

Indigenous education at university: Stepping into and navigating the classroom

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This article provides a critical insight into some of the key challenges that are found in Indigenous education at university. It achieves this through sharing the storied experiences of non-Indigenous pre-service teachers, academics and myself. Overall, the study found, through storytelling methodology, a total of 11 key challenges across interrelated areas of the university. These areas included the university classroom and the broader institution, as well as education policy, specifically the Australian Professional Standards for Teachers (APST) 1.4 and 2.4 by the Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership (AITSL). This paper will provide an in-depth insight into three key classroom challenges (1, 2 and 4). It will not address key institutional or policy challenges. Ultimately, this paper will argue that some schools in Queensland need to place a greater value on the inclusion of Indigenous knowledges and perspectives. A practical recommendation is also offered in this article to further strengthen Indigenous education at university.

Keywords: Indigenous education, APST 1.4, APST 2.4, AITSL, pre-service teachers

Introduction

Indigenous¹ education at university is filled with many learning and teaching opportunities. However, it is also fraught with complex and colonising challenges for both academic teaching teams and pre-service teachers. A 2022 national report by Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership (AITSL)² stated that initial teacher education (ITE)³ should play an important role in developing the cultural competency levels of pre-service teachers in Indigenous education. The report, titled *Building a Culturally Responsive Australian Teaching Workforce: Final Report for Indigenous Cultural Competency Project*, recommended that “Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander content should be included as a mandatory unit of study or indeed, mandatory cross-curricula focus, within ITE programs” (AITSL, 2022, p. 6). These national calls to raise the cultural competency levels of teachers in Australia are needed. However, it is important to understand the challenges associated with Indigenous education courses in these university programs prior to putting forward ITE programs as one of the solutions to improving the cultural competency of teachers.

¹ I acknowledge the diverse identities of Indigenous peoples. I use the term “Indigenous” to respectfully include Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples as the “First Peoples of Australian lands” (Phillips, 2011, p. xiv).

² The Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership provides national leadership for the Australian states and territories in promoting excellence in the profession of teaching and school leadership (AITSL, 2011).

³ Initial teacher education programs are provided by higher education institutions for pre-service teachers.

Positioning myself

This section draws upon the concept of relationality (Martin, 2008; Moreton-Robinson, 2013, 2017) as a way to position myself appropriately as a researcher in this article as well as share my connection (Moreton-Robinson, 2013) with Indigenous education. Yura, (Hello), I am a Quandamooka (Nunukul/Ngugi) man of the Moreton Bay region of South East Queensland, currently living on Jagera and Turrbal lands in Meanjin (Brisbane). I am descended from and belong to the Junobin/Gonzales family group through the Managai (Māori, Cook Islands) and Day families. Members of my family group lived on the Myora Mission on Minjerribah (North Stradbroke Island). For over a decade, I have been involved in Indigenous education. More recently, I have worked as a sessional academic in compulsory Indigenous education courses across Queensland. My navigation of the academy does not sit separately to or outside of my ancestry and family. This identity plays a role in my worldview and standpoint on both historical and contemporary educational matters.

The study: History matters and setting the Indigenous education scene at university

The historical exclusion of Indigenous peoples, knowledges and perspectives in the Australian education system, including the university sector, is well documented (AITSL, 2022; Barney, 2014; Bodkin-Andrews & Carlson, 2016; Bunda, 2018; Nakata, 2002). This exclusion has resulted in a myriad of challenges for academics now working in Indigenous education. The literature regarding the challenges in this space has mainly focused on students entering Indigenous courses with limited prior knowledge; student acts of resistance towards the compulsory nature of the course; student hesitation for “fear of offending” in classrooms; and students struggling to accept and learn concepts of white privilege, race and racism (Aveling, 2006; Bullen & Flavell, 2017; McDowall, 2018; Mooney et al., 2003; Phillips, 2011; Rosas-Blanch, 2016; Riley et al., 2019). When considering these issues from a historical and socio-cultural context, universities cannot be surprised if teaching teams report learning and teaching challenges given the disjointed inclusion of Indigenous epistemologies and knowledges in education after centuries of domination and control by the West (Nakata, 2002).

