Critical policy analysis of Indigenous knowledges and perspectives within health and physical education: moving beyond the past

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Abstract

The ideology of a national curriculum is to facilitate and nurture a nation's aspirations for future generations. The curriculum must provide a balance between recognition of cultural history and global contexts for 21st century learners. However, what constitutes effective policy reform to achieve future goals is always open to debate. Over the past decade, the Australian Professional Teacher Standards have increasingly emphasised the requirement for educators to demonstrate enhanced knowledge and understanding of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, their histories, and cultures. As such, there has been a renewed focus to ensure that Indigenous knowledges and perspectives are embedded and ultimately enacted within the Australian Curriculum: Health and Physical Education (AC: HPE). A critical policy analysis was undertaken to investigate the evolution of the effectiveness and representation of Indigenous knowledges and perspectives within the AC: HPE Version 9 and to explore tensions arising from an Indigenous standpoint. The findings revealed evidence of cultural inclusiveness and reconciliation discourse across the curriculum context (within the content elaborations), albeit with varying degrees of prominence in each and with particular emphasis of specific contexts. Examination of the curricula yielded three primary tensions: (i) Disruption of Western ideologies; (ii) Indigenous self-determination; and (iii) Power dynamics. A positive contribution to the field, revealing a lack of substantive progress with embedding Indigenous knowledges and perspectives within HPE, the results of this study provide direction for policy makers and curriculum developers when further incorporating Indigenous knowledges and perspectives within the AC: HPE.

Introduction

Within the context of Australia's dominant settler-colonial culture and politics, deficit representations and positioning of Indigenous[1] students, their families, communities, and cultures continue to dominate the educational landscape (Burgess & Lowe, 2022). Such manifestations can be observed in policies, curriculum, pedagogical approaches, and day-to-day practices within schools (Patrick & Moodie, 2016). Consequently, teachers often encounter challenges implementing Indigenous knowledges and perspectives within the curriculum, frequently avoiding it unless it is mandated (Lowe & Galstaun, 2020). These challenges stem from concerns such as cultural trespass, lack of culturally responsive pedagogy and limited prior experience within an already overcrowded curriculum (Bonato et al., 2023). However, research is beginning to address these concerns to further develop teacher capability (Bonato et al., 2023; Evans et al., 2017).

Educational systems assume that teacher capacities are consistent across all schools and states, however this is simply not the case (De Plevitz, 2007). Currently, educational policies for Indigenous students still represent a deficit view of integrating cultural assets within the learning process (Burgess & Lowe, 2022). This lack of cultural discourse for Indigenous students may also contribute to disparities

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[1] The term 'Indigenous' is used as a collective term to refer to all Indigenous cultural groups examined within the literature including Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. The author acknowledges the diversity of people, encompassed in this term

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in educational participation rates (Biermann & Townsend-Cross, 2008). Within contemporary cultural discourse, it is expected that educational opportunities for Indigenous students should utilise their cultural capacities to further develop their educational experiences (Lewthwaite et al., 2014). Although access to and participation in education for Indigenous students has shown some improvement in recent times, equitable outcomes are still not being achieved compared to that of non-Indigenous students (Perso, 2020).

However, for many teachers, embedding Indigenous knowledges and perspectives is an additional priority in which to navigate, particularly when there are no explicit connections to key learning areas (KLAs) (Bishop et al., 2021). This situation is further compounded by the lack of meaningful interactions with Indigenous people and communities which further exacerbates a lack of teacher cultural awareness (Morrison et al., 2019). These issues are entrenched within a policy context influenced by the legacy of Western settler-colonialism, whereby prevailing stereotypes and misconceptions regarding Indigenous people persist (Lowe et al., 2021). Within the current context of the Australian Curriculum (AC), the significant impacts of colonisation, racism, and entrenched power differentials are frequently overlooked and inadequately addressed (Burgess & Lowe, 2022). A prevailing Eurocentric perspective dilutes the content, largely unchallenged, which results in a delegitimisation of Indigenous worldviews (Schulz et al., 2023). Consequently, previous attempts to redress and reposition Indigenous voice as pertinent and central to these issues has in the past been met with disdain (Burgess & Lowe, 2022).

As such, this paper draws upon Indigenous Standpoint Theory (IST) to investigate representation of Indigenous knowledges and perspectives within the AC: HPE. 'Indigeneity' of the researcher is an integral component of IST and facilitates more in-depth and culturally appropriate Indigenous knowledges and perspectives (Nakata, 2007). IST "supports the view that non-Indigenous Australia cannot and possibly will not understand the complexities of Indigenous Australia at the same level of empathy as an Indigenous Australian researcher can achieve" (Foley, 2003, p. 46). IST allows Indigenous researchers the platform to investigate how Indigenous knowledges and perspectives seek alignment between Indigenous and Western knowledge systems (Coates et al., 2023), and to navigate the difficulties of their experiences within spaces which contest their epistemology. As such, the following passage describes my personal standpoint and the methodological foundations for this paper:

I am a Wagiman (alternative names: Wagaman, Waggaman, Wageman, Wogeman, Wongkakaringa, Ongkakaringa) man. The country of my people is in the present-day Pine Creek region of the Northern Territory. Spanning south-west from the Stuart Highway towards, and across the Daly River is Wagiman country. It is inland country, and I am a freshwater person. I am connected to my ancestral beings through generations of Wagiman people. Through my relationship with spiritual ancestors, I understand reality to be holistic, ever evolving and never fixed.

