



# 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.



# INDIGENOUS PEDAGOGY *as a* FORCE for CHANGE

SOENKE BIERMANN<sup>1</sup>  
& MARCELLE  
TOWNSEND-CROSS<sup>2</sup>

1 School of Arts and Social Sciences, Southern Cross University, Lismore, New South Wales, 2480, Australia

2 Gnibi, College of Indigenous Australians Peoples, Southern Cross University, Lismore, New South Wales, 2480, Australia

## ■ Abstract

Indigenous academics over the past decade and a half have been focusing strongly, in terms of theory development, on Indigenous epistemologies and research methodologies. What has not been given equal academic attention is the theoretical articulation of Indigenous pedagogy, not only as a valid system of knowledge and skill transfer, but also as one that conveys meaning, values and identity. In this paper, we want to explore some of the practical aspects of Indigenous pedagogy in a tertiary setting by way of a student-teacher dialogue and also discuss the wider implications of a theoretical articulation from our perspective as researchers and academics. We argue that at the intersection of the discourses on transformative pedagogy and Indigenous education in Australia lays an unexplored concept which, properly articulated and implemented, could have great benefits for all learners. Having been afforded attention elsewhere, particularly in North America, it is time to discuss Indigenous pedagogy as a teaching methodology based on Indigenous values and philosophies in Australia today.

## ■ Introduction

Over the past decade, there has been a lack of engagement with Indigenous pedagogical concepts by Indigenous academics. While Indigenist research methodologies and Indigenous epistemologies have featured heavily as topics of Indigenous students' postgraduate writing over the past two decades, there has not been, with the exception of Hughes' et al. (2004) work, a similar focus and emphasis on Indigenous pedagogies or teaching methodologies. It seems that an important part of the circle of knowledge – teaching – has not been part of the reclaiming of Indigenous philosophies. Why? What is it about the transmission of knowledge that earns it a lesser status than the nature of knowledge and how to gain it? Pedagogy plays a crucial role in the entire education process of lifelong learning – from early childhood to primary to high school to tertiary and adult education.

This article is therefore an initial, tentative exploration of an important yet under-theorised concept. It is only the first step, albeit an important one, in bringing together the discourses of transformative pedagogy and Indigenous education at the "cultural interface" (Nakata, 1997) of tertiary education. The exploration starts off comparatively small, relying on the authors' reflected experiences and selected student responses. We are by no means suggesting that Indigenous pedagogy has the same effects on everybody. However, more in-depth, evidence-based studies are needed to understand the impact of this kind of pedagogy on student learning. Nor are we seeking to define a universal model of an Indigenous pedagogy – localised articulations are needed to provide the basis for understanding the nature and complexities of such pedagogies. Instead, what this paper contributes is a challenge, to be taken up by others, an opening up of discursive space and an impetus to articulate this important area of Indigenous philosophy and methodology.

It is our contention that Indigenous pedagogy, properly analysed, explored and theorised on the basis of Indigenous values, philosophies and methodologies, has great potential to effect positive educational change for all learners. We want to turn a prevailing deficit-view of Indigenous education into a resource-based view that names and values Indigenous philosophies for what they are: complex and sophisticated systems of thought. This paper is reflected praxis and a call for



action – it builds on experience, weaves it with theory and highlights the need and means for change. Its setting is a tertiary one but its implications permeate the whole education sector from early childhood to primary and high school to tertiary, adult and community education.

Our discussion of Indigenous pedagogy is motivated by a three-fold desire to effect change in the classroom, in the education system, and in society. First of all, that change concerns addressing existing inequalities that prevent Indigenous children from reaching their full potential. Secondly, it goes beyond a racialised view of Indigenous education as education for Indigenous children and instead focuses on the “remedial potential” for all learners (Woods, personal communication, 2003) of a pedagogy based on Indigenous values, philosophies, and methodologies. Thirdly, it re-injects Indigenous values into the education system that run counter to the trend of producing students that are becoming increasingly, in David Orr’s words (cited in Sobel, 2004, p. ii) “mobile, rootless and autistic toward their place”.

Consequently, this paper sets out to:

- Challenge deficit-based views of Indigenous education as education for Indigenous children;
- Promote Indigenous methodologies as valid and valuable for the educational process of all children;
- Contribute to addressing the ongoing crisis in the provision of quality education for Indigenous children;
- Promote self-determination and human rights for Indigenous peoples in education.