In 2011, AITSL introduced the APST Graduate Standards 1.4 and 2.4. These national standards focus on teaching Indigenous students (1.4) and teacher skills and knowledge around reconciliation in schools (2.4) (AITSL, 2011). The Graduate Standards by AITSL inform the accreditation of ITE programs at university and, upon successful completion of an Education degree, graduates will “have met the Graduate Standards” (AITSL, 2011, p. 6), including Graduate Standards 1.4 and 2.4. Today, the overwhelming majority of universities now include at least one compulsory Indigenous education course as part of their ITE program.

My PhD research, grounded in the policy context of Graduate Standards 1.4 and 2.4, focused on the key pre-service teacher and academic challenges situated in the Indigenous education environment at university. It involved 174 non-Indigenous⁴ students from an elite Queensland university who were studying a compulsory Indigenous education course. It also involved five academic teaching staff members from the same Indigenous course, as well as myself who has taught in three compulsory Indigenous education courses across two Queensland universities. The 174 pre-service teachers and five academic staff members were from The University of Queensland (UQ) and were involved in the compulsory UQ course EDUC2090: Indigenous Knowledge & Education (EDUC2090). I also worked in

⁴ The term “non-Indigenous” is used in this article to refer to those peoples who have arrived to “Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander territories, whether their arrival occurred over 200 years ago or more recently” (Phillips, 2011, p. xiv).

this course in my capacity as a sessional academic. EDUC2090, as the only Indigenous course offered to students during their ITE at UQ, is also connected to and designed for students to meet Graduate Standards 1.4 and 2.4. In this course, students are introduced to a broad landscape of Indigenous education, including colonisation, the impacts of historical policies, Indigenous and non-Indigenous ways of knowing in relation to education and appropriate pedagogies. Theories and concepts explored in the course were related to identity, race, relationality, critical race theory, cultural interface theory, white privilege and tokenism.

The main research questions that were used to guide this study were:

- What are some of the key challenges that academics perceive they experience in relation to preparing pre-service teachers to meet Graduate Standards 1.4 and 2.4?
- What are some of the key challenges that I experience in relation to preparing pre-service teachers to meet Graduate Standards 1.4 and 2.4? and
- What are some of the key challenges that pre-service teachers perceive they experience in relation to meeting Graduate Standards 1.4 and 2.4?

In total, this study identified 11 key challenges across three interrelated areas of the university (including the classroom, institution and education policy). This article will predominantly focus on the third main research question and provide an in-depth insight into three key classroom challenges (1, 2 and 4).

Standpoint: Thinking with the cultural interface, Indigenous standpoint theory and decoloniality

Standpoint is strongly linked to our work (Bunda, 2018; Phillips & Archer-Lean, 2019) as Indigenous researchers. Standpoint is not an opinion on matters, instead it is a well-developed theoretical position that takes into account one's lived experience to further important political, social, cultural and/or educational agendas (Nakata, 2007a). My standpoint for analytical purposes in this study was underpinned by the intersection of my positionality as a Quandamooka researcher, together with established theoretical frameworks including Nakata's (2007a) cultural interface theory and Indigenous standpoint theory (IST) as well as decoloniality (Kilomba, 2010; Maldonado-Torres, 2007; Mignolo, 2007a, 2007b, 2011, 2017).

