

Critical Indigenous Pedagogical Practice

Introduction

“Reviewing the national curriculum was a priority with the Coalition keen to redress a Left-wing bias to the history course, in particular, which he said contained “apologia for Australia’s past”. “I don’t believe that the current history curriculum strikes the right balance.”

Christopher Pyne, Education Minister in Blake (2013, September 28), The Advertiser.

This statement clearly shows how political context shapes curriculum. It also indicates that recent government changes bring with them a political shift in focus as regards Reconciliation and the education of Indigenous (and non-Indigenous) Australians.

This paper outlines the intensified need for Critical Indigenous Pedagogical Practice (CIPP) in schools to ensure the Indigenous perspective remains included and that the educational outcomes for Indigenous students are improved. It uses critical race theory to highlight some of the key issues and proposes numerous practices that can be implemented by teachers to address these issues in the classroom. Included, as an appendix, is an introductory lesson plan for a year two Geography unit as further demonstration of CIPP.

Rationale

For many years it has been acknowledged that there are significant life-altering differences between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians. In 2000, the Australian Bureau of Statistics recorded the life expectancy of Indigenous persons to be twenty years below that of non-Indigenous Australians; unemployment rates for Indigenous people was twice the level for other Australians; nearly half of Indigenous people aged fifteen years and over were reported as having received no formal education; and 69% of Indigenous people (compared to 34% non-Indigenous) had not completed the highest level of secondary schooling (Feeny, 2002, p.54). And Bradley (2007, in Halse 2011, p.259) maintains that Indigenous students remain ‘one of the most disadvantaged minorities in Australian education systems’. Such significant differences are unacceptable and need to be addressed in the interests of social justice.

Improving the educational outcomes of Indigenous students is associated with improved labour market outcomes, and ultimately improved life outcomes, and as such, from the late 1990s, Indigenous education has been recognised as a national priority (Feeny, 2002, p.56). It has been one focus of ‘closing the gap’

on Indigenous disadvantage. One of the goals of The Melbourne Declaration on Educational Goals for Young Australians (2008) is to promote equity and excellence in schooling, within this ensuring the educational outcomes for Indigenous students improve to match those of other students. This goal and national focus is evident in the current Australian Curriculum in that 'Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander histories and cultures' is defined as a 'Cross-curricular priority' to be embedded within all learning areas, from Foundation to year ten. That is, teachers need to include Indigenous perspectives across all areas of the curriculum. Acknowledging that the Indigenous perspective needs to be taught and knowing what this looks like are two different things and this paper addresses this difficulty below.

Research conducted into the educational outcomes of Indigenous students (e.g. Hayes et al, 2009, and Hunter, 2003 in Rahman, 2010) argues several reasons for low attainment. Reasons include disengagement from education and low sense of identity and self value leading to 'dropping out'.

Using these reasons as a foundation, there are several key issues that need to be addressed when looking at improving the educational outcomes for Indigenous students. This paper considers three of these connected issues:

- The provision of an effective and safe learning environment for the Indigenous student
- The use of appropriate curriculum and pedagogies including an understanding of Indigenous perspectives
- The development of a strong, positive sense of identity

The provision of an effective and safe learning environment for the Indigenous student

It is essential that educators accept their responsibility for establishing a safe learning environment for Indigenous students. A safe learning environment is one in which all students can voice their opinions respectfully and where they are truly valued. To do this, it may be that non-Indigenous educators need to accept their 'white privilege' (McIntosh, 1990) in order to be inclusive of the Indigenous perspective.

"We need to expect teachers of the dominant group to take interest in these issues or in the spiritual/developmental growth of racialised communities. From my teaching experiences they almost never do and they almost absolve themselves of responsibility and accountability" (Sefa dei, 2008, p.99).

To be successful, the teacher will need to take risks and share personal stories with his/her students, to build relationships of trust and respect in order to engage in the 'practice of freedom' (Hooks, 1994). If teachers are to encourage and promote the values of respect and trust within their classroom they may first need to consider their understanding of their own history and cultural perspective, and to reflect on personal behaviours and how they impact on Indigenous people, particularly students. They may need to 'unpack their whiteness' (Sarra 2008, in DET, 2010 p.28). 'Cultural backgrounds, religious beliefs, family histories and individual experiences will impact on the attitudes and perceptions of Indigenous peoples' (DET, 2010, p.24).

