



# The Australian Journal of **INDIGENOUS EDUCATION**

This article was originally published in printed form. The journal began in 1973 and was titled *The Aboriginal Child at School*. In 1996 the journal was transformed to an internationally peer-reviewed publication and renamed *The Australian Journal of Indigenous Education*.

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# EXPLORING EFFECTIVE TEACHING STRATEGIES: SIMULATION CASE STUDIES *and* INDIGENOUS STUDIES

## at the UNIVERSITY LEVEL

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#### ■ Abstract

This paper explores teaching strategies for communicating complex issues and ideas to a diverse group of students, with different educational and vocational interests, that encourage them to develop critical thinking, and explores pedagogies appropriate to the multidisciplinary field of Aboriginal studies. These issues will be investigated through discussion of a successful simulation case study, including the setting up, resourcing, conducting and debriefing. The simulated case study was an assessed component of the new elective subject, *Reconciliation Studies*, offered at the University of Technology Sydney. In 2003 students participated in a role-play based on events in relation to the development of the Hindmarsh Island Bridge. Students were assigned roles as stakeholders where they researched and then role-played, through their assigned characters, the multilayered and complex dimensions of this recent dispute. Students were required to reflect critically on the cultural, economic, legal and political issues that were pertinent to their stakeholder and explore the underlying racial, ethical and moral grounds for their particular standpoint. I argue that teaching strategies such as these can contribute to locating Indigenous Australian perspectives and experiences as critical within the professional profiles and practice skills of Australian university graduates.

#### ■ Introduction

This paper details the development of a simulated case study as part of the new elective subject, *Reconciliation Studies*, at the University of Technology Sydney. The simulated case study was a useful teaching strategy because it provided a student-centered, experience-based forum to communicate complex issues and ideas to a diverse group of students with different educational and vocational interests. It also opened up new ways of thinking about appropriate pedagogies for the multidisciplinary field of Aboriginal studies. I have been teaching in the areas of Australian history and Indigenous Australian history and social policy at the University of Technology Sydney (UTS), since 1998 where I have experimented with different teaching strategies and critically reflected upon my own teaching methods. The approach to educational theory that I have found most useful is the work of liberation educationists, bell hooks and Paulo Freire, who see education as the practice of freedom (Freire, 1972, 1974, 1976; hooks, 1994, 1995). The teaching approaches I have explored include student-centred approaches to learning, creating different environments for learning, such as through field trips. I have experimented with using a range of different teaching resources including videos, newspapers, canvas, installations and a variety of writing genres, for example, poetry, personal narratives, fiction as well as standard academic texts from a range of disciplinary areas.

The development of this elective subject, new to Australian universities, opened up possibilities to introduce innovative teaching and learning strategies. Over the last two years, myself and my colleague Penny O'Donnell, have developed simulation role-plays, as part of this new subject. They were enjoyable, students identified their learning outcomes as highly significant and we enjoyed the teaching. But there was something more that came out of the simulation case study that is worth further scrutiny. The development of the simulation role-play crystallised my thoughts about approaches to teaching Indigenous Australian studies. So while this paper aims to demonstrate a useful teaching strategy, it is also an attempt to develop some critical engagement about teaching strategies in the area of Indigenous studies. This is not to suggest that the

*Reconciliation Studies* subject is necessarily a new direction or even related to the emerging Aboriginal studies “discipline”.

### ■ A framework for reconciliation

In 1991, the Governor-General proclaimed the *Council for Aboriginal Reconciliation Act, 1991*. Robert Tickner, former Minister for Aboriginal Affairs and key architect in the development, consultation and eventual passing of the *Reconciliation Act* says that the reconciliation process set out with three objectives. First, the education of non-Indigenous Australians about Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander history and culture; second, to “put on the nation’s public policy agenda the issue of some sort of formal document or agreement”; and third, the “driving force for the nation to address Indigenous (peoples’) aspirations, human rights and social justice” (Tickner, 2001, p. 29).

This legislation established the Council for Aboriginal Reconciliation (CAR) consisting of Indigenous and non-Indigenous members. They developed eight key issues that were adhered to throughout the 10 years of the Council. The key issues were:

- Understanding country: The importance of land and sea in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander societies.
- Improving relationships: Better relationships between Indigenous Australians and the wider community.
- Valuing cultures: Recognising Indigenous cultures as a valued part of Australian heritage.
- Sharing histories: A sense for all Australians of a shared ownership of their history.
- Addressing disadvantage: A greater awareness of the causes of Indigenous Australians’ disadvantage.
- Responding to custody levels: A greater community response to addressing the underlying causes.
- Agreeing on a document: Will the process of reconciliation be advanced by a document or documents of reconciliation?
- Controlling destinies: Greater opportunities for Indigenous Australians to control their destinies (Council for Aboriginal Reconciliation, 1992).