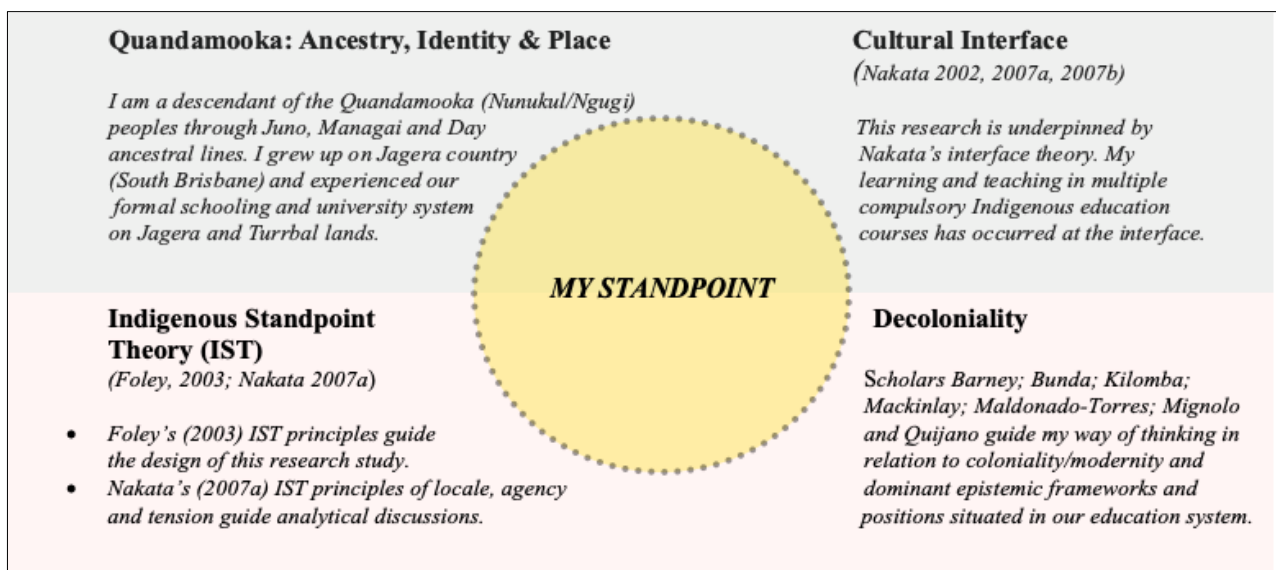
Nakata's (2007a) theory of the cultural interface provided the foundation for this study. Understanding the Australian university as a type of cultural interface, as it involves the "intersection of ... Western and Indigenous domains" (Nakata, 2002, p. 285), is important for both researcher and data analysis purposes. This theory informs the work that Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples do in Indigenous education on a daily basis. Nakata (2007a) states that the interface is "a space of many shifting and complex intersections between different people with different histories, experiences, languages, agendas, aspirations and responses ... it is also a space that abounds with contradictions, ambiguities, conflict and contestation" (p. 199).

The three principles of Nakata's IST also guided the analytical stages of this research. The first principle, referred to by Nakata (2007a) as *locale*, refers to the location of Indigenous peoples' lived experiences at the interface. In research contexts, Nakata (2007a) suggests that identifying and understanding locale is the initial commencement point for further inquiry into Indigenous matters. Following this, the second

principle *agency* predominately refers to Indigenous agency at the interface. Within this principle, researchers should understand how they are being positioned by others at the cultural interface regarding Indigenous knowledge production and to defend their position on matters if needed (Nakata, 2007a). The third principle is *tension*. This refers to the “tug of war” of knowledge (Nakata, 2007a, p. 216) experienced by Indigenous peoples at the interface. Overall, IST is a useful tool for researchers to understand matters at the cultural interface from a critical standpoint (Nakata, 2007a).

The final theoretical framework that assisted in the interpretation and analysis of the identified key challenges in Indigenous education was decoloniality. Decoloniality (or decolonial theory) has its origins as a “counterpoint” (Mignolo, 2011, p. 46) to Western modernity/coloniality. According to Mignolo (2017), “Decoloniality means first to delink (to detach) from that overall structure of [Western] knowledge in order to engage in an epistemic reconstitution ... of ways of thinking” towards coloniser/colonised contexts and situations. Kilomba (2010) adds to this and states that knowledge is a “reproduction of racial power relations that define what counts as true and in whom to believe” (p. 29). A decolonial position involves a researcher critically analysing hegemonic knowledge discourses and unpacking and questioning those discourses as they relate to power within colonial/colonising contexts. These aforementioned theories, together with my positionality as a Quandamooka researcher, informed my analytical standpoint in this study. Below is a visual that describes these different theories that constitute my theoretical standpoint.

Figure 1: The formation of my theoretical standpoint in this study



Storying as methodology

Storying is a practice used by indigenous peoples globally (Kovach, 2009) and Indigenous peoples in Australia (Phillips & Bunda, 2018). This research was guided by the work of Phillips and Bunda (2018) who view “stories and storying [as] translating embodied knowledges from diverse communities who are often silenced or their voices rarely given airplay” (p. 12). Indigenous voices in Australia have historically been marginalised on educational matters. Storying can contribute to knowledge production concerning historical and contemporary Indigenous matters. The use of this methodology in this study provided a culturally and personally safe way to “speak back to hegemonic knowledges” (Rigney, 2001, p. 8) and dominant cultural discourses situated in our Westernised education system. Storying is an

inclusive approach for working with Indigenous and non-Indigenous participants (Kovach, 2010; Phillips & Bunda, 2018) in research. Through using storying as methodology, this particular approach allowed participants to share their storied experiences of the challenges that they experienced in relation to being involved in compulsory Indigenous education.