Educators also need to acknowledge the racialisation of the Australian education system in that its practice and curriculum reflect Western tradition, reinforcing the knowledge and values of Western cultures. Halse (2011, p. 258) argues that Indigenous students find this environment difficult to 'feel comfortable in or be engaged with learning and committed to achieving'. This difficulty with learning environment has been acknowledged for some time. For example, in 1985 the House of Representatives Select Committee on Aboriginal Education (in Herbert, 2010, p.27), in addressing disadvantage, stated 'Aboriginal people are such a group for whom different educational strategies and approaches are required'.

In its published guide 'Embedding Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Perspectives in schools', DET (2010) outlines the need for teachers to understand their Indigenous students and encourages links with the Indigenous communities, because knowing the ATSI students' individual backgrounds and attitudes to school are important for enabling sensitivity and respect within the classroom (DET, 2010, p.40).

Developing strong community partnerships and having an open-door policy where parents, care givers and members of the community are always welcome further creates a feeling of belonging for all students. Involving Indigenous communities in the explicit teaching of ATSI protocols and respect for Country, and establishing school-community protocols for sharing cultural and school information are suggested strategies for creating this link (DET, 2010, p.32).

Accepting the racialisation of the school space acknowledges that Indigenous students may need a space of their own. Some schools have created what Blanch (2009) refers to as 'Nunga rooms' – spaces in which Indigenous students can feel safe within the context of a school environment. These are discussed in more depth later in this paper, but at this point these spaces are examples of safe learning environments where Indigenous students can develop a sense of well being as promoted within the DECS Learner Wellbeing Framework (2007).

In the classroom, a key priority needs to be building an understanding of, and respect for, traditional and contemporary Indigenous cultures (DEST, 1993 in Halse, 2011, p.258). Encouraging collaboration and group work working towards a common goal will promote such understanding amongst all students. Halse outlines pedagogical practices which may be more appropriate for Indigenous students due to cultural differences. Examples are removing the practice of singling out individual students to respond to questions, avoiding direct questioning, allowing more time for a response, and asking open-ended questions which allow for cultural diversity in student responses (2011, p.262). These simple practices may enable Indigenous students to feel more comfortable and safe within the classroom, take more risks, and therefore be more likely to learn. This being said, Halse may be generalising 'learning styles' for Indigenous students - all students are individuals and learn differently, having different learning preferences. It could be argued, therefore, that these practices would make *all* students – Indigenous and non-Indigenous – more comfortable in the classroom. Either way these are practices that should be encouraged within teachers.

The use of appropriate curriculum and pedagogies including an understanding of Indigenous perspectives

As 'Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander histories and cultures' is defined as a 'Cross-Curricular priority' in the Australian Curriculum, it is important to know what this means. If teachers are to teach the Indigenous perspective and implement CIPP, it is imperative that it is not treated simply as an 'add-on' to the curriculum, but rather as a starting point to learning.

Teachers need to promote an inclusive curriculum for all students. This includes learning environments that value and respond to diversity, using a range of resources appropriate to students' learning needs and that reflect students' identities, and encourage fair and respectful relationships between students and teachers (DET, 2010, p.29).

Harrison (2011, p.69) warns of the dangers of the indigenous perspective being simply 'transmitted *to* students *about* Aboriginal people' as opposed to addressing appropriate curriculum and pedagogy in terms of how students receive these perceptions. Harrison goes on to say that often 'students are not learning Aboriginal views or perspectives, rather they are learning about their non-Aboriginal teacher's perspectives on Aboriginal Australia' (2011, p.70). It is therefore essential that non-Indigenous educators are mindful of their whiteness and white privilege (McIntosh, 1990) when planning for learning.

