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Rethinking Majors in Australian Indigenous Studies

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The challenges of finding more productive ways of teaching and learning in Australian Indigenous Studies have been a key focal point for the Australian Indigenous Studies Learning and Teaching Network. This article contributes to this discussion by drawing attention to new possibilities for teaching and learning practices amid the priority being given to the more practice-oriented educational approaches for future professionals and the cultural competencies of all students and staff. We explore courses sequenced as Indigenous Studies Majors and discuss two different conceptualisations for framing teaching and learning in Indigenous Studies courses — decolonising theory and cultural interface theory — and the implications for some of the teaching and learning practices they facilitate, including the positioning of students and the development of dispositions for future professional practice. We suggest that those academic teams who structure course sequences in Indigenous Studies have a role to play in experimenting with shifts in teaching and learning frameworks and the design of course sequences to encourage approaches that are more focused on developing students' breadth and depth of knowledge of the field, as well as their capacities for deeper engagements with Indigenous thought and the scholarly disciplines.

■ **Keywords:** Indigenous Studies, Indigenous Majors, learning and teaching

Discrete courses in Indigenous Studies in the form of Major sequences of courses in undergraduate degree programs in Australian universities are one way of offering students the opportunity to understand more about Indigenous Australian people and issues. Majors serve the same purpose and goals as other approaches to imparting knowledge of Indigenous people, histories and cultures, such as embedding Indigenous knowledge/perspectives into all curriculum areas, the mandating of pre-service Indigenous Studies courses for key professions, and cultural awareness/competency program approaches for institutional change. The educational purpose of all these approaches is largely an instrumental one — to prepare graduates in future professions and workplaces for appropriate and responsive interactions with, and delivery of services to, Indigenous Australians. Implicit in these instrumental objectives is the transmission to students of Indigenous cultural knowledge, values and perspectives in order to position and prepare university students for a critical examination of Western disciplinary knowledge and practice for Indigenous contexts. Majors in Indigenous Studies, while designed to serve instrumental objectives, also have the potential to engage students in a wider field of scholarship and deeper intellectual debates as the foundation for Indigenous Studies Honours programs, and possibly further research inquiry that can contribute to the growing field of scholarly thought in the field.

Australian Indigenous Studies as an area of academic study constitutes a field of inquiry related to the past, present and future of Indigenous people and societies. Scholarly inquiry into these areas supports the continuing exploration of some of the most challenging intersections and interfaces of knowledge and understanding. In doing so, it reflects and supports Indigenous people's own interests in academic inquiry, and in the process works to support collective Indigenous purposes and goals as these stand vis-à-vis national and global interests. Indigenous Studies as a field of scholarly inquiry and Indigenous collective purposes and goals have become mutually constituted. It is thus important to keep in view that Indigenous scholarly inquiry and production emerges at the interface of: (1) Indigenous people's traditional and contemporary knowledge, experience and analytical standpoints;

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(2) the representations of these as they have been historically constructed by the Western disciplines; as well as (3) the knowledge, methods and practice of the Western disciplines that continue to impact on Indigenous lives and shape Indigenous options (Nakata, 2007a). All these sources and their points of convergence into the contemporary space provide rich content for the emerging Indigenous Studies scholarship, which discusses, debates, contests and mediates disciplinary, governmental and popular understandings of Indigenous people and issues 'from the past' that carries through to their various forms in the present, at philosophical, theoretical and practical levels.

As scholarly activity in Indigenous Studies expands and develops content, concepts and methods for this, the field of inquiry becomes more diverse, theoretically complex, and disputed if not contested territory. Developments, then, in program and course designs for Indigenous Studies ideally should reflect all the conceptual and topical developments in the expanding field of inquiry and at the very least contextualise these for students in relation to the more established theoretical positions and ongoing debates. This should occur in the routine process of course and program review by individual academics and academic committees.

However, we argue that there is also a need for some reflection on the broader Indigenous and educational philosophies that underpin the teaching and learning of Australian Indigenous Studies. Our proposition here is that these broader frameworks for teaching and learning embed particular sets of assumptions into our teaching and learning practice and that these sit in the background, out of sight, and remain largely unchallenged in the emerging scholarship. These assumptions are tied to Indigenous people's purposes and goals of political and cultural self-determination (Nakata, 2013), and how these are best translated or promoted through educational practice. Educational practice that aims to support Indigenous purposes and goals ostensibly brings into play particular assumptions about students, both Indigenous and non-Indigenous, and their dispositions to learn about Indigenous people and issues, about what they need to know, and about how best to enable them to acquire specific knowledge and skills to develop effective practice for Indigenous people and issues in professional contexts (Nakata, Nakata, Keech, & Bolt, 2012). How the teaching and learning project is framed discursively affects decisions about course aims and rationales, the selection and coverage of content, the pedagogical approach, academics' interpretation of the critical skills and communicative competencies that students require and how to develop them, as well as the assessment forms and regimes that are argued to measure demonstrable learning outcomes.

Continuing anecdotal and scholarly reporting of academics' frustrations about non-Indigenous students' responses (e.g., Leane, 2010) to teaching and learning in Indigenous Studies courses (see Andersen, 2009; Phillips, 2011) provides enough reason for interrogating the sets of assumptions that drive our teaching and learning approaches. Not only is it timely to consider whether the assumptions of teaching and learning frameworks construct students' responses to teaching and learning engagements and are thus part of the problem of academics' frustrations and student learning outcomes. It is also vital to consider whether broader framings enable students' intellectual growth and knowledge of the field of inquiry of Indigenous Studies, or track them instead towards a designed compliance with preferred Indigenous positions. Further to this, we argue that across Australian universities and in the context of crowded curriculum areas, the education of all students about Indigenous people and issues and the implications for their own professional practice are still at risk of being little more than consciousness raising, attitude changing, and a suite of quite basic prescriptive competencies akin to cultural protocols. Given the institutional constraints, we accept that these pursuits can be argued as a more realistic and achievable first foundation for stimulating students' future commitments to Indigenous people and issues in their professional or civic practice (e.g., Universities Australia, 2011). However, approaches to teaching and learning in mandatory courses and the limited addition of Indigenous content through embedding practices run the risk of overshadowing the exploration of the educational possibilities that present in Majors.