The research methods

This study gathered the educational experiences of 174 non-Indigenous pre-service teachers, five academic staff members and myself. It achieved this through the research methods of yarning sessions with academic staff, self-reflection and pre-service teacher reflections. Yarning as method was embedded in this research as it is a culturally safe, relational, reciprocal and inclusive practice that is commonly recognised by Indigenous peoples in Australia (Bessarab, 2012; Bessarab & Ng'andu, 2010; Fredericks et al., 2011; Shay, 2019). Yarning sessions with academics were conceptually guided by the technique of research topic yarning by Bessarab and Ng'andu (2010). This approach involves yarning "that takes place in a[n] un or semi structured research interview. The sole purpose is to gather information through participants' stories that are related to the research topic" (Bessarab and Ng'andu, 2010, p. 40). The aim of this approach was to gather the storied experiences (Bessarab and Ng'andu, 2010) from academic teaching staff from EDUC2090 regarding the key challenges they faced working in Indigenous education.

The method of self-reflection was also used in this study. This method is useful for researchers to utilise in qualitative studies as it presents "ourselves to ourselves" (Franks, 2016, p. 50) throughout the self-reflective writing process, which is similar to reflexivity in Indigenous contexts. Both self-reflection and reflexivity require researchers to become aware of their own ontological and epistemological positioning with regards to the research topic (Dawson et al., 2022). Questions that guided my self-reflection writing process included asking myself "What is the event/issue that is to be the subject of the reflection? [and] Has the nature of your description of the event/issue etc. influenced the manner in which you have gone about the reflective writing?" (Moon, 2004, pp. 210–211). Additional questions included "Who are we writing for? [and] How do we ensure that our writing keeps us rooted in our culture, traditions and worldviews?" (Whiteduck, 2013, p. 74).

The final research method, pre-service teacher reflections, was used to gather the storied experiences of EDUC2090 pre-service teachers. This method involved designing a template primarily based on the footprints exercise by Moon (2004). Moon (2004) states that this particular exercise is designed for individuals or groups of peoples and it is an activity that is located in reflective writing. This method allowed for 174 pre-service teachers to document their experiences of EDUC2090, from beginning the course to finishing the course. The reflective writing template stated, "*The teaching team would like to hear your story in relation to the course. Make sure you focus on any challenges or concerns that you had/still have as a pre-service teacher within the Indigenous education landscape*" [emphasis added]. This activity was undertaken by UQ pre-service teachers in class during the final week of EDUC2090.

Below is a figure that illustrates the shared connection between storying as methodology and the research methods embedded in this study. The use of circles in this figure to represent storying and the three methods reflects that they are a continual process (Jones, 2013) in research and educational contexts.

Figure 2: Storying and its connection to the three research methods

Story representation

Due to the significant amount of pre-service teacher data collected (174 student reflections), it would not have been possible to effectively and succinctly represent the voices of 174 pre-service teachers without developing a unique way to present the collected data. After conversations with my PhD advisors who work in the area of storying, it was decided to present the data through fictional pre-service teacher characters. This approach to developing appropriate characters to share important stories is consistent with storying as methodology and has been previously undertaken in decolonial academic work (Mackinlay, 2015; Rennie, 2018). Both Mackinlay (2015) and Rennie (2018) developed unique characters, from their positions as non-Indigenous academics, to guide readers through contemporary relations between non-Indigenous and Indigenous peoples.

In this study, the purpose of the characters is to communicate the many voices of EDUC2090 students in a succinct way, ensuring that as many pre-service teacher voices are captured and represented ethically, appropriately and fairly and not to homogenise experiences of Indigenous education. The fictional characters of Sara and Mike have been developed (in accordance with academic literature) to critically analyse the ways of thinking of students in Indigenous education. I understand the vast heterogeneity amongst non-Indigenous students. These characters are not intended to suggest that there is only one non-Indigenous female and one non-Indigenous male pre-service teacher archetype in ITE programs. Rather, the characters of Sara and Mike are intended to act solely as a vessel through which to share the many pre-service teacher voices in EDUC2090. The stories shared in this article through these characters are designed to guide readers throughout the educational journey of EDUC2090.