Over the 10 year period of the Council for Aboriginal Reconciliation (CAR) there were study circles, lectures, forums, public education and awareness through public art installations, such as the “Sea of Hands” and protest marches across bridges, including an estimated half million people walking across the Sydney Harbour Bridge in May 2000 to mark the final report of the Council. Many Australians prior to the reconciliation movement were unaware of the various Government policies in relation to Indigenous people, the impact on Indigenous communities or of the lived experiences of Indigenous Australians. The growing awareness in the wider community, while linked to the objectives of the reconciliation movement, was also related to Federal

Government recognition of Native Title and inquiries, such as the National Inquiry into the Separation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children from their Families (Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission, 1997). The change of Government in 1996 and end of the 10-year life of the well-resourced Council in 2001 has resulted in a departure from the community-led awareness campaigns and changed ideology in relation to the administration of Indigenous affairs and colonialist dialogue about national identity.

The development of *Reconciliation Studies* as a university-wide transdisciplinary elective subject required some critical engagement with how the reconciliation movement had been framed as a people’s movement and how this shift from community learning circles to the academy could be made. It also required consideration of the relationship of a subject on “Reconciliation Studies” to existing units of study that come under the general rubric of “Aboriginal Studies”. Many of these subjects have continued unchanged and have lived in obscure corners of handbooks while reviews to degree programs and elective options have taken place.

Indigenous studies has a difficult place in Western academies – as we struggle (or juggle) the multidisciplinary nature of Indigenous studies, meet the very different educational and vocational needs of students in our classes and critically reflect on appropriate pedagogical issues – the place and authority of Indigenous studies is questioned. Aboriginal studies in higher education has largely come about through the development of Indigenous student support services and in some cases a successful wrestling match with the anthropologists. Mostly, Aboriginal studies is aligned with particular disciplines as a major within areas like Faculties of Education. The teaching is mostly multidisciplinary and often with little theoretical underpinning. It is a little bit history, a little bit social enquiry, anthropology, politics, law, resource management, cultural studies, community development, literature studies, media studies and social policy. It is hard to do justice to these diverse areas of study, and the complex debates that exist within each of these fields, and apply them to a field that is outside of the organisation of Western knowledge systems. Different teaching strategies that allow flexibility in student identified learning outcomes, and that address the professional practices of Australian graduates go some way towards anchoring Indigenous studies within the academy.

### ■ Exploring different teaching strategies

In 2003 students participated in a simulated role-play based on the events relating to the development of the Hindmarsh Island Bridge on Hindmarsh Island in South Australia. The construction of the bridge from mainland South Australia to Hindmarsh Island has been a multilayered and complex dispute. The development of the bridge was opposed by traditional Ngarrindjeri women. They argued that it was a site of significance for

women. The Federal Government opposed the development, the state Government held an inquiry into the validity of the women's "beliefs" – and found that they had "fabricated" evidence while the Federal Liberal opposition made public documents intended for women only. The media, various expert witnesses, including anthropologists and lawyers, along with the High Court of Australia all played a role in this controversial dispute. In the end the bridge was developed and the newly-elected conservative Federal Government enacted special legislation to allow for the bridge against the trend of rights to cultural heritage protection and interpretations of racial discrimination laws. This dispute also took place in the context of the legislated reconciliation movement and yet no mention, throughout the 10-year dispute, was made of the reconciliation themes. The simulated role-play was an assessed component of the new elective subject, *Reconciliation Studies*, offered at the University of Technology Sydney. The student cohort was made up of overseas study abroad students, mainly from Europe and North America, and Indigenous and non-Indigenous students. Students were organised into "stakeholder" groups to research and then role-play, through their assigned characters, the multilayered and complex dimensions of this recent dispute. Students were required to reflect critically on the cultural, economic, legal and political issues that were pertinent to their stakeholder and explore the underlying racial, ethical and moral grounds for their particular standpoint.