The different possibilities for teaching and learning in Indigenous Majors and teaching and learning in mandated, embedded or cultural competency approaches reflect the different timeframes available for developing students' knowledge and skills, and the different tasks of engaging voluntary and reluctant students (e.g., Atkinson & Ma Rhea, 2009). We suggest these different teaching contexts require more differentiated discussion in the literature. How we design courses to engage students in Indigenous Studies has major implications for the development of future scholars and thinking in the field, not just for the development of future professionals. Knowledge of the field and its theoretical and practical propositions, and the skills and competencies required in future professions to explore, analyse and discuss these propositions are the necessary grounds for further development of thinking and ongoing scholarship. This growing enterprise in higher education warrants more attention in teaching and learning.

Alignments Between the Purposes and Goals of Indigenous People, Indigenous Studies, and Teaching and Learning Practices

When reflecting on teaching and learning practice in course sequences in Indigenous Studies Majors, we suggest

there are largely unexplored opportunities for reconsidering the relations and links between the political goals of the Indigenous collective, the more practical goals of Indigenous communities and organisations, the purposes and goals of Indigenous Studies programs and courses in universities, and the purposes and goals of teaching and learning Indigenous Studies to university students. Teaching and learning frameworks may not necessarily be best constructed as the direct translation of Indigenous collective goals and purposes into the project of educating others.

The struggles of Australian Indigenous people who 'hold strongly that they have a "right to be the interpreters and tellers of their culture and history"' are at the heart of the scholarly contest between Indigenous Studies and the disciplines (NBEET, as cited in Bennett 1998, p. 5). The entry of Indigenous people into tertiary education led to disputes around the organisation and location of Indigenous Studies as a discrete area of study and its relation to the disciplines (Bennett, 1998; Hill, 1986). According to Hill (1986), three main positions were argued. Some non-Indigenous academics posited Aboriginal Studies as 'content' of and for the disciplines to which a topic related, and subject to the methods of Western disciplines. Some Aboriginal people argued that Aboriginal people should be in control and, via their own methods and perspectives, generate and teach Aboriginal curriculum for students in the disciplines. Other Aboriginal people and supporters argued the case 'to put Aboriginal Studies within an interdisciplinary context which reflects back on the basic disciplines that have contributed to the area and which question the assumptions, processes and consequences of discipline involvement with Aboriginal people' (Hill, 1986, p. 21). This interdisciplinary model has emerged to provide the academic base from which Indigenous Studies scholars have interrogated the disciplines and developed distinct forms of analysis and methods of knowledge production in Indigenous Studies, to draw in Indigenous knowledge and perspective. Indigenous content and analysis is now recirculated and embedded back into the disciplines with, to paraphrase Hill (1986), some confidence that 'assumptions, processes and consequences' of disciplinary understanding of Indigenous people have been or can be interrogated there.

The self-determination goals that shape Australian Indigenous Studies priorities for inquiry mirror broader Indigenous goals. The education of culturally competent future professionals is critical to these goals (IHEAC, 2007; Universities Australia, 2011). In Indigenous Studies courses in higher education, teaching and learning rationales, aims, content selection and pedagogical choices are selected in pursuit of these goals. While the pursuit of these goals via educational design is not under question, there is room to question the translation of these goals into educational practice. Our questions of these goals in practice are primarily ones of broad focus. For example:

- Is the educational goal to focus on the transmission of Indigenous interpretations and cultural perspectives and practice as a way to uphold Indigenous interests, and to pave the way for university students to overcome the biases, misrepresentations and omissions in disciplinary knowledge or content?
- Or is the educational goal to engage students in the complex intellectual propositions and contests around the descriptions, interpretations, conceptualisations, representations of Indigenous people's knowledge, cultures and experiences, and the implications various positions hold for thinking about practice in Indigenous scholarly, professional, and civic spaces?

If the educational purpose is to reposition students to see the world as Indigenous people currently theorise it, and to enact the currently privileged forms of Indigenous thinking and practice, the first is indicated. If the educational purpose is to position students to understand how Indigenous people perceive their social realities and the very real, very difficult, very complex challenges and choices that confront Indigenous people in the 21st century, as a result of 200 years of colonisation and imposition and infiltration of Western thought and practice, then the latter is required. This distinction is not to suggest these foci do not bleed into each other in the design of courses and programs, only that the emphasis given to these goals is implicit in the teaching and learning frame and given effect through teaching and learning practices. The way that the broader goals and purposes of Indigenous people and communities are translated into teaching and learning frameworks position university students in particular ways. The former focus, for example, rationalises the educational task as one of transiting students from their own prior assumptions and biases to respect and implement Indigenous positions for practice — *a focus on compliance to a particular view of the world.* The latter focus positions students more as novitiates in the field of inquiry. This assumes the educational task is to develop students' knowledge of the field sufficiently to apply some intellectual rigour to their discussions of the debates and contests to be found there, and from there continue to develop their thinking as they practise as professionals or as they contribute further to the field — *a focus on scholarly thought and productive engagements.*

An implication of the ways academics choose their approach, and however the priorities come to be framed in them, is that every choice along the way in the design and implementation of programs and courses plays a role in students' learning outcomes, not just the assumed inherent characteristics, such as social location or perceived willingness or unwillingness of students to appreciate and affirm Indigenous purposes in educating them, as is sometimes portrayed in the literature (e.g., Phillips, 2011).