After each story shared by Sara and Mike, the total number of UQ pre-service teachers whose written reflections comprised the story, together with those who shared a similar classroom experience (relating to the specific key challenge) to either Sara or Mike, is purposefully recorded for readers. This practice allows for readers to view the breadth, significance and seriousness of the key challenges located in Indigenous education. For example, in the following section, Sara's story of entering the Indigenous education space comprises the voices of 126 pre-service teachers at UQ. It did not comprise the voices of all 174 pre-service teachers who were involved in the research, but only those students whose written reflections revealed they shared similar challenges in EDUC2090. Therefore, I am not presenting the data in such a way to suggest that *all* non-Indigenous students within a broader cohort of undergraduate students experience the exact same challenges in Indigenous education.

In developing full and coherent pre-service teacher stories, I initially read all student reflections that were collected so as to identify the 11 key challenges that were common amongst the reflections. Following this, I re-read each student reflection and then proceeded to highlight certain text within the reflections (that fell within a key challenge) that I felt accurately reflected students' voices with regards to that challenge. I then transcribed the highlighted text into Microsoft Word. From there, it became rather straight-forward to draw together various pre-service teachers' experiences of EDUC2090 (related to a key challenge) and merge the highlighted portions of the individual reflections to develop one full and coherent story, shared through the voices of Sara or Mike.

The five academic participants in this study were given the pseudonyms of Eve, Ruby, Jan, Liv and Jean. Eve and myself were the only Indigenous teachers and only Eve and my experiences are included in this article. I turn now to some of the findings of this study, shared through the form of storied experiences and through the voices of Sara, Mike, Eve and myself.

Findings: The storied experiences of Sara, Mike, Eve and myself

This research does not aim to portray that *all* non-Indigenous pre-service teachers who step into Indigenous education at university share the same experiences or that *all* non-Indigenous pre-service teachers are resistant learners. Such thinking around Indigenous education would be an inaccurate representation of the space, and fail to acknowledge the excellent and progressive efforts of many pre-service teachers in Queensland.

This study found that some students shared a willingness to engage with Indigenous education from the beginning of the course. For example, one pre-service teacher studying the course shared, "At the beginning of the course, I felt excited and ready to expand my views and knowledge". In addition to this, the research revealed that while some students may have commenced the course showing resistance, as the course progressed, students were able to shift their positions and gain a new understanding in relation to Indigenous education. For example, one student wrote,

I genuinely believed the stereotype that they [Indigenous peoples] weren't as good of [sic] learners as white people, because they were lazy and didn't apply themselves. While writing this, I now know how ignorant this perspective was and I was at a constant "ahhh" throughout this course.

All of the 11 key challenges found in this study are listed below. As previously mentioned, key classroom challenges 1, 2 and 4 will be discussed.

Classroom

Key challenge 1: Mixed initial views and feelings

Key challenge 2: Limited prior engagement, knowledge and understanding

Key challenge 3: Student identity – "not my place"

Key challenge 4: Resistance

Key challenge 5: Language discourses

Key challenge 6: Inconsistencies with student progression

Institutional

Key challenge 7: Academic contestation of knowledge

Key challenge 8: Structure, duration and number of courses

Education policy (APST 1.4 and 2.4)

Key challenge 9: Discourses of homogeneity and lack of relationality in the standards

Key challenge 10: Using the standards to justify the space

Key challenge 11: Perceived ill-preparedness to meet Graduate Standards 1.4 and 2.4

Sharing and analysing key classroom challenges 1 and 2

This section will focus on discussing Sara's initial views towards EDUC2090 and Mike's prior schooling experiences before stepping into the course.

Sara

Beginning the course, I was terrified. As a white non-Indigenous female, I thought that this whole thing was going to be about how privileged I am and how it is my fault that Australia's Indigenous population were and continue to be treated disrespectfully. I didn't have a high opinion or high expectation from the course title alone and felt apprehensive going into this course mainly due to what people had said about previous semesters (most people told me this course sucked). I was wary it would be wrapped in anti-Western rhetoric and would focus on demonizing Western culture. I remember at times in the course it was very awkward voicing my opinion as I felt I could be seen as racist. At the start, I held a pretty certain view of the world and Australia that I didn't necessarily want changed.

Sara further described her initial views and feelings about commencing the course as "unprepared", "nervous", "guilty", "dreading it", "sceptical", "dubious and disinterested" and "pointless". Sara's story above has been drawn from the reflective writing of 126 pre-service teachers whose storied experiences revealed that they had similar mixed initial views and feelings as expressed by Sara towards course commencement.

