional practice and social justice

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**Exploring the potential of Indigenous Australian
teaching and learning practices within tertiary
coursework to contribute to improved
professional practice and social justice.**

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Submitted in fulfilment of the requirements of the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

October 2023

Statement of Originality

This work has not previously been submitted for a degree or diploma in any university. To the best of my knowledge and belief, the thesis contains no material previously published or written by another person except where due reference is made in the thesis itself.

(Signed) _____

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Acknowledgments and Dedication

I want to start this PhD presentation with an acknowledgement country. I'd like to acknowledge that much of the work I've done on this Ph.D., in terms of editing and writing, has been done at home on Bundjalung Country, Northern New South Wales. I'd like to acknowledge the Bundjalung Nation. I'd like to acknowledge the ongoing sovereignty of the Bundjalung Nation.

I'd like to acknowledge the families, the communities, and in particular the young people and elders of the Bundjalung Nation. I'd like to acknowledge the wisdom and understanding that's been shared with me over many years through many connections with Bundjalung people, particularly elders, extended family and friends within the Bundjalung Nation.

I'd also like to acknowledge country right across Australia and the surrounding islands, especially country that I've travelled to, to meet and record yarns with the people who shared yarns with me as part of the process of this PhD. That country ranged from the far north of Australia. To the far south and from coast to coast.

I acknowledge the First Nations, communities, families, elders, and ancestors, across and within all Australia and its surrounding islands.

I want to acknowledge all the ancestors and peoples who have come before me in the struggle to resist the colonisation of their lands, ways of life and their knowledges and practices. It is due to their sacrifice and their success that I am able to present this work.

There are three such people, now passed, that I want to acknowledge in particular, Nanny Jessie Harrison, Uncle Mick Walker and Uncle Errol West. You have inspired me to do what I do, and I am a better person for knowing you. I miss yarning with you.

I want to acknowledge the encouragement and support I have had from family, friends, colleagues and supervisors to start and continue with this Ph.D. study, well before I officially started. There are too many individuals to mention but please know that your encouragement and support has helped me a lot over this time. You are appreciated.

I dedicate this Ph.D. to my wife Denise, whose support and belief in me made all the difference, and to my children Mikey, Jamal and Leilani who have taught me so much and inspire me every day to place love and compassion ahead of all else.

How to engage this PhD document

This document has been produced to enable a text-based representation and archiving of the fuller version of this PhD presentation, which has been produced in a multimedia format via a website. Please see the website link [here](http://www.glennwoods.com.au) (www.glennwoods.com.au).

The multimedia web-based format was designed as a culturally responsive and openly accessible way of presenting my PhD to a broader audience outside of the academic space, and accessible within a First Nations community space. The commitment to the Ph.D. being available and engaging at a broader community level is in keeping with tenants of an Indigenous research methodological approach and reflects the ethical commitment to the work being of broad benefit to First Nations peoples within Australia.

The multimedia-based web presentation includes audio and visual representation of the people that contributed to and produced this work as well as the country on which the work was produced. It has been designed to provide those engaging the website with a deeper experience of the research journey than can be provided by text alone. This document does present all the content from the website that is able to be transcribed to text, in the sequence it is presented on the website. Where appropriate all audio sections from the website are included in this document and identified as transcriptions

Primary Research Question

What defines an authentic Indigenous Australian teaching and learning experience?

Secondary Research Questions

1. What is the potential of Indigenous teaching and learning processes to contribute to improved professional practice?
2. What are the challenges to implementing Indigenous learning and teaching practices into tertiary education spaces?

Ph.D. Abstract

The purpose of this PhD was to explore what it means when we talk about an Indigenous approach to teaching and learning in practice.

This topic is important because the published discussion that currently exists in this space is far from comprehensive, often theoretically considered around pedagogical models but not clear in terms of what it is an Indigenous approach to teaching and learning might include as an experience for learners and teachers.

With an increasing recognition of the rights of Indigenous peoples to engage the education space on their own terms, in ways that represent the beliefs, values and aspirations of Indigenous educators, it is important that we have definitions and examples of what an Indigenous education process might look like in contemporary Australian education contexts, when advocating for and negotiating a place within those spaces.

Further to this, it is important to consider how an Indigenous approach to learning and teaching would look like in a specific context, such as a university qualification program, what the potential benefits of this approach are and what the current challenges are in implementing this.

The research approach involved engaging twelve culturally diverse First Nations education practitioners, who are committed to the recognition and engagement of Indigenous learning and teaching practices in contemporary education contexts. A yarning research method was utilised to thematically analyse the ways in which these practitioners defined what an Indigenous approach to teaching and learning is in contemporary and contested education spaces.

Key findings include a strong consensus amongst culturally diverse First Nations education practitioners around commonly held philosophical beliefs, shared values and shared aspirations regarding how we might define an Indigenous approach to learning and teaching in contemporary practice contexts. The strength of this consensus has led to a suggestion by the researcher that it may be best to define these shared beliefs as an Indigenist approach, that can be broadly applied outside of culturally specific Indigenous contexts but must always be done via the leadership and custodianship of Indigenous knowledge holders and in solidarity with the sovereign rights of all First Nations groups to maintain the integrity of their own specific knowledges and practices.

The format of the thesis is innovative and includes the presentation of the research in a multimedia web-based format. The choice to use this format has been primarily driven by the authors commitment to make this as accessible as possible to a non-academic, community centred audience. To this end the research has included his own voice as narrated audio

introductions to written work and longer podcast style audio discussion regarding consideration and examples of how we might engage with Indigenist learning and teaching practices within mainstream education settings, for all students and what the current challenges are to this happening.

Introduction

(transcribed from the audio introduction in the website presentation)

My study is officially titled: Exploring the potential of Indigenous Australian Teaching and learning Practices within tertiary coursework to contribute to improved professional practice and social justice.

In this context the term Indigenous Australian is synonymous with the term Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander and Australian First Nations. I have tended to use the term First Nations, First Nations Peoples and Indigenous as my preferred terms throughout this PhD presentation.

When I was originally discussing my ideas and aspirations for this PhD with my potential supervisors and others, I was very clear that I wanted to create a PhD study that had a strong sense of accessibility and meaning beyond a particular academic discipline area and beyond the broader academic community.

I wanted to make my work accessible at a wider community level so that people outside of academia could have access to the work and find some value from the work. I wanted First Nations peoples and organisations to have relatively easy access to the work, and especially for people working in education, in the promotion and maintenance of First Nations approaches to teaching and learning in contemporary educational settings and practices.

At the time of my PhD confirmation, I made it clear that I wanted to produce my PhD in a format that was accessible beyond an academically written document. At that time I imagined it would be something like a video type documentary of the participant yarning process, to give people a feel for that, and a better sense of the yarning method and to hear the direct voices of the Yarning participants, which to me is very important in terms of the approach to this PhD.

In the end, I decided on this particular format of a spoken word introduction and connecting spoken sections through the PhD that talk the reader through the process of connecting a series of publications and other written work, that make up the bulk of the text of this PhD.

There's both a culturally just and pragmatic aspect to this choice of how to present my PhD. Perhaps a well-produced video documentary would have been the most relevant and engaging approach however it was beyond the scale and resourcing of this study.

The final piece of work in this study is a podcast style narrative that discusses the opportunities and challenges in regard to having First Nations led and controlled teaching and learning experiences within mainstream university contexts.

In conversations with my supervisors during the course of this study, I realized that it's the yarning tradition that is at the core of this research. It's an oral process that has led to the production of the transcripts that were analysed to produce the findings of this study.

And so we talked about the idea of having that strong oral aspect from start to finish for continuity, right through the PhD. This an approach that I really resonated with and have utilised. It is an approach that demonstrates an Indigenous standpoint approach to doing research and reporting on research outcomes. I talk more about my commitment to an

Indigenous standpoint within the methodology section of this presentation of my work.

My primary motivation and inspiration for doing this research has come from the yarning experience. Yarns had with people in community over many years and well before my time as an academic. Yarns that were my big lessons. Yarns where First Nations philosophies, values and beliefs were shared and discussed. Yarns where I was encouraged to do this research and yarns that warned me about the challenges I would face.

Speaking my work allows people to hear my authentic, direct voice. I'm able to explain things in ways that I feel culturally safe, that I think are accessible, that give an outline of the significance of the various publications, that give an outline of the data gathering, the analysis and findings from the data, with the opportunity for people then to be able to look more deeply into if they wish to. It's an overarching and connecting yarning approach.

Introduction to the First Publication

(transcribed from the audio introduction in the website presentation)

The first publication I'm including in this study is titled. "Learning in Community: Reflecting on 17 years of visiting kuntri".

This work was published as a chapter in the text, "Engaging First Peoples. In arts-based community service learning".

Broadly speaking, this chapter provides a sense of my positionality and experience, personally and as researcher coming to this study. It serves as an introduction to my connection to First Nations communities, and my interest in the dynamics and place of contemporary First Nations teaching and learning practices and process in Australian education settings.

This chapter also serves to outline my overarching First Nations rights-based standpoint, in regard to how I have approached this research. The chapter helps explain why I've chosen to focus on exploring what defines a contemporary Indigenous approach to learning and teaching and why I believe the primary and secondary questions raised in this research are so significant.

Abstract of First Publication

The process of engaging with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and communities should be grounded within a human rights context, whereby it is the responsibility of those with agency and opportunity within universities and other institutions to recognise, support, and action the rights of Indigenous peoples to be included and involved at the highest levels of education design and delivery. In keeping with an Indigenous human rights approach, this inclusion of Indigenous peoples in higher education design and delivery needs to occur via equitable, negotiated, and culturally safe terms for all concerned. Further to this, facilitators and participants must understand and challenge the influence and impact of inappropriate, inaccurate, misleading, and discriminatory notions about Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander identity and authenticity that are generated in a myriad of forums outside of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander consent and control. The process of successful and sustainable engagement is facilitated by building meaningful interpersonal, inter-organisational and intercultural relationships beyond those that the Western university typically acknowledges or supports. Staff and students of the university will need to have a keen appreciation for the fundamental philosophies, values, and customs of Indigenous peoples and groups they are engaging with, including the significance of relationships to kuntri and the importance of reciprocity and sustainable process. This chapter presents a personal reflection on these topics. I discuss the process and outcomes of designing and facilitating student engagement experiences with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander teachers and hosts since 1997. In doing so, I present some of my own key lessons and make suggestions that may help develop and improve other peoples' experiences in the future.

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Reflections on the First Publication

(transcribed from the audio introduction in the website presentation)

The publication you've just read provides context and gives the backstory around how I came to be interested in and committed to exploring First Nations teaching and learning practices and processes in a contemporary educational setting.

In my own education journey, I have been profoundly influenced and supported and inspired by First Nations teachers who on reflection, I believe consciously utilized First Nations approaches to their teaching and learning, and in doing so shared and instilled first nations values, philosophies and beliefs.

And so, I came into an academic setting into my own professional space with a strong sense of valuing these experiences that were a result of First Nations teaching and learning practices

Reflecting on my own experiences in mainstream, white dominated and controlled education settings, I felt very strongly that those First Nations learning and teaching experiences were missing from the education settings I was involved in, both as a student throughout school and university and then as a teacher in schools and university settings.

I saw and felt that there was a big gap between the First Nations teachers that I had had the benefit of learning from and the institutional settings that I was working in, where those First Nations teachers were not typically present or readily accessible or certainly not present in regards to the sharing of First Nations values, philosophies and beliefs that I had been educated from and come to see so much value in.

When I started teaching within mainstream education settings, I was committed to sharing what I had learnt from First Nations teachers, I could really see the value in those First Nations experiences in terms of the support and development of the students that I was working with. Not just for First Nations students but for all students across a broad curriculum context.

As you can read in the first paper, my opportunity came to provide First Nations students and non- indigenous students an opportunity to connect with First Nations teachers by taking students on country and into First Nations community context. At that time, I was lucky to have the resources and tacit support to do this within a university program and teaching context. In a way I was subverting the dominate paradigm by using the resources available to me at this time in ways that they were not expected to be used but at least I had those resources available to do that.

Almost 25 years later I maintain that strong commitment and belief in the value and the importance of students having connection with First Nations learning and teaching experiences.

In terms of this PhD study, I decided what needed to be done was to provide a more focused

discussion, from an evidence base, around what determines and defines a First Nations approach to teaching and learning practice and experience.

This decision came about after I realised that there was very little discussion, via published literature, that talked specifically about how a First Nations Australian approach to teaching and learning is conceptualised and practiced in a contemporary setting. I came to this realisation whilst I searched for published reference points over the years and via a more focussed literature review leading into the formalisation of this PhD study. When I say very little published literature, I'm referring to discussions and studies set in Australia, within a First Nations context. I'm not including literature from a First Nations perspective outside Australia here because I want to keep this discussion within an Australian context and in direct relationship to First Nations peoples and societies, made up groups that are commonly identified as either Aboriginal, Torres Strait Islander or Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander.

The rationale for choosing this primary research question is based on providing some reference points from which we can have more informed and wider discussion around why and how First Nations people should be far more involved in the Australia's learning and teaching cultures and experiences generally and in university settings more specifically.

Arguably it is process, not simply content that differentiates different what cultural beliefs and values look like in practice. When I originally bought up the idea that there was not a significant body of work, amongst colleagues and peers, and amongst potentially research participants, that talked specifically about contemporary First Nations teaching and learning practice and experiences there was some noticeable push back, even some concerned disagreement. What I found interesting is that much of the published evidence cited to contradict my opinion was not specifically speaking to the practice or even conceptualisation of teaching and learning from a First Nations perspective and approach. It was most often about approaches to Indigenous research theory and practice or to the issue of how to engage First Nations peoples in mainstream, Anglo Australian controlled education practices and objectives.

Introduction to the Second Publication

(transcribed from the audio introduction in the website presentation)

This paper explores the difference and the tension between discussing teaching and learning from a process-based perspective rather than a more simplistic content-based perspective.

The point is made that any particular or specific cultural approach to learning and teaching practice is evidenced by the process. Inclusion of content about First Nations peoples or issues within a learning and teaching process is not evidence that this content is being delivered within a First Nations learning and teaching approach to that content.

The discussion makes the point that based on broadly agreed upon international human rights standards, First Nations peoples should be in control of how content about their cultures is shared via learning and teaching experiences, and further to this First Nations peoples should be directly involved in the conceptualisation, design and delivery of formal education in Australia, across all levels and stages.

Based on reference to existing literature, the point is made that we need more clearly defined or agreed upon understandings of what an Indigenous approach to learning and teaching is in a contemporary Australian context. Without this sense of agreement or understanding it is hard to argue for and negotiate the inclusion of Indigenous practice moving forward.

Abstract of Second Publication

Exploring Authenticity and Integrity in the Sharing of Indigenous Knowledge: Is Process More Important than Content?

Until very recently Indigenous Australian people and cultures have been the subjects of study and content in non-Indigenous Australian education settings rather than the teachers of knowledge systems. Like all knowledge systems Indigenous knowledge systems are philosophically inspired, value driven and delivered via particular process. How do we create opportunities for the holders of Indigenous knowledges to share their knowledge in ways that are authentic and meaningful to all participants? If particular people and places are intrinsic to the authenticity and integrity of Indigenous knowledge sharing how well is this understood and valued by non-Indigenous policy makers and educators that are in a position to support and make space for this? What are the consequences if the authenticity and integrity of the Indigenous knowledge sharing process is overlooked or ignored in the quest to include 'it' as content within a non-Indigenous teaching and learning space? This paper draws directly on the voices of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander knowledge holders to provide some parameters around what makes a knowledge sharing experience authentic and meaningful. Further to this, it explores what the consequences may be when Indigenous process is overlooked.

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Methodology Chapter

Introduction

Over the past two decades there has been a steady increase in research and discussion about Indigenous pedagogies and the circumstances in which Indigenous pedagogies can or should be engaged.

Key contributions to research with and for First Nations communities within Australia have come from the work of Dr Tyson Yunkaporta, Dr Martin Nakata, Dr Irabinna-Lester Rigeny and the late Dr Errol West.

Nationally, we are seeing strong imperatives to ensure that research is being conducted in culturally safe, culturally responsive and culturally just ways and that research focused on Indigenous knowledges is Indigenous led.

Important considerations include the research methodologies used, the research outputs produced, the ethics of ownership of research data and the benefits of the research to Indigenous communities.

Considering the above, I adopted an overall Indigenous Research Methodological approach, informed by Indigenous Standpoint Theory which I detail further below.

Research Approach and Design

Through this PhD study, I will explore what constitutes authentic Indigenous teaching and learning experiences in Australian universities and how such experiences can help to promote social justice for Indigenous peoples in Australia. I have selected a research methodology and data collection techniques that will allow me to:

- a) adopt culturally relevant and emancipatory ways of working both for myself and diverse participants; and
- b) be flexible, open, and responsive to exploring the potential of these Indigenous teaching and learning experiences for Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples in Australia.

As a person who identifies as Indigenous with more than 25 years as an educator, I approached this research from an Indigenous standpoint, with a commitment to utilising a methodological approach that positions First Nations peoples as the primary researchers and active research participants, with agency in their role in the research process and with authority over ideas and information that was shared during the data collection and analysis process.

Core principles of Indigenous Standpoint theory dictate that the research is conducted by First Nations led researchers, for the benefit of First Nations peoples and that First Nations research participants have ownership and control of the knowledge they share. Further to this the research must be available and accessible to a First Nations audience at the community level (Foley 2013 p50). I have designed my research around the principles of Indigenous standpoint theory.

It is also important that my research approach explores and models the ways that Indigenous ways of knowing and working can be employed with authenticity and integrity within mainstream higher education institutions. The overarching philosophical and methodological approach of my research will be grounded in Indigenous Research Methodology. Indigenous research methodology places relationality at the centre of the research process (Smith 2012, Wilson 2020).

While Indigenous research approaches have some overlap with qualitative research approaches and assumptions, it is unique in the conceptualisation of relatedness and the synthesis of epistemology and ontology (Wilson, 2003; Rigney, 1999). Indigenous research methodology goes further than defining the data collection methods used: It shapes the research questions, overtly recognises the collaborative and shared nature of knowledge generation, respects knowledge custodianship and considers the impacts and value of the research outcomes beyond the specifically identified subjects and objects of study (Wilson, 2003; Rigney, 1999).

Hence, Indigenous research methodology stands as an alternative to research methodologies developed within Western philosophical and epistemological frameworks. In this regard it also functions as a decolonising methodology, free from the contradictions, oppressive history and constraints that many, if not all Western research methods encounter when applied to an Indigenous ontological and epistemological context (Smith, 2012).

In an overview of Indigenous research methodologies, Shroeder makes the point that “From the very outset the Indigenous paradigm resists the schema of Ontology/Epistemology/Methods, a schema inspired by Western philosophy” (Shroeder, 2014). Indigenous Research methodology prioritises relationships over outcomes and results (Wilson, 2020).

This is relevant to my approach as the core research questions require both the utilisation of established relationships, the forming of new relationships and the consideration of possible new relationships. At the core of my research are the relationships between myself as the primary researcher and the people I will be connecting with during the research process however the relationship concept extends beyond the interpersonal. Included within the relational context of Indigenous research is the intrapersonal, relationships to place and relationships to the culturally specific and the culturally diverse.

This presents both an opportunity and an obligation to take a multi-dimensional and holistic approach to the analytic and reflective aspects of the research process. The intention is to present a rich and complex discussion that is grounded on analysis and reflection of prevailing beliefs and understandings but also draws on autoethnographic narrative and decolonising pedagogy. Indigenous research methodology allows for and facilitates this process.

Phases of data gathering, analysis, and interpretation

Phase 1: Review of existing knowledge.

This phase involved a literature and knowledge review focussed on the primary research question. This phase was used to generate the second published paper. This phase was similar to a standard literature review process however in this case the concept of literature was expanded to multi-media sources beyond peer reviewed and text-based material. It included information presented via non refereed journals, video documentaries and online sites. This inclusion of ‘grey’, non-academic media is in keeping with an Indigenous Research methodological approach whereby Indigenous voices are sought and relied upon rather than having those voices filtered via non-Indigenous, academic re-interpretation. In discussing the core tenants of Indigenous research methodology, Indigenous Australian philosopher, scholar and education activist, Dr Lester Irabinna Rigney stresses the importance of “privileging Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander voices” (Rigney, 2001).