The time constraints that academics operate under in mandatory or embedded courses, which may limit them

to the former focus, have to be appreciated. But these practices are arguably not sufficient for other Indigenous Studies courses, either in disciplines or sequences of courses, as in the way of Majors. While we are not suggesting this is necessarily the case in practice either in all mandated or faculty courses or Majors, we labour the point about *differentiation in the teaching and learning focus*, to encourage more exploration of the tensions produced by these tight lines between Indigenous political purposes and goals and teaching and learning goals. We go on to explore these tensions in more detail by comparing two different ways of framing teaching and learning in university courses and how these come to position students and enable/limit students' learning outcomes and skills capacities.

Decolonising Frameworks

Decolonising knowledge practices offer rich grounds for intellectual inquiry and knowledge production to Indigenous people and other formerly colonised people. As a field of inquiry, with a large following in Latin America, African countries and more recently in North America (e.g., Kanu, 2011), decolonial approaches in teaching reject from the outset the universalising of Western thought as the assumed ideal human system of thought (Maldonado-Torres, 2011). It begins with the reassertion of colonially subjugated epistemologies of Indigenous people for knowing the world (e.g., Battiste, 2013), as an entry point for repositioning and 'de-linking' from the epistemological assumptions of Western/colonial knowledge (e.g., Mignolo, 2007, 2009). Its mission is to clear space for Indigenous peoples to continue practising Indigenous knowledge and cultures, in ways and forms determined by Indigenous people (United Nations, 2007).

Smith's (1999) treatise on 'decolonising research methodologies' has had a major influence in Australia, not just on the direction of the general Indigenous scholarship, but also on the teaching and learning of Indigenous Studies in Australian universities. Smith's call to Indigenous people to 'reclaim and re-name' Indigenous people's perceptions of the world and social reality from the clutches of Western enlightenment and reason, and to 're-write and re-right' colonial constructions of Indigenous people has become, de facto, the educational purpose for Australian Indigenous Studies courses and programs. The rationale for applying decolonising frameworks to processes of education is to implement broader Indigenous political goals of changing relations of power between Indigenous people and nation-states. Viewed through the decolonising lens, the mission is clear: '[f]or the radical black body, the university represents a site of knowledge production, racialised and dominant, that needs to be disrupted' (Bunda, 2006, p. 458). Decolonising approaches confront the disciplines head-on and interrogate how they represent Indigenous people and social realities as well as their role in the constitution of historical and contemporary conditions of Indigenous people. It also involves bringing to light the traditional 'worldviews', knowledge and practices that have constructed the way Indigenous people understand themselves in the world and how they come to also organise their political, social and economic relations. For Rigney (1999), racism and oppression in Indigenous lives require a critique of the dominant Western epistemologies. Indigenous self-determination and emancipation also then require Indigenous definition and control of the 'epistemologies and ontologies that value and legitimate Indigenous experience' (p. 114), which he relabels as 'anti-colonial' epistemologies. In Canada, Dei (2008) proposes a similarly conceived anti-colonial education, calling for an Indigenous space in the Western academy that provides for Indigenous 'intellectual sovereignty'. Resistance to Western ways of knowing, Dei suggests, can then be developed 'through a nurturing of oppositional stances informed by our relative subject positions and experiences that the dominance of Westernity and Eurocentricity can be subverted' (p. 10). This provides the space for Dei's main proposition on Indigenous values, to include a sense of community, values of forgiveness, healing and righteousness of praxis (p. 6).

The quest to 'decolonise the academy' positions Indigenous people as 'producers of theory and not simply as objects of analysis' (Smith, 2010, p. 43), and with the capacity to deliver analysis to reshape theoretical assumptions within the disciplines. To critique the Western disciplines and uphold Indigenous goals, decolonising teaching and learning philosophies draw from a range of theories from within the academic disciplines. For example, the use of Critical Race Theory puts 'race at the centre of critical analysis' (Roithmayer, as cited in McLaughlin & Whatman, 2011, p. 369), alongside the commitment to 'transforming social structures and advancing the political commitment of racial emancipation' (2011, p. 369). Similarly, Whiteness theory is recruited to a decolonising method to unpack and challenge the white male underpinnings of the academic disciplines. Proponents of Whiteness theory posit, for example, 'the epistemological *apriori* [sic] of whiteness [as] a dominant representational source through which Western societies produce and consume Indigeneity' (Andersen, 2009, p. 81). For some, decolonising frameworks for teaching and learning help emphasise the application of 'Indigenous theories and values that emphasise relatedness, reciprocal responsibility and caring for the land and sea' as a way to disrupt the theoretical assumptions of the disciplines (e.g., Biermann & Townsend-Cross, 2008, p. 151).

