



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*.

In 2022 *The Australian Journal of Indigenous Education* transitioned to fully Open Access and this article is available for use under the license conditions below.



This work is licensed under the Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License. To view a copy of this license, visit <http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/> or send a letter to Creative Commons, PO Box 1866, Mountain View, CA 94042, USA.

INTRODUCTION

MARTIN NAKATA

Jumbunna Indigenous House of Learning, University of Technology Sydney, PO Box 123, Broadway, New South Wales, 2007, Australia

This edition of *The Australian Journal of Indigenous Education* is a special supplementary issue which brings together papers from the 2007 Indigenous Studies and Indigenous Knowledge Conference that have been reviewed through a blind-referee process. The conference was hosted by Jumbunna Indigenous House of Learning, and the Indigenous Programs Unit in the Faculty of Business, at the University of Technology Sydney, 11-13 July 2007. It was the second of an annual conference series planned to encourage conversation and dissemination about the place and meaning of Indigenous knowledge in the Western academy and its implications for the evolving cross-disciplinary area of Indigenous studies. The series began in 2006 with the (Re)Contesting Indigenous Knowledges and Indigenous Studies Conference hosted by the Oodgeroo Unit, Queensland University of Technology. The papers from that series were published by *The Australian Journal of Indigenous Education* in Volume 36, Supplement 2007. The third conference was hosted by Riawunna, Centre for Indigenous Education, at the University of Tasmania in Hobart, 2-4 July 2008.

Internationally, Indigenous studies, in all its various denominations, has become the focal point for the collection and distribution of knowledge about Indigenous peoples across the academy. Since the mid-1980s when significant numbers of Indigenous students began to enter Australian universities, the production and transmission of knowledge and understanding “about” Indigenous peoples has sat in uneasy tension with higher education programs “for” Indigenous students and other students. The presence of Indigenous students, staff, academics and researchers has ensured inevitable contestation of the meanings of Indigenous experiences and traditions as these are re-presented (or omitted) through the knowledge, practices and conventions of the disciplines which underpin teaching, learning, and research activities in faculties.

The Indigenous Studies and Indigenous Knowledge Conference series attempts to provide the space to draw in these aspects of our knowledge and experience into complex and challenging conversations. While the conference series encourages contestation of the issues, it does not seek a divisive campaign between Indigenous and Western knowledge in the academy. Rather it supports “unsettling” conversations and encourages original or applied thinking that can promote the sorts of analysis required to explicate

the complexities of Indigenous peoples' position in the 21st century. The aim is to encourage Indigenous and non-Indigenous academics, practitioners, and researchers to explore, investigate, describe, and interrogate our own assumptions and thinking as well as our own practices and positions. Those of us who are Indigenous seek to make our presence felt in the interest of working more productively with and between both sets of understanding. While we may contest and dismantle the thinking of others, the aim is to produce forward motion in our own thinking and production of knowledge.

The highlighting of Indigenous knowledge in these conversations reminds us of all that still stands outside of the academy; all that is still not understood or well represented in the conversations and scholarship about Indigenous peoples and issues. Indigenous knowledge also reminds us that in everyday practice, Indigenous people are often working in accordance with other systems, values and practices passed down while at the same time making sense of and operating in Western frameworks. The coupling of Indigenous knowledge with Indigenous studies reminds us that in our own scholarly conversations and practice we are contributing to and constructing ways of thinking about Indigenous peoples and issues – we are responding to and shaping the discourses, the disciplines, and Indigenous cross-disciplinary practices – and we are passing that on to students. Indigenous studies represents a pivotal point between Indigenous knowledge, understanding, and experience and the representation and discussion of that in academia, in public affairs, and in the training of students' thinking and professional practice. But, embedded as it has been in Western systems of thought, Indigenous studies also represents the history of thinking about us, our current contestations, and the grounds for future understanding and directions. The conversations we generate in this conference series are therefore important opportunities to re-think the relationships between Indigenous and non-Indigenous on a range of levels and in a range of contexts.

The Indigenous Studies and Indigenous Knowledge Conference series attracts diverse interests and wide-ranging papers that cross a range of disciplines, topics, and theoretical and practical contexts. In 2007, we added an Indigenous student support strand. This was an attempt to gather together those who teach and support Indigenous students and who have a close working knowledge of the challenges students have in these contested knowledge spaces. This is a qualitative aspect of Indigenous higher education experience that is often lost between our understandings of the challenges facing academically under-prepared Indigenous students and the discourses of mainstream support, bureaucratic pressures, and government accountability agendas.

The opportunity for these academics and support professionals to be part of the wider Indigenous studies – Indigenous knowledge conversations keeps us all connected in our efforts. What to teach and how to teach Indigenous studies and Indigenous students is an important part of the conversation.