Phase 2: Recruitment and invitation of potential yarning participants.

The recruitment of potential discussion and yarning participants was based on inviting people to participate who have a demonstrated connection to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander knowledges and teaching fields within Australia. Potential participants were identified via three processes.

1.0 Drawing on existing professional and socio-cultural relationships.

As discussed by Wilson the recognition of existing and potential relationships prior, during and after the research process is a fundamental component of Indigenous research methodology (Wilson 2020). To this end existing relationships were drawn upon and utilised both as a way of identifying potential research participants and as a support in facilitating an effective and deeper level of discussion.

1.1 Identifying potential participants via the knowledge review process.

Whilst numerous Australian authors identified via the literature review process fell into the category of my professional and/or socio-cultural relationship there were others who do not. Individuals identified via the literature review in regard to their interest in Aboriginal and

Torres Strait Islander knowledges and who are not already known were also potential candidates for participation in discussion/yarning.

1.2 Recommendation of potential participants via existing relationships and knowledge review.

This process allowed for those that were contacted and invited to participate, to make suggestions regarding potential participants based on their own relationships to those people. It was evident that my own relationships base and literature review outcomes would not identify every person who would make a suitable research participant for the discussion and yarning phase. The process of utilising the knowledge and relationships base of other Indigenous people to explore Indigenous knowledges and practices sits comfortably within the Indigenous research methodology paradigm.

1.3 Determining the number of participants.

Based on a review of relevant literature, there was no specific formula or minimum number rule applicable to this research that must be satisfied in order to have the research deemed accurate or acceptable. There are however a broad range of opinions as to how many people should be interviewed within a quantitative postgraduate or post- doctoral research study. These opinions have been canvassed and presented by Baker and Edwards in the publication “How Many Qualitative Interviews Is Enough” (Baker and Edwards 2012). Despite the complexity of this question a figure of between 12 and 20 interviewees/interviews has been suggested as an average or suitable number by which to gain a diverse range of responses (Baker and Edwards 2012, p. 6).

The figure suggested by Baker and Edwards was adopted for this study as a means of determining a minimum number of participants to yarn with. There are a number of other variables that I determined to be important as a way to encourage as rich and diverse a range of yarns as possible. These are:

- Gender;
- Geographic location;
- Cultural identity – within the broader Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community;
- Relationship to the researcher; and
- Profession or vocation.

I aimed for a cohort of participants based on a 50% male and 50% female mix that would represent multi-cultural Indigenous viewpoints and who were living across a range of Country, geographically and culturally. My aim was to encourage as diverse a range of viewpoints and opinions for analysis.

In accordance with appropriate and approved ethics practices potential yarning participants were invited to participate in a yarn that considered all research questions but with a focus on the primary question.

I first approached potential participants people via email, in person, or via phone calls depending on the nature of my relationship to them. Prior to any yarning taking place participants received an overview of the PhD study, and the first two publications that provided them with the context in which I was coming into these yarns along with a comprehensive set of reference points via the literature that had been referenced to support those papers.

One of the most challenging aspects of determining an appropriate number of research participants to include within a qualitative approach such as this was based around the need to acknowledge the diversity of First Nations cultures, practices and individual identities, throughout Australia and surrounding Islands.

There was an understanding that a PhD study, carried out by a single primary researcher, did not have the scope and resource capacity to attempt to include participant representation from every possible First Nation group across Australia as this would number into the hundreds (AIATSIS 2023).

After discussions with supervisors and peers, I made the decision to establish a participant cohort that represented significant First Nations diversity, based on choosing participants across as broad a geographic area as possible. I understood via my own knowledge and experience as an Indigenous scholar within critical Indigenous studies, that choosing geographically diverse locations around the continent would help represent significant cultural diversity. The challenge of cultural diversity was also considered based on how potential participants had already identified themselves to me regarding their First Nations heritage and connection, however it could not be assumed that a potential participant was a member of the First Nations group on whose country they were working and living. To this end I did not make assumptions about a potential participants cultural identity. Allowing participants to self-identify during the yarning process was a critical aspect of cultural safety.

Further to this a decision was made to have as balanced a gender representation as possible regarding self-identified male and female participants. Whilst some contemporary academic scholars in particular sociocultural contexts consider the male-female binary to be an overly simplified and inadequate expression of gender (O'sullivan 2021), I was guided by the broader understanding, commonly held and expressed within Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander societies, of "Men's and Women's Business", whereby it is possible that teaching and learning associated with that business, or sociocultural space, has different sets of intentions and practices associated with it. (Merlan 1992; Yunkaporta 2019). In this case I considered self-identification to be based on my existing relationship with the potential

participant or the positionality and identity statements that a potential participant had made publicly via their publications or other media.

Based on discussions with my research supervisors and a review of relevant supporting literature, a target of twelve participants was decided on. Whilst this could be considered a relatively small sample group regarding gathering data for analysis from participant feedback, it was anticipated that the volume and quality of data generated via these yarns would provide a sound basis for an exploratory study. Fugard and Henry (2015) make the point that there are no fixed rules regarding adequate participant sample sizes in qualitative research based on conversations and interviews. Rather the focus should be on planning for quality of content over quantity of participants (Fugard and Henry 2015).

A standardised method of formal contact and invitation to potential participants was used via an email. This was sent to all potential participants identified, even if they were people I knew well and had already had initial informal contact. A participant information document was attached to this email that outlined the proposed research process and the terms and conditions that would apply if one chose to become a participant (See Appendix 1). A total of 14 potential research participants were invited. 12 potential participants agreed to participate, 1 potential participant declined, and 1 potential participant did not respond.

Upon confirmation of potential research participant interest via return email, I followed up with a phone call to the potential participant. During this email the I introduced myself in more detail, if I was unknown, or not well known, to the potential participant. A further explanation of the research project was presented, in as much detail as the potential participant required and initial plans to meet were discussed. At this point in the process potential participants were able to agree on a time and place for a yarn to take place, or to follow up conversation when they had decided about timing and location.

Prior to any yarning taking place participants were given a standardised consent form (see Appendix 3) that included the option for them to be identified or de-identified in the analysis and discussion of the yarns. Ten participants chose to be identified and two participants chose to remain anonymous.

1.4 Honouring Diversity

The scale and complexity of First Nations sociocultural diversity across the Australian continent and it's surrounding islands presents a critical consideration and significant challenge for researchers looking to engage with and reflect that diversity within a data gathering process, based on recording ideas, opinions and explanations about how cultural practice, knowledge sharing, and knowledge transmission is approached.

Whilst it was the intention of this study to recognise and enable First Nations cultural diversity amongst the research participants, the relatively small number of yarning participants, coupled with the scarce literature regarding First Nations pedagogies within Australia, leaves any findings open to scrutiny and critique in regard to the quality of thematic analysis results, and the discussions that flow from that.

I feel it's important that the emphasise on recognising and engaging with First Nations diversity in as comprehensive a way as possible is placed at the forefront of any research that attempts to determine or represent First Nations perspectives, practices and processes in specific detail or more broadly. In this regard the methodology of this research provides something of a scale model for that. Whilst the diversity represented in this research is limited in scale, I suggest it does provide a sound evidence base from which data can be considered as representative of a diverse sociocultural First Nations sample such that sound comparisons and reasonable conclusions can be made.

1.5 Cultural safety and Participant Empowerment

Given the overarching standpoint and methodological approach to this research I aimed to provide research participants with a clear sense of agency and control over their involvement and to offer participants as culturally safe a process as possible. In this regard I took an overarching human rights-based approach, informed by the UNDRIP (UN 2007). More specifically I took a trauma integrated approach based on my own professional knowledge and understanding of how to create safe spaces for people to share stories. My primary guiding document reference document around this process was “Culturally Informed Trauma Integrated Healing” (WeAlli 2023). WeAlli are an internationally recognised trauma education and recovery focused organisation that I have worked with over many years to co-design and deliver trauma integrated practice in education.

From the starting point in this process, participants were able to choose to have the yarn in a one-to-one format with me or with any other support persons of their choosing present. The participants were also invited to choose a time and location for the yarn to take place. Whilst these relatively open, participant driven conditions presented significant time and resource challenges, I considered them essential in meeting the foundational criteria for the overall empowerment and safety of participants throughout the research process. This is an example of how the ‘three R's’ concept (respect, relationality, reciprocity) in Indigenous research methodology can be put into practice. My aim as the researcher was to support the research participants to feel as in control, safe and comfortable as possible prior to and during, and after the yarning process.

Phase 3: The Yarning Phase

During this Phase of the research, I conducted yarns with participants in their preferred location. Yarning has been described as "... a semi-structured interview is an informal and relaxed discussion through which both the researcher and participant journey together visiting places and topics of interest relevant to the research study. Yarning is a process that requires the researcher to develop and build a relationship that is accountable to Indigenous people participating in the research." (Bessareb and Ngandu, 2010,p.38). This quote taken from the paper "Yarning About Yarning as a Legitimate Method in Indigenous Research" (Bessarb and Ngandu, 2010) points out the importance of honouring relationship building and accountability between those participating in the process.

There is significant reporting on the success of Yarning as a way to gather information in a culturally safe and equitable way that can later be analysed in similar ways to text based information (Bessarb and Nhandu, 2010;Kovach, 2010; Fredricks et al,2012) This process allows participants to set the pace, tone and direction of the conversation rather than feeling obligated or pressured to answer a series of pre-determined questions.

Yarning is also a process that allows the researcher's voice and experiences to be recorded alongside other participants. This allows for open reflection on the researcher's own position and experience in relation to others and also documents significant points of reflection for the researcher. To this end yarning was used as a means of generating the most authentic, comprehensive and individualised thoughts, opinions and stories around the research questions as possible.

Yarning was chosen as the primary method of communication and data gathering because, based on my own cultural knowledge and understanding along with the literature, it facilitates a culturally familiar, culturally safe and flexible process for First Nations researcher and participant engagement. This method opens up potential to gather deeper and broader content for analysis. My own sense of how and why the yarning method would be appropriate and effective in this research context is supported by a growing body of literature that has further informed my decisions around method and affirms my confidence in its relevance and safety in this specific research context (Kennedy et al 2022).

The semi-structured yarning approach to information gathering took place in a location named by the participant as most appropriate in which to have the discussion and share knowledge. Each yarn may last several hours in duration. This process is a way of honouring and empowering the research participant, demonstrating humility and recognising the most appropriate place for information to be gathered. All these considerations are driven by the requirement of an Indigenous Research methodology to be grounded in and driven by relevant Indigenous social and cultural protocols. It is a critical aspect of the research method integrity (Chilisa, 2012). With the consent of the participants, the yarns were digitally recorded via audio so that the most accurate, comprehensive and authentic voice of the participant is available for review and analysis.

Once the location and time for the yarn had been agreed on, I travelled to meet with each research participant. There was at least one extended phone conversation with the participant prior to this and as many phone and email conversations as the participant had wanted prior to this meeting.

The first in person meeting with research participants differed based on whether I and the participant were known to each other or not. For those participants who I had not met, we had agreed to take some time prior to recording the research specific yarn, to yarn more generally and to get to know one another somewhat first. The time and depth of these introductory yarns were led by the participant. Some of these meetings included sharing a meal with work colleagues, family or community members of the research participant present. This was a way for potential participants to meet me as the researcher in a safe way, and perhaps to have others get a sense of my integrity as a researcher.

The time spent with participants who were not already known to me, prior to our research yarn, varied from approximately one to four hours however there was no expectation or time frame placed on participants from me at any point. As the researcher I was willing to be led by the participant.

The yarns were based on covering a set of consistent questions and themes introduced by me as the researcher, focussed on both the primary and secondary research questions. Whilst there were consistent questions and themes introduced during the yarns, this was not done in a scripted or highly structured way. The timing and phrasing of questions was based on the dynamics and flow of each specific yarning event.

1.0 Consistent Questions asked during the yarning process.

- What do you think defines an Indigenous approach to learning and teaching from your perspective?
- Can you describe how an Indigenous approach to learning and teaching would be experienced?
- What is the context and setting that you utilise an Indigenous approach to learning and teaching?
- Is taking an Indigenous learning and teaching approach applicable in any education setting and with anyone or are there cultural or other factors that determine this?
- Are there any shared values, beliefs and practices between an Indigenous approaches and other approaches to education?
- What do you think makes an Indigenous learning and teaching approach authentic?
- Can non-Indigenous educators utilise an Indigenous learning and teaching approach?
- Have you experienced any resistance or barriers when trying to utilise an Indigenous approach to teaching and learning in the spaces that you work in?

- Is there a limit or restriction to what content can be included within an Indigenous approach to learning and teaching?
- Will culturally specific knowledge or information be protected via an Indigenous approach to learning and teaching?
- Do you take an Indigenous approach to your teaching as a conscious decision to utilise an anti-colonial and decolonising approach to practice?
- Do you think the opportunity to take an Indigenous approach to teaching and learning should be part of a rights-based relationship with the governance and policy making around education in Australia?

The yarns were digitally audio recorded and transcribed to text. A professional transcription service was utilised to provide a high-quality transcription to work from. The transcripts were first checked by me for accuracy then sent to the yarning participant. Participants were able to edit their contributions in any way they felt was necessary so that the transcript represented as accurate an account as possible regarding the participants response to the questions raised and issues discussed. The participant rights to edit included the option to add any additional thoughts or ideas they had or to remove any content that, on reflection, they decided they did not want included. The final yarning transcripts became the data used to undertake a thematic analysis of the participant responses.

Phase 4: Analysis of yarning and participant feedback

The yarning data was then subject to hybrid analysis based on inductive and deductive method, comparing the overarching themes identified by research participants with themes that had been identified within relevant literature that looked specifically at First Nations pedagogies within Australia and with any themes or definitions of practice introduced by myself within the yarning process or prior to the yarning process within my own professional experience as reflected in my own published literature.

I decided to use a hybrid analysis approach to analyse the yarns. This approach was guided by Schutz's social phenomenology approach (Fereday and Muir-Cochrane, 2006, p1) and the Indigenous research approach presented by Dr Shawn Wilson that encourages researchers to honour and reflect the relational experiences of those collaborating in the research process. (Wilson, 2020.)

I chose a hybrid approach as I believe it supports a process of exploring the subjective experiences that are captured within a yarning process. It allowed me to include the lived experiences of myself and the participants and allowed for the integration of existing theories and relevant literature. This approach allowed me to take an inductive and deductive approach to support the process of coding and the subsequent refining of themes that reflect a broader capturing of the wholistic knowledge within and around the research process (Xu and Zammit, 2020 p1).

I would define the analysis process as a qualitative hybrid method that included narrative and thematic analysis through inductive and deductive approaches; considered appropriate due to the non-linear way the yarning process takes shape. This method was chosen for its suitability in supporting the analysis of non-linear, semi-structured participant discussions and to enable ongoing reflective and reflexive process by all involved in the research process (Swain, 2018).

The first part of the analysis process involved the author listening to the audio recordings then making lists using NVIVO analysis software of key themes and contexts to which the theme applied (Speak AI 2023). Each recording was then re-listened to check for and confirm initial themes. The identified themes were then used as reference points to analyse each transcript in more detail. In this stage, more inductively derived themes and thematic contexts were identified and added to create the final list of saturated collective themes. A third and final review of all transcripts was conducted to identify the frequency of themes and thematic contexts mapped against the collection of yarns. For this process, NVIVO was used as the analytic tool, given the capacity of NVIVO to help store, organise and map thematic themes and frequencies of themes.

I would consider my use of NVIVO a relatively simplistic but effective use of the tool however it was also a process that did not require a sophisticated data analysis tool such as NVIVO and the process could have been done without the use of this type of software.

In keeping with the principles of the overarching Indigenous research methodology used (Wilson 2020.), results were shared back with yarning participants for consideration and further comment. No participants disagreed with the findings, nor suggested additional themes or sub themes. However, two participants did not respond at all to invitations to engage in this process of feedback. The response from the remaining participants was to express satisfaction with the analysis and positive agreement with the findings.

Phase 5: Focused discussion responses.

In this phase of the research secondary questions were considered and discussed against all the information that has been gathered along with my own autoethnographic narrative reflections based on my professional practice experience.

These discussions are presented via three publications, one of which is a written co-authored paper and two of which are audio podcasts that I have written and produced.

1. Are there benefits for students if they engage with an authentic Indigenous teaching and learning experience within a tertiary study program?
2. How may the engagement of students in Indigenous teaching and learning experiences influence the professional and social practice of graduates?

3. What are the broader socio-cultural implications of changes in graduate beliefs and practices as a result of students having engaged with an Indigenous teaching and learning experience during their study program.

4. Are there challenges or barriers to introducing an Indigenous approach to learning and teaching within a tertiary/university setting in Australia.

My method for exploring these secondary questions is based on autoethnographic reflective practice. Whilst the autoethnographic approach can be considered a methodology of itself (Ellis and Adams 2014), in this case I am utilising it as a method within my Indigenous Research Methodology. I chose this approach because it allowed me to draw on my extensive professional experience as an educator within the university system, and also to include my positionality to contextualise the sociocultural dimensions of my professional experience. Personal narratives, experiences and opinions are valuable data which provide researchers with tools to find those tentative answers they are looking for (Marshall and Rossman, 1999). The autoethnographic reflective process is a sound method to support my narrative approach in considering these secondary research questions.

To further emphasise and contextualise this approach as appropriate within an Indigenous Research Methodology, the closer consideration of the secondary research questions was done via a recorded oral method, presented as audio, with transcripts available. I chose this method for a number of reasons. I believe this is the most direct and authentic method of providing an Indigenous ethnographic narrative as possible whilst making my work as accessible as possible to a non-academic audience, which is a commitment I have made to this work from the outset. Further to this I agree with Nabobo-Baba (2008) that presenting an oral account of Indigenous research focussed on speaking to an Indigenous audience, from an Indigenist Standpoint, represents a decolonising approach to research within the academy. Whitinui (2014) makes the point that -

“Indigenous autoethnography aims to address issues of social justice and to develop social change by engaging indigenous researchers in rediscovering their own voices as “culturally liberating human-beings.”

Finally, given the significance placed on the Indigenous tradition of yarning within this research, such that yarning has been the primary method for data collection, my use of an oral method to present my autoethnographic reflection provides a sense of methodological consistency throughout the work. The ‘data’ in this case is my own extensive experience over twenty-five years.

Phase 6: Production of multi-media research presentation.

My PhD study is presented via a web site that presents a digital story of the research process. It is intentionally presented in a way that is accessible to as broad an audience as possible, particularly to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community members who may not be as comfortable and familiar with the traditional academic paper medium, as a way of accessing and considering research outcomes. Presentation via this medium also allows for relevant and important aspects of the research process and findings, such as country and people to be

experienced via a more dynamic medium than text. It allows country and people to be seen alongside the text that talks about them.

The website is what will be presented to markers of my Ph.D. and will be the medium that all the publications curated as content will be accessed from. Beyond its role in the PhD presentation and marking process my website will be a representative of a 'live' digital medium that can be further edited and developed so that it can be of greater service to the broader community and in particular to First Nations community education and support in regard to a rights-based approach to negotiating space and activity within the Australian education landscape.

Ethical considerations

My research proposal underwent a very rigorous examination via the Griffith University Ethics committee before receiving an ethics clearance. Whilst I had developed my proposal via the guidance of my own Elder mentorship and in close consideration of the Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Research Guidelines (AIATSIS 2022), my ethics approval involved a long-winded exchange between the First Peoples representative on the Griffith Ethics Committee and myself. To this end I have remained very vigilant in my consideration of the ethical considerations of this research.

I am aware that for some researchers, working outside an Indigenous Research Methodology, the idea that you would invite friends and colleagues to have intentional discussions that sought to draw out unbiased or unfiltered thoughts and opinions may be considered problematic and even unethical, based on the 'risk' that there could be an unintentional or even intentional collusion. This concern sits almost squarely in contrast with the focus on the quality of relationality amongst research participants within an Indigenous or Indigenist research approach (Wilson 2020). For this reason alone, I don't consider my choice of participants to present any ethical concerns. My concern around participants is more to do with how many participants I was able to engage, or more so how many more I would have liked to engage but I will address this further when I talk about the research limitations.

