The Australian Journal of Indigenous Education
Volume 52 | Number 2 | © The Author/s 2023 doi 10.55146/ajie.v52i2.678

Growing learning dispositions in Indigenous studies

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Indigenous studies has come a long way. In this paper, we share some bold steps we have taken to develop a learning process that situates Indigenous people as a people of place, a people of knowledge and a people of science. This teaching disengages students from learning about Indigenous people as remnants of the past. We extend earlier conversations by focusing on the development of learning dispositions which enable students to better navigate the complexities of the interface between Indigenous and non-Indigenous ideas. This reflection on practice contributes to ongoing discussions about the establishment of Indigenous studies as a discipline.

Keywords: Indigenous studies, higher education, learning dispositions, cultural interface

Introduction

Indigenous studies has come a long way.

In the modern university, Indigenous studies as a discipline is well placed to prepare graduates to better work with Indigenous communities. Over recent decades, such teaching has often focused on the interrogation of students' identities, questioning their complicity in colonialism, investigating the social construction of race as an active component of structural oppression and using notions such as cultural competency as competency-based approaches to learning and knowing about the "other". This approach to teaching often invites students to be advocates of Indigenous peoples and issues (Nakata, 2017). While this work has been successful in putting Indigenous topics on the agenda, following Nakata (2017), we question whether advocacy is sufficient. Our focus moves Indigenous studies far from its origins as a colonial or post-colonial enterprise, a study of Indigenous people from the outside. It also shifts Indigenous studies beyond a study of inter-race relations, a teaching of Indigenous perspectives, or a professionally driven preparation to be culturally competent in the workplace, to an engagement with the needs of Indigenous peoples and communities as the determiners of their own futures.

When graduates find themselves in the field, caught between their disciplinary training and realities on the ground, or in a novel situation for which they feel unprepared, which dispositions will guide them to respond in a way that supports outcomes for the Indigenous communities they service, regardless of

their field? What type of curriculum prepares graduates to navigate contemporary Indigenous spaces to ask questions, work within the complexities of the corpus, trial different approaches, take risks, accept critique and critically consider the outcomes of their work? What contribution does Indigenous studies make to a workforce who can work collaboratively with Indigenous communities to contribute to, rather than advocate for, political and cultural self-determination?

This paper responds to these questions by describing our work in developing a sequence of undergraduate learning, an Indigenous Studies major. We seek to grow graduates who can better navigate the complexities of the interface between Indigenous and non-Indigenous people. A focus on the interface is a shift away from the position of Indigenous and non-Indigenous people as in a simplistic dichotomous relation (see Nakata, 2007). The cultural interface raises questions of our loyalties to such forms of representation that cast Indigenous people singularly as "the colonial other", "culturally different", "racially behind", "the victim", or in need of "reconciliation actions". Our argument is that university graduates who can read and work within the tensions of Indigenous and non-Indigenous positions, and understand Indigenous and non-Indigenous agency in relation to various and changing discourses, will be better prepared to work with Indigenous communities than those who are taught to defer to Indigenous positions, to "fix" problems, to serve a moral agenda, or to create a more united Australia. That is, the cultural interface is a proposition to make visible the role of the other elements on Indigenous people in our everyday engagements. Therefore, Indigenous studies educators must provide students with the analytical, conceptual and reflective tools, as well as the language, required to do this work.

Background

The recent shift to embedding Indigenous graduate attributes in a whole-of-university approach offers insight into the problematics of teaching Indigenous studies. The notion that all graduates will benefit by integrating Indigenous knowledge into their learning was outlined by the Indigenous Higher Education Advisory Council (IHEAC) (2006), the Bradley Review (IHEAC, 2008), and the Behrendt Review (Behrendt et al., 2012). Across Australian universities, this approach has often been implemented through a model of cultural competency (Frawley, 2017; Harvey & Russell-Mundine, 2019; Universities Australia, 2011), or Indigenising the curriculum (e.g., Bullen & Flavell, 2022). This work has been advanced to the level of designing the scoping and sequencing of Indigenous subjects to meet disciplinary learning outcomes (e.g., Page et al., 2019), and also follows at least a decade of professional practice of embedding Indigenous perspectives in the curriculum (e.g., Acton et al., 2017; Williamson & Dalal, 2007). As Australian universities trial different approaches to prepare a workforce who can work collaboratively with Indigenous communities, this paper focuses on how we can develop the dispositions graduates will require, rather than a particular set of content knowledge.