As in higher education teaching and learning generally, a range of pedagogical approaches are recruited in the effort to pursue decolonising goals in teaching and learning in Indigenous Studies. Some academics have discussed pedagogies for all students (with an emphasis on their value for non-Indigenous students) based on

Indigenous epistemologies (e.g., Biermann & Townsend-Cross, 2008; Brown, 2010; Edwards & Hewitson, 2008; Sheehan, 2004). Others have utilised Critical Theories as pedagogy and variously prescribed critical pedagogy (e.g., Lumby & McGloin, 2009) and anti-racist pedagogy (e.g., Hart, 2003) for Indigenous Studies classrooms. Problem-based pedagogy has been adopted by Norman (2004, 2012) and further explored through an Australian Learning and Teaching Council grant to support social justice and Indigenous empowerment in tertiary education, and later reworked as PEARL (Political, Embodied, Active, and Reflective Learning) pedagogy (see Mackinlay & Barney, 2012). Rigney, Rigney, and Ulalka Tur (2003) suggest a 'reconciliation pedagogy' based on a 'teaching for resistance' model, and as a way to move beyond the liberal agenda of social inclusion. Phillips (2011) proposes an Indigenist Standpoint Pedagogy, which 'authorises Indigenous knowledge perspectives' and 'insists on critical examination of neo-colonial dominance' (p. 261). These do not exhaust by any means the different pedagogical approaches being applied in the field today.

Pedagogical approaches promote the possibilities for connecting Indigenous purposes and goals, teaching and learning rationales, and the application of decolonising theories to pedagogies and strategies for teaching students. Here, we mention only a few examples to draw attention to the differential positioning of Indigenous and non-Indigenous students in teaching and learning rationales. Bunda (2006), for example, who argues for Indigenisation principles as the disruptive 'key to changing power dynamics between black and white cultures', reasons that 'white students would be more sensitive' and 'black students would be empowered through the knowledge of their own histories and cultures' (pp. 451–452). Herbert (2010) reasons that the inclusion of Indigenous knowledge and cultural values provides a decolonising tool that 'enables [Indigenous students] to engage in their own transformation . . . their own empowerment' (p. 24) when learning within the non-Indigenous academy. For some, challenging and unsettling the assumptions of Western knowledge involves positioning university students as the embodiment of colonial or dominant knowledge and the site for challenging, unsettling and disrupting educational techniques. For example, some advocates who recruit Critical Theory and Whiteness theory as their pedagogical preference argue that these enable teaching and learning manoeuvres that can 'skirt the (always looming) individual guilt' of non-Indigenous students and enable attention to bear down on their 'intellectual discomfort' (e.g., Andersen, 2012, p. 74). In other applications, Critical Theory or Whiteness theory are utilised to pedagogically 'challenge and displace [non-Indigenous] students' dominant epistemological beliefs about themselves and the world they share with Aboriginal peoples' (e.g., Hart, 2003, p. 120). Some pedagogical practice goes further to place a primary focus on non-Indigenous students' capacities for critical self-examination. For example, Phillip's (2011) Indigenist Standpoint Pedagogy, designed for non-Indigenous students in a mandated pre-service education course, is focused squarely on non-Indigenous students' resistance, 'difficulty and discomfort in exploring one's complicity [in ongoing colonialism] from the position of privilege inside systems of dominance' (p. 9). Non-Indigenous students by this method become the object of teaching, via the chosen teaching design. In this, '[t]here is minimal focus on studying content *about* Indigenous peoples or cultures in the first module [of the course] but instead it is directed at self-investigation and critical processes designed to encourage students to clarify their standpoints' (p. 137). Her proposition here is:

> *[o]nce students are re-positioned to take a more critical perspective on their own perspectives, the possibility for developing new ways of dealing with the contradictions arising in critical inter-subjective and inter-cultural inquiries in compulsory Indigenous Studies is enhanced. (Phillips, 2011, p. 273)*

These pedagogical choices appear to be more intensely applied when the timeframes for shifting students' prior assumptions and attitudes to Indigenous people or issues are compressed, as they are in one-off, mandated pre-service courses. The student learning experience of confronting emotional and personal discomfort is propositioned as a quicker route to disrupt 'intellectual comfort' derived from being a beneficiary of 'systems of dominance' (Phillips, 2011, p. 9).

Some Limits of Decolonising Frameworks

Most scholars in the field of Indigenous Studies do not question the limits of the decolonising concept or the assumptions it rests on, nor whether — in its direct translation — it is the most productive framework for teaching and learning. The strength of the decolonising frame is that it does provide a counter-narrative to the naturalised, common-sense ways of seeing things in a Western order of things, and does present university students with insights into the positioning effects of Western knowledge and practice, as well as the different epistemological conditions of Indigenous traditional knowledge, when taught competently. However, a central assumption of decolonising theory is that the reassertion of what are claimed to be Indigenous epistemologies in Indigenous contemporary knowledge production and practice, which also utilises concepts and methods from the Western academic disciplines, does constitute an 'epistemic de-linking' from Western knowledge. Another assumption is that the reassertion of (as apart from 'consideration of') Indigenous epistemologies, or ways of knowing, are not just paramount to the Indigenous political self-determination process, but the best means also for improving Indigenous social and economic conditions and resolving Indigenous problems in contemporary contexts. A third assumption is that structuralist explanations of dominant-subordinate relations of

power as explanations for coloniser-colonised or Western-Indigenous knowledge relations are sufficient for understanding the complex conditions of knowledge and power relations in Indigenous contemporary contexts. A fourth assumption is that framing teaching and learning in this way will produce future professionals and scholars whose practice will go on to support decolonising goals as well as improve practice for Indigenous people and contexts in their different fields. None of these propositions can be assumed and none of these assumptions can be taken for granted (see Nakata et al., 2012).