It is interesting to note that comments in the 2007 conference survey reinforce that people want to learn from each other's practical experience within and across the sub-sectors of Indigenous activity. Suspicion about the relevance of perceived "elite" scholarship to Indigenous community contexts remains a concern for some. Although topics relating to Indigenous studies – Indigenous knowledge range very wide, it is important the conference series does not run the risk of trying to be all things to all people in all sectors, or raise false expectations about what can be achieved through these conversations. At one level the conference series is unapologetically academic and resonates most strongly with those involved in Indigenous studies in the higher education sector. However, wherever Indigenous knowledge issues intersect with practice on the ground, descriptions and analysis of practice contribute to Indigenous studies and wider conversation in Indigenous affairs. It is important that those who work at the interface between Western and Indigenous knowledge practice report and disseminate their experiences through publication so that this can be brought back in to keep shaping the content of Indigenous studies, cross-disciplinary work and the field of Indigenous inquiry and research. For Indigenous graduates and other community workers, this conference series is a touchstone to the changes in thinking occurring all the time through research and other scholarly work. The theory-practice nexus involves us all in these important conversations as learners. Without both scholarship around theoretical and methodological concerns, and reporting and research about practice, both theory and practice will be the losers.

The 2007 conference papers in this edition not only cross a range of topics but approach questions of Indigenous knowledge – Indigenous studies in different ways. The 2007 conference international keynote speaker was George Dei, Professor and Chair, Department of Sociology and Equity Studies, Ontario Institute for Studies in Education at the University of Toronto. Professor Dei received his higher education in both Ghana and Canada and spoke of ways to "cultivate an Indigenous space in the Western academy" (p. 8 this volume). Dei urges Indigenous scholars to establish an Indigenous presence through claims of identity, place and culture and argues that the material and discursive conditions of knowledge production in the academy must account for identity politics to avoid misrecognition and negation. From an African perspective, he sets out principles for building a 'critical Indigenous discursive framework' to meet

the challenges involved in including Indigenous knowledge in Indigenous studies and Indigenous studies within the Western academy which can also support anti-colonial pedagogy in education.

Five authors discuss Indigenous knowledge in its intersections with Western legal practice. Terri Janke, Michael Davis, Chris Kavelin, Robynne Quiggin and Spike Boydell discuss the intersections with Western notions of intellectual property. Janke weaves the reader through the intricate issues that emerge from differences in Indigenous and Western notions of knowledge ownership and intellectual property rights. She describes some of the efforts being made to find solutions to Indigenous concerns about the protection of Indigenous intangible cultural heritage. Davis also questions the primacy of Western concepts of property in the building of regimes for protection of Indigenous knowledge. He argues for alternative frameworks that allow for dialogue, negotiation and agreement making between Indigenous and other knowledge traditions. Kavelin explores the role of universities and the appropriation of Indigenous medical knowledge. Through case studies he is able to demonstrate the elements that facilitate the appropriation of such knowledge from Indigenous communities to trans-national pharmaceutical corporations. He concludes with an analysis of the law and policy context before calling for a re-examination of the roles of universities in their partnerships with pharmaceutical companies. Quiggin's paper analyses Indigenous knowledge and the commercial aspects in relation to national and international conventions and outlines possibilities for Australian Indigenous people. She paints an optimistic message against the tide of commercial arguments and concedes that a rights-based approach is probably the only workable solution. Spike Boydell's paper addresses a very real problem looming in Pacific Island nations – the potential future conflict in commercial land-use lease renewals on customary-owned land. The terms and conditions associated with expiring leases and/or renegotiation of continuing leases raises very complex issues for customary landowners, commercial entities, and the economies of these tiny nations. These papers highlight the complexities of working at the interface of two knowledge systems.

Noah Riseman's paper makes a contribution to Indigenous studies – Indigenous knowledge by adding to the broader project of bringing in Indigenous histories from the peripheries of "Australian" history. He explores Yolgnu historical accounts of their role in the defence of northern Australia in World War II. In doing so, he uncovers an aspect of this history not presented in official or other accounts of the war and which brings due recognition to Yolgnu and their analysis of their role. Jason De Santolo and Juanita Ypinazar explore the reverse: how to disseminate legal and policy analysis and research relating to

Indigenous issues into the Indigenous community. Using online video and streaming they hope to harness the technological interface to bridge the gap between formal academic texts and more accessible formats for the Indigenous public audience.