Although many educational resources may provide an 'Indigenous perspective', teachers also need to be aware that they can represent generalisations that are 'often misleading and inappropriate, causing the homogenisation of Indigenous peoples' (DET, 2011, p.21). Teachers need to be conscious of Anglo-European bias and values, particularly in History where the majority written about Indigenous peoples has been recorded and researched by non-Indigenous people (DET, 2011, p.22). Indeed, in reference to the late nineteenth century, Herbert (2010, p.25) argues that 'Our First Nations peoples disappeared from the written history, along with any accounts of what was done, or being done, to them, the practice of denial could now be practised on a national scale'. Resources therefore need to be carefully considered and selected to ensure appropriateness and authenticity in teaching. There are a number of sources for obtaining authentic learning material and information. For example, in South Australia teachers can seek support from the Aboriginal Multicultural Languages and Learning Resource Centre, The Living Kurna Cultural Centre, and consider local points of ATSI interest suggested by Adelaide City Council in their Footprints walking trails (see 'references'). Website resources for researching ATSI notable persons include 'BlackWords', found in www.auslit.com.au, the Australian Dictionary of Biography (<http://adb.anu.edu.au/>) and www.racismnoway.com.au (see 'references').

Teachers need to make the learning meaningful and relevant to *all* students, implementing and maintaining a culturally appropriate curriculum. Referencing learning to local country (e.g. Kurna Country) is one way. Using significant Indigenous Peoples as examples of great scientists, sporting heroes or historians, and using Indigenous stories as a basis for teaching history, geography and narrative writing are also great starting points. Displaying both Indigenous and non-Indigenous resources incorporating language, flags, maps etc can help redress the balance of the racialised learning space. Consideration also needs to be given to the use of language and terminology within the classroom to ensure that it is used in a respectful manner. Deliberate choice of resources, lesson content and language can aid all students to make effective connections and guide them to recognise the importance of inclusive practices within their community.

In terms of specific pedagogical practice, teachers would do best to see their role as 'facilitator' as opposed to 'expert' when teaching from the Indigenous perspective, using this approach to frame and support their development and understanding of Indigenous issues (DET, 2011, p.30). Halse states that, 'Many teachers use the pedagogies with which they are most comfortable, but effective teachers recognise the importance of using approaches that are appropriate to the backgrounds and needs of their students' (2011, p.261).

The development of a strong, positive sense of identity

Teachers are responsible for the wellbeing of all students, and developing a strong and positive sense of identity in each student is a key part of this. By creating safe learning environments and using culturally sensitive curriculum and pedagogies as outlined above, Indigenous and non-Indigenous students have the opportunity to develop their own sense of identity irrespective of culture or social diversity.

Choosing strong Indigenous role models throughout the curriculum demonstrates that Indigenous culture is valued. And as language is also culture, it is important for teachers to respect students' first languages, recognising them as valid forms of communication, as they are a means for building relationships and developing their own cultural understandings. Indeed, DET (2011, p.42) maintains that students' first languages are 'integral to their sense of self and identity'.

As outlined previously, it is crucial that appropriate resources are used when teaching from the Indigenous perspective so as a positive sense of identity can be formed. The construction of Indigenous peoples and the manipulation of Indigenous knowledges has influenced the way Indigenous peoples have interpreted who they are and who they ought to be (DET, 2011, p.23). Establishing high expectations of Indigenous (and non-Indigenous) students will dispel racist viewpoints of indigenous peoples being of inferior intellect to non-Indigenous peoples. When reliving his school days, O'Brien talks about teachers telling him he wouldn't amount to anything and of Indigenous peoples 'hiding their true identity and denying their Aboriginal heritage, because of the discrimination they would have suffered otherwise' (2007, p.115). Successful CIPP counteracts racist views within the classroom and supports and encourages students' Indigenous identities.

'Nunga rooms' (as discussed previously) further enable Indigenous students to create and develop an identity. Blanch (2009, p.84) argues that 'Young Nunga males ... move between two different cultures, Indigenous and dominant white culture'. Having a place away from the dominant racialised space of the mainstream classroom supports the Indigenous students' 'acknowledgement of self as first nation's people' (Blanch, 2009, p.83).