To effectively position my standpoint as an Indigenous research paradigm several factors must be considered. Firstly, and most profoundly, I speak from an Indigenous standpoint focused upon a subjective viewpoint. I view this subjectivity as an epistemological strength as opposed to a weakness. The knowledge I possess, and produce is both developed and hindered by my own personal standpoint i.e., I cannot provide accurate analysis on things in which I have not personally experienced or form world views from a position I do not hold. I can however speak with knowledge and authority to my own position as an Indigenous person with an understanding of embodiment for other Indigenous people. Secondly, I accept that Indigenous ways of doing and being are valid approaches regardless of whatever barriers might be perpetuated by Western society. To do this effectively, I must always question what agendas may be in play from a Western perspective. Finally, I privilege Indigenous voices and understand the importance of Indigenous research by Indigenous scholars.

Facilitating Indigenous knowledges and perspectives within the AC: HPE is contentious, and often informed by sociocultural, political, and economic factors (McLaughlin & Whatman, 2015). The uncertainty and confusion surrounding effective practices of embedding Indigenous knowledges and perspectives within Australian schools and higher education institutions, is largely based upon hegemonic historical policies written by non-Indigenous people (Bonato et al., 2023). The trepidation with embedding Indigenous perspectives within the current curriculum, is due to current educational discourse (Nakata, 2011). This discourse promotes the ideology that teachers have the capacity, with the use of their 'pedagogical toolboxes' to facilitate Indigenous perspectives, however, this is often not the case (Bonato et al., 2023). As such, Indigenous knowledges and perspectives appear to be a 'mystical notion' within policy and curriculum documents, with little regard to how these can actually be embedded within day-to-day teaching practices (Buxton, 2021).

Policy context

Within current educational climates, there is unprecedented support for a "strong focus on reform and renewal in the education of Aborigines and Torres Strait Islanders" (Vass, 2012, p. 183). At a policy level, Indigenous education is the responsibility of both State/Territory and Commonwealth governments (Maxwell et al., 2018). While Australian states and territories ultimately oversee education within schools, the Commonwealth government is responsible for educational outcomes at a national policy level (Morrison et al., 2019). Subsequently, all levels of Government then need to be held accountable for the current policy failures that reverberate throughout the Australian education system (Gray & Beresford, 2008). The mid to late 1980s saw a surge in Commonwealth initiatives to address educational inequities with the introduction of the *Quality of Education* report, the *National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Policy* (NATSIEP), (Whatman & Duncan, 2012). Following this, The *National Strategy for the Education of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples 1996–2002* (MCEETYA, 1995), addressed recommendations which were provided from the *National Review of Education for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander People* (DEET, 1994), to strive for an outcomes-based national plan by 2002. The strategy (chaired by Manduwuy Yunupingu) included clear directives to improve educational outcomes for Indigenous students (MCEETYA, 1995). The final report was presented in 1995 with the Australian states and territories reaffirming their commitment with the MCEETYA National Strategy for the Education of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples 1996–2002 (MCEETYA, 1995). Additionally, this policy development saw the implementation of the Adelaide declaration (MCEETYA, 1999), and subsequent Melbourne declaration (MCEETYA, 2008), from which the current curriculum was framed upon (MCEETYA, 2008). In the latest installment of educational policy, the *Alice Springs (Mparntwe) Education Declaration*, which now forms the basis for the Australian Curriculum, outlines two key goals:

1. The Australian education system promotes excellence and equity.
2. All young Australians become confident and creative individuals, successful lifelong learners, and active and informed members of the community (Education Council, 2019).

The foci of all recommendations since the NATSIEP policy, has seen various approaches essentially implemented as a 'trial and error' process with limited educational gains evident (Whatman & Duncan, 2012). Irrespective of the 'good intentions' of policy reform, large gaps still exist between policy rhetoric and policy enactment (Morrison et al., 2019). It is important to acknowledge that policy drives curriculum and determines what curriculum content should encompass (Wilkinson et al., 2021). When students are instructed according to uniform standards within the same subject curriculum, the underlying policy assumption is that they will acquire a comparable level of subject matter knowledge (Wahlström, 2023). To move beyond the policy rhetoric of learning, it is essential to gain deeper insights into the specific types of knowledge that different groups of students interpret. To address this issue, further high-quality synthesis of policy strategies is needed, with an increased voice from Indigenous people.