Mike

Before starting EDUC2090, I'd never had much to do with Indigenous studies in my schooling so I wasn't sure what to expect in this course. I am a non-Indigenous person and did not have much knowledge about the Indigenous Australian landscape. My experiences at school were mostly tokenistic. I lacked knowledge and understanding of Indigenous histories and culture and had no experience in teaching an Aboriginal student (and didn't know much about their culture and background). This made me feel under-prepared. In the past, the information I received about Australia's Indigenous people was through their negative representation in the media.

Mike's story has been drawn from the reflections of 66 pre-service teachers whose storied experiences showed that they had similar challenges as voiced above by Mike regarding a lack of prior engagement, knowledge and understanding towards the Indigenous landscape.

Before Sara entered into EDUC2090, she perceived that the Indigenous education course was going to make her feel guilty or shameful for being white. This is quite powerful because it reveals that even before the academic teaching team has had the opportunity to introduce the course and themselves in this space (or essentially before the first word is spoken), particular racialised discourses exist. These discourses include white “guilt”, “shame” and “fault”, and they directly impacted Sara’s initial perception of the unit. This was also reinforced by former students of the course mentioning to Sara that the course “sucked”. Her view that the course would focus on placing blame on to her and “demonizing Western culture” is interesting. Through this, Sara positions herself as an innocent pre-service teacher completely separate to the university course and its concepts of race, racism and white privilege. At this initial stage of Sara’s learning journey, she does not understand that her body (as a white female student), and epistemology, is inextricably tied to colonialism and an historical process of Empire and Indigenous dispossession (Moreton-Robinson, 2000, 2020). In her story, Sara does not once acknowledge the past or contemporary demonisation of Indigenous cultures and peoples (Bunda, 2017) in Australia. Instead, Sara’s whiteness became her focus and the immediate defence of her own Western culture was prioritised.

This means that academic teams in Indigenous education are met with external challenges and tension (that they did not produce) at the cultural interface. This is established in the thinking of students like Sara even before students enter the first week of the semester. Dominant cultural knowledge production (Mignolo, 2007a) in our society also impacted Sara’s ability to navigate the initial stages of the course in appropriate ways. Sara recognised that the Indigenous education course was going to centre the knowledges (Kilomba, 2010) and voices of Indigenous peoples in education and in doing so challenge and question her epistemological framework, histories and ontology, as a white pre-service teacher. As such, Sara was “dubious and disinterested”, “sceptical” and “dreading it”. She held a “view of the world and Australia that [she] didn’t necessarily want changed”. I am not without empathy for Sara. She was worried about having to contribute to the class in fear of being labelled as racist. From this, it is clear that Sara lacks a sense of agency and has not yet experienced “new ways of being” (Lewis et al., 2007, p. 5) at the interface and in relation to Indigenous education. As a future teacher who will likely be working with Indigenous students, Sara needs to extend the parameters of her current colonial thinking to engage with Indigenous topics at the interface in meaningful ways.

Consistent with the work of Bond (2014) and McDowall (2018), Mike shared that he was ill-prepared prior to starting the course and had only been exposed to “tokenistic ... [and] negative [Indigenous] representation in the media”. Here I contend there is tension or a “tug of war” (Nakata, 2007a, p. 216) between what we as academics are attempting to do with pre-service teachers regarding the normalisation of Indigenous knowledges and perspectives in classrooms and the current schooling system. Mike’s story shows that some schools in the Queensland education system are continuing to ignore the inclusion of Indigenous studies and perspectives.

Given Mike’s story on this matter is comprised of 66 UQ pre-service teachers, this challenge appears widespread and it forms part of a broader systemic issue within the Queensland education system. The tension becomes apparent when pre-service teachers like Sara and Mike arrive at university in an Indigenous course with limited prior knowledge and a lack of value towards Indigenous education as a result of their prior schooling experience (Moreton-Robinson et al., 2012). This key challenge places a disproportionate amount of pressure on those academics tasked to prepare the next generation of teachers in accordance with education policy, such as Graduate Standards 1.4 and 2.4. The continual reproduction of Westernised knowledge in the schooling system (Mignolo, 2007a) is failing students like

Sara and Mike regarding their preparation for navigating Indigenous courses and, therefore, stifling their professional capabilities to meet Graduate Standards 1.4 and 2.4 as future teachers.