To reflect the multiple perspectives with which Indigenous pedagogy resonates, this paper is shaped by an educational dialogue between student and teacher, between scholars and between learners. It is testament to both the importance of the acknowledgment of the learner’s subjectivity and the inherent quality of a reciprocal learning process guided by a common vision. We want to contextualise, relate and extrapolate to provide an overview of what one localised instance of Indigenous pedagogy in Australia might look like. After laying out the historical, political, and intellectual context of our conversation, we reflect on our practice as teachers and learners, and what this experience means for theorising Indigenous pedagogy. We will explore the methods as well as the underlying methodology of teaching practice and bring this reflected practice into a theoretical relationship with international indigenous experiences and other ideas about transformative education. In conclusion, we will look deeper at the potential benefits and challenges of trying to articulate a theoretical underpinning for the practice of such a transformative Indigenous pedagogy.

## Context

Before we begin our exploration of reflected practice, we need to delineate the context in which it takes place. The three dimensions within which this discussion is placed are as follows:

- Temporally, it is situated in the recent past, although it also draws on the life histories of the authors.
- Spatially, it is located within an Indigenous Australian college, within a regional university, and within the tertiary education sector in Australia.
- Thematically, it lies at the intersection of two discourses – that of transformative pedagogy and that of Indigenous education.

## Time frame

The authors’ reflections on Indigenous pedagogy at Gnibi encapsulate a period of approximately nine years and five years respectively, while the supporting student responses were chosen from this current year’s cohort. However, the Indigenous values and philosophies that underpin and are interwoven with Indigenous pedagogy cannot be defined in such narrow Western understandings of time.

## Location

Southern Cross University is a regional university situated in the heart of Bundjalung country on the far north coast of NSW. Gnibi, College of Indigenous Australian Peoples, was created as a new structure within Southern Cross University in January 1997. The College had evolved from the functions of a successful and longstanding Indigenous student support program established in 1989. Gnibi is committed to delivering culturally safe, dynamic and innovative Indigenous studies courses for all people, with the aim of facilitating and supporting students to experience a teaching and learning process that is founded on Indigenous knowledges, experiences and process under principles of social justice, cultural integrity, and inclusion. As well as preparatory foundation studies and postgraduate degrees by research, Gnibi offers three courses:

- Master of Indigenous Studies (Wellbeing)
- Bachelor of Indigenous Studies (Trauma and Healing)
- Bachelor of Indigenous Studies

The course in focus in this study, the Bachelor of Indigenous Studies, explores the interface of Indigenous knowledges and the academy. The course investigates “the complexity of knowledge intersections” (Nakata, 2004); challenging the continuing history of



the circumscription of Indigenous knowledges by the non-Indigenous disciplines across the academy. The course focus (Gnibi College of Indigenous Australian Peoples, 2004) is for students to develop:

- An appreciation of the diversity of Indigenous Australian peoples' philosophies, values, histories, experiences, viewpoints, literature and politics;
- An accurate understanding of Australian colonial history from the perspective of and in relation to Indigenous Australians;
- An awareness of the complex and ongoing manifestation of racism in Australian society, particularly in relation to pedagogic paradigms and practices;
- An awareness of current Indigenous issues related to social justice and human rights including Intellectual and Cultural Property Rights;
- An appreciation of the development of Indigenous cultural, economic and educational policies and practices.

## ■ Discourses

### *Pedagogy*

When considering a discourse on transformative pedagogy, it is useful to remember that the etymological roots of the English words pedagogy and pedagogue go back to the ancient Greeks. There, the paidagogos was the slave who escorted the sons of the upper classes to their various private teachers and generally supervised them (Onions, 1966; Partridge, 1966). Our contemporary conception of pedagogy, on the other hand, is expressed in most dictionaries as "the art of ... teaching" (Delbridge & Bernard, 1998, p. 848) or "the science of teaching" (Moore, 2003, p. 1036), reflecting a significant shift in understanding.

The underpinning principles of mainstream pedagogy appear to be normalised and hidden, and have become visible only by critique. Establishing education as one of the important means by which those in power perpetuate the injustices of the status quo, Freire (1996, p. 7) identified "the [dominant] 'banking' concept of education as an instrument of oppression", whereby students are made to conform through discipline, rote memorisation and repetitive tasks controlled by the teacher (see Freire, 1996, pp. 52-67). Other metaphors, employed to describe mainstream pedagogy, are those of the classroom as a factory managed by behavioural psychology, standardisation and emphasis on content, and as an incarnation of Bentham's *panopticon*, where constant surveillance results in self-disciplining behaviour (Lambe, 2003).