From this, two significant issues emerge to suggest that decolonising goals are a problematic framework for teaching and learning in higher education courses. Even as they seek to promote decolonising goals, decolonising frameworks promote teaching and learning that reinforces the boundaries between Indigenous and Western knowledge and cultural practice domains, as if these are or can be mutually exclusive and discretely bounded in contemporary contexts, and inevitably concentrates students' analytical attention on the *divergences* between these (Nakata et al., 2012). We emphasise quite strongly that this focus and these theoretical propositions *are* part of teaching and learning in Indigenous Studies. However, if the teaching and learning emphasis is limited to the investigation or effects of divergences, this reduces students' attention on the complex entanglements resulting from the *convergences* of Indigenous and Western knowledge and practice, which has occurred over generations, and its discursive positioning effects on our thinking and actions in contemporary spaces. Analytical skills development that trains students in oppositional analysis trains them to see the conditions of Indigenous life in 'black and white' or 'us and them' terms, without necessarily understanding the role of the Western order in also constituting Indigenous (op)positions through the inverted re-drawing of the colonial binaries. Teaching and learning that reinforces the binary oppositions of Indigenous-Western or coloniser-colonised or dominant-subordinated relies on and reproduces the simplification of Western knowledge influences and simplified explanations of Indigenous epistemologies that do not explore the complexities of either system or the historically layered interface between them with sufficient focus or rigour. The complex interface that ideally should engage students' intellectual efforts is reduced to a site for overcoming the dominance of the Western, and retrieving and reclaiming colonially subjugated Indigenous knowledge by reworking, renaming and valorising it as 'distinct Indigenous knowledge' and the more appropriate foundation for future practice. This is a legitimate pursuit of the field of inquiry. However, in the absence of critical tools for analysing and considering the contingent conditions of contemporary Indigenous epistemological propositions, teaching and learning of these run the risk of being the practice of transmitting what Gordon (2006) terms 'asserted beliefs' (p. 2).

The second issue is the differential positioning of students. Indigenous students are positioned as empowered by Indigenous worldviews, resistant to Western positions, and victims to be healed and affirmed through 'culturally safe' educational practices. Non-Indigenous students are positioned as neo-colonial identities, resistant to critical self-examination and Indigenous standpoints, and who need to undertake a journey of self-discovery and transition. Student positioning in classes becomes a site for pedagogy: (a) culturally safe pedagogy that protects Indigenous students' identities, bodies and minds from further dominance; and (b) decolonising pedagogies that work on non-Indigenous students' identities, bodies and minds with the intent to decolonise, remediate and reprogram. Teaching and learning environments should neither be so safe nor so threatening that students' subjectivities are reduced to little more than that of victims or agents of ongoing colonialism on the basis of their 'raced' origins. As we have argued elsewhere, such approaches 'position non-Indigenous students as objects of the teaching act, not subjects of knowledge who have come from a range of social locations to learn and understand the most complex of knowledge contestations that possibly exist' in higher education studies (Nakata et al., 2012, p. 134).

Cultural Interface Framework

Cultural Interface and Indigenous Standpoint theory as proposed by Nakata (e.g., 2006, 2007a, 2007b, 2010) presents entirely different premises and possibilities for framing teaching and learning approaches in Australian Indigenous Studies and for the positioning of university students in courses and programs. This proposition does not make claims in relation to decolonising knowledge, which is not to say it does not hold potential for this goal. Rather, it describes and conceptualises the contemporary interface between Indigenous and Western knowledge and practice in ways that suggest their historically thickened discursive entanglements undermine the arguments for drawing (op)positional boundaries between them (Nakata, 2007a). It does not in any way suggest that critique of Western methods of knowledge production is not necessary for bringing students to an understanding of how Indigenous people and societies were and are inscribed into the disciplines. Nor is it suggested that Indigenous epistemologies are not critical considerations in the design of practice in contemporary settings. It does suggest that explorations of these need to serve a larger role in our decisions on educational approaches to courses in Indigenous Studies (Nakata et al., 2012).

Nakata (2007a), from the outset, positions the Indigenous standpoint and what can be said of Indigenous contemporary issues as 'problematic'. Based on a study of the past 150 years of literature on Islanders (see Nakata, 1997), he suggests that what we have all come to know

today is largely constituted by a corpus of knowledge on Indigenous Australians largely produced by people who were not Indigenous. He conceptualises contemporary spaces as sites that evidence Indigenous people's continuity and discontinuity (following Foucault, 1970) with their own histories of social practice and practices of 'reading the world' from within traditional knowledge systems, even though colonial impositions have reordered and subjugated Indigenous worlds. This proposition implicitly questions the certainty of any authoritative claims 'to know' what knowledge and practices will serve Indigenous interests and improve Indigenous futures at this historical point. His argument is that in the academy, representations of Indigenous people are mediated through the practices of the disciplines and that Indigenous experience, including how Indigenous people now understand themselves 'is constituted in a complex nexus between "lived experience" and discursive constructions that play out in many shifting intersections' (Nakata, 2007a, p. 210) over time and place. Complex layered entanglements, accommodations, and adaptations of Western and Indigenous knowledge have occurred over generations and both have been utilised in developments of disciplinary theory and reconstructed Indigenous methods in contemporary knowledge production. This means it is difficult to resolve the lines between Indigenous and Western as they emerge in lived spaces and public discourses, including Indigenous community and academic discourses. The Cultural Interface today remains 'a site of struggle over the meaning of our experience' (Nakata, 2007a, p. 210). Designs for teaching and learning must keep students engaged primarily in these everyday complexities. Contests over the meaning of Indigenous knowledge concepts and historical experience require interrogations that can move beyond analysis that reinforces simple distinctions and oppositions between Indigenous and Western worldviews.