Three papers address the theory/practice nexus in educational programs intended to improve institutional practice on the ground for the benefit of Indigenous Australians. Drawing on both the relevant educational literature and the personal experiences of Indigenous women, Bronwyn Fredericks describes some limits of cultural awareness training for health and hospital workers and argues for deeper anti-racist education as a better basis for effecting change at the institutional level of health practice. Cat Kutay and Janet Mooney describe the value of Problem-based learning approaches in the development and implementation of an information technology course for young Indigenous people in central Australia. This approach allowed students to engage in real-life projects and also engaged some important social considerations. Shane Edwards and Kieran Hewitson provide a valuable insight into Maori education as it evolved from early programs with Maori elders and then programs with Maori youth. The success factor highlighted by them was the ability to develop programs to meet specific needs in the communities.

The other papers in this edition address issues associated with improving the support of Indigenous students or academics in higher education in Australia. Andrew Gunstone updates a previous 2000 study that surveyed a sample of university policies and performance areas considered to be indicative of universities' commitment to the education of Indigenous students. His paper is a contribution to ongoing policy discussion in the Indigenous higher education sector. Susan Page and Christine Asmar describe a study that explored and documented the hidden and unrecognised aspects of Indigenous academics' work. Their conclusions provide important evidence of the unique demands on Indigenous academics in Western institutions as they take on additional roles of student support and the strong cultural expectations and demands of their communities. Studies such as these support the case of Indigenous academics who struggle to devote the time required for intellectual work that advances their careers.

In relation to the support of Indigenous students, Sue Whatman, Juliana McLaughlin, Susan Willstead, Annie Tyhuis and Susan Beetson contribute a much needed investigation into an under-researched area: the efficacy of the Indigenous Tutorial Assistance Scheme (ITAS) both in terms of quality of tutoring to students and efficient program delivery. The authors have addressed the inter-twined areas of teaching and learning issues for Indigenous students and measures of success from that perspective, bureaucratic reporting and measures of success, and administrative burdens on Indigenous academics/support staff. Sonya

Pearce's contribution also emphasises the close ties between teaching and learning and the support of students and draws attention to the critical role of Indigenous program facilitators. The connections between teaching and learning and academic skills support are also addressed by Martin Nakata, Vicky Nakata and Michael Chin. The authors contend that Indigenous students require particular academic tools for engaging the disciplines whilst drawing in their own knowledge and experience to inform their own analyses of content presented to them in courses. An argument is made that research is needed to shed light on how Indigenous students process intellectual contestations between their own knowledge and experience and those represented or omitted from their course content. A different approach is taken by Soenke Biermann, a non-Indigenous student, and Marcelle Townsend-Cross, an Indigenous academic, who reflect on the meanings of transformative pedagogy in an Indigenous studies subject for Indigenous and non-Indigenous students. They argue for the potential of pedagogy based on "Indigenous values, philosophies and methodologies ... to effect positive educational change for all learners" (p. 146). Descriptions of concepts of Indigenous pedagogy and some tools for practice provide a basis for others to explore and adapt.

All these papers contribute to understandings of the cultural interface between Indigenous studies – Indigenous knowledge. All make cases for the Indigenous position within the academy and/or in practice beyond the academy. These papers stand, not just as contributions to the discourse, but as sites for further discussion and conversation. All those who teach, work and play a supporting role in the Indigenous higher education sector are urged to interrogate, build on, and take these contributions forward.

■ Acknowledgements

I wish to thank *The Australian Journal of Indigenous Education* for publishing this special supplement and for editorial assistance. Thanks also to: all the authors who submitted their papers and gave their time to the referee and editing process; all our blind reviewers who also gave up their time to provide feedback to authors; and all our conference presenters who contributed to a stimulating conference. Special thanks must go to our conference organisers, in particular, Zeita Davis of Jumbunna Indigenous House of Learning, Sonia Pearce and Judith Phillips of Indigenous Programs in the Faculty of Business, staff of Jumbunna Indigenous House of Learning and our many University of Technology Sydney student volunteers. Special thanks to Tony Pearce an invaluable community volunteer. We must also thank conference sponsors and partners: UTS Library, UTS Faculty of Business; Koori Centre, University of

Sydney; Indigenous Law Centre, University of New South Wales; Oodgeroo Unit, QUT; Woolyungah Indigenous Centre, University of Wollongong; Eora College, TAFE NSW Sydney Institute; Reconciliation Australia; Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies; Aboriginal Studies Press; Illawarra Aboriginal Medical Service; and Macquarie Bank. Without this support the conference series would not have been as successful as it was.

■ About the author

Professor Nicholas Martin Nakata, guest editor for this supplementary edition, is Director of Jumbunna Indigenous House of Learning and Chair of Australian Indigenous Education at the University of Technology, Sydney. He has written and researched across Indigenous issues in schooling, higher education, Indigenous knowledge, Indigenous library and digitisation issues and in areas relating to anger and Indigenous men.