While alternative pedagogies have been developed in Western countries since at least the turn of the

19th century, there has been a strong growth of transformative pedagogical approaches in competition with and opposition to mainstream education since the 1960s. Some of these, like critical or anti-colonial pedagogy, are based on the Freirean model of understanding a "problem-posing concept of education as an instrument of liberation" (Freire, 1996, p. 7; also see Bassey, 1999; Giroux, 1997; Kincheloe, 2005; Luke & Gore, 1992; Shor & Freire, 1987). In a similar vein, transformative adult education, or androgogy, is based on self-directed learning, reflected practice and a conscious, internally transformative process (Elias & Merriam, 2005; Usher et al., 1996). The field of environmental pedagogy, on the other hand, attaches value to localised and traditional knowledge, immersion in nature and identification with place and community (McRae, 1990; Smith & Williams, 1999). It has been characterised as operating within a framework of relationality, reciprocity and integrated, purpose-driven projects that include methods such as peer mentoring, experiential and community-based education projects (Sobel, 2004).

In Australia, we find that the concept of pedagogy as the art, as opposed to the science, of teaching is intellectually neglected and heavily under-theorised, perhaps even un-theorised, especially when compared to discussions about curriculum, school structure or funding. Rather, we tend to restrict ourselves to responding to behaviourist, cognitivist and constructivist theories of learning based on research in the discipline of psychology, rather than education. In pursuing ideals in an instructional framework of procedures, tools and strategies, we miss the point that pedagogy is both the art and the science of teaching.

### *Indigenous education*

The discourse on Indigenous education in Australia has been framed almost exclusively in terms of mainstream education for Indigenous students, with the corollary of teaching all students something about Indigenous cultures. Despite good intent, this is ultimately an objectifying deficit-view that sees Indigenous students as an educational problem or issue that requires remedying or addressing.

In the past 30 years, however, there have also been some attempts at articulating an Aboriginal pedagogy, most notably by the Deakin-Bachelor Teacher Education (D-BATE) Program (Wei et al., 1991), by the Curriculum Development Centre of the Department of Education, Employment and Training (Hughes et al., 2004), and by Indigenous academic Paul Hughes (Hughes et al., 2004). These attempts, however, were based on the premise of responding to perceived particular Indigenous learning styles (see Christie, 1985; Harris, 1984, 2004; Harris & Malin, 1994) and thus, as such, not much concerned with pedagogical approaches to education based on Indigenous



philosophies and methodologies. As opposed to transformative approaches, they were rooted in needs-based or problem-based initiatives focused on Indigenous children.

It thus appears in Australia today that the intersections of a set of discourses, on transformative pedagogy and Indigenous education, has the potential to start a conversation about transformative Indigenous pedagogy. Yet where does one start in bringing the two together? We take our clue from Paulo Freire and Hannah Arendt and undertake the following tentative exploration in the form of a dialogue on reflected practice. These scholars discussed, as did many others, that reflections of our practice, while important in themselves, take on a different dimension when brought into a theoretical relation with other ideas. We want to embrace Arendt's call to "think what we are doing" (Arendt, 1998, p. 1) and bring about the conscientisation Freire insisted was necessary for change (Shor & Freire, 1987). In this spirit, we wish to commence our conversation by building a relationship with each other, the reader and the topic through relating our background and motivation that led us to where we are.

## ■ Reflections

### *Backgrounds*

**Lecturer:** My heritage is Biripi, Worimi and Irish. I am an Indigenous Australian woman, who was, like many other Indigenous Australian people, raised in a non-Indigenous family. Being fair-skinned I was raised as a non-Indigenous (or "normal") person without acknowledgement of my Indigenous identity. When I was 17, I found my way home to my Koori family and began my cultural learning journey. Soon after, I engaged in an academic learning journey in Indigenous Studies at university. Whilst both these learning journeys will not conclude till the day I die, I've been lecturing at Gnibi since 1999 and am currently Course Coordinator of the Bachelor of Indigenous Studies.

**Student:** I am a saltwater person from northern Germany and grew up in an "alternative" Western culture, where I learnt to relate to and respect the land I lived on. I worked in environmental education before immigrating to Australia in 2001, when I was 20. A few years prior, I had experienced a culture shock as a high school exchange student in Australia, where my interest in getting to know Indigenous people and learning through interaction collided with the realities of segregated life and social injustice in a deeply racist country town. Being a recent immigrant to this country, I feel a desire and

obligation to learn more about the peoples whose lands I had moved onto. I come with a sincere interest in learning from Indigenous peoples, cultures and philosophies. Because of my background, this might perhaps be a bit easier than for colonial descendants, many of whom carry a guilt that paralyzes them.