The undergraduate major outlined here is driven by an understanding of the corpus and the "complex and contested knowledge terrains" (Nakata et al., 2012, p. 1) which constitute the conditions of possibility for understanding Indigenous ideas. For hundreds of years, outsiders have inscribed Indigenous people into their own frameworks: missionaries, with a view to "salvation"; government officials, who created subjects of law; anthropologists, with a focus on "culture". Nakata (2007) terms the body of knowledge produced via this inscription the *corpus*, and shows how the corpus is built on binaries such as civilised/savage, parent/child, culturally superior/inferior, colonised/coloniser. This problematic corpus, which produces knowledge of Indigenous people from outside knowledge systems, influences what we know as "Indigenous" today.

The corpus has also shaped how Indigenous studies is taught. Speaking of Indigenous traditions as "cultural" draws on anthropologists' concepts and research, and discussions of Native Title are underpinned by Western conceptualisations of land ownership. It is through our reliance on such constructs that Indigenous people are re-inscribed through Western ideas. For example, some sequences of learning commence with an exploration of Indigenous people as colonised, subject to systems of oppression and domination, or through stories of resistance and survival. These concepts constitute an important part of Indigenous people's experiences. However, to commence with the coloniser/colonised framework is to re-inscribe Indigenous people as subjects of oppression.

Given the disruptions to traditional knowledges and the production of the corpus, it is difficult to clearly identify which ideas are Indigenous or non-Indigenous. It is this disruption that defines the cultural interface: a space where knowledge and knowledge positions are not simply black or white, Indigenous or non-Indigenous; rather, they are historically entangled, are continuous and discontinuous, and are subject to changing discourses (Nakata, 2007). Attempts to Indigenise the services provided to Indigenous clients, patients, students or communities can rely on simplified conceptualisations of Indigeneity, and can lead to easy assumptions about what is useful to meet the needs of the people using the service. Such approaches may support the communities to feel more comfortable, valued and appreciated. Yet, it is unclear whether these approaches can change, for example, doctors' capacity to explain complex diseases and work with Indigenous patients to develop strategies to mitigate these, or teachers' capacity to progress Indigenous students' learning in a particular content area. Recent systematic reviews of educational research, for example, have demonstrated that there is no evidence base as to how to improve Indigenous students' learning outcomes (Burgess et al., 2019), and reviews of health research have demonstrated similar issues (Bainbridge et al., 2015). Engaging these frameworks also risks "cultural difference" being applied as a one-size-fits-all framework. University graduates go on to work in a range of settings with diverse populations. Teaching Indigenous people as people of (cultural) difference, or as colonised subjects, risks promoting a rigid understanding of who Indigenous people are, and a closure, rather than an opening, of the range of options which professionals can deploy to undertake their work.

We look to continue the conversation about Indigenous studies in Australian universities and situate ourselves among other contributions drawing on Nakata's (2007) cultural interface. In their paper on decoloniality and Indigenous studies pedagogy, Nakata, Nakata, Keech and Bolt (2012) critique decolonising approaches that are underpinned by emancipatory claims. Indigenous studies classrooms, they argue, have the potential to lead to increased self-determination and Indigenous empowerment in the broader community. However, the pedagogical approach differs according to the proposition that underlines the teaching framework. For example, Indigenous contestation of Western knowledge can be presented as a complex endeavour, recognising Indigenous standpoints in adapting, agreeing to, refusing and manoeuvring around changing conditions. It can also be presented in a more simplistic manner, with educators seeking to replace the problematic colonial knowledge with an unproblematised Indigenous view, without considering how the corpus has shaped what is now understood as Indigenous. Arguably, engaging students in open inquiry about the complex intersections between Indigenous and Western ideas is more productive than teaching through decolonising frameworks that claim to replace problematic Western knowledge traditions with Indigenous knowledges (Nakata et al., 2012). Similarly, building students' language and analytical skills to navigate the limits of knowledge (both their own, and the knowledge conditions in which Indigenous people live and work) will allow graduates more flexibility and creativity than asking students to position themselves within a coloniser–colonised framework.