On the other hand, I do feel that the research roles that I essentially defined, in retrospect somewhat unwittingly, may present some ethical concerns for some researchers within the Indigenous Research Methodology field, depending on how they analysed the relationships to agency and data sovereignty between those initiating the research and those participating (KuKuTai and Taylor 2016). In this case I was a singular lead researcher and those that I invited to yarn with have been identified as participants rather than co-researchers. There may be concerns raised that I did not co-design my research aims and objectives with a collective of Indigenous co-researchers first and then proceed to the yarning process after which the yarning collective would engage in the process of analyse and maintain collective ownership of all research findings and outputs, including collective authorship of findings and other subsequent publications.

I see that scenario as somewhat of an ideal research process in comparison to the options I had as a PhD candidate, utilising a process that somewhat dictates the options available. For this reason, I don't feel my approach was unethical, particularly given that all the participants that agreed to be part of it are keenly aware of the ethical principles involved in research with Indigenous peoples.

Outside of the limits of a Ph.D. study program and in consideration of research aims and context, I may choose a more collectivist approach to researching in the Indigenous knowledges space.

The final issue of ethical consideration I want to address is the content of my personal narratives within the two podcasts, and in particular in the second podcast. In these podcasts I provide my personal accounts of experiences that myself and others have had in regard to executive level decision making within a university employment context.

In telling my story, I have not named the institution. I have named any individuals nor have I been specific about the executive roles. I have intentionally not included that level of detail because my intentions are to provide the context and evidence from which I am making claims about process and the ideological drivers of process. I believe that level of detail I have provided is necessary to support this.

Nevertheless, I understand that, based on that level of detail, someone listening to that podcast may believe they can piece together a good guess as to who the specific people are who were involved. I do not believe my work encourages or supports the need to identify any individuals involved. On other hand I believe that we all need be accountable for our actions when we are acting as agents within hierarchical institutional settings, and I include myself in that. I do not think it is unethical to share stories of our individual experiences, that we hold to be true, that we believe are experiences of discriminatory or oppressive processes and practices.

Trustworthiness

I feel that addressing the issue of trustworthiness of my research process and outcomes is important given that I am making the claim that this study represents an approach that has not been previously undertaken (based on my literature review) and further claiming that the research findings confirm what has previously only been suggested, but not tested, in regard to the depth of common ground amongst First Nations in regard to how learning and teaching is approached and practiced.

To this end I am talking to the commonly understood elements of qualitative research trustworthiness as originally discussed by Guba, being dependability, credibility, transferability and confirmability (Guba 1981; Schwant et al 2007).

In considering the issue of trustworthiness I am aware that there is ongoing academic debate about the integrity of qualitative research process and outcomes more broadly (Watts 2008)

and more specifically there has been critique around the growing popularity of the yarning concept within Indigenous focussed research (Kennedy et al 2022).

I believe one of the strongest indicators of trustworthiness in this research comes from the fact that all the yarning participants were First Nations people who had accepted an invitation, with no incentive or reward offered. Out of fourteen initial invitations, twelve people agreed to participate. This demonstrates a strong level of enthusiasm to be involved.

Of the twelve people that accepted, ten of those people were comfortable to be identified and understood that those reading the research would be able to identify them. Further to this all of the participants are professionally capable of scrutinising a research proposal and its methods in order to make a clearly informed decision about the integrity of the process.

In regard to the trustworthiness of the data that came from the yarning process I believe my commitment to honouring relatedness and relationship as a foundation of my methodology, the placing of cultural safety of participants at the front end of methodological consideration, in combination with a strong shared depth of knowledge between myself and the research participants supported the gathering of high quality, rich and thick data (Atkinson et al 2021).

Trustworthiness of both the data gathering and findings process was supported by the consistency of engagement with research participants throughout the data gathering and analysis process. I believe the process I used went beyond a more typical member check and was more aligned with critical reflexive methods, which has been identified as a more trustworthy process in research with Indigenous participants (Nicholls 2009; Motulsky 2021). I note that there was an 80% positive response rate from participants in regard to the analysis and findings of the study and no participants disagreed with or sought to add to the findings of the study.

I believe the inductive/deductive hybrid analysis method I used to analyse the yarns, whilst a relatively new process, is increasingly being recognised for its capacity to synthesise complex themes (Proudfoot 2023). In this case it was the combination of inductive analysis of the existing knowledge and understanding of myself as the researcher and/or the consideration of the literature and the deductive discovery of understanding that comes from the yarning in combination. This trustworthiness of this hybrid approach is dependant on the depth of knowledge that the research brings outside of the data captured by the yarns. The decades of knowledge development in the space that I am researching and the depth of expertise of the yarning participants is an ideal situation in which to apply the hybrid analysis method I utilised. This method is highly transferable to research in which similar circumstances apply between the researchers and research participants.

The autoethnographic narrative method I used in considering the secondary questions in this study is well established both as a method and an overarching methodology (Le Roux 2017). More specifically Indigenous autoethnography, as I have utilised it, is described as part of the

process of decolonising research and a method by which Indigenous peoples voices can be heard as a process of social and cultural justice (Whitinui 2015; Pham and Gothberg 2020).

I have presented my autoethnographic reflection via the spoken narrative of the podcast publications however I have also demonstrated support for my reflection with supporting references from relevant literature, that I have included within the transcripts of the spoken narratives.

I suggest that the any further issues in regard to the trustworthiness of this method in my process will come down to the decision of the reader to believe the narrative I bring, from a factual perspective and to accept my analysis as it stands, from my positionality without feeling a need to re-define that analysis. I don't believe this is something that I can manage or control other than having a strong sense of faith that the reader will engage with a strong sense of cultural humility.

Limitations

Some limitations must be considered in this study. Firstly, the study was conducted with a convenience sample, that was somewhat limited by number. However, given, resource limitations of the study, I consider twelve participants from diverse cultural backgrounds to be sufficient for this research. Further, as with most research that evaluates sensitive social, cultural and/or political matters, there may be tendency for social desirability bias (Bergen and Labonte', 2020). It is entirely possible that participants may have held views or opinions during yarning, or in regard to feedback on the analysis, they chose not to share. However, given this group represent First Nations peoples with demonstrated professional commitment to the promotion of First Nations teaching and learning practices, including the decolonisation of education, it seems unlikely that reluctance or apathy have played a significant part in the consensus outcome. Further to this Bergen and Labonte' (2020) have identified that providing sound information about the study, establishing rapport and asking questions are important strategies in avoiding or limiting bias. These practices were actively engaged during the yarning process with participants.

Further Research

I recommend that a larger scale project, with a more diverse representation of First Nations teaching and learning practitioners, should be undertaken to provide further confirmation or challenge to a thesis based on shared beliefs, values and processes amongst First Nations groups.

I further recommend that future research in this space be undertaken via a collectivist research approach and that no single individual be responsible for engaging the process from design through to publication of results and follow on discussions.

Finally, there should be a more widely considered exploration of how First Nations led pedagogies and education experiences can be engaged across the full spectrum of formal education settings in Australia, from early childhood through to postgraduate training. This

should include consideration of the argument for First Nations approaches to be utilised to help overcome the significant impacts that the colonising project has had on human and non-human society throughout Australia.

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Appendix 1: First contact email with potential research participants

Potential candidates were first contacted formally via the following standardised email, regardless of their relationship to the researcher.

Dear _____

I am writing to invite you to participate in my PhD research project titled "Exploring Indigenous Australian Teaching and Learning Processes".

You have been chosen as an invitee due to your self-declared interest in this area along with public recognition of your enthusiasm, relevant experience and expertise.

As we are well known to one another I will not include my CV although I am happy to provide this upon request.

OR

As we are not well known to each other I am including my CV in this email.

I have attached a Participant Information Sheet that briefly explains the project and the role of participants. This document is shared with you in confidence and is for your exclusive viewing. I respectfully ask you not to share or distribute it to any third parties.

I invite you to confirm or decline your interest in participating in this project via return email. I am more than happy to provide further information via email or via phone - 0400292446.

Yours Sincerely

Glenn Woods

Appendix 2: Participant Information Sheet

Participant Information Sheet **Exploring Indigenous Teaching and Learning Processes** **Ethics Approval # GU Ref No: 2017/236**

Researchers:

Glenn Woods PhD Candidate.
School of Human Services and Social Work,
Griffith University
[REDACTED]

Principal Supervisor: Dr Naomi Sunderland.
School of Human Services and Social Work,
Griffith University
[REDACTED]

Why is the research being conducted?

This research is being conducted as the core component of a PhD research study. The primary aim of the research is to explore how Indigenous teaching and learning processes can be defined from an Indigenous Australian perspective drawing on Indigenous knowledges and contexts for teaching and learning. The research will also examine how Indigenous teaching and learning processes can be accessed and used for the benefit of Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples within tertiary education settings and the potential impact of this on graduate professional practice and social change more broadly.

The expected benefits of this research

The primary benefit of this research will be to provide a contemporary, broad and diverse discussion that is focussed on what an authentic Indigenous Australian teaching and learning process would be, as defined by Indigenous Australians.

The knowledge gathered and shared via this process will inform and support ongoing discussions on how to: improve education practices in Australia; improve professional development for professionals who work with Indigenous peoples; and action social justice and human rights initiatives. At the broadest level we hope that this research will help to promote equity and social justice within the Australian community.

What will you be asked to do?

You will be asked to take part in a yarning session or series of sessions with the researcher Glenn Woods. These sessions will be semi-structured around themes and ideas regarding what defines an Indigenous Australia teaching and learning process and how this might look in a tertiary education setting. You will be asked to name a time and location that is convenient to you to have the yarn. The researcher will travel to you to conduct the yarn.

You will not be expected to commit any more than 4 hours of your time to the yarning process. If you wish to you may elect to break this 4 hours up into shorter segments of time and spread that over more than a single day. There is no expectation that you take place in a session that may last for up to 4 hours without a break.

The researcher will request your permission to film the yarn so that the yarning can take place as easily and naturally as possible without notes having to be taken. With your permission, sections of the filmed yarn may be used in a mini-documentary that will document the outcomes of the research. If you do not wish to be filmed the researcher may request your permission to audio record the yarning session.

If you agree to be filmed, you will receive the video footage of your yarn and be given an opportunity to add to or edit anything you would like to change before the researcher analyses the yarns for the research.

After the researcher has analysed and collated all of the yarns, you will receive a report detailing important overall concepts, themes and ideas relating to Indigenous Australian teaching and learning processes that have emerged from the research. You will then be given an opportunity to make any final comments about the report but will not be required to do so. All comments made will be included by the researcher as part of the research data.

Will my identity be confidential in this research?

You will have the option to remain anonymous or to be identified in the research based on your preference. The researcher will discuss the implications of your choice to remain anonymous or be identified with you during the yarning session.

You will also be asked if you would like video footage of your yarn to be included within a video documentary styled research output that will be produced as part of the PhD research products along with published and unpublished discussion papers. If you wish to remain anonymous in the research, we will not use video footage of you in the video documentary.

Your participation is voluntary

If you choose to participate in this research, you do not need to answer every question unless you wish to. Further, your participation or non-participation will in no way impact on your relationship with the organisation or researcher from whom you heard about the research project.

You can withdraw from the research at any time without fear of negative reactions from the researcher or Griffith University. Participants should note however that once research publications and the documentary are “published” and released for public viewing it may be impossible for us to remove your comments from those publications and documentary.

How participants are identified and selected

Potential participants will be invited to participate based on the following criteria:

- They are a person known to the researcher via established professional and/or cultural relationships who has a demonstrated interest or involvement in Indigenous teaching and learning processes and practices.
- They are a person identified via the literature review as having a demonstrated interest or involvement in Indigenous teaching and learning processes and practices.
- They are a person referred to via an established professional or cultural relationship.

The researcher will seek to recruit a gender balanced group that represents a very broad range of Indigenous Australian cultures, experiences, and perspectives.

Potential participants will be sent a written invitation to participate via mail or email. Participants will confirm their availability via phone, mail or email.

Informed Consent

All participants will be asked to review this information sheet carefully before signing an informed consent agreement to participate in the research. No information gathered will be re-used in any future research without the written consent of the participant.

An informed consent agreement will also be used in regard to audio and visual recordings of participants during yarning sessions. No audio or visual material will be used in any form without the written consent of participants.

No use of information gathered from participants will be shared or used outside of this research study without the informed consent of participants.

Intellectual and cultural property rights

Participants hold the intellectual and cultural property rights to all the knowledge and information shared during the research process, as recognised by the Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies: Guidelines for Ethical Research in Australian Indigenous Studies (<http://aiatsis.gov.au/research/ethical-research/guidelines-ethical-research-australian-indigenous-studies>); the Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples: Article 31 (<https://www.humanrights.gov.au/publications/un-declaration-rights-indigenous-peoples-1>) and in regard to any and all existing state and national legislation. Participants retain the right to withdraw or withhold any information shared prior to the publication of any document or other product that contains information provided by the participant in written, audio or visual form.

Potential risks associated with this research

Your participation in this research will involve taking part in yarns/discussions and responding to written material via email or verbally. There are no significant perceived risks involved with your participation in this research. If you choose to be identified in the research your name will be used alongside comments you have made to the researcher in public documents and a documentary film arising from the research. If you choose to have film footage of you included in the documentary arising from this project that film may exist in the public sphere beyond the period of your lifetime. The researcher will take this into account and include relevant cultural warnings at the beginning of the documentary film and seek your express permission to include footage of you in the film.

The ethical conduct of this research

Griffith University conducts research in accordance with the National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Human Research (2007). The present study has been granted ethical clearance for the present research. If potential participants have any concerns or complaints about the ethical conduct of the research project they should contact the Manager, Research Ethics on 3735 4375 or research-ethics@griffith.edu.au.

Storage and archiving of information collected

Information collected from participants as written material, audio recordings and visual recordings will be securely stored and archived by the researcher via the Griffith University Research Online data storage systems. These systems are not available to the public and are only accessible by the researcher and approved research team members. For a comprehensive guide to the Griffith University research storage facilities please see: <https://www.griffith.edu.au/eresearch-services/research-data-management-and-storage>

Disclosure Statement

The conduct of this research involves the collection, access and/or use of your identified personal information. As outlined elsewhere in this information sheet, your identified personal information may appear in the publications/reports arising from this research. This is occurring with your consent. Any additional personal information collected is confidential and will not be disclosed to third parties without your consent, except to meet government, legal or other regulatory authority requirements. A de-identified copy of this data may be used for other research purposes. However, your anonymity will at all times be safeguarded, except where you have consented otherwise. For further information consult the University's Privacy Plan at <http://www.griffith.edu.au/about-griffith/plans-publications/griffith-university-privacy-plan> or telephone (07) 3735 4375.

Appendix 3

Participant Information Sheet
Exploring Indigenous Teaching and Learning Processes
Ethics Approval # GU Ref No: 2017/236

Researchers:

Glenn Woods PhD Candidate.
School of Human Services and Social Work,
Griffith University
[REDACTED]

Principal Supervisor: Dr Naomi Sunderland.
School of Human Services and Social Work,
Griffith University
[REDACTED]

Why is the research being conducted?

This research is being conducted as the core component of a PhD research study. The primary aim of the research is to explore how Indigenous teaching and learning processes can be defined from an Indigenous Australian perspective drawing on Indigenous knowledges and contexts for teaching and learning. The research will also examine how Indigenous teaching and learning processes can be accessed and used for the benefit of Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples within tertiary education settings and the potential impact of this on graduate professional practice and social change more broadly.

The expected benefits of this research

The primary benefit of this research will be to provide a contemporary, broad and diverse discussion that is focussed on what an authentic Indigenous Australian teaching and learning process would be, as defined by Indigenous Australians.

The knowledge gathered and shared via this process will inform and support ongoing discussions on how to: improve education practices in Australia; improve professional development for professionals who work with Indigenous peoples; and action social justice and human rights initiatives. At the broadest level we hope that this research will help to promote equity and social justice within the Australian community.

What will you be asked to do?

You will be asked to take part in a yarning session or series of sessions with the researcher Glenn Woods. These sessions will be semi-structured around themes and ideas regarding what defines an Indigenous Australia teaching and learning process and how this might look in a tertiary education setting. You will be asked to name a time and location that is convenient to you to have the yarn. The researcher will travel to you to conduct the yarn.

You will not be expected to commit any more than 4 hours of your time to the yarning process. If you wish to you may elect to break this 4 hours up into shorter segments of time and spread that over more than a single day. There is no expectation that you take place in a session that may last for up to 4 hours without a break.

The researcher will request your permission to film the yarn so that the yarning can take place as easily and naturally as possible without notes having to be taken. With your permission, sections of the filmed yarn may be used in a mini-documentary that will document the outcomes of the research. If you do not wish to be filmed the researcher may request your permission to audio record the yarning session.

If you agree to be filmed, you will receive the video footage of your yarn and be given an opportunity to add to or edit anything you would like to change before the researcher analyses the yarns for the research.

After the researcher has analysed and collated all of the yarns, you will receive a report detailing important overall concepts, themes and ideas relating to Indigenous Australian teaching and learning processes that have emerged from the research. You will then be given an opportunity to make any final comments about the report but will not be required to do so. All comments made will be included by the researcher as part of the research data.

Will my identity be confidential in this research?

You will have the option to remain anonymous or to be identified in the research based on your preference. The researcher will discuss the implications of your choice to remain anonymous or be identified with you during the yarning session.

You will also be asked if you would like video footage of your yarn to be included within a video documentary styled research output that will be produced as part of the PhD research products along with published and unpublished discussion papers. If you wish to remain anonymous in the research, we will not use video footage of you in the video documentary.

Your participation is voluntary

If you choose to participate in this research, you do not need to answer every question unless you wish to. Further, your participation or non-participation will in no way impact on your relationship with the organisation or researcher from whom you heard about the research project.

You can withdraw from the research at any time without fear of negative reactions from the researcher or Griffith University. Participants should note however that once research

publications and the documentary are “published” and released for public viewing it may be impossible for us to remove your comments from those publications and documentary.

How participants are identified and selected

Potential participants will be invited to participate based on the following criteria:

- They are a person known to the researcher via established professional and/or cultural relationships who has a demonstrated interest or involvement in Indigenous teaching and learning processes and practices.
- They are a person identified via the literature review as having a demonstrated interest or involvement in Indigenous teaching and learning processes and practices.
- They are a person referred to via an established professional or cultural relationship.

The researcher will seek to recruit a gender balanced group that represents a very broad range of Indigenous Australian cultures, experiences, and perspectives.

Potential participants will be sent a written invitation to participate via mail or email. Participants will confirm their availability via phone, mail or email.

Informed Consent

All participants will be asked to review this information sheet carefully before signing an informed consent agreement to participate in the research. No information gathered will be re-used in any future research without the written consent of the participant.

An informed consent agreement will also be used in regard to audio and visual recordings of participants during yarning sessions. No audio or visual material will be used in any form without the written consent of participants.

No use of information gathered from participants will be shared or used outside of this research study without the informed consent of participants.

Intellectual and cultural property rights

Participants hold the intellectual and cultural property rights to all the knowledge and information shared during the research process, as recognised by the Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies: Guidelines for Ethical Research in Australian Indigenous Studies (<http://aiatsis.gov.au/research/ethical-research/guidelines-ethical-research-australian-indigenous-studies>); the Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples: Article 31 (<https://www.humanrights.gov.au/publications/un-declaration-rights-indigenous-peoples-1>) and in regard to any and all existing state and national legislation. Participants retain the right to withdraw or withhold any information shared prior to the publication of any document or other product that contains information provided by the participant in written, audio or visual form.