### *Motivations*

**Lecturer:** Reflecting on what has informed and influenced my pedagogy, it became important to me to articulate why I engage in the academy, what drives me to negotiate the "interface" (Nakata, 1997) of Indigenous and dominant knowledges.

Initially my drive was fuelled by outrage at the historical and currently maintained depth of racism, ignorance and power imbalance in Australia. I was truly shocked when I first came to understand the full and unabridged history of the colonial project in Australia and gained insights into the mammoth effort that has historically gone into maintaining this ignorance, and therefore colonial dominance, in the general population. I harboured for a long time deep anger and bitter resentment bathed in a blanket of grief and perceived cultural loss. Learning about my mother's, grandmother's and great grandmother's lives broke my heart. I watched the trans-generational effects of their experiences on my family and community every day: alcohol and drug abuse and dependency; social and emotional difficulties – which some people call "mental illness" and what I like to call "perfectly normal responses to traumatic experiences" (Atkinson, personal communication, 2003). My drive was that addressing ignorance and dominance in Australia was vital to Indigenous community interests and in the interests of the Australian national community.

To some extent this "beast of outrage" is still with me, though it is tempered by Indigenous philosophies, values and process in education as I have come to understand, interpret and engage them. This tempering has "lifted the blanket" (Atkinson, personal communication, 2003) of perceived identity and cultural loss to be replaced by a buoyant carpet of acknowledgment and celebration of identity and perceived cultural potential. I strongly believe that engaging the interface to which Nakata refers in proactive and positive ways in mainstream education is critical in the fight against racism and dominance, the fight for social justice (a very broad term that includes self-determination), and critical to Indigenous Australian well-being and community interests.



**Student:** Before I begin to reflect on my pedagogical experience at Gnibi, I would like to say what I consider to be “good pedagogy”. This understanding is shaped by my experience as a student in various formal (Steiner school, mainstream primary school, integrated high school in Germany, state high school and university in Australia) and informal settings, as well as my experience working as an environmental pedagogue in a German national park. Good pedagogy is not just about relating content, but about values and purpose in an engaging, egalitarian and liberating process. To me, it is much more about the art, than the science of teaching. The science has to constantly change to keep up with the circumstances of the learning experience and offer diverse strategies for diverse contexts but the art of teaching, the values and purposes that the pedagogy seeks to convey, need to be embodied – they are solid, they are “business”.

#### *Methods – The science of teaching*

**Lecturer:** Engaging a pedagogical practice embedded in Indigenous philosophy within the confines of the university structure is, whilst challenging, achievable. Self analysis and reflection in classroom activity, discussion and assessment encourages students acknowledgement of their own identity and world-views and awareness of their relatedness. Overall, the pedagogical space is important – a space that is “culturally safe” (Bin-Sallik, 2003), respectful and conducive to shared learning. Being outside the classroom and using the concept of a talking circle to physically emphasise non-hierarchical structures and holding every participant to account to both speak and listen is indicative of this approach.

Quite a few of the units and courses are held in blocks of time, allowing for deeper, more meaningful and longer interaction between all learners. Field trips allow for interaction with community on the land. Many of the assessments are group-based, either in their preparation or in their presentation. On the other hand, there is a clear understanding of the personal responsibility a learner must take for their work. Many assessments emphasise reflectiveness – personal journals, artwork or active participation in class discussions are used to reflect on the whole learning experience of content, process and purpose.

**Student:** If learning is self-directed and the teacher not the repository of all knowledge, what, then, is the role of the teacher? In the pedagogical context I experienced at Gnibi, it is the twofold role of ice-

breaker/confronter and guide/mentor. Because of the enculturation in Western systems of education, a class needs to be brought back to a common starting point, so the first part of any subject usually consists of active unlearning, of collapsing the barriers that have been erected in the way of true, liberating education. Presenting previously marginalised historical accounts, legal insights and social commentary, the teacher creates the space needed for productive learning to take place. Once this is achieved, students’ desire to know usually takes them wherever they want to go and the teacher takes a position of providing stimuli and facilitating pointed reflection, liberating conversation and individual conceptualisation.

#### *Methodology – The art of teaching*

**Lecturer:** My personal life circumstances, (being raised and educated as a “normal” Australian and then coming back to my heritage and identity through cultural education), have provided me the opportunity to critically reflect and comparatively analyse the pedagogy of State education against the pedagogy of my cultural education.