McGloin (2009), for example, frames Indigenous studies as an anti-colonial endeavour, replete with political implications for non-Indigenous educators. In her model of Indigenous studies, a core goal is to "undermine dominant discourses and foreground Indigenous perspectives and knowledge in curricula" (McGloin, 2009, p. 40). The subsequent pedagogical strategies look to destabilise Western knowledge claims via group work and discussion. McGloin (2009) reports the use of anecdotes to help students connect experiences to theory. In the case of Indigenous students and non-Indigenous educators, the teacher engages in mutual learning. In this approach, Indigenous studies is an explicitly political endeavour, where students learn how they are positioned in systems of power with a view to dismantling oppressive structures. On the other hand, Carey and Prince (2015) describe the design of an Australian Indigenous Studies major where the prescribed goal is to unsettle binaries between Indigenous and Western, allowing students a complex view of Indigenous–non-Indigenous relations and preparing them for future work. The authors outline a three-year sequence where students are introduced to Indigenous studies as a discipline and Indigenous popular culture, engage in intercultural learning and work-integrated learning opportunities (including a placement with an Indigenous organisation), and finish with a conceptual third year that examines the limits of conceptual frameworks (reconciliation, sustainability) in various contexts. The disposition that they seek to engender in students is an ethical one—a "developing sense of the social just" (Carey & Prince, 2015, p. 280). In this example of Indigenous studies practice, working with Indigenous communities is a complex ethical endeavour, where students need to develop their sense of fairness. These two examples show the different ways that the cultural interface has been interpreted as a pedagogical teaching tool.

This paper uses the cultural interface, taking a different approach. Rather than working from anti-colonial, decolonising, decolonial or social justice driven approaches, which centre the nation-state as the object of analysis, this Indigenous Studies major focuses on dispositions to work in the complexity of the interface. In particular, we explore the locale of the learner in the Indigenous studies classroom, and how the curriculum can develop the dispositions required to navigate complexity, given the entanglements between Indigenous and non-Indigenous ideas. This includes giving graduates the analytical tools required to understand their own knowledge limits, listen to conflicting positions, explore alternative possibilities and evaluate solutions. In this way, we hope to move Indigenous studies beyond the current focus on cultural models (such as cultural safety or competency), racial literacies, or re-instating "lost" Indigenous positions. We hope to contribute to the conversation on teaching Indigenous studies by sharing some of the strategies used to develop dispositions for learning.

Developing a new major

The Indigenous Studies major developed and delivered at James Cook University is anchored in the need to educate graduates who will work in the rural, regional and remote communities of northern Australia and the wider Tropics (Indigenous Education and Research Centre, 2020). Redeveloped in 2019, the major is now taught as a sequence of eight subjects across three year levels in the Bachelor of Arts. Students also take individual subjects as electives or compulsory subjects within a variety of degrees.

Our Indigenous Studies major has come a long way. Originally a standalone Bachelor of Indigenous Studies, the Indigenous Studies suite had been brought into the Bachelor of Arts first as a major, before being reduced to a minor. Simultaneously, the Indigenous Studies subjects were being co-opted into disciplinary accreditation requirements, resulting in service teaching to a range of disciplines such as education, social sciences and the health sciences. This service teaching, while ensuring students across the university were engaged in curriculum developed by Indigenous academics, was done at the expense

of developing Indigenous Studies as its own discipline. The fragmentation of the subjects meant that an ad-hoc selection of subjects was being taught without an overall narrative.

At the same time, there was an emerging scholarship led by Indigenous academics and educators which called for honest conversations about the benefit of university research and teaching for Indigenous people in the community (e.g., Bainbridge et al., 2015; Nakata, 2017). This led to the courageous choice to start with an empty whiteboard and to re-envision an Indigenous Studies major that could prepare graduates to work constructively with Indigenous communities for positive change. This choice was courageous in that it required a significant organisational effort in re-writing the curriculum. However, the empty whiteboard also symbolised a preparedness to suspend our loyalties to disciplinary conventions and the "way things are done". This suspension was necessary for us to be able to centre the Indigenous communities that our graduates will go on to serve and the learning trajectories of the students we teach.