Potential risks associated with this research

Your participation in this research will involve taking part in yarns/discussions and responding to written material via email or verbally. There are no significant perceived risks involved with your participation in this research. If you choose to be identified in the research your name will be used alongside comments you have made to the researcher in public documents and a documentary film arising from the research. If you choose to have film footage of you included in the documentary arising from this project that film may exist in the public sphere beyond the period of your lifetime. The researcher will take this into account and include relevant cultural warnings at the beginning of the documentary film and seek your express permission to include footage of you in the film.

The ethical conduct of this research

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Disclosure Statement

The conduct of this research involves the collection, access and/or use of your identified personal information. As outlined elsewhere in this information sheet, your identified personal information may appear in the publications/reports arising from this research. This is occurring with your consent. Any additional personal information collected is confidential and will not be disclosed to third parties without your consent, except to meet government, legal or other regulatory authority requirements. A de-identified copy of this data may be used for other research purposes. However, your anonymity will at all times be safeguarded, except where you have consented otherwise. For further information consult the University's Privacy Plan at <http://www.griffith.edu.au/about-griffith/plans-publications/griffith-university-privacy-plan> or telephone (07) 3735 4375.

Appendix 4. Informed Consent form for yarning participants

Informed Consent for Research Project: Exploring Indigenous Teaching and Learning Processes

Ethics Approval # GU 2017/236

Choosing to take part

If you choose to take part in this research you will be contributing to our understanding of Indigenous teaching and learning practices and how these can be applied ethically in tertiary settings. You will be asked to participate in an in depth discussion (of one hour or more in duration) with the researcher to discuss your understanding and experiences of Indigenous teaching and learning practices. The Researcher will request to video and audio record that discussion. We expect that there will be no risk to you as a result of your participation. It is expected that the subject matter explored in your interview with researchers should not provide any emotional harm. You can choose not to answer any questions that you do not feel comfortable with. You can withdraw from the research at any time.

What will happen with the information?

The information you provide will be used as information to be evaluated and analysed in regard to ideas and themes that are relevant to Indigenous teaching and learning processes and practices. The findings will be published as a core component of a PhD being undertaken by Glenn Woods, PhD candidate, Griffith University, Australia. The PhD study aims to present a compelling discussion around what constitutes an authentic Indigenous teaching and learning practice in a contemporary Australian context and, further to this, how Indigenous teaching and learning practices may be included within the learning experiences of university students as a means of improving their professional development and social justice advocacy capacity.

The data gathered throughout this research project will be stored on the Griffith University Health Research Centre's secured research data depository for a minimum of five years. Additionally, during data analysis, data will also be stored on Griffith University staff hard drives which are password protected and secure. A de-identified copy (i.e. with your name removed) of the data will be made available to you for your approval prior to its use in published material and final study discussions. For further information consult the University's Privacy Policy Plan at <http://www.griffith.edu.au/about-griffith/plans-publications/griffith-university-privacy-plan>

Please note: Information from your discussion sessions may be included in research publications and associated presentations. If you choose to have your real name, and your organisation's real name included in the published case study, third parties will be able to identify you and your organisation. You can request that researchers anonymise your contributions to the research (i.e. by removing your name and any identifiable information about your organisation) however some people may be able to identify you and your organisation if they are already familiar with your field of work. If you choose to share documents relating to your work for the case study these items may also identify you to others. Researchers will not use these items in public documents without your permission.

Approval for publication: You will have an opportunity to review and provide feedback on the written case study about your work prior to its publication in any form. You can withdraw from the research at any time however once the PhD is submitted the researcher will not be unable to remove your information from that published material.

Statement of Consent

You are asked to consent to be involved in discussions and to participate in this research. Please determine if you need to have organisational consent to participate in this research. If you do need organisational consent please provide the relevant representative with this information and ask them to also sign below. By signing below, you (and your organisational representative) are indicating that you:

- Understand that the researcher would like to use the outcomes of discussions with you in developing a PhD study that is focussed on Indigenous Australian teaching and learning practices and processes.
- Understand that you will be given a copy of the discussion for comment or edit prior to publication;
- Understand that once the PhD is submitted researchers will be unable to remove your information from that published material;
- Have read and understood the information sheet about this project;
- Are willing to have your discussion contributions and any other documents you provide regarding your work included within research publications and presentations;
- May be identifiable in the research and associated publications if details about your work and organisation are included in publications;
- Understand that you can request to have all identifying information about yourself and your organisation removed to reduce the chance that readers can identify you or your organisation;
- Understand you are free to withdraw from the information gathering at any time;
- Understand that if you have any further questions or concerns you can contact the researchers involved with this study at any time;
- Understand that if you have any concerns about the ethical conduct of this research or the researchers involved please direct them to the Manager of Research Ethics, via phone, 61 7 373 54375 or e-mail: research-ethics@griffith.edu.au;
- Agree to participate in the project.

The conduct of this research involves the collection, access and/or use of your identified personal information. As outlined elsewhere in this information sheet, your identified personal information may appear in publications/reports arising from this research that may be available to overseas recipients. This is occurring with your consent. Any additional personal information collected is confidential and will not be disclosed to third parties without your consent, except to meet government, legal or other regulatory authority requirements. A de-identified copy of this data may be used for other research purposes. However, your anonymity will at all times be safeguarded, except where you have consented otherwise. For further information consult the University's Privacy Plan at <http://www.griffith.edu.au/about-griffith/plans-publications/griffith-university-privacy-plan> or telephone 61 (07) 3735 4375.

Do you consent to participate in this research? (please tick) Yes
No

Do you wish to be identified in this research? (please tick) Yes
No

Do you agree to your interview being digitally recorded? (please tick) Yes
No

Interviewee Name _____

Signature _____

Date ____ / ____ / ____

Organisational representative Name (if required) _____

Signature _____

Date ____ / ____ / ____

Introduction to Findings Paper

This next publication has been written to work as a stand-alone publication that contains that includes relevant background and my approach to the study as well as the analysis and findings. Some of the discussion around methodology will mirror content covered in the methodology chapter although there may be some more for the reader to get out of this regarding understanding and reflecting on my methodology. By far the most rewarding and enjoyable part of this Ph.D. journey for me was the time I spent yarning with the wonderful people whose thoughts and opinions are the heart of this research. I want to thank all of them again for the incredible contribution they all made to this research. I would have preferred to present a much stronger sense of the voices of all the participants within this publication however I struggled to edit it down to its current word limit. As a way of making sure the voices of the research participants are heard I have included some transcript edits from the yarns following this publication.

COMMON GROUND FOR RIGHTS-BASED EDUCATION:

WHAT DEFINES AN INDIGENIST APPROACH TO LEARNING AND TEACHING IN AUSTRALIA?

Word count: Abstract – 197 wds

Article – 7467 wds plus references

Disclaimer: This manuscript has not been published elsewhere and is not under consideration by any other journal. There are no known conflicts of interest.

Keywords: Indigenist, Australian tertiary education, teaching and learning, decolonisation, yarning

ABSTRACT

First Nations peoples have distinct approaches to learning and teaching, passed down intergenerationally for thousands of years, largely ignored by settler-colonial education institutions in developing policy and practice. A thematic analysis of yarns with 12 diverse First Nations educators found shared agreement about values, beliefs and approaches that inform an Indigenous/ist approach to learning and teaching in Australia. Four key themes emerged from this common ground: Relationship, Country, Practice Experiences and Knowledge Systems. While there are some similarities across recent literature about First Nations pedagogies, there is currently no collective agreement amongst Australia's diverse First Nations groups on what defines an Indigenist learning and teaching approach. There are also significant differences between the findings of this study and the dominant, Anglocentric learning and teaching approaches operationalised by the Australian settler-colonial State, particularly at a tertiary level. The settler-colonial State's failure to consider First Nations approaches as an option in mainstream tertiary education context is at odds with a rights-based approach, pointing to a need to decolonise education. The four themes emerging from these yarns comprise an Indigenist approach and an opportunity to negotiate the inclusion of First Nations learning and teaching experiences across the national education context.

Australia is home to hundreds of First Nations¹ societies who represent the most successful enduring societies humanity has known (Pascoe, 2018; Yunkaporta, 2019). At the time of British invasion, the continent comprised one of the most biologically and linguistically diverse regions on earth (Gammage, 2012). The initial British, and then Anglo-Australian colonising project, had profound negative impacts on country, the foundation of Indigenous identity, culture and society. This ecocide was accompanied by brutal attacks on First Nations

¹ The terms 'First Nations' is used when pointing to the diverse cultures in Australia, while Indigenous is used to point to concepts shared by these groups and connecting globally in terms of international rights.

peoples, amounting to coordinated and systematic attempts at genocide. The continued consequences of this history include extensive community-based intergenerational trauma for surviving First Nations peoples and one of the worst non-human species extinction outcomes of the last 200 years (Atkinson, 2002; Recher, 2002). Today, First Nations societies in Australia continue humanity's oldest traditions, maintaining distinct cultural identities that are vastly different epistemologically and ontologically to the Anglocentric culture of settler-colonial Australia. Processes and practices of learning and teaching are fundamental to the maintenance and ongoing development of these intergenerational systems of knowledge.

By contrast, settler-colonial education systems in Australia (re)produce broader discourses where powerful narratives minimise, re-frame, and deny First Nations peoples' and societies' recognition of successful ongoing civilisation (Pascoe, 2018; Rowse, 2014). The achievement, enduring genius, and relatively harmonious multicultural mosaic representative of First Nations civilisation in Australia has been reduced, via the colonising project, to narratives of the grossly primitive, dangerous and deficit 'Aborigine' (Reynolds, 2000; Fforde et al., 2013.; Watego, 2021), which work to provide ongoing justification to the primacy of the settler-colonial state. This colonial narrative is pervasive even in 21st Century educational and pedagogical scholarship (Walton, 2017; Gunstone, 2009).

Australian policy and practice as applied to First Nations peoples remains culturally hegemonic and cloaked in the language and practice of socioeconomic welfare and remedial development, rather than operating from a rights-based framework (Nakata, 2007b; Yunkaporta, 2009; Woods, 2016). Contemporary First Nations education policy focuses on the successful *inclusion* of First Nations peoples into Anglo-Australian controlled systems of education as well as *helping* achieve successful outcomes as defined within settler-colonial aspirations (Woods, 2016). This is very clearly seen even in the most recent educational policy and curricula, especially at a tertiary level. In their critical literature review identifying

the issues and challenges of implementing the University Australia 2017-2020 Indigenous Strategy, Anderson et. al. note that one of three key themes was the “embedding of Indigenous knowledge and perspectives in the curriculum” (2023, p. 789). They note that key challenges of embedding First Nations knowledge and perspectives include the continued dominance of Western knowledges and the varied approach to doing so across universities (Anderson et. al., 2023, p. 793).

There is no legal recognition within Australia that First Nations peoples maintain a right to define and practice their own education systems based on recognition of sovereign rights or other agreements negotiated with the settler-colonial state (Behrendt, 2012). This is despite Australia being a signatory to the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UN, 2007) which stipulates the right of Indigenous peoples to “establish and control their educational systems and institutions providing education in their own languages, in a manner appropriate to their cultural methods of learning and teaching” (UN, 2007). To meet this fundamental human right, higher education institutions in Australia must understand the role of Indigenous philosophies, knowledges, and knowledge-sharing practices both in their own right, and also in regard to how mainstream education is defined, delivered, and experienced within Australia (Nakata, 2007a; Woods, 2016).

As an Indigenous educator with decades of experience at secondary and tertiary levels, I have lived experience of both the complexities of integrating Indigenous learning and teaching approaches in the university system and the challenges of operating as a staff member with epistemological, ontological and axiological approaches incongruous with the dominant Anglocentric culture of education institutions. This experience and my acknowledgement of it here is an important aspect of Indigenist research methodologies built on ‘reflexivity, ethics

and positionality' (Kwame, 2017, p. 1); my relational placement as both researcher and practitioner inside a university affords me a unique position from which to understand the findings of this study and assess their implications. (Smith, 1999; Martin, 2006). From experience, I have found that contemporary scholarship and practice of decolonising education lacks contextual focus and is yet to centre Indigenous/ist approaches to education as a viable option. Privileging First Nations systems of knowledge production, with an understanding that these have supported and maintained people and place at unprecedented levels of success, is imperative to providing an alternative to, and ultimately overturning, dominant settler-colonial narratives and supporting rights-based educational frameworks (Pascoe, 2018; Yunkaporta, 2019).

FINDING COMMON GROUND

This research transpires against the history of education in the Australian settler-colonial state, with its legacies that, until very recently, expose continued disregard of First Nations pedagogies. While there is clear recognition of First Nations diversity within contemporary education scholarship, the depth of *shared* epistemological, ontological and axiological approaches to learning and teaching has not yet been clearly articulative collectively by First Nations scholars and practitioners (Prehn et al., 2020; Woods, 2016; Yunkaporta, 2009). This has implications for both educators and students attempting to define and engage with First Nations knowledge systems. Of the relatively little published discussion regarding Australian Indigenous pedagogies generally, three notable examples are the work of Nakata (2007); Yunkaporta (2009) and West (2000). Dr Tyson Yunkaporta's doctoral research (2009) inspired the New South Wales Department of Education and Training's '8 Ways Pedagogy Training Program', an example of Indigenous pedagogical practice being engaged within a mainstream education context. Dr Martin Nakata's 'cultural interface', as a 'multi-layered and multi-

dimensional space of dynamic relations ...,within and between different knowledge traditions’, contains epistemological, ontological and axiological dimensions for asserting First Nations learning and teaching in mainstream settings (Nakata, 2007, p. 197). Notably, these scholars tend to maintain a culturally specific focus, arising from their own distinct cultural perspective. Yunkaporta’s Aboriginal pedagogy is considered and developed within a Apalech/Wik cultural context (2009), West’s work is strongly aligned to a Walpiri context (West, 2000), and Nakata’s work is considered from a Torres Strait Islander context (Nakata 2007). Reading across these culturally specific educational works, there are indeed shared First Nations beliefs, values, practices and aspirations, although these remain unarticulated by published research.

Burgess et al. suggest that “definitions and detail about [Indigenous] pedagogies are mostly absent, relying on ‘common understandings’ of what pedagogy means” (2019, p. 297). Critically, if there is no clear or shared understanding of the purpose and process of First Nations approaches to learning and teaching, further discussion about why and how that process is engaged is also compromised. This leaves the integrity and authority of First Nations-defined, -designed and -led education vulnerable to the continuation of imposed, non-Indigenous definitions and practices.

This research provides an evidenced based starting point from which to explore a broader understanding of what defines an Indigenous/ist approach to learning and teaching, by considering whether or not there are indeed common and shared values and beliefs that underpin and define a Indigenous/ist approach broadly. It then considers the implications of a shared approach to First Nations learning and teaching as critical to supporting the decolonisation of education practice in Australia.

THE STUDY: WHAT DEFINES A CONTEMPORARY FIRST NATIONS APPROACH TO LEARNING AND TEACHING IN AUSTRALIA?

Methodology: Indigenous standpoint theory, yarning, and place

This research was conducted using Indigenous research methodologies, underpinned by Indigenous Standpoint Theory (Briese & Menzel, 2020; Foley, 2006; Kwaymullina, 2017), chosen for its capacity to directly represent the voices of First Nations peoples, prioritise First Nations agendas, and place First Nations research participants in an active and empowered role regarding how knowledge is shared, represented and analysed. Nakata defines Indigenous Standpoint Theory as “a method of inquiry, a process for making more intelligible ‘the corpus of objectified knowledge about us’ as it emerges and organises understanding of our lived realities” (2007b, p.215). A commitment to Indigenous Standpoint Theory requires implementation of research practices that highlight the ownership of the knowledge investigated by the communities from which it comes, including recognising there must be direct benefit to these communities.

A key background understanding for this research is therefore the interaction of the specific cultural identities of different communities within the broader context of First Nations identity in relation to the colonial Nation. The author recognises the multicultural reality and sovereign governance rights of First Nations societies throughout Australia. However, this does not limit a culturally safe inquiry around shared ground between and among First Nations societies. Such discussions have been facilitated through extensive and complex sociocultural networks throughout the continent for millenia (Yunkaporta, 2019), evidenced by traditional kinship systems and songline networks that continue to unite multiple individual First Nations societies over vast geographic spaces (Fuller, 2020; Keen, 1988). A belief that this common ground, established and maintained prior to colonisation, continues

despite colonial disruption, prefaces this research. This does not discount that First Nations cultures have adapted in response to the colonising experience, introducing numerous other ontological and epistemological reference points, often by force via assimilationist government policies and settler-colonial cultural norms (Clark, 2000; McGregor, 2009). Human culture is a fluid, dynamic concept: to this end First Nations peoples are free to engage with, embrace, or reject new ideas, beliefs, and values just as members of any multicultural society may do (Wyer et al., 2009). Questions of cultural authenticity and legitimacy are issues that can be discussed amongst members within a group or society, as part of the shared human philosophical tradition. Such discussions should be differentiated from those coming from outside these specific social and cultural spaces, which impose uninvited and uninformed judgements regarding authenticity, particularly via the Anglo Australian hegemony (Harris et al., 2013). In this research, cultural identity and authenticity were approached from this insider perspective, particularly given the author's own positionality.

The primary knowledge sharing method used in this research was yarning, recognised as a First Nations conversational-based method of sharing and exchange (Atkinson et. al., 2021) that differs considerably from other qualitative 'talk methods' such as interviews (Bessarab & Ng'andu, 2010). Whilst yarning may be considered relatively new in the mainstream qualitative research space, it is grounded in a long and deep tradition (Atkinson et al., 2021). This method was chosen primarily to support a First Nations-based, culturally safe and egalitarian approach to engagement between the First Nations researcher and the First Nations participants.

Aligning with Indigenous Standpoint Theory, a significant aspect of yarning is the recognition that those who share knowledge continue to be the custodians and managers of that information (Bessarab & Ng'andu, 2010). Thus, participants were invited to provide

feedback on the process and outcomes of the researchers' analysis, as a way of maintaining an ongoing yarn and to clarify, include or edit anything that did not accurately represent their views. Participant voices were not anonymised unless requested. Consent to represent participants' voices was obtained at multiple points of the research process. These practices all work to shift the historical objectification of First Nations knowledges by university-based researchers as highlighted by Nakata (2007b), and Martin (2006).

Participants

Participant selection was designed to reflect as broad a diversity as possible, with a primary focus on cultural diversity. Invited participants were First Nations peoples from Australia, who identify as practitioners working with First Nations approaches to learning and teaching. The final participant group was representative of at least 20 culturally specific First Nations groups, from a wide geographical area across the continent, incorporating urban, rural and remote educational settings (figure 1). All participants had cultural connections through professional and kinship networks as well as broader cultural experiences upon which they drew. While it is difficult to comprehensively represent First Nations societies, the extensive sociocultural networks of participants strengthened the diversity within this study. All yarning participants identified as either Aboriginal, Torres Strait Islander, or both Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander. Four participants had a culturally distinct Torres Strait Islander background.

Figure 1

GEOGRAPHICAL REPRESENTATION OF PARTICIPANTS

There was equal representation of people who identify as female and people who identify as male. A deliberate attempt was made to seek a male and female gender balance, although the

author acknowledges the potential binary over-simplification of this process due to the complexity and culturally determined nature of gender identification (Sullivan & Day, 2021). Gender was an important factor because First Nations societies in Australia have clearly expressed lore/laws, traditions, customs, and social norms around gender, commonly referred to as ‘men’s and women’s business’ (Yunkaporta 2019). It is also the personal cultural understanding of the author that identification of and discussion about women’s and men’s business within First Nations contexts is pervasive and broadly accepted, including for concepts around educational practice and process. It was made explicit in written and spoken information preceding the yarn that the right and responsibility to accept an invitation and control what was disclosed rested with the participant. None of the participants requested gender specific rules or protocols, however the right to do so was made clear.

Data collection

Participants were asked to nominate a time and location of their choosing to conduct the yarn, as a method to support cultural safety and include place as a significant consideration in First Nations knowledge-sharing processes (Moran et al., 2018). Participants identified a range of locations as a ‘good place’ to have a yarn, including their homes, workplaces, or other specific locations on country. Participants were given a suggested time frame of one to four hours for the yarn. The length of resulting yarns was between one to three hours, with a two hour average. The yarns were audio recorded with permission. Transcripts were produced by a professional service and were cross-checked with participants for accuracy. Both the audio recordings and transcripts were used for analysis.