My pedagogical practices are most powerfully influenced by the formal and informal cultural learning that I have experienced through family/community cultural mentors, including Indigenous academics, that has informed my appreciation of Indigenous philosophies and values. This pedagogy could be described as being founded on the broad principals of identity and relatedness, couched in the contextual values of reciprocity, inclusiveness, nurturance and respect:

- Identity – learning about oneself as primary to the life-long learning process;
- Relatedness – belonging – an enlarging of identity through relatedness to people, place, space, flora, fauna, creation, time (history, present and future) – emotional/passionate;
- Inclusiveness – acknowledgement, attention and consideration of unique identities, experiences and perspectives;
- Reciprocity – as a process of relatedness – rights and responsibilities; equal exchange; balance in relatedness;
- Nurturance – caring, generosity (sharing experience and knowing), patience, forgiveness;
- Respect (acceptance, acknowledgment).

**Student:** Overall, I found the pedagogy explicitly Indigenous, that is based on and proclaimed in relation to Indigenous values, processes and philosophies. Non-hierarchical structures based on relationships are an important factor in the



pedagogy at work at Gnibi. The creation of communities of learners is a reality that takes peer mentoring and group efforts seriously, encouraging individual responsibility and collective success reminiscent of my own practice of environmental pedagogy.

Reflected practice seems to be the most appropriate term to explain Indigenous pedagogy as I perceive it working at Gnibi. This is not a naturalised assumption of a practice inherent in all Indigenous people, but a cultural artefact that is amplified, thought about and implemented by engagement with Indigenous philosophies, values and theoretical and socio-political contexts. It is perhaps an overstatement to say that a form of Indigenous pedagogy is consciously practised at Gnibi but nevertheless, the Freirean nexus between conscientisation and educational practice for social change is certainly present and pertinent (Shor and Freire, 1987). The impetus in Gnibi's teaching methodologies is expressed through a commitment to both liberating education for all, in the sense that it presents a normally hidden account of Australian history and cultural, social and political presence, and the accompanying need to work for change to address these injustices. In other words, the axiological component of teaching and learning at Gnibi focuses on the responsibility that comes with acquiring that knowledge and education.

The teaching methodology itself is based on reflected and applied Indigenous theories and values that emphasise relatedness, reciprocal responsibility and caring for the land and sea. Importantly, this is not restricted to the content of teaching, but infused in the process of it. An appreciation of and concern for the whole person, not just the academic mind, is an active component of a teaching process that sits within the confines of academia while at the same time subverting it. Gnibi's pedagogical approach recognises the importance of learning about the self before learning about others, all in the context of a web of relations. This signifies an approach rooted in reflection, individual judgment and personal interest – not everybody is interested in all knowledge but pursues what s/he feels connected to.

## ■ Responses

Student feedback suggests that this pedagogy is not only effective but a new and welcome change to the pedagogy previously experienced by both non-Indigenous and Indigenous students. The following quotes are responses to the first year, first semester Bachelor of Indigenous Studies core unit, Indigenous World Views:

**Non-Indigenous Student:** The unit has open my eyes and given me a whole new understanding of indigenous cultures and has challenged me to think outside the stereotype image of Aboriginal people ... I have learnt so much about myself ... This subject has ... transformed my thinking. My learning through this unit has been based in deeper knowledges, of not just Indigenous cultures, but of my self and my culture also. By acknowledging Indigenous groups as diverse, culturally legitimate peoples with complete and complex education, knowledge and learning systems, I became aware of myself. This was interesting because I became visible as a subject and not invisible as the naturalised dominant white Australian ... I think that being visible to myself as a citizen of one way of being in the world, opened up my appreciation and the potential for gauging multiple world views ... It is important for me to express that I have changed; I can feel that I have changed. Thank you for opening up my eyes, heart and mind to this potential. Never in my life have I been introduced to the seeds of deeper, higher learning that is practical, spiritual and political all at once (Little, 2007).

**Indigenous Student:** As I reflect on what has been an absorbing unit, I cannot help but acknowledge the important role this unit has played in establishing a personal sense of cultural safety, affirming my identity and thus through the proliferation and promotion of my personal perspectives I have been able to greatly articulate my own worldview and subsequent identity. For most of my life leading into this unit, there has been a definite difficulty on behalf of the dominant Australian social paradigm ... in accepting my multidimensional Indigenous life and the range of Indigenous lifestyles across a modern spectrum and subsequently, I have found it complicated to truly articulate my place within this contemporary climate. But now, as result of this unit's work, specifically as it relates to the way in which knowledge is constructed in relation to Indigenous Australians, I feel I am equipped to enter into such contemporary discourse. Hence, I believe this coursework has enabled me the ability to appreciate the construction of knowledge, as a relational concept, in order to mark my space, within Australia's discursive practice. But surprisingly, in accepting the principles of cultural safety as they pertain to my sense of identity and wellbeing, I have invariably begun to understand the importance of sharing one's worldview as a valid remedial experience (Creighton, 2007).