What Nakata argues to be more useful are forms of analysis that focus attention on the implications of the historically layered *convergences* of Indigenous and Western meanings that come to constitute understandings of Indigenous people and social realities. Developing understandings of the Indigenous experience of being positioned at this interface is not a simple task. It requires forms of inquiry and the development of language that can illuminate how both Indigenous and non-Indigenous understandings of Indigenous people and issues are mutually constituted. This constitution occurs in the sets of historical, knowledge, discursive and social relations that emerge in contemporary spaces, including the academy, the Indigenous academy, public discourse, and Indigenous lifeworlds. The very conditions of how we all — Indigenous and non-Indigenous — 'come to know' and understand the experience of being Indigenous, and the effects and legacies of colonisation need to be brought to the surface for closer consideration (see e.g., Nakata et al., 2012) in the efforts to critically engage and develop current thought and practice for Indigenous courses (Nakata, 2007a, 2007b, 2010). In this, the full array of historical and contemporary theorising and knowledge production is of interest for all students' critical analysis and reflection in order to understand the limits it imposes on representations of Indigenous standpoints today. Also of interest for contextualisation and critical analysis are the discursive grounds of Indigenous contemporary theorising of the traditional Indigenous knowledge and practice domains. This, we suggest, needs some focused attention in teaching and learning choices and generally in the scholarly realm. The risk of not developing critical tools in this area, as we have all witnessed, is the continuing non-critical engagements that result in students' romantic embrace, their polite patronisation, their respectful silence, or their more dismissive responses to these efforts.

When thinking about which teaching and learning approach, the Cultural Interface proposition suggests the 'problematisation' of all knowledge on Indigenous Australians that converges in the learning space. By reframing this as a contested space for disciplinary engagements, it invites opportunities for exploring the conditions and contingencies of what can be known and said about Indigenous people and issues. The purpose behind this proposition is to reveal to students the practice and complexities of knowledge production that underlie the very considerable challenges that Indigenous people, including Indigenous scholars in the academy, must contend with to address the deep legacies of the colonial world and place of Indigenous Australians in the onward nation-state and global agendas. The key educational goal of this approach relates to the second focus discussed above; that is to say, to engage students in the complex intellectual propositions and contests around the descriptions, interpretations, conceptualisations, representations, and meanings of Indigenous people's contemporary life worlds, knowledge, cultures, and experiences; and the implications they hold for thinking about practice in Indigenous scholarly, professional, and civic spaces. In this, the Cultural Interface assists a more comprehensive approach that also allows for decolonising strategies but is directed more toward the disposition of all students to remain open to an expanded range of propositions for understanding Indigenous people and Indigenous issues.

An important objective of a sequence in learning for an Indigenous Major framed by a proposition of a Cultural Interface where different knowledge trajectories converge is to present the field of study as one that is intellectually interesting. Students who are being asked to 'think' and 'critically reflect' are engaged in intellectual work primarily, even when there are strong components of fieldwork or interaction with Indigenous knowledge holders. Students need to be drawn into awareness of Indigenous knowledge and tradition as an organiser of Indigenous worlds and continuing Indigenous practices. Knowledge production about Indigenous Australia in the disciplines

can then be considered as the attempt of others to understand this world. The colonial archive can be recognised for its role in continuing to limit the field of meanings through the continuing engagement of both Indigenous and non-Indigenous scholars in the disciplines who critique, revision, or develop theory for contemporary knowledge production. The work of Indigenous and other critical scholars (e.g., Langton, 1981, 2003; McKay, 1999; Moreton-Robinson, 2000) can be acknowledged as attempts to challenge the disciplines and develop and insert Indigenous standpoints into the disciplines in order to contest and reshape them to be more useful for understanding Indigenous historical experience and contemporary social realities. Thus, the knowledge field can be viewed in terms of both Indigenous and non-Indigenous accounts of Indigenous reality and the deep entanglements of methods of knowledge production, of vantage points and analytical standpoints, and the contests and debates that occur in response to them.

It is challenging for all students to problematise the 'accepted' understandings in Indigenous Studies and to pursue inter-subjective mapping of their own learning at the Cultural Interface because these demand explication of broader sets of discursive relations beyond the literal interpretation of any text (or speaker), or the singular theoretical framings within a particular approach to a topic or course. Here, we suggest the structure of courses in Majors, given the opportunity of sequences in learning, can assist in disposing students to become practised in engagements with challenging or confronting materials and complex knowledge conditions, without making the transformation of students the object of teaching practice, which we consider to be primarily concerned with shifting 'attitudes' towards Indigenous people. Rather, both Indigenous and non-Indigenous students, can be positioned as *learners* who can benefit from knowledge about knowledge, theories, and discourse as a means to understand the 'limits of current language and discourse for navigating the complexities of knowledge production that Indigenous people now must engage in the quest to determine Indigenous futures to continue on' (Nakata et al., 2012, p. 136).

A New Initiative for an Indigenous Studies Major

At Nura Gili we have undertaken a challenging initiative to re-vision the learning sequence of courses in our Indigenous Studies Major to support priorities for deeper learning of the complexities of contemporary convergences in Indigenous Australia. Our curriculum approach was based on a proposition to focus on outcomes that could better prepare students to serve the interests of Indigenous Australians: a disposition to think more critically about convergences and to become more practised in navigating boundaries between Western disciplines and Indigenous standpoints. Here, we describe the top level structure over the three year levels to illustrate how sequencing can support the development of knowledge, dispositions for inquiry, and enquiry skills.