### ■ Simulation case studies

Innovative teaching strategies, such as simulations and games have been around for a long time. Harvard Law School is attributed with having pioneered the "case study model" in the 1800s, where it was considered a very radical and controversial shift in curriculum and teaching strategy. It is now widely used by other disciplines, including business and medicine, and there are various associated networks, including the International Simulations and Gaming Association (ISGA). From the 1970s adult educators have explored, theorised and documented effective and innovative teaching and learning practices (e.g., Leigh & Kinder, 1999; Lewis, 1986; Mille & Crookall, 1989). Lovelock (in Lewis, 1986) explains that the case study model of teaching emphasises inductive learning and is in contrast to the deductive teaching approach used in the lecture format where students are directly presented with concepts and theories. Simulations are generally defined as open-ended, real-life oriented, often behaviourally-based and process focused. A case study, according to Leigh and Kinder (1999), is characterised by in-depth analysis, detail, and a review of results and actions. Simulation case studies are an opportunity to bring real-life learning experiences to students through which they can consider appropriate ways to solve problems.

### ■ Organising the Hindmarsh Island Bridge simulation case study

The Hindmarsh Island Bridge simulation case study was run over three classes that were each three hours in length. A total of nine hours of class time was thus spent on the case study. Students were required to work collaboratively to develop an understanding of their stakeholder, and individually to produce a paper analysing and/or critically reflecting on the role of their stakeholders and how the dispute could be understood within a reconciliation framework.

There were three distinct stages to the organisation of the Hindmarsh Island Bridge simulation case study:

#### *Stage one*

- Developing an appropriate topic and learning objectives.
- Setting up the activity.
- Sorting students into groups.
- Locating appropriate resources.
- Explaining or negotiating participant/stakeholder roles.
- Organising suitable space/room.

#### *Stage two*

- Session one: Preparing the class (three hours).
- Session two: Conducting the role-play (three hours).
- Session three: Debriefing and critical reflection (three hours).

#### *Stage three*

- Student completion of written analysis of how the Hindmarsh Island Bridge dispute can be understood within a reconciliation framework.

In setting up the activity a number of issues need to be taken into account. These are discussed sequentially in relation to the three stages.

### ■ Stage one issues

#### *Developing an appropriate topic and learning objectives*

The simulated case study was based on the events of the Hindmarsh Island Bridge, so it was a "real-life" case study. It was chosen as a topic because it was a dispute that covered a range of complex issues and it took place over the time of the reconciliation movement, yet there was no reference to reconciliation throughout the dispute. It seemed that on the one hand bridge walks were taking place in support of Indigenous rights and in other cases they were being built in defiance of rights. The Hindmarsh Island Bridge case study provided an opportunity for students to critically engage with some complex issues and concepts and to critically consider the place and significance of the different reconciliation frameworks.

### *Setting up the activity*

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Ten stakeholder groups were identified for the Hindmarsh Island Bridge simulation case study. These were:

- Ngarrindjeri traditional owners (women and men);
- Ngarrindjeri community of Hindmarsh (men and women);
- Federal Labor Party in Opposition and Government;
- Federal Coalition in Opposition and Government;
- State Government;
- media;
- expert witnesses (Anthropologists);
- developers;
- legal experts; and
- Australian “public”

### *Sorting students into groups*

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Students were encouraged to assign themselves to a stakeholder group. This allowed for students to undertake research in areas they were comfortable with and that interested them. There were 30 students in the class with three students assigned to each group. In some cases students took opposing views within their group (for example, the media and expert witnesses). Assigning or nominating to a group requires sensitivity and discretion. It is important that students are not assigned to groups that could be embarrassing or that bear closely on personal issues. In this case study some roles were very emotionally confronting, especially for students who were not familiar with feelings of being marginalised or silenced. There were also issues of sensitivity around Aboriginal identity and religion.

### *Locating appropriate resources*

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Several key texts on the Hindmarsh Island Bridge dispute were listed in the subject outline for students to research their stakeholder's position. In addition, over 100 journal articles were sourced and forwarded to students according to their stakeholder's role. We kept in regular email contact with students and set up online forums for each group to work collaboratively. This was also useful for posting electronic copies of journal articles.

### *Explaining or negotiating participant/stakeholder roles*

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Students kept in regular email contact with us to clarify particular events and their stakeholder's perspective. The Hindmarsh Island Bridge dispute extended over a period of more than 10 years. There is continuing academic work on the dispute as well as ongoing considerations in the legal and heritage protection area, not to mention among the Ngarrindjeri women and community. The simulation followed the events as they occurred in a time-line format, although some events were not dealt

with in the same detail as others. For the purposes of the case study the life of the dispute was condensed to a three hour session with particular events, as narrated by the instructor, dealt with in detail.

### *Organising suitable space/room*

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Classrooms at UTS are generally of a standard model where desks are aligned facing the front of the classroom. For the purposes of this activity, and throughout the whole semester, the classroom was rearranged so that all participants could interact in a collaborative learning environment.