Indigenous knowledges and perspectives within the AC: HPE

Following the initial release of the Australian curriculum documents, extensive research has revealed that the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander curriculum is entrenched in a racialised deficit perspective regarding Indigenous people (Meston et al., 2024; Morrison et al., 2019). This outlook perpetuates the misrepresentation of Indigenous cultures through broad generalisations, rendering Indigenous cultures as distinct and alienated from mainstream ideologies (Salter & Maxwell, 2016). Regrettably, it also fails to duly recognise and acknowledge the historical presence, sovereignty, and legitimacy of Indigenous communities (Bonato et al., 2023). The persistence of a curriculum that either dismisses or discredits Indigenous knowledge, languages, interconnectedness, and lived experiences exerts enduring implications on the academic achievements of Indigenous students (Parkinson & Jones, 2019). Furthermore, a curriculum that embodies a colonising mindset restricts truth-telling and undermines the representations of Indigenous self-determination and sovereignty (Harrison et al., 2022).

The Australian Curriculum: Health and Physical Education (AC: HPE) is shaped by five interrelated propositions which are informed by a futures-oriented curriculum and include: focus on educative purposes, take a strengths-based approach, value movement, develop health literacy and include a critical inquiry approach (ACARA, 2012). Furthermore, the AC: HPE is organised into two content strands: personal, social and community health and movement and physical activity which are then informed by six sub-strands: being healthy, safe and active; communicating and interacting for health and wellbeing; contributing to healthy and active communities; moving our body; understanding movement; and learning through movement (ACARA, 2012).

Additionally, the AC: HPE encompasses a comprehensive framework consisting of twelve distinct content focus

areas, which are underpinned by five fundamental guiding principles aimed at directing effective pedagogical practices among educators (ACARA, 2012). These twelve content focus areas are further categorised into six elements that accentuate the "physical" aspects of the curriculum, encompassing topics such as motor skills, games, and sports, alongside an additional six elements that emphasize the "health" aspects of the curriculum, which encompass topics such as the health benefits of physical activity, as well as issues related to alcohol and other drugs (ACARA, 2012). Within this policy framework, teachers are tasked with the responsibility of designing and implementing student learning experiences and assessments which align with the specific Achievement Standards that span across Foundation to Year 10 (ACARA, 2012). However, although content descriptions delineate the curriculum content and specify the learning outcomes for students, the accompanying content elaborations are "optional, and are provided to give teachers ideas about how they might teach the content" (ACARA, 2024b).

Methodological approach

Critical policy analysis

Critical policy analysis encompasses a branch of scholarly inquiry within the realm of educational policy studies (Taylor, 1997). Its primary focus resides in the identification and exposition of incongruities existing between articulated policy intentions and the practical implementation thereof (Diem et al., 2014). This analytical approach is particularly attuned to discerning the power dynamics that underlie societal structures (Taylor, 1997). A central emphasis within this analytical framework is directed towards investigating the processes by which marginalised sectors of the population become further marginalised through policy instruments (Vidovich, 2001). Furthermore, it endeavors to unravel the mechanisms by which prevailing disparities in wealth and various forms of capital (be it economic, cultural, or social) are perpetuated and upheld through the intricate tapestry of policy (Vidovich, 2001). Parallel to critical discourse analysis, this investigative paradigm highlights the pivotal role played by cultural and historical constructs in shaping meaning (Taylor, 1997).

In current educational policy research, there is a growing divide between 'formulation' and 'implementation' phases of policy (Vidovich, 2001). This divide has resulted in a shift away from a focus on policy intentions at a political macro level to an emphasis of policy implementation at a micro level (Criddle et al., 2004). Supporters of this shift assert that contemporary policy analysis must prioritise research

focused on investigating the actual practices, outcomes, and repercussions of policy implementation at the micro level (Vidovich, 2007). This emerging emphasis marks a departure from earlier preoccupations centered around discerning the policy intentions of decision-makers operating at the macro level (Vidovich, 2001). The focus of this paper is to delineate the policy intention of the AC: HPE, through a critical policy analysis of the curriculum to identify if discourses and power relations may be evident. Indigenous Standpoint Theory (IST), adapted from Decolonising Race Theory (DRT), was used as the analysis tool in which to explore the critical policy analysis.

Theoretical lens

This paper draws upon the theoretical framework of IST informed by Critical Race Theory (CRT) (Brayboy, 2005) and further refined by DRT (Moodie, 2017), to conduct a critical policy analysis through the lens of the 'cultural interface' tenet (Moodie, 2017). In recent times, decolonising discourses have often been associated with increased efforts of embedding Indigenous knowledges and perspectives within curriculum as well as the facilitation of culturally appropriate research methodologies that focus upon research 'for' Indigenous people and not 'of' Indigenous people. In advocating for the utilisation of DRT as a conceptual framework to critically examine the complex implications of Indigenous futurity, the concept of 'decolonisation' assumes centrality, with a focus on place and relationality as fundamental constructs within Indigenous education research (Moodie, 2017). Retaining each of Brayboy's core elements and providing a synthesis informed by Indigenous theoretical and methodological approaches, Moodie (2017) proposed an update to the 'tenets' for DRT to include the cultural interface as well as emphasising the importance of Indigenous sovereignty.