The overall theme of the Major that runs through all levels is *Continuities,* which places an emphasis on Indigenous goals to remain continuous with Indigenous knowledge, histories and cultures. Two Level 1, or Gateway courses, *Indigenous Australia* and *Aboriginal Sydney,* introduce students to Indigenous people via their knowledge traditions, concepts, values, and practices. This shift concerned staff who worried that it was a return to the anthropological gaze and a focus on Indigenous people as people from the past, rather than emphasising the vibrancy of survival cultures or the impact of colonisation. However, the aim of the Level 1 courses is expressly to introduce Indigenous Australia to students on Indigenous Australian terms. The learning sequence begins with understandings of family, people and place. This provides the necessary foundation for understanding a people of knowledge and, in turn, enables a progression to our teachings of a people of science. *Aboriginal Sydney*'s key objective is to demonstrate ongoing presence of knowledge traditions. Students here begin to appreciate more deeply the diversity of Indigenous Australia, which often conflicts with their generalised prior assumptions of 'exotica' and erodes their notions of Indigenous fixity, authenticity, and essentialism. The emphasis on Continuities also prevents the tendency to view these traditions as in the past, rather than continuing in the form of contemporary Indigenous expressions of knowledge and cultural practices. The use of guest Indigenous academics and community knowledge holders reinforces this notion of continuing cultural knowledge and practice in adapted forms, as do the contributions of Indigenous students. Not only do all students, including Indigenous students, gain an appreciation of the complex knowledge and social organisation of Indigenous societies, they gain an appreciation of the depth of what there is to know and therefore how little they know, and what little their prior assumptions are based on. Both Level 1 courses shift students' awareness and attitudes through their learning engagements, without asking them to self-consciously examine themselves or their social positions — the content of the courses is sufficiently illuminating at this preparatory stage.

Students enter Level 2 better prepared for the 'unsettling' that comes and indeed are better positioned and motivated to understand the trauma and destruction of the Indigenous experience of colonisation. Our pedagogical proposition here is that learning the deeper values as understood by Indigenous people can lead to a deeper investment by students on what is at stake when all becomes disrupted. Level 2 courses focus on *Ruptures, Discontinuities and Convergences* that are the result of colonisation and ongoing Indigenous relations with the Australian nation-state, as well as Indigenous peoples'

strategies to maintain continuities with Indigenous knowledge and social practices. Here, staff were on familiar territory. However, they were still stretched in finding ways to balance colonial narratives in their teaching with an equal emphasis on Indigenous people's narratives of the world albeit a subjugated one. Teaching students about the resilience of love, happiness and hope in Indigenous families in the face of the dire poverty and devastation that accompanied rapid and adverse change, is not something that comes naturally to anyone. Students from this approach gain an introduction to historical events, devastation, and erosion of Indigenous understandings, but importantly gain a much deeper sense of the degree of difficulty Indigenous people still have to navigate in contemporary situations when the only narrative is the colonial one. In Level 3, the theme of *Navigating the Interface* engages students to explore the boundaries of Indigenous knowledge, Western disciplines, and the confinements of an unproblematised presence of the Western order of things. Here students learn to question everything as problematic, and throughout their course develop their early skills to shunt between their disciplines and Indigenous people's knowledge and understandings, always cognisant of the tendencies to speak within a Western order of things. The Capstone course of the Indigenous Major is designed for students to become practised in dealing with complexities of the cultural interface. Students at this point in the sequence are engaged in lessons designed to equip them with opportunities to develop, practise and demonstrate both knowledge strategies and communicative skills to navigate these contested terrains. This involves developing their capacities to recognise different theoretical positions within everyday professional discourse and to articulate their own positions when dealing in complex intersections of professional and Indigenous practice. Seminar sessions encourage students to explore their disciplinary intersections in more depth and familiarise themselves with the multiple positions that present in the literature. The most important aspect for the Capstone course is constant feedback from teaching staff as students develop their capacities to navigate the boundaries and engage in difficult dialogues.

At all levels of the Indigenous Studies Major, students are involved in a struggle to understand, and are asked to explore and discuss the conditions of knowledge production in historical and contemporary spaces and critically reflect on what this means for their own thinking and practice. Students' claims to know or understand Indigenous social realities are unsettled, promoting argument and position-taking that is more conditional, less certain and less authoritative. They are positioned to keep thinking about their own thinking and practice by remaining engaged with ongoing developments in scholarly, professional and public spheres. Our project with the Indigenous Studies Major at UNSW Australia is under three years young and it will be a few years before we can more fully report on the shortfalls and successes. A comment from one student provides us some confidence we are at least heading in the right direction. After completing her first course in the sequence, she remarked that it really made her 'think'.

Positioning Students for Deeper Learning

Our Cultural Interface framing in our Indigenous Studies Major enables a move away from the more accepted teaching and learning assumptions that differentiate Indigenous and non-Indigenous students and considers them all as students whose dispositions to inquire and learn in Indigenous Studies require some developmental support and scaffolding. Students as learners are not positioned simply as subjects or objects of the currently trending and seemingly therapeutic discourses, which differentiate them as in need of cultural safety or requiring some traumatic 'unsettling' before they can explore and appreciate the complexities produced in the contests and conflicts of Western and Indigenous interests in knowledge. A Cultural Interface framing opens up an understanding that the knowledge and content of Indigenous Studies is difficult and 'problematic' and gives expression to various tensions that emerge in classroom discussions, dialogue and argument. The tensions in classrooms reflect those in the wider world, including in scholarly domains and professional practice. As future professionals or future scholars, students require some assistance to navigate and manage these tensions and engage in more productive and constructive dialogue about the positions and debates that produce them. More importantly, these tensions reflect the enormous challenges Indigenous people face in the ongoing struggle to remain continuous with Indigenous customary values and practices, while working with and benefiting from the ongoing, ever-changing fields of Western knowledge, its practices and impacts. For us, these difficult terrains must be surmounted if we are ever to have any degree of success in enabling the different professions to respond better to Indigenous people.