### ■ Stage two issues

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#### *Session one: Preparing the class*

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For the first class students discussed the events of the Hindmarsh Island Bridge dispute and collectively compiled a time-line. Based on their research, students spoke outside of their chosen character. This meant that all students became familiar with the overall dispute rather than simply from their own stakeholder's experience of the dispute. Some students were nervous about what to expect (I was too!). The first session was important to calm nerves and ensure that all students were familiar with the “bigger picture” of the dispute. This was also an important time for clarifying role-play protocols. These included a signal for “time-out” that participants could use at any time in the role-play; they could move out of character and speak in more analytical terms where it was appropriate and where there were issues of cultural sensitivity; and that the cultural rights of the Ngarrindjeri women would be respected in the role-play, despite what occurred in real-life. It was also noted that students were discouraged from caricaturing or overly exaggerating their stakeholder.

#### *Session two: Conducting the role-play*

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At this stage students were reminded that they were “role-playing” and then moved into character by introducing themselves to the group. The instructor's “role” in the role-play was to:

- manage the discussion and keep the dialogue progressing, even though it was contrived, as a natural process;
- ensure all of the stakeholders had a chance to participate;
- call time-out if necessary;
- support students who were more timid or nervous; and,
- keep an eye on time and determine when to call a halt to the role-play.

Students were well prepared, although some students, given their apparent state of nerves were given the option of observing. They were well equipped with the relevant readings for their stakeholder based research and had participated in a three-hour lead-in discussion to prepare them for the role-play. Many students came along to class "in character" – some even dressed up for the occasion, and had all taken their research seriously and were well prepared in terms of the position of their stakeholder. The lead-in discussion ensured that all students were familiar with the broader dispute not just the perspective of their character. The success of the simulation depends on student preparation and successful intervention by the instructor. Given that the simulation was loosely based on a time-line of events, the main role of the instructor was to keep students on task and ensure that all of the stakeholders were contributing in a manner consistent with the actual events.

### *Session three: Debriefing and critical reflection*

At the debriefing time it is important that students come out of their character. Pfeiffer and Jones (in Jones 1980) suggest a process whereby participants say, for example, "I am no longer Mrs Chapman the Developer, I am ..." as a way of formally debriefing from their character. Some students became very emotional at the sense of injustice, and for some students it was apparent through their body language that they felt very alienated and dispossessed from the other students. It was necessary to be sensitive to their needs and allow them to talk in detail about how they felt and for other students to understand this emotional response.

The debriefing session, according to Cryer (1982) and Pfeiffer and Jones (in Jones 1980), is the most critical point of the case study – it is after all the deductive analytical stage where the learning experiences come together. They outline five key stages to assist in facilitating the debriefing:

1. *Publishing*: Describing what happened in the exercise, sharing reactions and observations.
2. *Integrating*: Putting together the separate viewpoints to reveal underlying patterns and dynamics and making interpretations.
3. *Generalising*: Drawing out general principles and concepts and relating them to other contexts.
4. *Applying*: Considering what has been learnt both individually and collectively and the implications of that for future action and scope for problem solving.
5. *Evaluating*: Discussing how valuable the activity was for everyone and how it might be improved.

### ■ Stage three issues

Students were required to research and prepare a written profile from the perspective of their stakeholder on the dispute. Through this they were required to outline and

critically analyse the range of issues at the centre of political and cultural conflicts between non-Indigenous and Indigenous Australians. They were also required to understand and discuss what is meant by adopting a reconciliation framework for resolving this dispute.

### ■ Students' learning outcomes of the simulation case study

These can be summarised as follows:

- Understanding of different viewpoints and how the views we hold can be seen to be located within particular cultural frameworks.
- Understanding of how knowledge is produced in particular contexts.
- Place of Indigenous issues within the federal system of governance.
- Different ideological positions of the Labor and Liberal Parties on heritage protection and Indigenous rights protection.
- Limitations of the Australian constitution and the "race power" provision.
- The significance of ATSIC's "rights agenda"
- The limitations and/or differences of the Council for Aboriginal Reconciliation.
- Divisions and differences within Aboriginal communities and how these are interpreted differently and in some cases manipulated.
- Impact of colonisation on individuals, families and communities.
- Cultural revival.
- The role of the media in the reporting of Indigenous news stories, in creating particular public perceptions, and agenda setting.
- Use of language: how language constructs knowledge, logic and prominence of voice.
- The role of anthropologists as experts on Aboriginal people's history and culture.
- Broader questions about Australian nationhood and identity, truth, justice, racism and legal recognition.