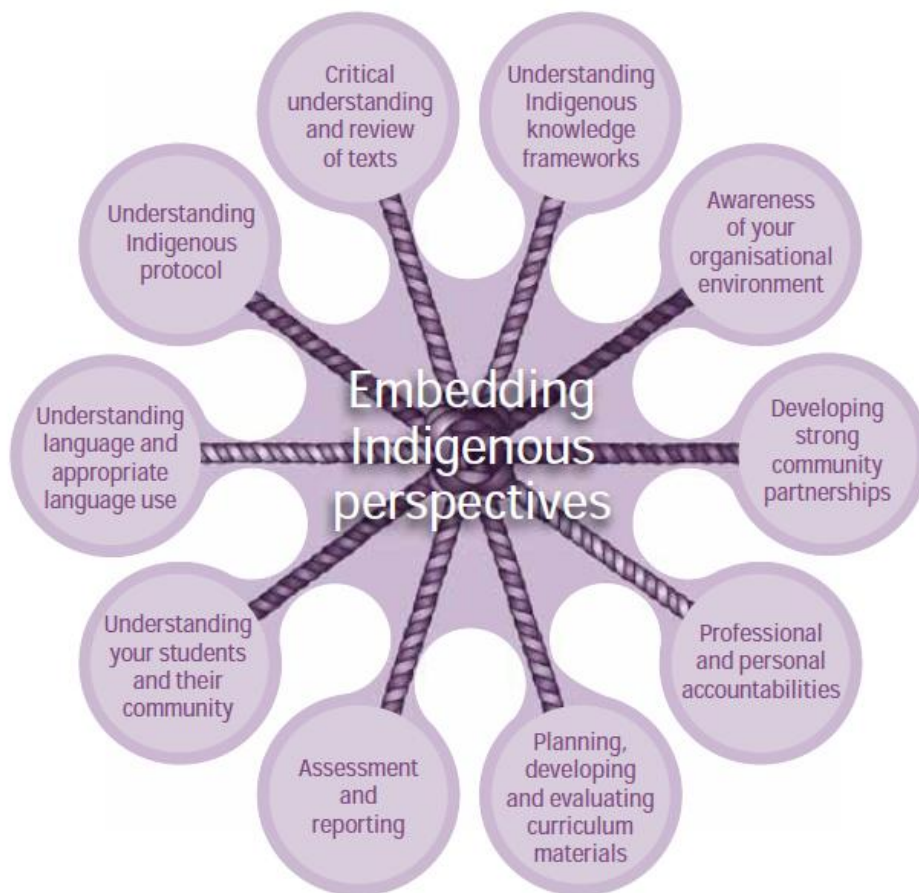
If teachers have been successful in implementing CIPP, having created safe learning environments and subsequently engaging the Indigenous student, positive self-identities will follow. Halse (2011, p.259) argues that 'engagement makes a critical difference to academic achievement and fosters a sense of belonging and self-worth in students'. She argues that 'Children who are engaged in school develop lifelong skills in learning, participation and communication' (2011 p.259). They take responsibility for their own learning.

Summary

This paper has discussed the need for CIPP in classrooms. It has highlighted some key issues that teachers need to address in order for CIPP to be successful and has suggested simple practice that can be implemented. CIPP is not just symbolism – using Indigenous language signs and flags – but a clear practice of embedding Indigenous perspectives in curriculum and pedagogy. It has been argued that creating safe learning environments, promoting positive self identities, and embedding the Indigenous perspective through appropriate and engaging curriculum are critical to the successful implementation of CIPP and to the educational outcomes for Indigenous (and non-Indigenous) students.

Appendix A is an introductory lesson plan for a year two Geography unit. This unit demonstrates CIPP in action.

Below is a visual representation of what teachers need to consider when implementing CIPP and embedding Indigenous perspectives in all that they do – in planning, delivery, assessment, moderation, reporting and evaluation processes (DET, 2011).