To develop the curriculum, the teaching team had to critically reflect on the successes and limitations of their teaching experiences to date, as well as to draw on the scholarship. Given that Indigenous studies has traditional roots in anthropology, as well as in archaeology and linguistics (Nakata, 2004), the new major was to be firmly cemented in the commitment to Indigenous communities' plans and aspirations for self-determination, and growing the graduates who could contribute to these plans. We recognised that starting at colonisation would be to promote the idea that Indigenous people are first and foremost colonised people, rather than people who, long before colonisation, had their own systems of thought and societal processes. To evade the corpus's stranglehold, the decision was made to first teach Indigenous people through their own knowledge structures. Once students were cemented into understanding Indigenous people as people of place, only then would they move onto thinking about the ruptures caused by colonisation. In doing so, we hoped to show Indigenous people as having their own life trajectories and their own futures, with colonisation being one element of this trajectory, rather than the primary framework through which to understand Indigenous experiences.

Curriculum: People of place, people of knowledge, people of science

The major that emerged moves students through a sequence of continuities, discontinuities and ruptures, through to navigating complexity, similar to Nakata et al. (2014). Throughout the major, students develop the capacity to identify Indigenous and Western positions and to reflect on the entanglements of Indigenous and Western ideas since colonisation.

Two over-arching frameworks organise our Indigenous Studies major. The first is the centring of Indigenous understandings of who Indigenous people are, namely as people of place, knowledge and science. As people of place, the connection between self and place (or self and country) becomes the primary binary through which Indigenous knowledge and experiences are ordered. This relationship sets up the responsibilities that Indigenous people have for place and country. People of knowledge acknowledges that Indigenous people have their own histories and knowledges. This principle responds to the construction of knowledge about Indigenous people as a people without agency, or history, or traditions in colonial texts. Instead, the focus on Indigenous people as people of knowledge highlights the importance of working with Indigenous people as agentic people. Teaching about Indigenous people as people of science highlights how Indigenous people have analysed their own experiences and environments, and used these to project into the future. This refers to traditional knowledges as well as Indigenous people's analysis of their position within changing colonial contexts, and the attempts to change the conditions of this experience.

This first framework feeds into the second, which is the sequencing of subjects across three year levels as follows:

- Level One: Continuities
- Level Two: Discontinuities and disruptions
- Level Three: Navigating the cultural interface

In their first year, students are introduced to the idea of place as an organising principle that structures Indigenous people's relationships and responsibilities. The focus is on the continuities of Indigenous relationships to country; social systems; knowledge of the stars, sea and land; and applications of knowledge such as plants for medicinal and food use.

The second-year subjects focus on the discontinuities and ruptures of Indigenous knowledges and lives through colonialism. By studying how Indigenous people were inscribed into the colonial narrative as a people without history or knowledge, students learn how Indigenous people were stripped of agency. Students work through multiple inscriptions, such as "lost souls", "uncivilised savages", "children", "problems" and "people of difference". This inscription of Indigenous people as colonial subjects is counter-balanced with subjects focusing on Indigenous responses to colonisation, both locally and internationally. The emphasis on agency, adaptation and resistance highlights that, even though Indigenous lives took a different trajectory following contact, Indigenous people had and continued their own trajectories.

The third-year subjects draw the earlier themes together to examine how both Indigenous people and Indigenous Studies students can work within the complexity of Indigenous and Western knowledge positions. Rather than drawing on anti-colonial or decolonising analyses that suggest substituting Western practices or ideas with Indigenous ideas, an interface analysis requires students to study how Western ideas come to form major parts of Indigenous people's agendas (for example, the development of Native Title), and similarly, how traditional and ancestral Indigenous ideas come to be incorporated into understandings of Western science and knowledge. In the final subject, students integrate their learning over the last three years as they work with a local Indigenous community to develop proposals for a project which could be delivered within that community. This subject provides students with an opportunity to explore how their learning to date is relevant in the lives of Indigenous people living in their region and, importantly, provides opportunities to trial new ideas.

In the next section, we describe the different pedagogical approaches that underpin the development of these capacities across the major.