During the yarns, conversation centred around the primary research question: What defines a First Nations approach to learning and teaching in Australia? Responses often included

stories rather than ‘concise answers.’ This is central to Indigenous research methodology, which aims to honour the cultural integrity of participants and centre the unique interaction between participants, researchers and Country, above and beyond the production of particular results (Drawson et al., 2017; Hart, 2010; Wilson, 2001).

Data Analysis

Analysis was a qualitative hybrid method that included narrative and thematic analysis through inductive and deductive approaches (Swain, 2018), considered appropriate due to the non-linear way the yarning process takes shape. This approach was further guided by Schutz’s social phenomenology approach (Fereday and Muir-Cochrane, 2006, p. 1) and the Shawn Wilson’s Indigenous research approach presented which encourages researchers to honour and reflect the relational experiences of research collaborators and to enable ongoing reflective and reflexive process for all involved (Wilson, 2020). These approaches were chosen for their potential to explore the subjective experiences that are captured within a yarning process, to include the lived experiences of the researchers and to allow for the integration of existing theories and relevant literature. Inductive and deductive approaches were combined to support the process of coding and the presentation of themes that reflect a broader capturing of the holistic knowledge within the research process (Xu and Zammit, 2020, p. 1).

After the author listed an initial list of key themes and their contexts on first listening, each recording was then checked a second time to confirm these themes. The identified themes were then used as reference points to analyse each transcript in more detail. In this stage, more inductively derived themes and thematic contexts were identified and added to create the final list of saturated collective themes. A third and final review of all transcripts was conducted to identify the frequency of themes and thematic contexts mapped against the

collection of yarns, using NVIVO. In keeping with the principles of Indigenous research methodologies (Wilson, 2020), results were shared back with yarning participants for consideration and further comment. No participants disagreed with the findings, nor suggested additional themes or sub-themes. Importantly, this suggests a strong consensus amongst participants. Ethical approval was granted by the lead institution Human Research Ethics Committee and adhered to the Guidelines for Ethical Conduct in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Research (Values and Ethics) (NHMRC, 2003).

RESULTS

Key Themes and Contexts

Several key themes emerged regarding the primary research question: what defines a contemporary First Nations approach to learning and teaching in Australia? A key theme was defined as one that all participants spoke to in at least one or more contextual setting/s. Table 1 summarises these themes.

Table 1

Summary of Key Themes and Contexts (in Highest to Lowest Frequency of Mentions)

Theme	Sub-Themes
Relationships	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Relationships as the foundation of process. • The importance of relationships between learners and teachers. • Learning in relationship. • Relationship to place and country.
country	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The significance of country in Indigenous learning and teaching practice.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Country as teacher.
Practice Experiences	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The difference between Indigenous and Western approaches to learning and teaching. • The significance of understanding an Indigenous learning and teaching process. • What defines an Indigenous learning and teaching process. • The significance of culture as a defining difference in learning and teaching practice. • The significance of historic experiences. • What defines authenticity of Indigenous learning and teaching practice.
Knowledge Systems	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The significance of knowledge systems. • Differences between knowledge systems. • Respect for cultural values. • Cultural integrity. • The significance of culture as a defining difference in learning and teaching practice.

Relationships

“They should know about being who they are in relationship”

(Mr Ian Pedrisat, yarn, 2019)

All participants discussed the importance of relationships: how they are considered, valued, and utilised within First Nations learning and teaching processes and practices; and how they affect the learning and teaching experience. The valuing and significance of relationships was

consistently highlighted in discussing critical differences between Indigenous and Western process and practice. The building of relationships between learning and teaching participants, and between participants and country, was identified as the most important consideration of a First Nations approach to learning and teaching in Australia:

There have been very deliberate choices of spaces of high current significance. I think that's important, however I think that sense of connectedness and relatedness and being human together could theoretically be created in places anywhere. It's not just about the place, it's about how we are together, how long we are together, spending more than 1, 2 or 3 hours together, needing to eat and sleep and rest, and you know, play together across all times of the day. I think that is a really, really important part of it, perhaps as important as where we are...Being humans together beyond just meeting in a classroom—sharing food, helping each other to sleep safely, prepare food, be safe together.

(Dr Marcelle Townsend- Cross, yarn, 2019)

Clear links were made between the quality of relationships among teachers and learners and the quality of experiences as an outcome of this. Participants prioritised as significant experiences of groups and individuals both prior to and during the learning and teaching process.

The yarns suggest that for a First Nations approach, previous experiences of participants need to be recognised, acknowledged, and understood as they affect and shape the way teachers and learners relate to each other and place:

You had a deep relationship with them outside the classroom before you get in the classroom, so I think how you are valued can only be from developing a relationship with somebody and getting to know them.

(Dr Anne Poelina, yarn, 2019)

Taking care of people and having those good relationships with them extends to the way you want people to engage within the teaching.

(Deidentified participant, yarn, 2019).

Whatever we think of as a university and a place of higher learning, I think that it's got so far away from what I call really deep higher learning that we've lost the essence of who we are as humans, because it is our relationships with each other (and I include the natural non-human world in these relationships), that teach us.

(Professor Judy Atkinson, personal communication yarn, 2019).

The building of relationships is such a fundamental foundation to learning and teaching experiences that they should ideally be established and understood before any specific learning and teaching takes place.

Country

All participants highlighted the significance of country and other physical cultural spaces. This included the importance of having access to country and being able to go to specific places on country for learning and teaching facilitation, pointing to the concept of country itself as teacher. 'Country as teacher' stands out as most distinct from dominant Western pedagogies:

For us, we see country as alive and that it has power and can evoke memory because it holds memory, so for me coming here it's all about those sorts of things, it's a total relationship with the land like we talk about relationships with people, but there's a deep entrenched relationship for me that comes from time...this sense of place and

space is critical with what else we can evoke from this process of learning and sharing.

(Poelina, yarn, 2019)

It's more than just to have an out-of-class activity, no! It's far more valuable and important to sit outside our classrooms, to sit in a space and a place filled with our teachers.

(Mr Bilyana Blomeley, yarn, 2019).

so what I'm saying is there is this kind of knowledge and country go together and experience and country go together and love of the country and knowledge of spirits and stories about spirits and country and that singing out to country. And so the country is an active character in conversations and therefore it deserves to be an active actant.

(Sandra, yarn, 2019)

While country was identified as central to First Nations learning and teaching practices, the yarning participants did not insist that any or all learning and teaching practice be conducted in specific geographic locations away from existing mainstream settings or institutions for the process and experience to be considered authentic. The point was consistently made that we are always on country, including if we are within the spaces defined by formal education institutions, and the authority of the First Nations peoples of that country also remains regardless of any colonising impositions.

Even when we are in the classroom on campus, we are on country, that's the way I view Australian sovereign territories, despite what colonial overlays there are.

(Dr Marcelle Townsend-Cross, yarn, 2019)

It then follows that opportunities to experience Indigenous learning and teaching in practice are not lost in any location, to any person, including the most urban. This is an important challenge to stereotypes that locate authentic Indigenous experiences in remote or ‘natural locations’, away from urbanised ‘mainstream’ contexts.

Practice Experiences

The practice experiences theme encapsulates participants’ explanations of what shapes a First Nations learning and teaching experience along with a range of factors that influence that experience for teachers and learners. Participants identified that there were important culturally based factors that differentiate a First Nations approach to learning and teaching from others, particularly from the dominant Anglo Australian approach of most formal education settings. There was shared concern that the cultural integrity and purpose of First Nations practices can be negatively affected and compromised when attempts are made to blend or include ‘Indigenous perspectives’ within these more dominant practice settings.

The two agendas are completely different, so as soon as you start considering facts like this is the oldest civilisation on earth, this civilisation invented bread, society, something similar to democracy, you can’t have a conversation in that space which is anything like conventional Western teaching, it just can’t happen, you’re talking about totally different things.

(Bruce Pascoe, yarn, 2019)

I’m here because I feel very disillusioned about the western paradigms [in which] I was taught to become the practitioner that I am and it’s not actually hitting the mark anymore and I can see there is so much more, it’s really interesting and I feel there’s a really slow recognition that the indigenous world view is the human world view.

(Alana Marsh, yarn, 2019)

Many participants pointed to the sense of disillusionment and frustration when trying to work within settler-colonial education systems as champions of Indigenous learning and teaching practice.

Knowledge Systems

Yarning participants made a number of consistent points regarding how First Nations knowledge systems inform learning and teaching practice, particularly from the perspective of maintaining cultural integrity and values. In yarning about cultural integrity, participants frequently highlighted the difficulty of having to navigate tensions between practice as informed by First Nations knowledge systems and practice that is informed by hegemonic Anglo Australian knowledge systems.

The power of the circle is in our culture, in Indigenous culture, in our country in every other Indigenous countries of the world. Anyone who sits closely with deep ecology of the earth, understands and feels the power of the circle.

(Blomeley, yarn, 2019)

That's what Aboriginal culture does, it places it back onto personal responsibility, you are personally responsible to behave properly otherwise you are programmed to dysfunction and fall apart so you have a responsibility to yourself, to your family to the country around you and all the creatures and plants that live on that country, it's all about responsibility.

(Ian Pedrisat, yarn, 2019)

Yarning participants further talked about the importance of being able to share their culture from a philosophical and practice-based perspective with all people, especially in learning and teaching settings in which there are both First Nations and non-Indigenous participants. This followed a perceived lack of understanding about First Nations values, beliefs and practices within professional learning and teaching settings.

Magani Malu, a spiritual whirlpool of wisdom which we as indigenous people don't have the patent on, it's freely open to anybody and everybody who listen with an open heart."

(Blomeley, yarn, 2019)

Aboriginal people have this knowledge system that has been created over millennia that shows they have all these multiple disciplines as well in terms of science knowledge, but it's actual wisdom and then we bring a white scientist here and show him that ridge and we say what is this and he says that was an ancient river before the Fitzroy river and that the old people can tell you how it travels and where it comes up, there is an epitome in terms of wisdom.

(Poelina, yarn, 2019)

That land didn't belong to you, this is not some airy fairy thing, the land didn't belong to you, so you couldn't own it or give it away, you couldn't take it, she was herself, she was Mother Earth. It's a completely different philosophical stance, the two modes of thought can't come close together unless Western people can understand what Australian Aboriginal people were doing.

(Pascoe, yarn, 2019)

The issue of authenticity was raised with all yarning participants. Yarning participants defined the authenticity of learning and teaching practice as being informed and guided by First Nations philosophies, beliefs, and values. For authenticity to be honoured and protected, teaching practitioners need to be both educated about, and committed to, the sharing and maintenance of these philosophies, beliefs, and values. A number of participants commented that race-based identities and culturally-defined identities are two different things. Race is an imposed definition that doesn't relate directly or inherently to knowledge and understanding from a First Nations perspective.

Just because a person is Aboriginal it doesn't mean necessarily that their methods, information is totally correct and their methods have an indigenous component, is it coming from a good place, from a good purpose, from people who are genuinely interested in promoting that area, and is it following a methodology that helps to communicate the genuine feeling?

(Pedrisat, yarn, 2019)

In further support of not focussing on race, the opportunity for non-Indigenous practitioners to be educated through an Indigenous learning and teaching experience was highlighted by participants.

You're learning about a different way of thinking that a particular group of people who have a particular space that you're occupying, think feel and behave, but that's not for you to be an expert on until you've engaged with those people..and that's the same for Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people, because everybody is different.

(Pedrisat, yarn, 2019).

I don't want you to be me, I want you to be you. I want me to be me, within the safety of the circle, that word you use, egalitarian, we have flattened the power of the differential.

(Blomeley, yarn, 2019)

These quotes point to the importance of inclusivity in First Nations knowledge systems.

DISCUSSION

A Common Ground in A Culturally Diverse Context

The results demonstrate a strong sense of agreement among all participants regarding key concepts and practices that determine an Indigenous approach to learning and teaching in a contemporary Australian context, as grouped into the four themes. This is important given the participants represent a diverse, multicultural First Nations cohort who work across a broad education space. Without a strong sense of interconnected and shared beliefs, values, and practice approaches as identified in these yarns, educators may continue to make assumptions about First Nations pedagogies and misunderstand the significance of diversity.

Given that much of the literature regarding First Nations pedagogies and education practice is from more culturally and regionally specific contexts (Nakata, 2007; West, 2000; Yunkaporta, 2009) it remains difficult for those engaging with that literature to make the connections identified by these findings. Building generalisations from localised cultural contexts requires caution. This research therefore offers some broader understandings about the Indigenist nature of First Nations approaches to learning and teaching, developed from a culturally safe methodology specifically designed to deliver a culturally-guided broader consensus.

The tension between the cultural specificity of existing First Nations education approaches and the desire for a more broadly applicable pedagogy is evident in the application of Yunkaporta's work in the development of the 8 Ways Pedagogy program by the NSW Department of Education. Yunkaporta's initial exploration of a First Nations pedagogy presents as an example of more culturally specific framework, that has subsequently been adapted beyond that space by First Nations communities in Western New South Wales, and then applied further across a national context. This tension is considered on the 8 Ways website, which notes that 'the 8 Ways belong to a place, not a person or organisation. They came from country in Western New South Wales', while at the same time offering some more general 'Cultural Interface Protocols.' (NSW Department of Education, n.d.)

Arguably the example of other First Nations groups valuing Yunkaporta's culturally-specific model of pedagogy seems to align with the findings of this research regarding the existence of commonly held beliefs and values around learning and teaching amongst diverse First Nations groups. However, the development of the 8 Ways Pedagogy was conducted in a limited regional context, in North-Western New South Wales. Drawing together 12 First Nations educators from across Australia, the findings of this research provide a stronger evidence base to identify that common shared beliefs, values and process operate across a much larger geographic and cultural footprint than have previously been considered.

A Rights-based Process

All participants recognised that there are unique aspects to Indigenous learning and teaching practices that include consideration of both process and content within the context of cultural integrity. Process (the doing) was where the strongest intersections of commonality and shared practice were identified. Content (what was focused on or specifically shared) was where consideration and caution around culturally specific knowledge was highlighted. Here,

process is where the integrity and the authenticity is maintained; culturally guided process delivers culturally grounded content.

Participants also agreed that culturally specific law and customs considerations must be understood and honoured above and beyond any other learning and teaching agenda. This was seen as a First Nations rights-based issue, beyond best practice or broader protocols. How such rights are acknowledged and protected beyond a First Nations sociocultural practice space is a critical question that should not be overlooked when thinking about negotiating practice at the cultural interface.

Intercultural methodologies for building relationships

The most common thread throughout the yarns was relationships and the importance of relationship building in learning and teaching, on a broad scale, beyond human society. Locating relationships on this scale as the foundation of an Indigenous learning and teaching practice approach places Indigenist practice in contrast with Western and Anglo-Australian-dominated practice.

Whilst relational learning theory and practice is considered within Western academic discourse, it is not prioritised at the ‘front end’ of mainstream practice nor promoted in overarching policy (Morrison & Chorba, 2015). From over 20 years experience teaching within universities, I have witnessed the common learning and teaching starting point to be that relative strangers are taught by relative strangers. This is more so now than ever as the move to blended and online learning has gained increasing traction following the Covid-19 pandemic (Dumford & Miller, 2018).

This fundamental difference to how relationship is valued as a learning and teaching starting point presents a major challenge well before any other considerations. When negotiating practice at Nakata’s cultural interface, the epistemological and ontological dimensions can be

considered and even negotiated via discourse (the development of policy and curriculum). However, the axiological dimension presents a challenge in regard to the significance of relationship making and maintenance, as identified by this research.

Country as Teacher and Process

It is unsurprising that country should feature so prominently in discussions and considerations about First Nations knowledge systems and practices, given that connection to country is commonly associated with First Nations cultures. Country, as simultaneously geographic place, social space and spiritual centre, is the foundation of Indigenous identity and is central to practices of knowledge generation and sharing (Kohen, 2003; Burgess and Morrison, 2020). However, there is still a tendency to include understanding of the significance of country merely as content within Indigenous studies, rather than to recognise the active, sentient nature of country as host and teacher, as identified within all of these 12 yarns. This understanding in Indigenist practice sits in sharp contrast to Western considerations of place in learning and teaching, particularly in regard to place as an active agent. Within the Western models that dominate formal Australian education institutions, place has been largely reduced to a utilitarian concept based on an economically rational location for the infrastructure required to deliver education (Seawright, 2014). Western knowledge is mainly defined as an intellectual artefact, transferable and translocatable to any physically place, as required. These clear epistemological and ontological differences require deep shifts in the current relationship between Indigenist learning and teaching and the Western system.

Decolonising education for a collaborative approach

The conflicting values and practice approaches regarding place and Country provide a clear example of the need to decolonise dominant educational institutions. The stark difference in how country is seen and valued by First Nations educators has implications regarding how country is understood in Western educational contexts and is particularly salient for First Nations practitioners attempting to negotiate legitimacy, space and resourcing at the institutional cultural interface. To this end the consideration of the epistemological, ontological and axiological components of the cultural interface, regarding what and who country is, require an Indigenous perspective. In the authors experience, it is unlikely non-Indigenous colleagues within mainstream education settings will have this. Significant difference regarding values and approaches to learning and teaching present the first of many potential challenges at the cultural interface of decision making regarding collaborative education planning and practice with Indigenous peoples (Nakata, 2007a; Yunkaporta, 2009; UN, 2007). If the prevailing institutional structures and systems are culturally fixed in such a way that there is no opportunity for experientially-based Indigenous pedagogical approaches to be established, any process of informed negotiation around practice will be compromised at best, if possible at all, until overarching hegemonic barriers are removed (Bodkin-Andrews & Carlson, 2016; Woods, 2016). This speaks to the need for the systematic and cultural changes called for via anti-colonial and decolonising theory and practice discourse (Leroy-Dyer, 2018).

Foundations of Indigenist education practice

An Indigenist education approach places at the front-end particular practice commitments that the Western approach considers more often as an ‘add-on’, if at all. These ‘add-ons’ can be attempts to introduce equity to practice or rectify a dominant pedagogical inadequacy. In contrast, these 12 yarns showed consideration of equity from an Indigenous practice perspective to be foundational to an Indigenist practice perspective.

The foundations of Indigenous learning and teaching practices are being ‘re-discovered’ within Western theory and practice, in an attempt to improve outcomes for learners, mirroring Western shifts in broader epistemological and ontological domains, as outlined by Woods and Holscher (2022). Just as ethical considerations are increasingly add-ons to practice, Western approaches are also recognising the significance of relationship building and there is also growing discourse, literature and practice regarding place-based learning (Bartholomaeus, 2013; Bates 2018). From a cultural justice and academic integrity perspective researchers, scholars and education practitioners should be encouraged and supported to develop a sound awareness of Indigenous and Indigenist education approaches so that these sources and existing knowledges that have already refined these practices are recognised and respected.

A foundation in cultural knowledge systems

In terms of culturally defined rules and protocols, yarning participants agreed that anyone involved in facilitating the sharing of Indigenous knowledges at any level should be endorsed to do so through their relationships to other Indigenous knowledge-holders and should be experienced in teaching from that cultural context. This was most specifically highlighted in terms of teachers or facilitators having the right to share culturally-specific knowledge, based on their established relationships with the owners and custodians of that knowledge. This commitment to the recognition of Indigenous knowledge custodianship and working within First Nations rules of knowledge-sharing aligns with an Indigenous standpoint within the research space (Martin 2020; Snow et al., 2016; Fitzpatrick et al., 2016). Discussions of this nature are more prolific within the institutional research setting than in the learning and teaching setting (Nakata, 2007a).

