Research-based Approaches to Teaching Indigenous Curriculum: Some practical exemplars

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Fellowship:

‘Indigenous teaching and learning at Australian universities: Developing research-based exemplars for good practice’

• Reference Group and Critical Friends

• Interviews with academics across NSW and VIC to identify effective practice in Indigenous teaching

• Outcome: Research-based exemplars for Indigenous Teaching

Other relevant research:

• Indigenous student data from 2009 AUSSE national survey

• Interviews with Indigenous academics (with Susan Page)
Indigenous Teaching at Australian Universities

Welcome

The examples and resources on this website are designed for anyone engaged in Indigenous teaching in Australian universities - or beyond. In the Australian context, ‘Indigenous teaching’ is a subset of any teaching involving Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander students, teachers, or subject matter.

As a teacher, you might be of Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander descent yourself, or not. You might be teaching Indigenous students, or you might be teaching Indigenous curriculum to mixed classes.

If you are not a teacher, you might just want to learn more about the fast growing area of teaching in Australia today.

Whatever your interests, you are welcome.

Arnouts Tan Songscope

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Teaching Exemplars

This website aims to provide practitioners in the field of Indigenous teaching with a set of “research-based exemplars for good practice”.

For the data collection, 36 Indigenous and non-Indigenous university teachers across New South Wales and Victoria - all recommended by senior Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander colleagues - were interviewed about their teaching. (The Interview Schedule is available on request).

The findings were analysed using NVivo software, resulting in the set of Approaches outlined below. For each Approach, short exemplars are provided or teachers’ own words.

1. Make the classroom a safe environment for learning
2. Show confidence in your own expertise, credibility and authority
3. Set high academic and personal standards (and model them yourself)
4. Provide scaffolding and support when needed
5. Nuture emotions in the classroom
6. Model dialogue by teaching in pairs/whole class
7. Locate local Indigenous areas in global contexts
8. Get students to question established assumptions and texts
9. Build relationships with, and connect students to community
10. Teach students to “walk in the shoes of others”
11. Utilise personal experience
12. Encourage student self assessment

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Indigenous Consultation and Participation

Advisory Group and Critical Friends (n=16)

- Indigenous: 13
- non-Indigenous: 3

Teaching staff interviewed (n=26)

- Indigenous: 14
- non-Indigenous: 12

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'Indigenous teaching': Who is involved?

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A Question for You

In the area of Indigenous teaching, is basic ‘good teaching’ enough?

Or, is something extra needed?
In Indigenous teaching, is ‘good teaching’ enough?

Ramsden’s Principles of Good Teaching:

1. Make subject interesting, & explain it clearly

2. Show concern/respect for students & their learning

3. Give appropriate assessment and feedback

4. Set clear goals and intellectual challenge

5. Allow independence, control and engagement

6. Be willing to learn from students (& make changes if needed)  

(Ramsden, 2003, 93-99)
Is good teaching enough?

• Of 526 Indigenous respondents, 355 commented on how their university engages students in learning.

• Over 90% of comments were not related specifically to Indigenous issues. Instead, Indigenous students appreciated things like prompt responses from teaching staff, efficient use of technology, and well run discussions.

• Indigenous students also suggested areas for improvement including the quantity and speed of feedback; and - in common with many other students - ‘No boring lectures’.

(Asmar, Page & Radloff, 2011)
Your task

1. Read the 10 Suggested Approaches
2. Next to each Approach put √ if it would work for you; or X if it would not
3. Compare with your group
4. Share any useful strategies
5. Be ready to report back
1. Make the classroom a safe environment for learning:

'The premise, which I've developed over years, is that I make a safe and respectful environment for them, where they feel safe, and where they don't get jumped on for not knowing things. It's the not knowing that creates friction - the fear of not knowing, so [I say]: "You can ask anything. You won't know it, you can't get it out of a book, but you can ask".' (UNSW)

2. Show confidence in your own expertise, credibility and authority:

‘You have to convince students coming in that they have to listen to an Indigenous person teaching you [non-Indigenous subject matter]. This is hard for them to accept. Non-Indigenous students think they are getting ripped off, to have an Indigenous teacher teaching non-Indigenous material or subjects. My expertise is in government, governance.’ (Monash)
3. Negotiate emotions in the classroom:

‘If someone says something stereotypical, I put it out to the other students to think about, rather than taking it on myself. Other students will respond to it, but they need a comfortable space to feel free to do so. I always try to respond with empathy, that: “I can see where you are coming from, I can see why you might think that” - I try to acknowledge that there is some legitimacy to their views.’ (Sydney)

4. Model dialogue by teaching in pairs/collaboratively:

‘We have an “interrogative” approach to teaching. The questioning by one of us goes on while the other one is talking about the content, in a kind of meta-cognitive way, so Henry will intervene to say: “The reason Zane is saying that, is…”’. In the end, the use of this “critical meta-narrative” means that students develop the ability to reflect on their own practice. We model the possibility that you can have normal relations.’ (Monash)
5. Get students to question established assumptions and ‘facts’:

‘I try to challenge students to see beyond the mythology. They often come with kitchen table prejudices in their heads. When they are confronted with material, documents showing that the world is otherwise… - things usually start to shift. There are some remarkable transformations - I had a student this year … she was very open about her family background and their views of Aboriginal people, but her views have shifted remarkably.’ (La Trobe)

6. Build relationships with, and connect students to community:

‘I organise a public forum - there might be a researcher, a service provider, policy makers, and a community member. They all come and speak to a particular issue; it might be the justice system, the Intervention, family violence. Two or three of the speakers are Aboriginal. The audience can ask questions. The students are in the audience too, and they come back later, after tea, and deconstruct everything they’ve heard. (Melbourne)
7. Teach students to ‘walk in the shoes of others’:

‘Increasingly, I use role plays in class. We might work on fishing rights over a lake, and the Indigenous students are asked to play the role of government officials, and non-Indigenous students have to take on Indigenous roles.’ (Macquarie)

8. Encourage student self-awareness:

‘At the beginning of the semester I start with my non-Indigenous students by asking them to write down: “What I know about Aboriginal people” and “What I would like to know about Aboriginal people”. Then they have to put that aside. At the end of the unit they have to write: “What did I learn in this unit?” And they also have to compare and critique what they have learnt, in comparison to what they wrote at the start.’ (Macquarie)
9. Be open to reflecting, learning and changing as a teacher:

[After completing a course in university teaching]
‘I moved away from challenging racist students directly, to encouraging the whole class to think differently about an issue. Students have to come to their conclusions themselves. I try to focus on the good of the whole group rather than picking on one person.’ (Sydney)

10. Be enthusiastic, enjoy your teaching, and have fun!

‘I love teaching… it is such a fascinating area. When I am well prepared for a class I go in feeling really excited - knowing what I am going to share with the students.’ (UNSW)
Our Indigenous Teaching Workforce

Indigenous academics 1%

NonIndigenous Academics
99%

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Indigenous Knowledges

• “It is not always easy to appreciate the differences between a western academic knowledge system, and the systems shared and celebrated by Indigenous people around the world. Even when there is recognition of knowledge differences, practitioners do not always know what to do about them. New teachers may be inhibited by fear of getting things wrong, or of offending someone.

Fortunately, the rewards of engaging with Indigenous knowledges and ways of seeing the world are as great for teachers as they are for students.”

• “We’ve all got knowledge about this land - so let’s just do it!”
Selected Collaborative Research and Publications


Thank you

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