Engaging in decolonising research compels scholars to examine the ways in which colonial oppression has perpetuated the marginalisation of Indigenous knowledges and reinforces epistemic hierarchies (Chilisa, 2019). IST rejects ethnocentric research methodologies and positions the Indigenous perspective as central to research conducted for Indigenous people. This approach contrasts with Western epistemologies, such as objective positivism, which often treat Western scientific knowledge as universally applicable without fully acknowledging the exclusion of alternative epistemologies from the formation and dissemination of knowledge. An Indigenous standpoint is shaped by historical, familial, and collective factors, serving as a discursive method of inquiry. Many Indigenous individuals experience a sense of duality, navigating the intersection between

Indigenous knowledge and Western knowledge claims daily, the *cultural interface*.

In this context, IST emerges as a robust framework for interpreting curriculum text to investigate tensions of equality. Over the past two decades, a substantial body of literature focusing on Indigenous education, decolonisation, and settler futurity has surfaced (Ladson-Billings, 2009; Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995; Moodie, 2017; Taylor et al., 2023; Vass, 2015). This research has presented an opportunity to explore critical race theorising through lenses such as IST and more accurately capture the purpose and intellectual endeavours of Indigenous people.

Indigenous standpoint theory

Brayboy (2005) highlights that "The concepts of culture, knowledge, and power take on new meaning when examined through an Indigenous lens" (p. 429), underscoring the contextual specificity of cultural knowledge for Indigenous people. IST is an intricate theoretical approach to how Indigenous people navigate the difficulties of their experiences within spaces which contest their epistemology, i.e., the cultural interface. Nakata (2007) observes that Indigenous standpoints and perspectives do not emerge fully developed from lived experiences but serve as positions from which to assess knowledge production processes. Moodie (2017) then prescribes that rather than Indigenous resistance defining Indigenous 'way of knowing or being,' the emphasis on the cultural interface elucidates the vantage point from which we interrogate the intricate dynamics of power and challenge-imposed positionalities.

IST emerged as a foundation for Indigenous scholars to actualise Indigenous knowledges and perspectives while negotiating the complex space resulting from Western methodologies (Cox et al., 2021). IST provides an opportunity to link back into the contested space between Indigenous and non-Indigenous knowledges (Nakata, 2007). When examining benefits to Indigenous methodologies, Nakata frames IST as an Indigenous perspective which positions the 'Indigeneity' of the researcher at the forefront of decision making (Foley, 2003). Nakata (2007), positions IST not as "the endless production of subjective narrative to disrupt objective accounts" nor the "aggregation of stories from lived experience" (p. 213), but as "a distinct form of analysis and is itself both a discursive construction and an intellectual device to persuade others and elevate what might not have been a focus of attention by others" (Nakata, 2007, p. 214). This focus of analysis allows Indigenous scholars to provide a position based upon cultural knowledge and experience compared to non-Indigenous scholars (Coates et al., 2023). As such, IST is "not a social position but a discursive method of inquiry" (Moreton-Robinson, 2013 p. 33).

The methodological and theoretical contribution of IST when navigating the cultural interface allows a centring of Indigenous ideologies and the disruption of the power imbalances between Indigenous and non-Indigenous people which perpetuates deficit discourses. It is for this reason that the author as an Indigenous researcher has chosen this lens for which to conduct the curriculum analysis.

Methods

Using IST as a theoretical lens, the AC: HPE Version 9, provided on the Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority (ACARA) website (ACARA, 2024a), was analysed and investigated. Content within the following AC: HPE curriculum materials was analysed to investigate tensions which may exist resulting from the inclusion and effectiveness of Indigenous knowledges and perspectives:

- Rationale
- Aims
- Structure
- Focus Areas
- Propositions
- Content Descriptions
- Achievement Standards
- Elaborations

To achieve this, a search of the curriculum documents was conducted using the following explicit terms: 'Indigenous', 'Aboriginal and Torress Strait Islander' and 'First Nations People'. Additionally, the documents were scanned and read by the author to ensure no-like referring terms for Indigenous knowledges and perspectives were missed. For this critical policy analysis, the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander CCP was not analysed due to the author's intention of the AC is that the CCP should be embedded across all KLAs and not just HPE.

To identify representation of Indigenous knowledges and perspectives within the AC: HPE, the author engaged in an extensive familiarisation process with the data by thoroughly reading and re-reading the material, while documenting preliminary ideas and identifying potential connections which were then assigned primary codes based upon the search terms of 'Indigenous', 'Aboriginal and Torress Strait Islander' and 'First Nations People'. Secondary codes were then independently generated by the author to identify the themes in which each of the representations of Indigenous knowledges and perspectives could be categorised.