Building new language

Working in the interface of Indigenous and Western standpoints is a new idea for many students. Interface thinking requires the development of a new language set that students can utilise to navigate complexity, identify arguments and express their own emerging understandings. One emphasis throughout the major is to support students to develop the vocabulary to allow them to talk about different ideas such as agency, Indigenous and Western standpoints, and the tension of being pushed and pulled between different discourses. This development takes place alongside students learning to read academic texts and engage in academic discussions, as well as in the context of various knowledge systems jostling for position as students start to read and learn about different ideas. This locale of the

learner (Nakata, 2007) requires all students (both Indigenous and non-Indigenous) to develop higher-order thinking skills and learn to navigate the philosophical complexities of the cultural interface as presented in the classroom and beyond. Instead of asking students to critique their own knowledge and assumptions (a task for which they may not have the skills to undertake, and carries the risk of shutting down further learning), we provide a rich environment where they can start to learn how to talk about the complexity of the interface. This requires a scaffolded approach to developing students' language.

Students engage in a scaffolded and iterative language-building process in each subject: lectures model new language and knowledge, tutorials allow students to practise language and develop new skills, readings extend the knowledge and language used, and assessments allow students to use their new language skills to express complex ideas. Tutorials, in particular, provide an opportunity for students to practise discussing ideas. For example, think-pair-share activities facilitate collaborative learning and the ability to practise using language before moving into a group environment or assessment (McKeachie & Svinicki, 2010; Raba, 2017). Students also read out their annotations of the weekly reading, allowing them to learn through observing how others have interpreted or constructed that week's argument. Such verbal discussions build their abilities to approach complex ideas and concepts before moving to the independent production of written assessments. This scaffolding enables students to work with communities in more informed, respectful and analytical ways.

Students also build language skills and analytical proficiency over time as they move from general concepts and themes to more complex material in later years. In the early subjects, we focus on developing the language skills needed to discuss basic concepts and terminology around Indigenous Studies. As students progress through the major, a new discourse community is produced. Rather than simply being provided with a linguistically rich environment, students contribute to building their own. Duff (2010) suggests that a socialisation of the discourse is needed before students can use this new language to interact with the discourse. As they develop new language around the concepts of continuities, discontinuities and the complexities of Indigenous experience and agency, students can engage in discussion of theoretical constructs that underpin the discourse such as progress, place in society, connection to country, agency and adaptation, resistance, and the cultural interface. This environment allows for an exploration of discourse as a topic in its own right, and how Indigenous people have been historically and contemporarily constituted.

Learning to read for arguments

A second emphasis throughout our Indigenous Studies major is supporting students in learning to read for arguments within texts, both written and spoken. Students have to learn to listen to conflicting positions and identify the limits of what is said within each position. The subjects throughout the major expose students to the push-pull of Indigenous discontinuities and continuities. This push-pull can be challenging and unsettling for students seeking simple solutions to complex tensions in the literature and in shared tutorial discussions. However, these opportunities help students to learn to withhold their own position on a topic until they have had an opportunity to reflect and consider what learning they might also need to undertake. Rather than asking students to critique texts before they have had an opportunity to understand a field, we ask students to first try to understand what the text is saying. As students read more and more texts, they are then able to identify the differences and similarities in approaches, and develop an understanding of the limits of one text by understanding how it sits within a field.

Students in our Indigenous Studies major learn to read for arguments across a variety of texts, including academic readings, policy papers, media articles and other popular pieces. In the first year, reading is

quite structured. First-year students focus on learning to read academic texts and are supported with scaffolds and explicit instruction as they learn to annotate these. As students move into second year, there are more collaborative learning opportunities, including analysing a reading with a group and reading their annotations out loud in class. By the time students reach third year, they observe analyses of government policies, public opinion and media pieces, in addition to more complex academic texts in lectures and workshops, before beginning to analyse these themselves. This requires extending academic reading skills to a wider variety of textual analyses. Students also begin to build conceptual maps of the literature that exists on particular topics, producing an understanding about how knowledge is produced, as well as preparing them for later research tracks. As students reach the capstone subject where they hear from and discuss projects with people from a discrete Indigenous community, they are able to extend these skills to listening to how people speak about their lives and the issues that face them.