Positioning all students as novice learners in an intellectual field of knowledge and discourse cannot prescribe the learning 'journeys' or 'destinations' of students who come to learn from various social, political, and knowledge locations. Students' ideas and arguments require engagement on the basis of their logic and command of the field of study. This provides a way of revealing to students their allegiances and 'embedded-ness' in the logic of their own social view of the world, without the expectation that they can or will change this location, but with the expectation that they can reflect on and engage why they take up particular positions and will take up in their future professions. From within the Cultural Interface frame, the view that students' capacities to engage critically with the theoretical propositions of Indigenous Studies courses

can be prejudged according to whether social and cultural locations are viewed as an inversion of the colonial order rather than a breach of it. It is overly deterministic in its reading of students and overly optimistic in its hopes to 'decolonise' students thinking.

Cultural Interface framing supports thinking about teaching and learning practices that aim to expand and complicate students' understandings, not prescribe methods for reworking their own identities and subjectivities, nor prescribe how they should think. Students' subjectivities are but one expression of the knowledge and social relations that Indigenous people seek to disrupt. Teaching and learning practices can focus on students by thinking about how to scaffold learning engagements that first, prioritise the building of students' knowledge foundations; second, provide learning engagements that historicise and make more tangible the convergences, ruptures and discontinuities in Indigenous experience at the discursive level; and third, provide learning engagements that will assist students as future professionals to navigate the complexities of this contested space rather than accept the limits of current thinking and practice. This requires a focus on and the sequenced development of student learning dispositions that are more open to uncertainty and unresolved positions and more willing to reflect over time when they are confronted by the ongoing complexity of various contests and debates in professional or scholarly practice.

Limits and Challenges of the Cultural Interface Framing for Teaching and Learning

One perceived limit of Cultural Interface framing is that it does not seek to and cannot determine or control the implications of any transformations that occur in students' thinking. This we see as a positive effect of supporting more open explorations and inquiry, for this holds potential for the innovative development of analysis, discourse, scholarship and practice. A more practical limit of Cultural Interface framing for sequences in Indigenous Studies Major is the demand it places on academics. As an inter-disciplinary field, where academics come and go, have their own interests, or articulate to particular disciplines, positioning their individual courses in relation to other courses and in relation to the knowledge and skills emphasis at each level is not easy and takes time. However, our development of Cultural Interface framing does not place any restriction on the selection of content, including theoretical framings, or pedagogical approaches; only that these require contextualising within the broader field of Indigenous Studies inquiry and discourse, in the interests of students longer-term understanding. This contextualisation, however, presupposes academics' comprehensive and deep knowledge of the field.

The major challenge to implementing such a framework is the task of designing and revising individual courses for students at each level that promotes more open teaching and learning engagements. Much depends on academics' abilities to manage student questions, debates and discussions and focus on the substance of their arguments rather than the emotion of them. In this regard, the development of students' skills for productive and constructive critical engagement in classrooms (and assessments) presupposes academics' own knowledge of the contests and theoretical propositions of Indigenous Studies and academics' skills in managing classroom interactions. Here there are major challenges for those academics politically schooled and trained in oppositional and ideological analysis and used to deflecting student questions that are perceived to be difficult, insensitive or politically incorrect. In developing students' dispositions to engage in 'more uncertain, less resolved, but more complex critical analysis' (Nakata et al., 2012, p. 134), students have to search for and use a different, more intricate and measured language and logic that allows reserved judgment and traversing back and forth across various positions. Difficult and emotional issues will surface. Insensitive and offensive positions can be managed as teaching and learning opportunities, and the challenge for academics is to refine their own arguments and language for using these instances productively. To lead and manage students' discussions, academics need to be able to do this traversing, and to develop particular language and logic as well. How individual courses are designed — how they construct aims, select content, utilise particular teaching strategies, propose learning outcomes — will contribute to this. The process is challenging for academics, even those who are in agreement with the basic propositions being put forward here. This is because there is no easy language or prescription at this time for navigating the complexities at the interface. We as yet do not have a discourse for the middle ground. Most of us appear very incoherent in this space to others and we seem to only make sense when we retreat back into a 'black/white' position.

An implication of these challenges is the need for some attention to reviewing the critical skills area. What does critical thinking mean and aim for in this space (see e.g., Moore, 2013)? What are the tools for critical engagement with theoretical and practical propositions that utilise Indigenous epistemologies (see e.g., Nakata et al., 2012)? What do we really expect from students' reflective journal writing at different levels (see e.g., Boud, 2001)? How do we support Indigenous students and their very real intellectual, physically and emotionally felt discomforts? How are we to avoid the defeatism of students who want certain prescriptions for practice so they don't have to think or be in conflict with others? Attention will have to be focused in these areas, but ways to produce less polarised thinkers in the field warrants our collective attention in the future education of all students.

Concluding Thoughts

In this article we have questioned the tight relations between Indigenous political goals and purposes, the purposes and goals of Indigenous Studies in the academy, and the purposes and goals of teaching and learning Indigenous Studies at the higher education level. Many academics we have worked with who teach Indigenous Studies courses from within a decolonising frame do engage students in the ways we advocate here. However, others who we have also worked with struggle to see how particular theoretical positions, particularly when deployed as pedagogy, restrict students' access to multiple vantage points and openness to inquiry. In proposing Nakata's Cultural Interface as a useful frame for teaching and learning in Indigenous Studies, we have emphasised its departure from decolonising goals and frameworks and the different possibilities Cultural Interface framing presents for the education of all students. As a framework for restructuring the Indigenous Studies Major at Nura Gili, we are noting the challenges of the task, including some of the challenges it currently presents to academics. Nevertheless, we propose here that the education of all students in courses as sequenced in Indigenous Studies Majors does warrant the search for more productive teaching and learning practices and that there is much room yet within this approach for work to be done by others.

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