Results

Table 1 illustrates themes identified from the analyses using evidence of the characteristics and representation of Indigenous knowledges and perspectives situated within the AC: HPE Version 9 from an IST perspective. From the analyses it is evident that Indigenous knowledges and perspectives is represented 19 times within the Foundation – Year 6 levels, and a further 20 times within the Year 7 – Year 10 levels. This table codes all identified AC: HPE content descriptors and elaborations to identify their year level, strand and descriptor number. For example, the reference to AC9HP4P04, refers to Australian Curriculum Version 9 (AC9), Health and Physical Education Year Level 4 (HP4), Personal, Social and Community Health Strand (P), Personal, Social and Community Health Strand Content Descriptor number 4 (04), while AC9HPFM03 refers to Australian Curriculum Version 9 (AC9), Health and Physical Education Year Level 4 (HPF), Movement and Physical Activity Strand (M), Movement and Physical Activity Strand Content Descriptor number 3 (03). All other content descriptors are coded similarly.

Discussion

Within the AC: HPE, recent policy calls for the privileging of Indigenous knowledges and perspectives has resulted in an inclusion now considered a legitimate part of school curriculum i.e., an emergence of Indigenous knowledges in the curriculum where they were once not as profound. The current policy analysis identified that Indigenous knowledges and perspectives is now referenced thirty-nine times within the content elaborations from thirty-two content descriptors and once within the focus areas. Within this study, the findings revealed evidence of discourse across the curriculum context only within the content elaborations, albeit with varying degrees of prominence in each and with particular emphasis of specific contexts. Examination of the curriculum yielded three primary themes from an IST lens: (i) Disruption of Western ideologies; (ii) Indigenous self-determination; and (iii) Power Dynamics.

Disruption of Western ideologies

To challenge the white settler-colonial foundations of HPE, this analyses examined the intricate process of incorporating Indigenous knowledges and perspectives within the discursive landscapes of the current version of the AC: HPE. The disruption of Western ideological narratives is reflected mainly within the assumptions of opportunities to promote Indigenous diversity which was reflected through conduits

such as game-based play of Traditional Indigenous games and connection to Country. This demonstrates further development and focus of the concept of reconciliation within the curriculum (Pill et al., 2021), which is exemplified in the following content elaboration:

> *(AC9HPFM03) - playing traditional First Nations Australian games and discussing how they are like other games they have experienced.*

This conceptualisation of promoting Indigenous knowledges and perspectives through traditional Indigenous games provides an avenue for both Indigenous and non-Indigenous students to explore the deep and meaningful transmission of socio-cultural learning. Such an approach holds the potential to diverge from the long-standing emphasis on historical perspectives within the AC: HPE (Pill et al., 2021). The promotion of culturally responsive curricula underscores the significance of identity for all individuals and the relevance of educational experiences to every Australian. However, for HPE to fully embrace and implement this approach, it must first address and transform the colonised contexts in which it operates through the overrepresentation of Western games and sports (Pill et al., 2021).

Furthermore, for Indigenous people, the concept of 'Country' is fundamental to their identity, education, and governance (Craven, 2020). This encompasses interconnected interactions involving every living and non-living element, including culture, land, and family (Craven, 2020). The objectives of the curriculum sections prioritising the importance of Country for Indigenous people suggest that they were designed to introduce Indigenous knowledge to all teachers and students as way to disrupt the focus of Western perspectives and create relationality between Indigenous and non-Indigenous people. The following content elaborations express and affirm the significance of incorporating Indigenous knowledges and perspectives into the AC: HPE for the benefit of all students:

> (AC9HP4M05) - *exploring First Nations Australians' connection to special places and how these places are linked to physical activities.*

> (AC9HP6P05) - *exploring the importance of cultural expressions of First Nations Australians in maintaining a continuing deep connection to Country/Place and its influence on wellbeing.*

While the presence of the themes prioritised in these examples are relevant to deconstructing Western ideologies, greater representation of Indigenous knowledges and