With a focus on learning to read the arguments within a text, students learn to struggle with pieces that they do not necessarily understand and to sit with complex ideas. The opportunities to hear others' reading, and receive feedback in class, serves multiple purposes. First, it provides students with a language-rich environment. As students hear each other's annotations and receive feedback from the teaching staff, they gain access to multiple ways of expressing ideas. These language-rich environments relate to theories of reading development (Dickinson et al., 2010). Second, students learn to accept public critique in the form of supportive and constructive feedback. Our experience suggests that students are generally quite nervous about sharing their work publicly and receiving feedback in a group setting. However, reminiscent of Bandura's (1977) social learning theory, students learn by observing how their peers respond to public feedback and observe that no harm will come to them. These engagements help students be better prepared to take on critique and understand what is being shared with them in their future work.

Reflexive confidence

Indigenous studies graduates go on to work with Indigenous individuals, families, organisations and communities in a variety of settings. Carey (2015) notes the importance of Indigenous studies students being able to develop a self-reflexivity which enables them to engage with a wide variety of Indigenous positions, rather than a reflectivity which encourages non-Indigenous students to always defer to an Indigenous position of difference or to defer to Indigenous students in the room to speak on behalf of all Indigenous positions more broadly. Building on Carey's analysis, McDowall (2021) argues that a transformative learning paradigm, where students are led to a critical examination of the self and their position, does not necessarily lead to the skills that professionals need to engage with multiplicity and the complexity of the Indigenous position. As such, it is a type of tentative and reflexive confidence that we seek to develop in the students through the Indigenous Studies major, whereby our students develop a confidence to trial different ideas and approaches, but with a tentative nature and an eye to critically observing their own work and asking questions about how the approach worked.

Within the major, this disposition for learning is developed in large part by approaches that encourage students to withhold judgement and, instead, to appreciate the complexity of the contemporary position of Indigenous people. The three-year-level structure, for example, builds complexity. As students engage in later years and move from continuities to discontinuities to ruptures, they see that there is much more complexity to Indigenous people's positions than what they originally understood. Each additional layer of complexity sends them deeper down the rabbit hole. By structuring the curriculum in this way, we hope to engender a disposition within students where they learn that there is always more to understand than what they originally perceive and, as such, learn to hold themselves back from reaching hasty

conclusions about the "right" approach. That is, we seek that students learn to suspend their initial judgements and instead ask what else might be at play. In turn, language such as continuities, discontinuities, the corpus, interface, and Indigenous and Western standpoints provides reference points with which they can find their way through the complexity. The language also provides an analytical process that they can extend to understand novel situations. Simultaneously, students develop confidence in taking on critique and, therefore, the confidence to take on measured risks once they better understand the complexity of a situation.

In addition to the three-year-level structure and the introduction of new language for discussing complexity, the different teaching strategies we employ provide students with opportunities to develop their confidence. Reading annotations in class, for example, and receiving constructive critique in front of peers prepares students for working in new settings where they may receive feedback from community members, colleagues, clients or others in public settings. Although it may feel uncomfortable, this practice develops students' ability to listen, accept and reflect on the feedback, rather than feeling embarrassed or freezing. This practice is then extended from peers and teaching staff to include Indigenous community members in the final subject (where students develop a project that could be delivered in a discrete Indigenous community). The safe classroom setting, coupled with support from the teaching team, allows the students to trial new ideas with the Indigenous guest speakers from the community and reflect on the feedback to make iterative changes to their projects. The students also reflect on the nature of the interaction—whether their questions had been properly understood and whether they understood the response that they received.

Growing dispositions for later learning

The world that our graduates live and work in is rapidly changing. Changes to technology, the environment and government policy all impact work environments. Students entering the workforce will face increasing complexity in a world that is always changing and is increasingly diverse. Simultaneously, the contemporary position of Indigenous people within this complex world is rapidly changing, as are dynamic and evolving Indigenous knowledges. The everyday is influenced by the histories, continuities and discontinuities at the interface of Indigenous and Western knowledge. The contemporary Indigenous position is influenced by the ways in which Indigenous people have been made the subject of various discourses and how Indigenous people have developed their own subjectivities in response. As a framework for teaching and learning, the cultural interface allows Indigenous and non-Indigenous students to navigate an increasingly complex society, through its focus on complex and contested interfaces, rather than concrete binary notions.