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Appendix A

Year Level: Two **Geography**
Lesson: One – introduction to unit
Unit Topic: ‘Australia and our place within it’
Links to other Learning Areas: English, Mathematics, History

General Capabilities

-  Literacy
-  Numeracy
-  ICT competence
-  Critical and creative thinking
-  Ethical understandings
-  Personal and social capability
-  Intercultural understanding

Cross Curriculum Priorities

- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander histories and cultures

Concepts

- Place
- Space
- Environment
- Interconnection
- Change

Global Education Concepts

- Interdependence & Globalisation
- Identity & cultural diversity
- Social justice & human rights
- Peace building & conflict resolution

Aims *What relevant curriculum aims will this lesson address?*

Geographical knowledge and understanding:

The definition of places as parts of the Earth’s surface that have been given meaning by people, and how places can be defined at a variety of scales ([ACHGK010](#))

- examining the names of features and places in the local area, and the meaning of these names and why they were chosen
- investigating the names and meanings given to local features and places by the local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples
- describing the hierarchy of places: from the personal scale of their home, the local scale of their suburb or town, the regional scale of their state, to the national scale of their country

Geographic enquiry and skills

Pose geographical questions about familiar and unfamiliar places ([ACHGS013](#))

- posing questions using the stems ‘what do I feel’, ‘what would it be like to’, ‘what effect’
- developing questions about the connections they have to other places

Learning Objectives. **As a result of engaging with the lesson, students will:**

Understand that (The big ideas)

Places change over time

Know (e.g. facts, vocabulary, dates, information)

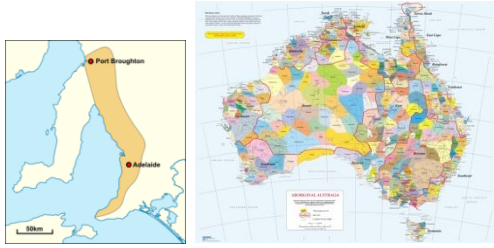
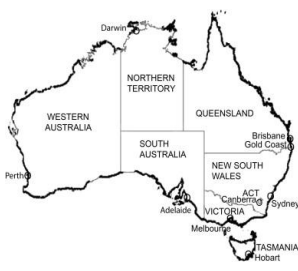
- * Names of (some) traditional Indigenous Countries and their boundaries, and of Australia in terms of States and Territories
- * Places change over time
- * Local Indigenous country/land is Kurna land
- * Indigenous Peoples have strong connections to the land

Be able to (do) (Skills, processes)

- * Indicate where Kurna land is on a map
- * Name States and Territories of Australia

Essential Questions

- Who lived on Kurna land first and how do we know?
- How am I connected to Kurna land?
- How can I find out about our local area and how it has developed? How has it changed from the days of my Grandparents?
- What is special about my area and what has particular ATSI significance?

Lesson	Resources & Notes
<p>Introduction</p> <p>Whole class: Discuss map of Indigenous Countries showing traditional custodian boundaries. Compare with modern map of Australia showing States and Territories.</p> <p>Ask:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How are these maps different? • Why do you think they are different? • When do you think these changes happened? • Focus on local area. Place names. Features. Look at rivers and boundary differences between maps <p>(Note: may not have the answers to all questions but note them during K.W.L. exercise outlined below so as we can research as a class).</p> <p>Discuss custodians of our land (Kurna) & the importance of connections to land.</p> <p>Explain the unit topic including visit to The Living Kurna Cultural Centre to learn more about our local area.</p> <p>Need to establish what students already know & what their interests are in terms of topic so as can plan the rest of the unit:</p> <p>Pre-assessment task: Whole class</p> <p>Complete first two sections of 'Know', 'Would Like to Know', 'Learned' (K.W.L.) as a class. Use observation of student contribution for pre-assessment purposes 'brainstorm session. Complete first 2 sections and display in classroom to add to as unit progresses.</p> <p>Individual: Using outline map of Australia, colour in Kurna Country. Add names of capital cities of States and Territories.</p>	<p>Map of 'modern' Australia & map of Indigenous Countries showing traditional custodian boundaries</p> <p>http://www.abc.net.au/indigenous/map/</p>   <p>K.W.L. template ('Know', 'Would like to know', 'Learned')</p> <p>Same outline map on board to use as reference (see below).</p>

Reflection:

Student Assessment:

- Observe – was the student able to contribute to the class discussion?

Self Assessment:

- Did the lesson engage the students?
- Did the lesson flow smoothly?
- Were the activities engaging for the student? Stage appropriate?
- What would I do differently next time?

Notes for inclusion in unit and/or next lesson:

(to be completed following lesson)

Book/story for this day:
Tjibruke Dreaming



- Colour in Kaurna land
- Label States and add Capital cities