Table 1 Characteristics and representation of the discursive patterns of AC: HPE

	Disruption of Western ideologies	Indigenous Self-determination	Power dynamics
	Patterned in notions of opportunity for promotion of Indigenous diversity	Patterned in notions of ownership of learning opportunities for Indigenous people	Patterned in notions of power inequalities and deficit perspectives of Indigenous people
Focus Area:	*Culturally significant games and sports (such as traditional Indigenous games and games of significance from the Asia region)*		
Content Descriptor Code & Elaboration:	**AC9HPFM03**- *playing traditional First Nations Australian games and discussing how they are like other games they have experienced*	**AC9HPFP01** - *exploring similarities and differences in family structures in First Nations Australian communities and other cultures*	**AC9HP4P04** - *discussing how demonstrating respect and empathy for First Nations Australians can build positive relationships*
	AC9HP2M03- *participating in children's games from First Nations Australian cultures, such as Keentan played by the Kalkadoon People of the north-west central districts of Queensland, and discussing similarities with other games and activities they enjoy*	**AC9HP2P01** - *describing how belonging to First Nations Australian cultural groups contributes to identities*	**AC9HP6P04** - *recognising how words and labels used regarding First Nations Australians can cause offence and how this awareness can support and strengthen respectful relationships*
	AC9HP4P02-*exploring the nature of family support networks in First Nations Australian communities and discussing how a wide range of family and community members support young people when they are going through changes and transitions*	**AC9HP2P02** - *discussing strategies we can use to show respect to First Nations Australians and acknowledge difference using appropriate language*	**AC9HP8P04** - *proposing strategies for addressing racism towards First Nations Australians, including the role of bystanders in promoting respectful interactions and challenging disrespect and discrimination*
	AC9HP4M05-*exploring First Nations Australians' connection to special places and how these places are linked to physical activities*	**AC9HP4P01** - *investigating how First Nations Australians' pride in cultural background strengthens identities*	**AC9HP8P09** - *exploring health campaigns targeting First Nations Australian young people and discussing the messages and strategies used to promote and enhance their health; for example, Deadly Choices, Don't Make Smokes Your Story and Yarn Safe*
	AC9HP4M08-*exploring rules and scoring systems used in traditional games of First Nations Australians and comparing them to rules and systems used in other games they have played*	**AC9HP4P05** - *recognising the important role of cultural narratives in describing the diversity, and sharing beliefs and practices, of First Nations Australian communities*	**AC9HP8P01** -*analysing how naming of deceased protocols, such as kumanjayi, can impact the identities of other members within First Nations Australian communities*
	AC9HP6P01-*investigating how First Nations Australians identify within and across communities through connection to Country/Place; for example, Bama People of the rainforests of North Queensland or Quandamooka People of Southeast Queensland; exploring the different levels of connection within First Nations Australian communities, such as cultural group, clan, Country/Place, skin names and social standing within community*	**AC9HP6M05** - *learning traditional dances from local First Nations Australian community members and recognising the role dance plays in the lives of these communities*	**AC9HP10P09** - *investigating health issues specific to First Nations Australian communities and proposing proactive community strategies for promoting better access and health outcomes; for example, remote area dialysis buses and community-based treatment options*

Table 1 (continued)

Disruption of Western ideologies	Indigenous Self-determination	Power dynamics
AC9HP6P02 - *understanding that physical changes experienced during puberty are linked to rites of passage ceremonies in many First Nations Australian communities*	**AC9HP8P05** - *investigating events and strategies that value the contributions of First Nations Australians and strengthen relationships, such as Indigenous rounds in sporting codes and NAIDOC Week*	**AC9HP10M08** - *analysing how First Nations Australian athletes have been treated in different sports and evaluating the impact that may have on the participation of young First Nations Australians in sport and physical activity*
AC9HP6P05 - *exploring the importance of cultural expressions of First Nations Australians in maintaining a continuing deep connection to Country/Place and its influence on wellbeing* **AC9HP6P10** - *exploring how kinship and extended family structures in First Nations Australian communities support and enhance the health, safety and wellbeing of their communities*	**AC9HP8P02** -*examining how ceremonies of First Nations Australians involve sharing of cultural knowledge leading to changes in social standing and responsibilities in communities; examining the notion of "border crossing"; that is, how First Nations Australians live acrossmultiple cultures, and how these transitions can impact on a sense of belonging to culture, family and peer groups*	
AC9HP6M08 - *investigating the effectiveness of rules used in traditional games of First Nations Australians to promote participation, such as Inkanyi: a cooperative running game played by the Pitjantjatjara / Yankunytjatjara of central Australia where there are no winners and Barambah gimbe: a throwing and catching game from the lands of the Wakka Wakka where catchers can be nominated to increase participation*	**AC9HP10P01** - *analysing how the use of personal totems in First Nations Australian cultures can be based on personal qualities and contribute to identities*	
AC9HP8M05 - *investigating different approaches to custodial responsibility for Country/Place used by First Nations Australian communities to support the use of local settings and spaces for physical activity while protecting the environment*	**AC9HP10P02** - *analysing the changing roles and responsibilities for First Nations Australians as their social standing changes within their communities; discussing the impact of border crossing on the development of identities for First Nations Australians*	
AC9HP8M08 - *exploring rules, equipment and scoring systems of traditional games of First Nations Australians and investigating how they support skill development and fair and inclusive play*	**AC9HP8P10** - *investigating how First Nations Australians have developed complete diets that meet nutritional requirements, and used and continue to use food for medicinal purposes; examining how different cultures value the contribution of the mind–body–spirit connection to health and wellbeing; for example, Dadirri – the Aboriginal meditative practice of deep listening developed and shared by First Nations Australians of the Daly River region, and yoga and meditation practices from the Asia region*	
AC9HP10P10- engaging in nature experiences to understand how these activities can promote the development of eco-identity and positive sense of wellbeing, including exploring how a deep connection to Country/Place enhances health and wellbeing for First Nations Australians; investigating how cultural rights of First Nations Australians include maintaining traditional diets and explaining how these have proven health and wellbeing benefits; investigating the pharmacopeia and health practices of First Nations Australian communities while showing respect for Indigenous Cultural and Intellectual Property (ICIP) protocols and cultural knowledge	**AC9HP10P05** - *designing strategies and actions they can implement to challenge stereotypes, prejudices and discrimination, and publicly acknowledge the contributions First Nations Australians make to Australia's sporting and health fields*	

perspectives is needed within the curriculum to ensure that it becomes a truly inclusive policy document. To do this effectively Indigenous knowledges and perspectives need to be at the forefront of curriculum content and not just as an option within the elaborations. Furthermore, the content of Indigenous knowledges and perspectives must be aligned with school-based curriculum through local Indigenous communities as opposed to a holistic national curriculum perspective. By adopting this approach, new opportunities for curricular reform may arise, laying the groundwork for a reinvigoration of how Indigenous knowledges and perspectives are taught within the AC: HPE. This reform can enhance learning by fostering a deeper understanding of the complexities of conceptualizing Indigenous histories and cultures (Battiste, 2017).