Different academic fields, professional settings and grassroots movements have promoted various ways of addressing the contemporary Indigenous position, such as cultural competency approaches, trauma-informed responses, and the promotion of strong identities and cultures. These responses have emerged from experiences on the ground and the perceived needs of different clients. In acknowledging the work that has been achieved in these approaches, particularly in establishing Indigenous issues on professional agendas, we propose that, to move forward, an interface approach has more scope for developing a disposition for learning. Where many approaches are premised on the use of concrete notions (such as culture, trauma, race, colonialism), the interface analyses the knowledge production processes that produce these notions in the first place. In doing so, an interface approach prepares students for deeper complexity and changing contemporary positions, as it focuses on identifying and navigating the tensions of the everyday position of Indigenous people. It promotes complexity, flexibility, intuitiveness,

change and reflectiveness, allowing a disposition for learning to be moulded to various situations, places and discourses that may not yet exist. Indigenous people are well practised at inhabiting different positions. This has been necessary for survival, given the conditions that colonisation has created. To work with Indigenous communities and, more generally, in complex environments, students—both Indigenous and non-Indigenous—need to learn to maintain flexibility in their work. This includes learning to listen to different claims, identify the possibilities and limitations of what is being put forward, and hold back opinions while they consider pathways forward. We argue, this develops a disposition for continual learning.

This paper explains how we have been building capacities to work in the interface—to have students go into a changing world with skills and dispositions to navigate the unknown. Students may commence their studies looking for "answers" on how to work in a particular field. The teaching approaches we use within this major disrupts this search for simplicity. Instead, we try to build students' comfort with ambiguity. This is achieved by the staging of the curriculum to first build knowledge of continuities, and then to look for the discontinuities within these. This staged approach allows students to better understand the tensions within the interface and the push-and-pull that Indigenous people experience within competing discourses. We use the curriculum to challenge assumptions of Indigenous people as being victims, as passive, or as simply colonised peoples. By focusing on the complexities of Indigenous peoples, technologies and continuities, and on Indigenous agency in the response to colonisation, students can better see how Indigenous people have always been active. They see the tension that arises as Indigenous people are placed into such passive discourses, and will better understand what it means to inhabit different positions.

It is these moments where students feel the tension of the push-pull themselves that is itself a rich place of learning. The tensions that emerge as students are immersed in new ways of seeing Indigenous people may disrupt how they have learnt previously. And, as students move through the major, each level both builds on and ruptures understandings students developed in the previous year. Given the discomfort most people feel when faced with ambiguity, the teaching strategies outlined here are key to giving students a way to build their confidence to remain open to new ideas and to sit in the push-pull. Having to re-calibrate their own positions and re-adjust how they view the contemporary position of Indigenous people is an opportunity. As hooks (1994, p. 207) writes, "The classroom, with all its limitations, remains a location of possibility."

Reflections on our practice

At the time of publication, we have been teaching the major described here for four years. This presents an opportune time to reflect on the teaching work so far within this description of practice.

The first reflection is that students appear to respond positively to the renewed focus on the interface. Many students, Indigenous and non-Indigenous, first enrol in our subjects wanting to "learn more" about Indigenous people. Instead, they encounter an analysis of how Indigenous people are positioned within the interface of Indigenous and Western systems. Many students comment on the practicality of what they learn, as they see applications to their everyday lives as well as their work commitments. This includes students from a range of disciplinary backgrounds and students with various experiences of working in the interface, such as Indigenous students who might be Native Title holders and sit on Prescribed Body Corporates. Within this, students appear to appreciate the focus on agency and thinking about how Indigenous people have contested the conditions they find themselves in, even if there are

limits to this contestation. This focus on agency is made possible by getting outside of a coloniser–colonised binary.

Second, given the variety of students who enrol in the major, within one class there will be different levels of experience with reading scholarly papers (as opposed to research reports) as well as thinking outside of the confines of the scientific paradigm (that observations lead unambiguously to the production of facts). For these students, particularly those who come from science or more technical disciplines, there is often a need to develop their scholarly reading and writing skills. Other students may enter these subjects with strong social justice positions, or a political conviction on the "right" ways to talk about Indigenous issues. With support, however, these students can suspend their own disciplinary assumptions. This is assisted by discussions about how Indigenous and Western standpoints are constructed by different sources. Additionally, a focus on learning to read for argumentation gives students an understanding that all texts are constructed. This focus on the process of knowledge production allows students to extrapolate to understand how their disciplines construct different standpoints. Students' progression throughout semester, and their astonishment at their own ability to engage with complex critical texts, suggests that the teaching strategies facilitate the academic skills that students require in order to engage in these difficult conversations. On several occasions students have commented that they did not think they would be able to properly understand complex texts or that they have never understood how to think critically, having been told this is important.