It can be seen that the learning outcomes for students were comprehensive. All of the issues listed above were explored prior to and after the role-play so many of these concepts were reinforced by "experiencing" them. It meant that key concepts were presented to students through different teaching strategies. But it also provided a quick means for students to acquire necessary information. For example, the issue of "race power" that is embedded in the Australian constitution requires discussion of the 1967 referendum, the politics of the conservative Howard government, rights protection and probably the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission's (ATSIC) "rights agenda". Each of these requires careful presentation of what are complex political and legal issues. The simulation role-play as well as the traditional lecture format and small group discussions allowed for students to develop an

understanding of the inter-relationship of these events and issues – and that the “race power” in the Australian constitution is not an abstract legal technicality. Its impact is real and has been devastating. It also provides a useful and appropriate forum for students, as future professionals, to consider solutions to problems. For example, students reflected critically on solutions, such as constitutional or legislative change.

Often, at least in my experience, Australian students approach Aboriginal studies subjects with a great deal of trepidation – they are nervous and anxious that they are going to be attacked or confronted. We can understand these fears as stemming from issues of power and dominance, deeply entrenched ideas about race and possibly simple naivety. I have encountered students who approach Australian history and Aboriginal studies armed with a litany of ill-informed anecdotes and unsourced references to “special” benefits Aboriginal people receive and, often, fixations on bloodline percentages. Commonly in teaching Aboriginal studies the first and critical task is to bring students around to a more considered and less defensive position.

Simulation role-plays that are appropriately timed, resourced and setup are useful ways to achieve this. This is largely because students get to “experience”, in a safe environment, a range of competing, conflicting and different perspectives; to step outside of themselves and develop an understanding of complex issues; but also, and most importantly, to understand what it feels like to be marginalised, and how dominant ideas are served and affirmed by existing social institutions. To understand and *feel* one’s self constructed as irrational through legal and political forums and the media was a very powerful learning experience for students.

In *The meeting of the waters* (2003) Simons says that:

The story of the Hindmarsh Island bridge is one of the most important that can be told about Australia at the end of the last century and the beginning of this. It can be seen as a tale of small town gossip and enmity. But as well ... it is one of those big, even archetypal, stories that tell us something about who we are (Simons, 2003, p. xvi).

Through the study of Ngarrindjeri people’s experience and the building of the bridge, students could see the unquestioned dominance of their own cultural identity and logic played out. This resulted in a shifted framework in thinking about solutions. They understood how their own cultural privilege and aspirations were, in the case of Hindmarsh, a part of the problem. As they worked towards thinking about solutions it was not within a framework of coming up with solutions *for* Aboriginal people, but rather a more nuanced understanding of the complexity of race relations and their own implication. As future professionals it gave them a sense that they did not necessarily have the answers, but could understand how to begin to understand the complexity of Indigenous

rights and reconciliation. As future professionals – lawyers, journalists, scientists, developers, activists and advocates – they could see critical issues for their professional practice.

The national reconciliation movement and now with the development of the university-wide elective subject at the level of curriculum development and teaching strategies, has sought to reorient “who is studying whom”. To create new dialogues about race and subjectivity. To create a learning environment that critically and meaningfully engages with concepts of power – of political and cultural rights, and individual and collective freedoms. At the level of graduate profiles these are highly desirable attributes.

Most simulation case study examples that are related to the social sciences, including culture studies and politics do not provide models for creating new dialogues that the multidisciplinary field of Aboriginal studies and related reconciliation studies seek to do. Chapman and Smith (1982) showcase simulation examples in the area of cross-cultural communication. These role-plays are more anthropologically-based, for example, a role-play about the tensions and problems faced by Indigenous leaders in Papua New Guinea. “Babel” (Pfeiffer & Jones in Jones, 1980, p. 38) is another game that simulates intercultural communication in a multilingual setting.

For the purposes of effective teaching and learning, there are many recent examples that lend themselves to the simulation case study model, and as a means to place Indigenous studies as a critical academic field directly related to the professional profiles of Australian university graduates. However, they are not easy and take considerable time, preparation and commitment. The success of the simulation was in fact years in the making. It was a second attempt at simulation case studies. The first case study, based around different events, did not achieve the learning objectives I had in mind – students became too entrenched in their roles and it became a rowdy, and fun, argument rather than a considered learning process. Penny O’Donnell and I were lucky to have had a semester to develop and plan the curriculum for the subject and the luxury of working together and negotiating expectations across different academic disciplines as well as differing cultural and family backgrounds.

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