## ■ Conclusion

What becomes apparent from the reflections and responses, then, is an emerging methodological concept of Indigenous pedagogy with some key underpinning values and an array of tools to translate them into practice. While we use the singular, it is but one instance in a culturally diverse continent of distinct Indigenous nations and communities.

The idea of Indigenous pedagogy as one based on Indigenous values, philosophies and methodologies, even if not widely discussed in Australia, is certainly not new. In North America, for example, it has to various degrees been articulated, discussed and consciously implemented (e.g., Hickling-Hudson & Ahlquist, 2003; Lambe, 2003; McKay, 1996; McNally, 2004). While Lambe (2003) discusses the challenges of incorporating Indigenous pedagogy into Native Study courses in a university setting, McNally (2004) provides one solution by going outside of the classroom when integrating Ojibwe pedagogy into a Western college. While Battiste (2002, p. 21) may warn that “[n]one of the provincial initiatives taken so far have integrated the expertise of the Aboriginal peoples in ways that are truly transformational”, she nevertheless identifies this integrative negotiation as the pedagogical challenge facing Canada.

Is an articulation of Indigenous pedagogy equally important in the Australian context? Yes, for two reasons – (re)claiming Indigenous knowledges and decolonising the teaching process. Regarding the former, we believe that as long as Indigenous researchers speak of cultures, ways of learning or worldviews, there is an inherent unspoken assumption by academia that these concepts are less rigorous, complex or accessible than Western ones. Battiste (2002, p. 16) put it succinctly:

Postmodernist scholars have noted that culture is often viewed as what the inferior “other” has. While some peoples have civilizations, philosophies, romance languages, or cultured societies; other peoples have cultures, dialects, worldviews, and tribal knowledge. Peoples with “civilizations” are regarded as inherently superior to peoples with “cultures”.

Reflecting on comparative approaches to philosophy, West (1998) noted in a similar vein that:

Western epistemology differs from Indigenous epistemology in that we Koori peoples already know the origin, nature, methods and limits of our knowledge systems, what we unlike Westerners seem to lack is the capacity to flaunt that knowledge as a badge of our intellect and cultural integrity, in a very public sense.

The articulation and theorisation of Indigenous pedagogy, however, is more than just an exercise in flaunting a badge – it is the naming and claiming of a transformative process with significant “remedial potential” for all learners (Woods, personal communication, 2003). In North America, it has been argued (McKay, 1996) that the current educational climate, with the introduction of alternative “Western” concepts like “peer mentoring, apprenticeships, experiential learning and holistic development”, prepares the ground for Indigenous pedagogy to be widely introduced into the school system. McNally (2004, p. 610) holds that engaging Indigenous pedagogy means unlearning racism, going outside of the academy and transforming white middle-class intellectual curiosity and spiritual hunger into “a politicized fire in the belly”. It is therefore part of a wider analysis of Indigenous contributions to ecological and educational understanding (Kawagley & Barnhardt, 1999).

In Australia, too, there are voices such as Ungunmerr’s (cited in Atkinson, 2004, p. 5) that speak of the knowledge and resources Indigenous peoples hold which are vital for the wellbeing and healing of the whole country. It was Nakata (2004, p. 9), after all, who said that:

To defend Indigenous peoples, Indigenous students require understanding of the concepts and methodologies of both systems of knowledge. That is, one can’t do battle with Western systems of thought without understanding it, likewise, its inconsistencies cannot be turned around and an Indigenous perspective substituted without rigorous understanding of Indigenous concepts.

Is this not equally true for non-Indigenous students? By engaging both the oppressed and the oppressor through a transformative pedagogical process, decolonisation and a paradigm shift in thinking and values can become a reality in this country. If we can agree that there is substance to the concept of Indigenous pedagogy and that there is a need for its further articulation and consideration, then how do we proceed and utilise the concept to make a difference for Indigenous and other marginalised children?