Indigenous self-determination

It has been posited that learning necessitates an active engagement on the part of the learner, and knowledge emerges from a collaborative process of inquiry, interpretation, and creation in which the educator plays an integral role (Alfrey & O'Connor, 2020). When examining the AC: HPE, the notion of self-determination entails Indigenous peoples having the right to maintain shared responsibility and ownership of their own learning (Meston et al., 2023). Despite advancements toward self-determination within the AC: HPE over the past decade, curriculum content has continued to facilitate sports and games through Western perspectives with limited opportunity for Indigenous students to take ownership of their own learning (Bonato et al., 2023). However, recent advancements within the AC: HPE have made the curriculum content more palatable for Indigenous learners by providing additional avenues for facilitation and connection with cultural identity. Gloria Ladson-Billings's educational research, conducted through the lens of CRT, has previously explored the interconnection of education, whiteness, and property. She notes that "literacy represents a form of property, traditionally owned and controlled by whites in society" (2003, p. xi). Whiteness in this instance confers the privilege to possess education as an institutional and psychological entitlement, which, through policy has previously reinforced racialised hierarchies essential to perpetuating coloniality, and therefore control of Indigenous people. However, upon analyses of the AC: HPE, recent curriculum developments have provided greater opportunity for Indigenous self-determination. The curriculum now allows for Indigenous knowledges and perspectives to offer valuable insights into the holistic integration of Indigenous knowledge systems (IKS), with identity, languages, cultures, connections, and self-determination as

core components, which is demonstrated in the following content elaboration:

> (AC9HP2P01) - *describing how belonging to First Nations Australian cultural groups contributes to identities*.

Given the above context, "learners' tacit knowledge may now include the learning of cultural narratives and practices passed down through generations, enabling all learners to understand the unique environments in which Indigenous people live and benefit from them" (Mandikonza, 2019, p. 1). This knowledge is linked to their cultural capital and habitus, as contextual factors influence classroom practices (Mandikonza, 2019), which is exemplified in the following content elaboration:

> (AC9HP4P05) - *recognising the important role of cultural narratives in describing the diversity*, *and sharing beliefs and practices*, *of First Nations Australian communities*.

Uncontextualized Western perspectives hold limited relevance for learners and their contexts, especially Indigenous learners (Demssie et al., 2020). However, with further additions of Indigenous-specific content elaborations within the AC: HPE, this will ensure greater Indigenous self-determination. This will also provide avenues for all learners to further develop their understanding of cross-cultural learning, which is further reinforced through the following content elaboration:

> (AC9HP4P01) - *investigating how First Nations Australians' pride in cultural background strengthens identities*.

Power dynamics

Systemic discrimination, manifested through institutional policies and practices orchestrated by dominant groups in society, influences the emergence and apparent prioritisation of cultural values and beliefs within educational settings (Anderson et al., 2020). Furthermore, research studies within HPE reveal complex networks and power imbalances that underpin culture, race, and gender relations, perpetuating systemic unchallenged power and privilege (Bonato et al., 2023; Fitzpatrick & Santamaría, 2015; Hylton, 2015; Thorjussen & Sisjord, 2018; Whatman, 2020). Scholars continue to highlight the profession's inability to recognise the privileges of whiteness within its pedagogical training and curriculum (Blackshear & Culp, 2021; Bonato et al., 2023; Flintoff et al., 2015). As Fitzpatrick and Santamaria

emphasise, uncritical perspectives on race relations, if left unaddressed, allow discrimination and oppression to persist.

Acts of oppression manifest in nuanced ways within educational spaces, defined by the distinction between those who are centralised and those who remain marginalised. A closer examination reveals that these seemingly neutral educational environments are contemporary reflections of historical coloniser-colonised dynamics, perpetuating the privilege of certain groups at the expense of others (Whatman et al., 2017). In HPE, individuals occupying positions of centralised power tend to be non-Indigenous, perpetuating specific modes of being and acting in physical education contexts (Whatman et al., 2017). Additionally, curriculum design is often managed by non-Indigenous scholars and educators with limited exposure to racial and ethnic diversity (Harvey & Russell-Mundine, 2019). Consequently, like other educational settings, HPE replicates the mechanisms of white privilege, where whiteness benefits white individuals and enables them to navigate daily practices without recognising or acknowledging their racial positioning (Kirk & Tinning, 2006). Many critical scholars in HPE emphasise how dominant traditions in the field replicate Eurocentric values through constructions of whiteness and racial positioning (Meston et al., 2023).