Participants typically discussed authenticity of process and practice around philosophical and values-based criteria rather than around any specific cultural protocols or practices. This important distinction points to the difference between understanding what more deeply informs visual expressions of culture, as opposed to building assumptions from uninformed observations of publicly available cultural expressions, such as performances, artworks and other physical cultural artefacts. When notions of Indigenous cultural authenticity are imposed from the outside via an ethnocentric and anthropologically inspired gaze (Yunkaporta, 2019; Carlson, 2016; Gupta 2017), they can be provocative, emotive, and offensive, often drawing on cultural ignorance, racist stereotypes, and culturally fossilised imagery. This process becomes even more damaging when members of First Nations communities themselves invoke the power of authenticity over others based on similar criteria (Carlson, 2016). In the authors experience, it is still far more common within mainstream education institutions to present 'First Nations culture' in these latter ways rather

than to provide opportunities for First Nations knowledges to be experienced at deeper, more intellectual and philosophical levels, relevant to everyday life. The systems for knowledge sharing and cultural authenticity highlighted by the participants are one way to work towards such deeper opportunities.

Indigenist Pedagogies, Decolonisation and Rights

Moving forward, including Indigenist pedagogies in discussions about systemic decolonisation of education is essential given the colonising project involves the attempted destruction and ongoing prohibition of Indigenous processes and practices. Thus, agreement about, understanding of, and equitable sharing of common ground for Indigenous learning and teaching is vital so that activists, practitioners, and scholars are able to champion Indigenist practices as viable alternatives to colonising practices.

Based on these yarns, inclusion of authentic Indigenous/ist learning and teaching practices and experiences at the 'cultural interface' (Nakata, 2007a) should be authorised and managed by custodians and practitioners of the wisdom and knowledges from which they are derived. This is in concert with the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, particularly Article 14 (UN 2007). This highlights the need for formal inclusion of First Nations community involvement and shared governance, which is consistently missing within settler-colonial, institutionally defined and developed administration and practice, particularly in a tertiary setting (Watego, 2021).

Given that the cultural interface is a setting in which knowledge and practice approaches should be negotiated, it is critical that resources and platforms are available to Indigenist practitioners to support such negotiations. An adequate level of knowledge regarding Indigenist practice is required by those in authority to be able to competently engage in

epistemological, ontological and methodological considerations at the cultural interface.

Unlike other states within the settler-colonial Anglosphere, such as Canada and Aotearoa/New Zealand, Australia does not have First Nations controlled organisations that enjoy significant levels of authority over and management of Indigenous education design and delivery, particularly at the tertiary level. Instead, the current situation in Australia sees agents of the settler-colonial state and their institutional practices control the extent to which students and others have access to Indigenous learning and teaching experiences, maintaining colonising practices in education. (Gunstone 2009; Moreton-Robinson 2015).

Limitations

Due to resource limitations, the study was conducted with a convenience sample, somewhat limited by number. However, given their wide representation of diverse cultural backgrounds, twelve participants are considered sufficient to draw themes for a common ground. Further, as with most research that evaluates sensitive social, cultural and/or political matters, there may be a tendency for social desirability bias (Bergen and Labonte, 2020). It is entirely possible that participants may have held opinions during yarning or during feedback on the analysis that they chose not to share. However, given this group represent First Nations peoples with demonstrated professional commitment to the promotion of Indigenous education, including decolonisation, it is unlikely that reluctance or apathy played a significant part in the consensus outcome. Nevertheless, in guiding the yarns, I employed strategies for limiting bias, such as providing sound information about the study, establishing rapport and asking questions (Bergen and Labonte, 2020).

Further Research

It is recommended that a larger scale project with a more diverse representation of First Nations educators be undertaken to provide further confirmation or challenge to a thesis

based on shared beliefs, values and processes amongst First Nations groups. Further to this there should be a more widely considered exploration of how Indigenous-led pedagogies and education experiences can be engaged across the full spectrum of formal education settings in Australia, from early childhood through to postgraduate training. This should consider Indigenous/ist learning and teaching approaches as a key tool to overcome the significant impacts that the colonising project has had on human and non-human society throughout Australia.

Conclusion

From 12 yarns, strong consensus was found among a diverse cohort of First Nations practitioners about what defines contemporary Indigenous learning and teaching process and practice in Australia. Preceding broader shared definitions around themes and contexts is the recognition of Indigenous sociocultural diversity and the rights of First Nations societies to control and manage access to and application of their knowledges. This research provided practice examples that confirmed and further enhanced theory of Indigenous pedagogies from within Australia, and practices discussed within existing literature. Of foundational importance to Indigenous learning and teaching practice is the establishment and development of relationships between people and place. There is significant recognition of the intentional use of Country as a place to facilitate learning and teaching, as a facilitator of learning and teaching itself and an entity with which teachers and learners can develop unique and beneficial learning relationships Country. Learners and teachers are always on First Nations Country and the significance of this exists regardless of the physical setting, including the walls and boundaries of settler-colonial institutions. Indigenous learning and teaching practice is inclusive and does not seek to exclude non-Indigenous participants. The depth of engagement accessed, and development of knowledge gained, is governed by the quality and authenticity of relationships between participants. The experience is process-

rather than context-orientated.

With some marginal and emerging exceptions, there are clear contrasts between Indigenous and the dominant Western approaches to learning and teaching across the education spectrum in Australia. Fuelled by existing structurally and systemically racist paradigms within settler-colonial society, including within professional education practice, this situation presents significant challenges for First Nations educators to enjoy their rights to practice within their own sociocultural domains and for the potential of Indigenous pedagogies to challenge and disrupt the ongoing impacts of the colonising project. Any shifts in the dynamics between First Nations and settler-colonial societies in Australia are not dependent on the social policy of the day, but rather the willingness of individuals with varied epistemological, ontological and axiological backgrounds to meet at the cultural interface and equitably negotiate contested spaces based on a shared commitment to human and non-human wellbeing within Australia and beyond.

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Introduction to Fourth Publication

The next and final written publication that I'm including in my PhD discussion will help unpack three important points of reference. This paper provides a further discussion about what an Indigenist approach to tertiary education is, what this approach is conceptually, and how it can work in a tertiary education context.

The discussion also unpacks by example, one of the major themes of the research findings which is Country as a sentient being, Country as teacher, and how challenging it is to maintain the integrity of this understanding in a context in which that understanding is re-defined via a Western ontological lens.

The First Nations resistance to the ongoing colonisation of Country and its people via the Adani mine project is highlighted in this case study to demonstrate that, even via the left wing of politics, Australia is a long way from a rights-based approach to acknowledging and engaging First Nations knowledges, understandings, practices and aspirations, even when those rights being exercised will have a net positive effect on social and environmental wellbeing.

This publication makes it clear that an Indigenist approach is a whollistic approach to equity and wellbeing far beyond the scope of contemporary Western theory and practice even though there is a long running tendency in Western cultures to view the Indigenous knowledges and practices from where the Indigenist approach is drawn, as inferior and irrelevant outside of siloed culturally specific contexts.

This publication highlights the bigger picture within the academy and the broader social justice and human rights challenges surrounding the negotiation of sharing of epistemological, ontological and methodological space with those that have yet to fully understand and consider the potential of Indigenist theory and practice, as it applies to tertiary education.

Abstract from Fourth Publication “Return of the Posthuman”

Critical posthumanism and Indigenist theorising and practice Critical – including feminist, anti-racist, anti-oppressive, anti-imperialist and post/anti/decolonial – scholars have long insisted that neither an objective representation of facts nor a universally applicable representation of ethical arguments in relation to these facts are possible or even desirable (see, for example, Braidotti, 2013; or, in social work, Dominelli, 2018). Considering ourselves part of this tradition, it is thus important to try and tease out how our respective locations in Australia as Indigenous (Glenn) and non-Indigenous (Dorothee) social work educators may have impacted our understanding of the case study before returning to consider points of convergence, tension and their implications for social work. We begin by laying out Dorothee's position, which remains rooted within Eurocentric, academic traditions. This is followed by Glenn's response, who has spent much of his working life trying to resist the dominance of European thought and practice within a variety of settings by helping to mainstream Indigenist articulations of what it means to be in this world.

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My Approach to Engaging the Secondary Research Questions

These questions have been considered via the autoethnographic narrative method as discussed in my methodology chapter. My reflections on these two have been recorded in the form of two audio podcasts. The first podcast is focussed on the question – What is the potential of Indigenous learning and teaching processes to contribute to improved professional practice? The second podcast is focussed on the question – What are the challenges to implementing Indigenous learning and teaching practices in tertiary education spaces?

Given that these are secondary questions within the study I have had limited scope to consider these questions as fully as they could be. Each of these questions could be the focus of an entire Ph.D. and they certainly deserve further consideration beyond my reflections here. That said, I feel that the depth of my professional practice experience provides a compelling evidence base from which to reflect on.

To add further support to the observations and points I have made within these two podcasts, I have included references within the transcript. I do not verbally include all the specific reference points within the audio versions of the podcast as I felt this would disrupt the flow of the yarnning style. I urge the reader to go to the website and listen to these podcasts rather than relying on the transcripts to get a full sense of my reflection on these two questions.

Transcript of First Podcast

Transcript with references for Podcast 1: Discussing the benefits of an Indigenist approach to learning and teaching.

Welcome to my first podcast which is part 1 of a 2-part series of oral works that cap off the series of published works that make up the bulk of the content in my PhD research study.

This podcast will be focussed on highlighting the potential of an Indigenist approach to learning and teaching within a university context, and in particular in the delivery of social work practitioner education.

This discussion is informed by the research findings of my PhD study which presents evidence of a shared way of thinking about and approaching Indigenous learning and teaching practice across a broad First Nations cultural landscape in Australia.

Based on previous and current policies, most of the activity in Australian universities that's focused on First Nations inclusion, is limited to three main criteria, the inclusion of First Nations students, the inclusion of First Nations staff, and the inclusion of Indigenous content and perhaps Indigenous perspectives, in a limited context.

What doesn't seem to get discussed or actioned from a policy perspective is the inclusion of Indigenous or Indigenist approaches to the design of curriculum and the management, delivery, and Indigenist evaluation of the learning and teaching experience. Even within the Indigenous studies and Indigenous knowledges discipline spaces, this is not typically happening (Townsend-Cross, 2021).

In this podcast I would like to discuss how universities can operationalise their commitments to Indigenous inclusion in ways that shift the process from a paternalistic welfare-based approach to a rights-based approach, in concert with international standards and expectations.

By way of example, I'll focus on a student-centred approach and how an Indigenist approach to learning and teaching can provide rich and meaningful experiences for university students, above and beyond the typical mainstream Anglocentric learning outcomes, and in ways that will support socially just and decolonising approaches to professional practice into the future.

For the past ten years I've been teaching into undergraduate and postgraduate social work qualification programs, so I'll talk specifically about this space but I'm also able to reflect on my extensive academic teaching experience prior to this, where I was able to facilitate Indigenous and Indigenist learning and teaching experiences more comprehensively, although not without challenge and resistance from within the academy.

The education of social workers is a particularly relevant example to use given the social work professions commitments to human rights and social justice at the national level through the Australian Association of Social Workers and at the international level via the International Federation of Social Workers.

These commitments include specific references to social justice, cultural justice and human rights for Indigenous peoples. Commitment to supporting social justice for First nations peoples in Australia was formalised by the AASW via an apology that recognised that, for

generations, social work had been involved in unjust, patronising and racist practises towards First Nations communities and families (Mendes and Fejo, 2014).

In a contemporary context Australia social workers are often working in response to critical community, family and individual support needs, and within these spaces there is, without exception a glaring over representation of First Nations peoples.

With less than 1% of professional social workers being First Nations people, most of the social workers who engage with First Nations peoples, facing challenging and often traumatic circumstances, will be non-Indigenous.

The AASW requires social workers to have a working knowledge and understanding of their clients social and cultural attachments (AASW, 2020). This requirement represents a significant challenge for the educators of social workers in providing a learning experience that develop knowledge and understanding rather than just provide information. It's a lot more sophisticated than just having relevant content.

Given the increasing demand for social workers in Australia, it will never be a realistic or perhaps even rational solution to just focus on increasing the number of First Nations people becoming social workers. There is simply not enough First Nations people available to fill that need.

And even if there were, we are failing to understand the difference between social and cultural connection and understanding and homogenised racial categorisation and assumptions of sameness.

What's more, even when racially defined representation percentages are increased, we don't tend to see significant changes in outcomes. There are numerous examples of health and education services that are wholly staffed by First Nations practitioners, yet the life outcomes for the First Nations service users and their communities does not significantly improve. Does it really matter who operationalises the system if the system itself is the problem?

So why do we persist with policies and practices that are clearly not producing better outcomes in any significant way? From my perspective, and as the slogan on the tshirt says, "because racism".

I'll come back to this, but for now I want to talk about how taking an Indigenist approach to the teaching of social work students might look and what positive impact this might have in the immediate and longer term.

I think it's important to make clear that this discussion is not just about how First Nations teachers and scholars should work with First Nations students, to support First Nations students to successfully complete their university studies and graduate.

That objective is definitely an important part of an Indigenist approach, however, if we limit the Indigenist approach to this we fall back into the trap of First Nations knowledges being culturally siloed and marginalised, which is a contradiction to an Indigenist approach.

Reflecting back on the findings of my research, the overarching principles identified are based on inclusivity of the human and non-human and growing relationships and maintaining relationships across that entire space.

The bigger picture is that an Indigenist approach provides an opportunity for all students in a program to have a learning experience that enables them to develop a far deeper understanding of the underlying philosophies, beliefs, values and practices that have been developed and maintained by First Nations peoples to live in healthy sustainable ways for hundreds of generations.

From a social work perspective this is an ideal big picture outcome. From a learning and teaching perspective this is a profoundly different approach to simply including Indigenous content.

Another critical point to make here, is that from a teaching perspective, an Indigenist approach can and should include people who are not Indigenous based on their ancestry, race or ethnicity. Given how profoundly racialised the hegemonic societies and systems are, that most of us currently have to live in, I have no doubt that this point will challenge a lot of people.

The powerful social constructs of race and the expectation that most of us within racialised societies will comply with the racial contract, as defined and discussed by Jamaican-American philosopher Charles Mills, should not be underestimated in regard to how hard it might be to just imagine a non-racialized society, and how the roles we currently play in challenging or defending racially defined cultural norms, need not exist.

Yet the alternative reality is right here, via Indigenous world views and the cultural norms that reflect those views. Alternatives to race-based thinking are available. Indigenist learning and teaching practices and experiences are a conduit to understanding this.

The point that Indigenist practices, as informed by Indigenous paradigms, must be available as a practice option, to non-Indigenous people was articulated in literature by Aboriginal Canadian scholar, Dr Shawn Wilson, in the context of discussing approaches to research. I'm going to quote Dr Wilson here:

"An Indigenous paradigm comes from the fundamental belief that knowledge is relational, is shared with all creation, and therefore cannot be owned or discovered. Indigenous research methods should reflect these beliefs and the obligations they imply"

"I use Indigenist to name or label the paradigm that I am talking about rather than Indigenous. It is my belief that an Indigenist paradigm can be used by anyone who chooses to follow its tenets. It cannot and should not be claimed to belong only to people with "Aboriginal" heritage. To use an analogy, one does not need to be female to be a feminist. Researchers do not have to be Indigenous to use an Indigenist paradigm, just as researchers do not have to be "white" to use a Western paradigm." (Wilson, 2007).

The final overarching point I want to make before I get into the finer detail of applied Indigenist learning and teaching practice, is that an Indigenist approach is not confined to only considering and working with Indigenous specific content.

The premise that a learning and teaching process is not determined or limited by specific content would seem to be given when we consider that a western learning and teaching processes are applied to the delivery of all content, across all disciplines, courses and programs within Australian universities.

However we need to be mindful that every time we discuss Indigenous and Indigenist practice within colonised, Eurocentric and culturally hegemonic spaces, we face the challenge that the colonising, hegemonic practices are being presented as the best, if not the only option, whilst Indigenous practices are racially and culturally marginalised by design and not considered a viable option outside of their application to Indigenous peoples who are also typically racially and culturally marginalised.

The impact of the deficit paradigm as it is comprehensively applied to Indigenous peoples, their knowledges and cultures needs to be understood.

So how does an Indigenist approach to teaching social workers look? I can reflect here on what myself and a small team of Indigenous and non-Indigenous academics have been doing within a single subject, as part of a Social Work degree at both undergraduate and postgraduate level. I'll then move on to suggest how this approach to a single subject could be expanded so that an overarching Indigenist approach could be taken to the whole program.

The subject is called First Peoples and Social Justice, and it's now offered as an on campus and online option.

If we go back to the findings of my Phd research, it's clear that the starting point of an Indigenist process is the focus on relationship. I've insisted since I started teaching in this subject that it needed to be based on a team approach that would bring more than one teacher to the learning and teaching space and not rely on the very western practice of the single academic expert taking charge of the space.

This insistence is based on my previous experience of a collective approach in other university learning and teaching contexts. The collective approach has not always been supported within the university, but I'll talk more about that in the next podcast. The importance of the team approach is for the benefit of those learning and those teaching. It's a collectivist approach because we are empowering collectivist knowledge making, which is critical to an Indigenist approach.

In terms of our team approach our teaching team have spent a lot of time together over the years talking about the knowledges, beliefs and values we bring, along with the aspirations for learning and teaching we have, as individual team members. This has been an intentional and planned part of our approach; it sits outside of what is generally expected or supported by the university at the individual subject delivery level but in taking an Indigenist approach we are valuing what each of us brings to the process.

There's typically been a great deal of common ground amongst the team, even before we all knew each other well, especially around our beliefs and values, although not all team members have had the same opportunities to be socialised within First Nations family and community contexts and informed by Indigenous knowledges. On the other hand, not all team members have been on the same academic levels, with levels ranging from Level A academic, considered the starting point, through to much more senior levels.

This scenario has made team vulnerable to the hierarchical dynamics of universities, both from an Indigenous knowledges and identity perspective or from an academic status perspective, or perhaps both.

The regulating dynamic amongst the team has been humility, being supportive and the commitment of each team member not to apply a deficit lens, in any way, to other team members. This also includes gender and age.

I believe the approach of our teaching team is evidence of an Indigenist approach and it has enabled us to go above and beyond the more typical way a subject is designed and offered, which is usually via a senior lecturer or facilitator and perhaps some subordinate support staff if required, such as the more typical lecturer and support tutor scenario.

I think it's important to point out that whilst this is the approach our team has taken over several years, it's not always been an approach that is recognised, understood and supported at the administrative, supervisory and executive levels.

In many ways our Indigenist approach has mostly flown under the radar of the systematic approach to doing teaching and learning at the university, which is far from an ideal circumstance and arguably not sustainable. I believe it's the way Indigenous and Indigenist approaches, within mainstream, culturally hegemonic systems and institutions, have had to do things and continue to do things. It is clearly not a culturally safe space.

Our Indigenist team approach to delivering this subject meant that we were ready to meet and engage incoming students with a strong sense of pedagogical consensus, a feeling of personal support and a shared vision for what and who we were representing, as an academic team, and what we hoped to achieve. I realise that I'm speaking on behalf of the team here. This is certainly the way I have felt over the years and I'm confident it's been a shared experience.

The initial challenge for engaging students and placing an emphasis on establishing positive relationships amongst learners and teachers is that this subject, like many others in the social work program is delivered to a tight and fixed schedule, as an on campus or online option.

In fact, during the recent COVID pandemic, it all went online over a two-year period. My reflection on this is that the key factor is not about whether or not we can engage with students in the same physical room or in the same online room, it's about how much time we have to facilitate that initial engagement and what we do with that time together.

Taking an Indigenist approach means that we need to get to know more about the people we are intending to teach as individuals, who have their own relationship to what we are going to be teaching about. It also means that the students get to know more about us as individuals with our own relationships to what we intending to teach. This is how we support the building of cultural safe process.

This approach is significantly different to the more common dynamic in the university learning and teaching experience whereby a relative stranger arrives in room, physical or virtual, and soon begins to deliver content to other relative strangers. And I have been part of that experience many times as student and teacher. I now believe it's not representative of a better practice approach and I'm loathed to be part of it.

Getting to know those who we'll spend time within a teaching and learning environment, supports a more effective process by establishing a stronger sense of safety and trust amongst participants. There is a strong evidence base to show that better student-teacher relationship lead to better learning outcomes. It seems ironic that this dynamic seems better researched in

the earliest years of formal education and hardly considered in tertiary education (Hagenauer and Volet, 2014).