First of all, what we discussed is but one instance of practice. There are probably dozens or hundreds of these around Australia, and not just at universities. We can begin a conversation about our pedagogical practice, its particular characteristics and its relationship to Indigenous philosophies, and discuss the theoretical considerations and implications of such practice. Having the comparative privilege of resources and freedom makes the university the best place to begin, however it is our responsibility to look beyond the tertiary sector, initiate meaningful changes and negotiate partnerships in the wider educational context.



Individual negotiations like those described by Greville (2000) are an important first step in bringing about larger agreements that could cover all educational aspects of an Indigenous nation's or community's life. For example, an instrument like the Indigenous Land Use Agreements (ILUAs) could be modified to provide the basis for a local education treaty between an Indigenous community and all three levels of government ("the State"), covering areas such as jurisdiction, resourcing and cooperation with other entities.

If this sounds farfetched, it is perhaps instructive, notwithstanding the substantially different legal and political circumstances, to refer to a Canadian example as a possible way forward. The recently completed Mi'kmaw Kina'matnewey Agreement in Nova Scotia provides for Indigenous peoples to assume jurisdiction for their education, and to research and implement new structures, models and methodologies (Battiste, 2002). The Alaskan Native Knowledge Network in the US, which developed the "Alaskan standards for culturally responsive schools", is another example of a negotiated way forward (Battiste, 2002, p. 23).

Keeping an eye on what has already been achieved elsewhere, but being aware of our own particular circumstances, we can thus begin to have a discussion on Indigenous pedagogy in Australia, its localised methodologies, its integrative principles and its potential applications in a variety of settings. In all of this, however, we should never lose sight of the fact that it is more than a theoretical abstraction – it has a powerful transformative potential to change teaching and learning for all.

## References

- Arendt, H. (1998). *The human condition* (2nd ed.). Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press.
- Atkinson, J. (2004). *Trauma and trauma recovery handbook: Master of Indigenous Studies* (Wellbeing). Lismore, QLD: Southern Cross University.
- Bassey, M. O. (1999). *Western education and political domination in Africa: A study in critical and dialogical pedagogy*. Westport, CT: Bergin & Garvey.
- Battiste, M. (2002). *Indigenous knowledge and pedagogy in First Nations education: A literature review with recommendations*. Retrieved 26 June, 2007, from [www.ainc-inac.gc.ca/pr/pub/kw/ikp\\_e.pdf](http://www.ainc-inac.gc.ca/pr/pub/kw/ikp_e.pdf).
- Bin-Sallik, M. (2003). Cultural safety: Let's name it! *Australian Journal of Indigenous Education*, 32(1), 21-28.
- Christie, M. J. (1985). *Aboriginal perspectives on experience and learning: The role of language in Aboriginal education*. Waurin Ponds, VIC: Deakin University Press.
- Creighton, J. (2007). *Indigenous world views: Summary* (Unpublished assessment item). Lismore, NSW: Southern Cross University.
- Delbridge, A., & Bernard, J. R. L. (Eds.). (1998). *The Macquarie concise dictionary* (3rd ed.). North Ryde, NSW: Macquarie Library.
- Elias, J. L., & Merriam, S. B. (2005). *Philosophical foundations of adult education* (3rd ed.). Malabar, FL: Krieger Publishing.
- Freire, P. (1996). *Pedagogy of the oppressed* (Rev. ed, trans. M. Bergman Ramos). London: Penguin Books.
- Giroux, H. A. (1997). *Pedagogy and the politics of hope: Theory, culture and schooling*. Boulder, CO: Westview Press.
- Gnibi, College of Indigenous Australian Peoples. (2004). *Course review submission: Report submitted to Southern Cross University Academic Board*. Lismore, NSW: Southern Cross University.
- Greville, H. (2000). *Walking the fine line: Transforming literacies for social change*. Perth, WA: Gunada Press.
- Harris, S. (1984). *Culture and learning: Tradition and education in north-eastern Arnhem Land*. Canberra, ACT: Australian Institute of Aboriginal Studies.
- Harris, S., & Malin, M. (Eds.). (1994). *Aboriginal kids in urban classrooms*. Wentworth Falls, NSW: Social Science Press.
- Harrison, N. (2004). *Indigenous education and the adventure of insight: Learning and teaching in Indigenous classrooms*. Flaxton, QLD: Post Pressed.
- Hickling-Hudson, A., & Ahlquist, R. (2003). Contesting the curriculum in the schooling of indigenous children in Australia and the United States: From eurocentrism to culturally powerful pedagogies. *Comparative Education Review*, 47(1), 64-90.
- Hughes, P., More, A. J., & Williams, M. (2004). *Aboriginal ways of learning*. Adelaide, SA: Paul Hughes.
- Kawagley, O., & Barnhardt, R. (1999). Education Indigenous to place: Western science meets native reality. In G. A. Smith & D. R. Williams (Eds.), *Ecological education in action: On weaving education, culture and the environment* (pp. 117-140). Albany, NY: State University of New York Press.
- Kincheloe, J. L. (2005). *Critical pedagogy primer*. New York, NY: Peter Lang.
- Lambe, J. (2003). Indigenous education, mainstream education and native studies: Some considerations when incorporating Indigenous pedagogy into native studies. *American Indian Quarterly*, 27(1/2), 308-324.
- Little, T. (2007). *Indigenous world views: Summary* (Unpublished assessment item). Lismore, NSW: Southern Cross University.
- Luke, C., & Gore, J. (Eds.). (1992). *Feminisms and critical pedagogy*. New York, NY: Routledge.
- McKay, M. R. (1996). *Indigenous pedagogy: Can this concept be successfully implemented in the current curriculum?* Retrieved 5 September, 2005, from <http://uregina.ca/~mckaymm/ip.html>.
- McNally, M. D. (2004). Indigenous pedagogy in the classroom: A service model learning for discussion. *American Indian Quarterly*, 28(3/4), 604-617.
- McRae, K. (Ed.). (1990). *Outdoor and environmental education: Diverse purposes and practices*. South Melbourne, VIC: Macmillan.
- Moore, B. (Ed.). (2003). *The Australian concise Oxford dictionary* (4th ed.). South Melbourne, VIC: Oxford University Press.
- Nakata, M. (1997). *The cultural interface: An exploration of the intersection of Western knowledge systems and Torres Strait Islanders positions and experiences*. Unpublished PhD thesis, James Cook University, Townsville.
- Nakata, M. (2004). *Indigenous Australian studies and higher education: 2004 Biennial AIATSIS Wentworth Lecture*. Canberra, ACT: Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies. Retrieved 24 June, 2007, from [http://www1.aiatsis.gov.au/exhibitions/wentworth/a352185\\_a.pdf](http://www1.aiatsis.gov.au/exhibitions/wentworth/a352185_a.pdf).