Within the current analyses of the AC: HPE, it was found that power imbalances still exist between Indigenous and non-Indigenous perspectives with Indigenous people still viewed upon from a deficit perspective, which is exemplified in the following content elaboration:

(AC9HP4P04) - *discussing how demonstrating respect and empathy for First Nations Australians can build positive relationships*.

Here, Indigenous people are being portrayed as an 'other', whereby a conscious effort is required to demonstrate respect and empathy for Indigenous people. If Indigenous people were considered as equals within the AC: HPE, there would not be a need to explicitly utilise this content elaboration. From an Indigenous standpoint perspective, all individuals should be treated with respect and dignity and should never be portrayed as an 'other' within the curriculum. Indigenous people do not need empathy. What they do need is an environment to co-exist within an educational ecosystem which respects and values their contributions. This power imbalance and notion of Indigenous people as 'others' from a deficit perspective is further reinforced through the following content elaboration passage:

(AC9HP8P04) *proposing strategies for addressing racism towards First Nations Australians*.

Again, this can be perceived as the AC: HPE suggesting that Indigenous people will be subjected to racism and strategies need to be implemented accordingly. To address the power imbalance of the AC: HPE, curriculum content needs to facilitate greater learning opportunities for Indigenous students which align and promote their cultural heritage and ways of knowing and doing such as utilising the natural environment for theory-based learning.

Nakata (2007) and Hokowhitu et al. (2020) have noted a significant shift since the 1990s towards incorporating the distinct ontological, epistemological, and axiological foundations of Indigenous knowledges and perspectives within educational research. However, the extent of progress made in terms of actual empowerment and agency within curriculum development afforded to Indigenous learners remains unclear. Moreton-Robinson's rhetorical inquiry poses the question: "Has attention to our cultural difference resulted in our knowledges being valued… and have our communities benefitted?" (2016, p. 111). If the goal of recent curriculum developments was to break the discursive silence and even up the balance of power, then what impact has been generated if Indigenous people are still viewed upon from a deficit perspective?

Conclusion

The process of Indigenising HPE continues to be a challenge. The understanding of who should undertake this task and the methodologies to be employed remain pertinent for further examination and resolution. Many educators advocate for Indigenous peoples to lead the Indigenising efforts, preferably in collaboration with non-Indigenous educators and curriculum developers (Meston et al., 2024). However, central to this endeavour is the necessity for educated Indigenous individuals possessing both HPE expertise and cultural knowledge to occupy senior leadership positions enabling the realisation of desired outcomes. Over the past decade, the Australian Professional Teacher Standards have incorporated an emphasis on educators showcasing their augmented knowledge and comprehension pertaining to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, their histories, and cultures (AITSL, 2017).

This paper utilised a critical policy analysis to investigate the evolution of effectiveness and representation of Indigenous knowledges and perspectives within the AC: HPE Version 9 through an Indigenous standpoint lens. This analyses of curriculum from an Indigenous standpoint perspective affirms the need for further development and incorporation of Indigenous culture within the AC: HPE. Although significant advances have been made regarding the embedding of Indigenous knowledges and perspectives within the

AC: HPE, the limited focus on historical and contemporary colonial impacts further exacerbate deficit-based viewpoints of Indigenous people. Although the current version of the AC: HPE has significantly developed opportunities for the disruption of Western ideologies and provided further opportunities for Indigenous self-determination, a reductive recognition of increased difference does not yet equate to the promotion of a fair and equitable curriculum. Evidence of discourse was only found within the content elaborations which reinforces the power imbalances. Furthermore, pedagogical approaches often restrict respect for and deeper comprehension of holistic Indigenous knowledges and perspectives. Although the inclusion of Indigenous content is present, engagement with the lasting effects of colonialism, trauma, and relocation is only explored on a superficial level.

For HPE to transcend superficial harmony and disrupt dominant practices for Indigenous people, their needs to be a greater shift in narratives to address the continued existence of power imbalances. Creating space for intercultural and intergenerational knowledge in HPE can shape the conception of Indigenous knowledges and perspectives both within and beyond the educational setting. Valuing difference requires de-centering and identifying colonial practices, addressing the ongoing effects of whiteness within curriculum policy, and striving for more socially just pedagogical experiences.

This analysis and the results within provide a positive contribution to the field of Health and Physical Education by demonstrating to policy makers, curriculum developers, academics, school leadership and teachers that greater curriculum development and incorporation of Indigenous knowledges and perspectives is required within the AC: HPE. To achieve this, it is imperative that leading Indigenous academics are at the forefront of guiding educational reform.

The incorporation of Indigenous knowledge systems and viewpoints within the F-10 Health and Physical Education segment of the Australian Curriculum constitutes a laudable endeavour aimed at fostering cultural inclusiveness and furthering the cause of reconciliation. However, this policy analysis has demonstrated that although there is the need for rigorous evaluation to address challenges and maximise the benefits, it has created an opportunity to further foster a more culturally sensitive and respectful learning environment for all students.

Declarations

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