If we focus on social work education this process talks directly to one of the foundation practice approaches which is to be able to develop an understanding of who the person is you are working with, and to establish rapport and trust. Even though this concept is reinforced throughout social work education as an important process to take into practice, it seems it is rarely modelled within the dynamics of the practitioner training experience.

Ideally, we would get more time at this stage of the Indigenist process than we currently do. As it stands, we spend around six hours of time introducing ourselves to students, introducing our approach to the subject philosophically and pedagogically and having students introduce themselves.

We make sure we explain to students where we are coming from. We tell them that we are taking an Indigenist approach, what beliefs and values this includes and that this is being intentionally done as an anti-colonial approach in support of decolonising tertiary education in Australia. We let the students know what we expect from them as participants and most importantly we let them know that we are here to support them as a team as we move through the learning and teaching process over the semester. We introduce the process of being able to reflect on and articulate your positionality – who are you as an individual coming into this space and what is your current relationship to what we are introducing as process and content.

Based on this approach students get a clear message that success in this subject is about reciprocity between learners and teachers. We all have our responsibilities in this journey. We all have agency and we are all accountable within the process. That's another lesson that can be taken into practice.

As we move through the content of this subject, the learning process is based on critical reflective practice. Students are asked to critically reflect on their own positionality regarding the course content and the issues covered. They are asked to be mindful of and reflect on how they feel as they move through content and why they might be feeling the way they do.

They are also asked to share these reflections with peers so that they gain insight into the importance and relevance of diversity and intersectionality and how that shapes how we perceive and feel about various situations and circumstances.

This is another lesson that supports social work students beyond the specific coursework and into professional practice. Our positionality is always important, always relevant, as is the capacity to understand that people perceive life as individuals, not as homogenised groups. In an act of reciprocity, we have crafted the individual critical reflection process into a cumulative assessment task, so that the work put in is credited with some of the marks they will need to successfully complete the subject.

How we do assessment within a learning and teaching experience is where we really get to demonstrate the difference between being content focussed and process focussed. We've designed the assessment of the learning outcomes in this subject to provide learners with an opportunity to be part of an Indigenist process.

The major assessment tasks for this subject are based on students getting together online in small groups, to have guided conversations, based on focus questions. The students record

these conversations which can be watched back later. It's not as open as a yarning process. Given that yarning is a culturally informed process, it's not equitable to expect that students can easily move into this mode to demonstrate and share ideas and knowledge. Perhaps it could be considered a gateway to yarning.

Nevertheless, this assessment is an example of an Indigenist learning and teaching approach. It requires participants to work as a non-competitive collective, to support each other's learning. Learners will also become teachers at points during the process. It supports the building of relationships between the participants in a small group. Participants get to experience how concepts such as intersectionality work in regard to how other people understand and see things. It's equitable in the sense that participants respond based on their positionality rather than as a de-identified outside observer.

This is a valuable experience for social workers in training. In the world of practice, we need to exchange ideas, challenge ideas and advocate for others. Most all of this will be done in conversation, not as abstracted words on paper. We need to understand that other people will see things differently to us, based on their identities and experiences and we can only get to understand that by having equitable conversations. We need to be able to practice humility and critical self-reflection in the moment, with others.

The marking of these assessments is done by the marker watching the recording of the students discussion. Each participant is marked individually based on the quality of their response to set questions and on the quality of their response to others. Being a supportive group member is valued.

This assessment can be challenging for markers who have previously only marked individual written work such as reports and essays. It literally brings the marker face to face with the student during a vulnerable time for them. The marker is able to develop a much better understanding of who it is they are assessing.

In this way the process becomes a lot more relational, especially as the same marker will mark a series of these conversations over the trimester. As an outcome of this the markers feedback tends to be more positive and encouraging rather than critical and correcting. This makes for a better experience for both marker and student.

Each time the group come together to record their conversations the questions they're responding to become more in depth and complex. There's a continuity of exchange and feedback from the marker to the individual student and the marker is able to see it when that feedback is taken onboard in the next conversation.

In this context the marker takes on more of a teacher and mentor role and there is a humanising of what can often be a more clinically academic experience for all concerned. I believe this is another lesson beyond the immediate experience for future social workers: power can be used in more equitable and considerate ways, people are more likely to respond to compassionate engagement rather than detached, clinical engagement.

At the end of the semester students have typically built stronger peer support relationships with the other members of their group. They feel that these are people they feel safer to share their personal experiences and critical reflections with in regard to course content. There is a sense of a collective journey through the learning process.

Aside from the more specific learning outcomes of the subject, the students have been able to experience what an Indigenist approach places the highest value on, the establishment and development of relationships and relatedness as the foundation for growing awareness and knowledge.

In contrast and challenge to the all-pervasive deficit narratives focussed on Indigenous peoples and their practices, students who are engaged via an Indigenist approach to learning and teaching, learn by experience that First Nations beliefs, values and practices are welcoming, challenging, relevant, effective and inclusive. They are not just being asked to consider theoretical academic discourse about human rights and social justice. They are having an embodied experience that tells them that Indigenist practice is a legitimate and arguably preferable overarching process to engage when it comes to putting a decolonising approach into practice. This is an experience that will resonate beyond the current semester and into future learning and practice.

I believe that this humanising and normalising of Indigenous led education, in spaces where Indigenous peoples have for generations been actively dehumanised and othered, should not be underestimated.

This is not something that can be achieved by simply presenting issues, that negatively impact First Nations peoples, as content, whether it sits within an Indigenous studies focussed course or within a program such as social work.

Even when a critical studies approach is taken there is a tendency for non-Indigenous students to see Indigenous peoples and knowledges as something separate from their own lived experiences, especially their experiences of being led and educated. Racism is at its most effective when people believe that the fictional other is not as equally human in capacity and ways of being.

If an educational experience challenges the racist beliefs so critical to colonising practices at the individual identity level, based on the beliefs, values and aspirations a student or practitioner takes on board as their own, those various imagined gaps between us and them very quickly begin to disappear. It becomes non-sensical to ‘other’ people whose beliefs, values and aspirations resonate in concert with your own.

Going back to the examples I’ve presented here about the Indigenist learning and teaching practices our team has been using. I’m not suggesting these are comprehensive and represent a fully realised an Indigenist approach.

We’ve been able to introduce some experiences which have been received well by students. For example, we surveyed students about their experiences with the small group recorded discussions over two semesters. The results showed that 90% of students found the process to be rewarding and transformative in regard to how they came to understand the causes of socially unjust situations in colonised societies.

Students reported that they were able to understand and appreciate why we should be taking a rights-based approach to social justice rather than a welfare-based approach. These insights and changes of perspective from social work students place them in-step with the practice principles of social work within Australia and internationally.

Further to this, in regard to the student experience, our subject, First Peoples and Social Justice, has ranked in the top 5% for the best part of a decade, for student satisfaction with the subject as a whole and with the individual teaching staff.

There is a lot more we could be doing and should be doing as part of an Indigenist approach. In particular providing students with opportunities to connect with and build relationships at a community level outside the specific university-controlled spaces and providing opportunities for students to experience that critically important roll of Country as teacher. Of course, the Covid 19 pandemic impacted the potential for some of this in the short term but a global health crisis has not been our most significant barrier.

Despite the positive outcomes and significant potential of our approach, the truth is that, as a team, we have had to consistently fight to maintain an Indigenist led approach within the broader Social Work and other programs that this subject sits within, in the university.

Despite a clear lack of insight and understanding, on behalf of colleagues and executive staff about what an Indigenist approach is (a situation that has motivated my choice of PhD topic), and what resources it requires to function, our approach has been regularly critiqued both in regard to how we work as a team and the way we design and implement assessment.

It's a paradoxical situation, given what we are sharing with students about deficit paradigms and continuing colonising practices.

We do have allies within the faculty whose reasons for supporting the approach we take is not always clear, although it seems clear to me via our conversations that they too do not fully understand what an Indigenist approach is. We do get feedback from colleagues that our subject has a profound positive impact on students which they carry into their other subjects and our team has previously been nominated for a national teaching award based on this.

As it currently stands, our team, this subject I've been highlighting and other First Nations focussed subjects we teach have been profoundly impacted by changes made at executive levels within the faculty and beyond.

The Indigenist approach we had managed to develop and maintain has been severely compromised, most significantly at our collective team level. In the space of two years, we have gone from having an Indigenous led and staffed team of four full-time academic staff, to myself as the only Indigenous and fulltime academic staff member delivering this course and others, with the support of sessional and part-time staff.

The team approach is not sustainable under these circumstances. My own experience within academia and wider collegial networks tells me that this is far from an isolated situation when it comes to First Nations Peoples asserting a right to develop and lead Indigenous/Indigenist practice. I feel it's critically important to explore this in discussing the potential of Indigenist education practice versus the current challenges we face. My next podcast will unpack this.

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Transcript of Second Podcast

Transcript with references for Podcast 2: Discussing the challenges of introducing and negotiating an Indigenist approach to learning and teaching within an Australian university context.

Welcome to my second podcast reflecting on what it means to engage an Indigenist approach to learning and teaching and how this approach can make a positive impact within a university education experience.

In the previous podcast I talked about the potential of an Indigenist learning and teaching approach using examples from my work delivering education to undergraduate and postgraduate social work students in an Australian university.

To quickly recap on that, I have been part of a teaching team that has endeavoured to utilise Indigenist teaching practices to improve the experience for learners and teachers, to deepen the learning outcomes during the time the subject is taught but very much in consideration of the longer lasting impact these experiences will have on developing the capacity of social work practitioners to provide better services to those they work with and to better support the human rights and social justice based approach the profession is committed to.

Based on my PhD research findings, moves to engage and incorporate Indigenist approaches to learning and teaching must be done through a rights-based approach. This means that these practices and processes must be Indigenous led and managed. The recognition that Indigenist approaches are intrinsically of First Nations knowledges must be made clear. This includes the obligation to engage and involve Country via First Nations custodians and communities of Country on which Indigenist practice is taking place.

Indigenist practices are borne of collectivist, relationally developed and expressed knowledges that are given their deepest and most significant expressions in place, in context, on Country. To this end the rights of Indigenous peoples and the rights of Country are inextricably linked and intertwined. This is a very different way of thinking about how rights are understood via a Western paradigm.

From a big picture Indigenous world view, knowledge is shared to maintain a clearly defined and agreed upon approach regarding what our roles, responsibilities and obligations are. Not just to what we can see and touch in our immediate physical world, but to all that we can imagine and beyond. The integrity of collectivist knowledge is based on investing in and relying on the building, securing and maintaining of relationships and relatedness. This was clearly articulated in the findings of my my PhD research.

It seems there are significant differences in how rights are considered, pursued, experienced and maintained from an Indigenous and Western viewpoint (REF). The Indigenous concept of collective custodianship of knowledge and relational responsibility to maintain and share knowledge is a very different one to the western concept of individual ownership of knowledge and individual rights to control how knowledge is used.

This makes for a very challenging negotiation at the cultural interface, as defined and discussed from the Indigenous perspective by Dr Martin Nakata (REF). And that's assuming any genuine negotiation is going to take place at the cultural interface.

As I've previously discussed, there is not a lot of evidence that universities in Australia are ready, willing and able to move beyond their culturally hegemonic approach to engaging with those that seek to share Indigenous knowledges and practices.

Based on my 25 years of lived experience working in the Australian university space, including working at an executive level, it would be naive to assume that there is anything close to any official, policy-based recognition that First Nations peoples have a right to be involved in learning and teaching in the academy beyond that of a homogenised group seeking equitable access to what's currently on offer.

This includes universities employing Indigenous people to deliver Indigenous content and to add Indigenous perspectives, within existing curriculum. I suggest that the most recent Australian university sector policies and priority statements such as the Universities Australia Strategy confirm this.

There may be statements about the recognition and inclusion of 'Indigenous knowledge' but this doesn't amount to much if those knowledges are not informing the design of curriculum and are not delivered via Indigenous or Indigenist learning and teaching practices.

Without a tangible experience of engaging with an Indigenous or Indigenist process students will simply experience this inclusion as content, via a Western ontological lens. Again, I'm not just talking about Indigenous Studies here.

So, let's revisit some definitions here in regard to what Indigenist theory and practice is because I believe that a focus on an Indigenist approach can help provide a much-needed conduit between what might appear to be intractable epistemological differences at the cultural interface.

Dr Michael Hart is an Aboriginal Canadian social work scholar who has engaged extensively with the theory and practice of an Indigenist approach within the social work space. Dr Hart makes the following critical point about the Indigenist approach.

“Indigenist social work is based on Indigenous philosophies, knowledges and ways of being, as well as the political and social contexts that Indigenous peoples face....To develop a deeper understanding of colonial oppression, racism and privilege, Indigenist social work relies on Indigenous knowledges as well as critical theories and literature on social justice.”

The way I see it, taking an Indigenist approach allows us to bring a rights based, social justice perspective focus to the critique of the ongoing colonising practices of the university sector whilst remaining directly connected to the integrity of Indigenous philosophies and knowledges, which guide us in developing a truly decolonising approach to the current political and social contexts. It's still all about process.

This point is much more important than an argument about the semantics between using the term Indigenous or Indigenist. It's about making it clearer as to what differentiates an Indigenous approach and an Indigenist approach and therefore why my choice to identify an Indigenist approach in this context is important.

In saying that, having attempted to rationalise the Indigenist approach ontologically and epistemologically, I'm going to be as clear as I can. In my direct professional experience and the experiences of Indigenous people that have shared their experiences with me privately and publicly, taking a rational argument to a discussion about Indigenous rights in an Australian university context is unlikely to prevail.

Not that I haven't tried, over and over again. I'm using the term rationale from a human rights and social justice context. We also have a compelling benchmark for this context via the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, of which Australia is a signatory.

Not that the standards and measures of this declaration have found their way into legislative and policy making culture within Australia. This stands in stark contrast to our neighbouring State of Aotearoa New Zealand where the rights of Maori peoples have long been part and parcel of legislative and policy making. In fact, right now the New Zealand government is consulting with Maori on how New Zealand can implement the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous peoples into national process. REF

Remember my reference in the first podcast to the T shirt slogan "because racism". This is where I need to start unpacking my thesis around that.

Is it possible that in critically evaluating what does and doesn't happen in Australian universities in regard to Indigenous peoples participation, we may have consistently played down the underlying ideological drivers at work? I think this is absolutely the case.

Lets start with some fundamental historic facts that we teach undergraduate social work students in the first few weeks of the First peoples and Social Justice subject. The colonising project perpetuated on this continent and it's peoples, represents one the most violent and sustained land grabs in modern history.

At no point in this process was consent from First Nations sought, there was no negotiated outcomes and not a single treaty entered into between First Nations and the British Crown, nor with the Australian Government and First Nations since Federation in 1901. The rationale for all this was founded on the notion that Australia was a land of terra nullius until the High Court of Australia deemed that to be a legal fiction in 1992.

It was deemed a legal fiction because of the overwhelming evidence presented by First Nations peoples to the contrary. It seems incredible and absurd that a decade's worth of meticulously gathered and presented evidence had to be appraised by the most powerful legal authority in the nation for a decision that basically said First Nations Peoples were legitimate unique human societies at the time of colonisation and continue to have legitimate unique human societies, unless of course and I quote the "sands of time have washed them away".

That is perhaps the most sanitised, cognitively dissonant, and base explanation of the impact of ethnic cleansing and state sanctioned genocide that I can imagine. And this is very important to consider, regarding just how desensitised the colonial settler public were to such a grievous absolving of responsibility on behalf of the nation state.

Despite this incredible formalisation of the obvious, the Australian Governments response was far from a rights-based consideration. There was no mention of the need for treaties to

resolve what was now a clear-cut case of violent dispossession and centuries of racist governance on a grand scale.

There was no consideration of reparations for ethnic cleansing and genocide. Instead, we got the now somewhat infamous Native Title Act. Infamous at least amongst First Nations rights activists and those who have taken time to critically analyse it.

It's a startling fact that this piece of legislation was based on creating a second-tier form of land title that provides little more than rights of access for government sanctioned 'Traditional Owners', and places the rights of pastoralists and their cattle above the rights of First Nations native title holders. It's also a form of land title that can be quashed by any state government as it sees fit, as evidenced in the Adani mine project in Central Queensland.

To sum it up, it's a hegemonic colonial settler response to managing the perceived threat of First Nations peoples enjoying their unceded and therefore ongoing rights, and to avoid the colonial settler state being called into account in ways that it cannot dictate.

I see strong parallels with this outcome mirrored and echoed in mainstream agencies and institutions throughout Australia, including the universities I work in and have worked in.

The underlying ideology at work here is White supremacy. Just don't bring that up in meetings with university executives, and maybe not with most of the non-Indigenous colleagues you work with. That's going too far beyond the pale at the cultural interface, pun intended.

On the other hand, with the universities blessing, do bring it up with students in classes that critically reflect on and analyse colonisation, the making of whiteness, and how Australia stands out within the cultural Anglosphere as a nation that has gone to extreme lengths over its relatively short colonial history, to socially engineer and maintain a racially privileged white society.

Do ask students to critically reflect on the ongoing legacy of this within the structural and systematic processes at play today and the impact this has on First Nations peoples in particular.

I continue to marvel at how quickly students can grasp all this when given a series of facts, some examples of sound anti-oppressive theory, process that supports them to critically reflect in a safe way, and a new awareness that there are alternatives to tinkering at the edges of ideologies whose foundations are built on profoundly discriminatory and irrational concepts of racial supremacy.

In a matter of weeks students of diverse sociocultural backgrounds will move from being unaware of the dominant paradigms of oppression they live within to arriving at a realisation that these paradigms cannot support the human rights and social justice principles that their chosen professions require them to live up to in practice.

It's a truly an experience of cognitive dissonance when the university that is paying you to deliver subjects grounded in anti-colonial theory and practice is not willing to commit to anti colonial practice.

The message I get is that it's Ok to teach this stuff to social work students because the AASW wants it taught, but it's definitely not OK to challenge the way the university operates by

applying an anti-colonial analysis to their practice. This is not a culturally safe space to work in if you are an Indigenous academic who expects their employer to practice what they preach via curriculum.

As I've said I am certainly not the only one pointing this situation out and calling for change. There has been far more written about the culturally unsafe, colonising and racist practices of academia and universities in the 21st century than what has been written about Indigenist learning and teaching in action.

For example, Dr Martin Nakata's book *Disciplining the Savages, Savaging the Disciplines* back in 2007 and most recently the powerful work of Dr Chelsea Watego via her book *Another Day in the Colony*.

From my perspective, I see this as a continuation of the process versus content issue. Indigenous peoples and Indigenous knowledges continue to be subjugated as content within a hegemonic culture of whiteness, whereby the ways of doing and what is valued are not negotiable.

I believe this non-negotiable stance is driven by an overarching ideological belief that white cultural processes and practices are logically and rationally the only way to approach the governance, administration and delivery of education, as they are quite simply the most sophisticated and superior. This is by definition a racist approach.

I am not suggesting that those who support this approach are intentionally and consciously colluding to utilise racism as a process, nevertheless there is collusion on a grand scale, which may be for the most part unconscious, but that doesn't make a lot of difference to the outcome. What's more the lack of conscious thought amongst those colluding makes challenging it much harder.

When ideologically driven people in positions of power and authority are the unconscious champions of a white supremacist approach the opportunity to openly challenge and debate that approach is unlikely.

In my experience, what's more likely to happen, is that the person challenging a white supremacist approach is cast as an aggressor making unfair and even derogatory personal accusations about those who collude to enable the process. Such critiques of process and practice may be re-defined by those in authority as misconduct whilst subconsciously confirming racist beliefs about the moral and intellectual weakness of the racially imagined and colonially established native subaltern (Moreton- Robinson, 2015 p 154-172).

This situation mirrors monotheist theocratic governance processes whereby the criticism of the all-powerful unquestionable processes and practices, informed by ideology, is deemed to be blasphemous and warranting sanction or worse.

This situation is exactly why we are educating social work students to understand their positionality coming into a situation in which you will be empowered to have authority over others.