Teaching in this way has required significant development of our own capacities as Indigenous studies educators and a commitment to a continual refinement of our practice. We have had to continually reflect on our work, and our own positions as Indigenous and non-Indigenous educators, to ensure that we do not fall into teaching about Indigenous people as the colonial other, culturally different, racially behind, as victims or through reconciliation frameworks. Discussion within the group and reading into scholarship that explores processes of knowledge production has supported this work. One of the challenges we have experienced along the way is developing a curriculum that starts from Indigenous systems of thought, rather than falling back into anthropological approaches. This task is especially complex given that many scholarly materials about traditional Indigenous knowledges and Indigenous technologies emerge from the corpus, and the knowledge frameworks used to represent these practices are often left uninterrogated. We have had to learn to teach both with and beyond the corpus, drawing on these materials for their primary data while explicating for students how knowledge is represented. Here, we have found returning to the commitment of Indigenous people as a people of place, knowledge and science critical in anchoring our work.

The work presented is a reflective description of practice. Our future work program may include exploring these issues through a structured program of research. This research would map the development of learning dispositions and graduates' work with Indigenous communities. We do, however, as educators in this space, have our anecdotal successes. For those in our team who have previously taught in programs centring notions of cultural safety or colonised/coloniser boundaries, the successes within the classroom spaces are clear. When classes present Indigenous topics as having only two sides (colonised/coloniser, Western/Indigenous, or other binaries), students find themselves positioned within these binaries. Many teaching programs drawing on these binaries or notions of cultural safety and competence also encourage students to first understand their own cultural backgrounds and often their privilege or disadvantage in society. Together, these strategies create classrooms of tension—spaces of emotion that are often the responsibility of Indigenous educators to navigate (Mills & Creedy, 2021). In interface approaches, the focus moves away from examining individual standpoints to examining how we are all bound by knowledge construction, in varying ways,

in differing disciplines. Classrooms become places that are not steeped with strong emotion (such as guilt/blame) but, rather, places of opportunity, growth, openness and humility to learn and adapt in the varying spaces we live in, without denying Indigenous agency. When educators have taught in these two very different spaces, the differing potentials to develop dispositions for learning are stark.

Final thoughts

The interface is not an endpoint; it is a starting point for a different conversation. It can be challenging to teach and learn about the everyday world being problematic. Yet to connect and engage with the complexity of place, people and knowledge affords the opportunity and the possibility of charting though the development of new sites of knowledge creation. As educators, we are invested in supporting the self-determination of Indigenous communities. Working in an interface paradigm can be both challenging and liberating, as it attempts to move beyond the current discursive practices in Indigenous studies. This underlying fomentation pushes on the boundaries of current scholarship to continue to think though the everyday of Indigenous people's places and knowledges, the adaptive responses Indigenous people engage in and the call for scholarship to do this too.

Acknowledgements

We would like to acknowledge the work of Professor Yvonne Cadet-James, Sharon Moore, Sandra Boswell, Vicky Nakata and Professor Martin Nakata in the development of the major. Thank you to Vicky Nakata for the support that was given in researching material for subjects in the Indigenous Studies major. Thank you to Professor Nakata for comments on an earlier draft of this paper. This paper was first presented at the 2021 Australian Association of Research Education Conference. Thank you to the audience for comments that helped to solidify our thinking.

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Please cite this article as:

McDowall, A., Hardy, D., Backhaus, V., Mills, K. & Watkin Lui, F. (2023). Learning dispositions in Indigenous studies. *The Australian Journal of Indigenous Education*, *52*(2). DOI 10.55146/ajie.v52i2.678

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The Australian Journal of Indigenous Education

Volume 52 | Issue 2 | © The Author/s 2023 doi 10.55146/ajie.v52i2.678