- Onions, C. T. (Ed.). (1966). *The Oxford dictionary of English etymology*. Oxford: Clarendon Press.
- Partridge, E. (1966). *Origins: A short etymological dictionary of modern English* (4th ed.). London: Routledge & Kegan Paul.
- Shor, I., & Freire, P. (1987). *A pedagogy for liberation: Dialogues on transforming education*. South Hadley, MA: Bergin & Garvey.
- Smith, G. A., & Williams, D. R. (Eds.). (1999). *Ecological education in action: On weaving education, culture and the environment*. Albany, NY: State University of New York Press.
- Sobel, D. (2004). *Place-based education: Connecting classrooms and communities*. Great Barrington, MA: The Orion Society.
- Usher, R., Bryant, I., & Johnston, R. (1996). *Adult education and the postmodern challenge: Learning beyond the limits*. London: Routledge.
- Wei, B., Nayin, D., Rom, Y., Nginingawula, N., & Ngawurranungurumagi. (Eds.). (1991). *Aboriginal pedagogy: Aboriginal teachers speak out*. Geelong, VIC: Deakin University Press.
- West, E. (1998, April). *Speaking towards an Aboriginal philosophy*. Paper presented at First Conference on Indigenous Philosophy, 'Linga Longa' Philosophy Farm, New South Wales, Australia.

#### About the authors

Soenke Biermann comes from northern Germany, where he worked as an environmental educator prior to moving to Australia. He completed a Bachelor of Indigenous Studies at Southern Cross University, and is currently undertaking an Honours degree in the field of transformative pedagogy and Indigenous Studies in Gnibi, College of Indigenous Australian Peoples, and the School of Arts and Social Sciences, Southern Cross University. He is also the Project Coordinator in the Centre for Peace and Social Justice for a higher education equity project on the theme of 'Beyond Tolerance'.

Marcelle Townsend-Cross is a Biripi, Worimi, and Irish woman. She holds a Bachelor of Arts (Contemporary Music) degree and has been lecturing in Indigenous Studies since 1999 at Gnibi College of Indigenous Australian Peoples, Southern Cross University. Her research and professional activity focuses on defining and engaging Indigenous Australian philosophies in relation to teaching, learning and practice in past, present and future contexts. She is dedicated to engaging Indigenous Australian values in mainstream Australian social and education policy and practice.