We support students to develop their capacity to critically analyse power structures and the systematic expressions of these structures, and to apply anti-oppressive solutions to imagine

and create alternative approaches to oppressive hegemonic practices and to avoid the impacts of oppressive practices.

In short, we are supporting students to become conscious of ideologies and practices that legitimise discrimination, including those that may be personally held. Of these ideologies white supremacist ideology looms large.

This is a student learning and teaching experience that is far more challenging and transformative than the more typical 'cultural competency' training favoured by university executives and managers in which 'Indigenous culture' is once again made the content whilst the process, typically conducted in less than a whole day, is designed to present essentialised information that will help the essentialised non-Indigenous successfully engage with the essentialised Indigenous, such that incredibly complex issues and circumstances stemming from hundreds of years of colonial violence, can be confidently addressed. This is the application of magical thinking at best and has been extensively critiqued for the past two decades.

If we are going to try and introduce and implement Indigenist learning and teaching approaches within universities, as a pathway to the decolonisation of tertiary education in Australia, we will need to develop a critical mass of Indigenist practitioners and a policy platform that clearly supports the approach.

As it stands there are arguably a small number of Indigenous academics and their allies flying under the radar and utilising Indigenist approaches based on their personal commitment to social justice and improved learning outcomes.

This is not a culturally safe and sustainable strategy and there is compelling evidence via the literature that Indigenous academic staff are vulnerable to experiences of racism and marginalisation generally within universities but especially so when hegemonic systems and practices are questioned and challenged. This is a situation I have personally experienced throughout 25 years of involvement with tertiary education in Australia.

I'd like to offer a recent personal experience to emphasise how these discriminatory and unsafe white supremacist ways of thinking play out in everyday academic life and at what cost.

This experience is contextualised around the recognition via the Universities Australia Indigenous Strategy (2022 – 25) that universities should acknowledge additional and often unseen work undertaken by Indigenous staff and recognise this work when negotiating academic staff workloads.

During 2022 I put together an evidenced based proposal to school executive, all of whom are non-Indigenous, that Indigenous academic staff should be given extra time when marking student assessments based on engagement with content and process related to the First Nations experiences and impacts of the colonising project in Australia.

This argument for additional time was based on recognising the emotional labour that Indigenous academic staff undertake to stay well and mindful of harm when engaging with

content and analysis that talks directly to their own family and community circumstances and impacts, including intergenerational trauma.

I included in this argument that the choice to undertaking this emotional labour was a conscious choice of professional commitment to the quality of the learning and teaching process, that myself and other members of our team were committed to.

Whilst there was recognition from executive staff that emotional labour in this context was a genuine issue, the decision that was made to address it was beyond what I had imagined would happen, and not in a good way.

After some months of nothing being done in response to my request, a series of meetings were held between members of the school executive myself and my only other remaining Indigenous academic team member. In these meetings it was suggested that a solution to our 'concerns' might be to recruit non-Indigenous people to teach the First Nations focussed courses that we were currently teaching and that we be given other courses to teach. To add perverse logic to the already perverse scenario it was suggested that it would be a good look for non-Indigenous students to see Indigenous academic staff teaching in mainstream subjects.

I recall how deeply shaken I was as this meeting played out. I was almost lost for words although I was clear in giving that suggestion a hard no.

Consider that my team member and I had only asked for an additional 30 minutes of extra time per student in our classes to mark assessments. We had also noted that the team-teaching model, previously endorsed as better practice and supported for several years had been discontinued without consultation or rationale and that this was taking away from a culturally safe approach thus adding to our emotional labour.

The most obvious thing to both of us was how fundamentally racist this proposal was, but also how absurd to assume that critically reflecting on issues of colonial violence, systematic discrimination and ongoing racial oppression would not have an emotional impact on a non-Indigenous academic. I mean what sort of racialized logic was at play here, in such an unconscious way, that someone would confidently put it forward in the guise of being in any way supportive.

For me this was the definition of a culturally unsafe space, I could barely think straight. My colleague was in tears.

The courses that they were suggesting I give up were courses I had been employed by the university to specifically teach, some for nearly ten years, and even more absurd, some of those courses were courses I had designed, authored and delivered. This was the teaching application of my contractually recognised expertise.

One the courses was the course I discussed in my first podcast, First Peoples and Social Justice, that was delivered as a core subject to undergraduate and postgraduate social work students.

This was a course that the Australian Association of Social Workers had stipulated needed to be led and taught by Indigenous academic staff.

This meeting was concluded with the suggestion that we think about this proposal.

Regardless of what these executive staff members imagined that they were doing, I felt that I had just been subjected to a racist attack, and I know my team member felt the same way. We were both aware that such a scenario would never play out if the issue had been contextualised around gender, sexuality or age.

Some weeks after this, both I and my colleague received separate unannounced calls from one of the executive staff, letting us know that as of Trimester 1, 2023 we would not be convening any of the First nations focussed courses we had been teaching, and that two non-Indigenous staff had been contracted to convene and teach into those courses. Both of these staff were white identifying people and neither of them had ever taught these courses.

The most senior of these appointed staff was a friend of one of the most senior executives in the university, and it was that executive who had directly appointed this person, on a twelve-month contract, at an Associate Professor level, two levels above my Level B status. This person later told me that they were in fact retired but had decided to take the role because it was such a great offer.

My response to this directive was to refuse to agree on the spot. My team member was emotionally overwhelmed by this decision, worn down by equally distressing workplace events that had preceded this situation.

Not long after this my colleague left their permanent full-time position with the university to take a one-year contract position in another university. My colleague was an Aboriginal woman, early career academic, recent winner of the Vice Chancellors Medal for the quality of her PhD study that directly supported the teaching we were doing. We were both in the top 5% of student satisfaction scores for our teaching and were both part of the Indigenous teaching team nominated for a national teaching award. The way she was treated was in direct contradiction to the university's commitment to its Indigenous staff and in direct contradiction to the principles and objectives of Universities Australia's Indigenous Strategy.

With my last team member now gone, I was the last remaining team member of what had been a highly successful Indigenous teaching team that had developed an increasingly Indigenist approach to learning and teaching over the best part of a decade.

I was determined not to abandon my commitment to delivering these courses so I began the push-back against these decisions, seeking support from other academic colleagues and threatening to make this situation a public story.

To cut a very triggering story short, the concession I gained was to remain as the convenor and facilitator of one postgraduate course I had designed and written, and to team teach into the First Peoples and Social Justice course with two non-Indigenous staff who had no experience with the process nor the content. This was not team teaching; it was staff training. It did not go well and one of the most unfair outcomes was the negative impact on the student experience.

This all happened very recently. The fight has taken its toll on me. I have developed significant depression. If it was not for the support of my family, good friends and supportive colleagues I would not have been able to push back against this racist process and I may not have been able to continue to finish my PhD study, which I am indeed still struggling to complete as I speak.

I'm relating this story to provide a sense of the human impact that plays out every time these culturally hegemonic, culturally unsafe and discriminatory processes occur. And they occur frequently and readily for Indigenous people within the academy, as has been clearly documented within the literature. Over the course of my nearly 25 years working in Australian universities I have experienced similar situations to the one I've described and worse. Some the impacts on me personally have been worse than this time around, and I've witnessed it happen to many others. These are consistent experiences as an outcome of systematic processes, supported by established colonising practices.

So where do I go with this discussion about the challenges we face when trying to introduce Indigenist process into spaces and places that appear to be so deeply stuck in colonising practices, borne of white supremacist ideological beliefs. The cruel irony is that an Indigenist approach provides a solution to this situation.

In her book "Another Day in the Colony", a reflective work that talks directly to what I have discussed in this podcast, Dr Chelsea Watego has titled the final chapter "Fuck Hope". In this chapter Dr Watego makes the point that we should not continue to cling to hope as a rational response to these systematic processes of oppression. She makes the point and I quote

"We occupy a social world that refuses to see our humanity, and not because it has yet to discover it, but precisely because its very existence is founded upon our violent erasure. It has no other way of knowing itself"

She goes on to say

"They will never realise our humanity, no matter how many reconciliation action plans, race discrimination cases or special research funding rounds they establish. And there is a real danger in entertaining any of the performative illusions of Indigenous inclusion or appreciation, either aspirational or actual in the colony"

Dr Watego makes the point that the nihilism of this analysis is a positive grounding experience and a commitment to being unapologetically Black (REF). I think such a philosophical stance will be easily misunderstood by white colleagues and allies who might encourage their Indigenous colleague not to give up hope, whilst all the while never having to gamble their own identity and place in the academy on such an ephemeral and powerless concept.

My takeaway from Dr Watego's concluding chapter in this book, is that hope is what the oppressor offers as a distraction whilst conspiring to undermine aspirations that will never be permitted to be realised.

This analysis resonates very deeply with me, as a person who shares a lot of common ground with Chelsea Watego, within the world of work at a university. As someone trained and practiced in critical studies, it seems rational to abandon hope in the face of my experience over the best part of a quarter of a century.

And in agreement and solidarity with Chelsea Watego I'm not equating the giving up of hope with abandoning my right to champion and demand better practice at the cultural interface.

So where to from here in moving beyond the dominate paradigm?

If we move away from the confines of the institution and out into a broader public space, and the broader world of popular public literature, there is a developing theme around the significance of First knowledges and First Law that I believe should be considered in connection to theme of process being more important than content, and what place and Indigenist approach to sharing knowledge might play.

Recent publications such as “Sand Talk”, by Dr Tyson Yunkaporta; “The Dreaming Path” by Paul Callahan and Uncle Paul Gordon; “Law: The way of the Ancestors” by Marcia Langton and Aaron Corn; “gigorou: First Nations wisdom and womanhood” by Sasha Sarago, and “Journey into Dreamtime” by Aunty Munya Andrews.

These are all books that present First Nations Knowledges and practices as contemporary relevant and important to all people, as a guide and inspiration for how can see we see the world and each other outside of and away from ideologies of separation and oppression.

These books represent much more than hope. They present decolonising options and are an invitation to consciously engage change.

My belief, based on my practice experience, is that most people resonate with the need to move away from colonising and oppressive ways of doing and being, Indigenist process is the conduit.

Indigenist practice represents a conscious synthesis of knowledges in response to the impacts and outcomes of colonisation. It offers those engaged in learning and teaching an embodied experience of what decolonisation is as process and how that process can be further developed and shared in a wholistic context, that includes but is not limited to the way we work as professionals with others.

I believe it’s accurate to say that there is compelling evidence that many universities and other institutions within Australia, responsible for delivering education, are not engaged with Indigenous peoples, Indigenous knowledges and Indigenous practices from a rights-based perspective, even if they go so far as to suggest they are.

There is still an overarching deficit paradigm that locates Indigenous peoples as a homogenised welfare group that should be included within the equity of access mix. Indigenous knowledges are reduced to content whilst Indigenous and Indigenist processes and practices are ignored at best and actively rejected at worst. Indigenous academic staff are often the objects of performative justice, profiled as evidence of success via virtue signalling policy outcomes.

Meanwhile within Australia, the socioeconomic circumstances and life outcomes for First nations peoples and communities outside the academy show no signs of positive shift as a result of what is happening within the academy, including via the human service professionals the academy graduates.

My hope used to be that universities would take the lead in the recognition of the rights of Indigenous peoples to be equal participants in the shaping of the education cultures, practices and professions within Australian education spaces. My experience has been that this has only happened within the teaching and research practices of a small number of isolated individuals and teams within the institutional spaces and has often come at a cost to career progression and wellbeing.

After 25 years working within institutional academia, I too am abandoning hope for change based on conscious critical reflection from within the various executive hierarchies. However, I am not abandoning holding the academy accountable to a rights-based inclusion of Indigenous peoples and knowledges, or my resolve to deepen my commitment to Indigenist learning and teaching practice. I feel that my PhD study has given me a deeper, more nuanced understanding of what it means to take an Indigenous and Indigenist approach to learning and teaching in Australia and I will be able to share this to support others to understand more clearly.

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Conclusion

My primary research question in this study was to explore what defines an Indigenous Australian approach to learning and teaching in a contemporary context.

My research found that there are several key concepts and practices, shared amongst a culturally diverse cross section of First Nations Australian education practitioners, that can be considered an overarching Indigenous or Indigenist approach to learning and teaching.

These concepts and practices can be summarised as the following:

Relationships and relatedness are the foundation to an Indigenous approach to learning and teaching. Relationships that support the values and aspirations of an Indigenous learning and teaching should be established before any specific learning and teaching activity and content is engaged with. This starts from the premise that we are all related.

Country is a sentient and active participant in the learning and teaching experience. Country is an important teacher. We are always on country. Not all Indigenous learning and teaching practice has to be done in geographically specific locations however it may also be important to be in geographically specific locations, depending on what is being shared and with who.

The significant ontological and epistemological differences between an Indigenous and Western approach to learning and teaching mean that Indigenous learning and teaching will be a significantly different experience based on significantly different aims and objectives.

Our previous learning and teaching experiences need to be understood from a critically reflective perspective as we come together in a learning and teaching space.

The specific First Nations knowledges and practices that inform and shape an Indigenous approach to learning and teaching must be acknowledged and respected above everything else. Respecting and protecting the custodial rights to specific cultural knowledge and practices is paramount.

My secondary reflective questions were:

1. What is the potential of Indigenous teaching and learning processes to contribute to improved professional practice?
2. What are the challenges to implementing Indigenous learning and teaching practices into tertiary education spaces.?

My reflections highlighted that Indigenous/Indigenist teaching and learning processes have significant potential to contribute to improved professional practice. I reflected specifically on my teaching within an undergraduate and postgraduate social work program to make this point. An Indigenist approach takes into consideration the values and beliefs that a learner

will take with them and apply beyond the immediate learning experience and into social and professional life.

I was able to connect the learning and teaching work my colleagues and I were already doing within these programs to concepts and practices identified within the primary research question. This provides confidence that the processes I was reflecting on are examples of Indigenist practices, albeit currently limited in scope and application due to the hegemonic education culture in which they are delivered.

My reflections on the challenges to implementing Indigenous/Indigenist learning and teaching practices into tertiary education spaces drew on my reflections of my own experience over twenty-five years in tertiary education. This was supported by relevant literature, specific to an Australian university context.

I have argued that there are currently significant systematic and structural challenges within the Australian university context due to dominating hegemonic cultural beliefs and practices, borne of white supremacist and colonising ideologies. These beliefs and practices are deeply entrenched to the point of being normalised at personal through to structural levels within universities. This is so even though myself and many other academics within Australian universities seek to champion scholarship, teaching and applied research based on anti-oppressive theory and practice and are employed to do so by the university.

This paradoxical scenario within Australian universities makes for culturally unsafe learning and teaching spaces and represents significant personal risk to the wellbeing of those who challenge the academy to systematically and structurally include an anti-oppressive approach. This is particularly so for First Nations staff and thus makes the current environment unsustainable regarding the systematic engagement and actioning of Indigenist approaches to learning and teaching.

I conceptualized and designed my research process from an Indigenous standpoint, based on Indigenist Standpoint theory as developed and discussed by Dr Uncle Errol West, Dr Aileen Moreton-Robinson, Dr Dennis Foley, Dr Martin Nakata, (West, 2000; Moreton Robinson, 2004; Foley, 2006; Nakata, 2007;) I took an overarching Indigenous Research Methodological approach as defined and developed by Dr Linda Tuwai Smith, Dr Lester Irabinna Rigney, Dr Shawn Wilson and many other First Nations scholars over the past two decades (Rigney, 2001; Wilson, 2020; Smith, 2021).

The critical foundational elements of an Indigenous Research Methodological approach are based on relationships of integrity with people and place in the spaces that research takes place, a commitment to the recognition of Indigenous sovereignty, including knowledge and data sovereignty and a commitment to social justice and the decolonization of research theory and practice.

I used a qualitative, hybrid, mixed methods approach to gathering and analysing the data for the primary research question, and I engaged autoethnographic critical reflection to discuss

the secondary questions. I engaged a yarning method with an invited community of expert participants, to build a body of stories, knowledges, opinions and conclusions that were thematically analysed for similarity, consistency and patterns of connection.

The yarning analysis process relied on a blended deductive and inductive approach that worked from an overarching sameness hypothesis between existing literature and the outcome of the yarns. This approach required the identification of themes and sub themes via an inductive analysis and positioned these alongside a deductive analysis drawn from relevant literature and my own professional practice experience.

To maintain the integrity of the Indigenous methodological practice, yarning participants were empowered to maintain control and ownership of their stories, knowledges, opinions and conclusions throughout the research process. No findings were finalized and published without seeking the feedback and approval of research participants. There was a strong consensus amongst yarning participants regarding the validity of the findings, with ten out of twelve participants expressing their agreement. No yarning participants voiced a disagreement. Two yarning participants did not respond with agreement or disagreement. The inclusion of the yarning participants in the development of the analysis and findings provided an additional layer of process and outcomes trustworthiness as the research participants had a strong cultural and professional knowledge by which to scrutinize and validate the deductive hypothesis and findings I introduced.

I used an autoethnographic reflective method to engage the two secondary research questions. This approach allowed me to draw on my extensive experience over twenty-five years of learning and teaching practice within university and other teaching contexts. I drew on relevant literature to further support my critical points and observations.

Given the research questions engaged for this Ph.D. I feel that an Indigenous Research Methodological approach was the appropriate and perhaps only ethical methodological approach to engage. The principles and tenants of Indigenous Research Methodology provided the framework that supported a socially just and culturally safe approach to these questions, for myself, but most importantly for the First Nations practitioners that responded to my invitation to be research participants. This methodological approach also allowed for and accommodated the hybrid, mixed methods approach I chose for the analysis and determination of findings.

I feel that my decision to present my Ph.D. as a digital work, via a website was the right choice based on the commitments I made at the outset of my research journey, that my work should be accessible and transparent at the broader community level, outside of the academy and an academic audience, and in particular a First Nations community audience. This approach also aligns with the Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies ethical research guidelines regarding research being of benefit to the broader Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community.

The website is also a creative product of my Ph.D. study. I had to develop my IT skills to do this as I have designed and produced the website myself. I have also recorded and edited all the audio components of the Ph.D. presentation This process has provided me with a broader

professional learning and knowledge set that I will be able to utilize and share as an educator. The digital approach to presenting my work has been a challenging process that is certainly no easier or time saving than traditional text-based writing, however I feel that I have developed my understanding of how research can be presented in more equitable and accessible ways.

I feel that this study provides both a model and a motivation for further research into applied Indigenist theory and practice. I believe there is great potential for Indigenist theory and practice to be considered, engaged and experienced in a far wider context than I have presented here. I believe Indigenist approaches can provide viable, sustainable alternatives to current hegemonic and non-inclusive approaches to the design, delivery and governance of education policy and practice within Australia and beyond. There is a very wide-ranging opportunity to explore this potential via research.

I feel confident that my research has played a significant role in helping to clarify and understand the depth to which culturally diverse First Nations within Australia have a shared ontological, epistemological and methodological approach to how knowledge and wisdom is shared and passed on to others. Whilst this has been something that has been implied and suggested via academic and non-academic literature, the lack of research-based evidence to confirm that more fully had been lacking. I hope that my research may encourage and support diverse First Nations educators and their non-indigenous allies to collaborate from the strengths-based focus that the Indigenist approach takes.

My Ph.D. research journey has been a long one, spaced over eight years part-time whilst working full-time within a university teaching context and being engaged in a full family and community life. There have been many challenges to overcome to get to completion. There have also been some encouraging developments in the applied Indigenous and Indigenist knowledges space during this time.

In a somewhat unusual approach, I have ended up completing my Ph.D. in the later part of my academic career rather than as the catalyst for starting my career. Given that my academic career started more than two decades ago, via my connection to First Nations communities and country, I feel my research has been going for far longer than eight years. The completion of this Ph.D. brings me a sense of closure but also a renewed sense of enthusiasm. I now have a more cohesive reference and resource point from which I can continue my yarning approach within the academy and outside of it. I have a more focused sense of how to champion Indigenist theory and practice and a renewed belief that First Nations peoples and knowledges are the key to providing guidance and leadership in the process of decolonising education and professional practice.

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