Sharing and analysing key classroom challenge 4

The key challenge of student resistance towards studying EDUC2090 will now be discussed through the voices of Mike, academic Eve and myself.

Mike

I was not looking forward to beginning the course and was extremely unhappy it was compulsory since I knew I'd be thought of as a middle-class white male that oppressed everyone. I didn't like how the tutorials made me feel. It felt like the teaching staff would make activities that addressed how white privileged I was. During the course, I was slightly confused as to why we were being taught this content separately to any other inclusionary education course. I thought that perhaps EDUC2090 should focus on multicultural perspectives rather than just Indigenous. We teach everyone equally, so why do we need to focus on Indigenous students specifically? Students who had done this course in the past have said a lot of people fail as you have to write to what the course wants and not what you believe. Sincerely, EDUC2090 course hater.

Mike's story has been drawn from the writing of 38 pre-service teachers whose storied experiences revealed that they had similar challenges as expressed by Mike regarding the compulsory nature of the course, being introduced to the concept of white privilege, Indigenous education as a sole unit of study and "lip service".

Eve

In tutorials, students find discussions of white privilege difficult. That whole early part of the course where we teach concepts of what was the History Wars, colonialism, what oppression did occur and how that continues to occur, that makes students reassess their understanding of their history and their culture. By the end, most pre-service teachers in EDUC2090 at least professed to accept it, although when you read the course evaluations, a lot of them would say, "Figure out what the lecturers want you to say and repeat it". So, they're only paying "lip service".

Myself

Before my first teaching week in EDUC2090, members of the teaching team shared with me a reflective letter that was written by a former student in relation to the course. A key purpose of this reflective activity was for pre-service teachers to share with future UQ pre-service teachers useful insights or tips regarding the course. I was not completely surprised or stunned reading this particular letter. This letter, written by a former UQ pre-service teacher, is shared below.

"Dear EDUC2090 Student of 2017,

Are you white? You're racist. Just accept that now.

Most of this course will make you feel guilty for the actions of the last 200 years. Any problems with Indigenous education will always be someone else's fault, not that of the Indigenous community.

Once you accept these facts and start regurgitating them back to the teaching staff you will do well on this course, which is all that matters. I got 6s and 7s by blaming colonisation and Western cultures for everything, and victimising the Indigenous community. Just play the game for 13 weeks and move on afterwards.

Regards,

White colonial pig."

Pre-service teacher resistance to compulsory Indigenous learning and teaching can manifest in various ways. Mike resists the compulsory nature of Indigenous education, as well as struggling to accept and learn certain course concepts such as white privilege. In Eve's classroom experience, she also addressed that students can find conversations around the concept of white privilege challenging. Eve's comment is consistent with Mike's story. As EDUC2090 did not represent Mike's way of knowing, Mike thought that he would be perceived as a white male oppressor in the classroom. Unlike students who are able to grasp and apply the concept of white privilege towards professional practice and work with Indigenous learners, Mike explicitly resists this learning process. Mike's resistance to new knowledge and concepts such as white privilege appears to stem from a deeper ontological reaction to his agency, ethics and values being challenged. At the interface, this position by Mike illustrates a connection between his body and coloniality such that when matters of epistemic dominance in modernity are discussed through the concept of white privilege, Mike can feel attacked. The effect of this is that tension is produced between teaching teams and students at an already forced interface.

These challenges (resistance to the compulsory nature of the course and concepts such as white privilege) are common in Indigenous education and have previously been documented in the literature (Aveling, 2006; Bullen & Flavell, 2017; Phillips, 2011; Rosas-Blanch, 2016). However, what is less critically discussed concerning Indigenous education challenges is the covert or more hidden forms of resistance enacted by some students in courses.

Mike's covert resistance to EDUC2090 came through the form of stating that the course could have formed part of an "inclusionary education course" that centred "on multicultural perspectives rather than just Indigenous". Mike's focus on multiculturalism as a way to pivot from explicit Indigenous education learning is problematic. He is more comfortable with a multicultural unit of study, that may embed some Indigenous perspectives, rather than a full course focused on Indigenous education. At the cultural interface, Mike is content with this approach as it still allows for his knowledge to largely remain "at the centre" (Kilomba, 2010, p. 27) of the classroom while he decides on what constitutes multiculturalism (Phillips, 2012) within his own epistemology and understanding of diversity. Mike would prefer to have the power to control Indigenous education matters in his ITE program and this position directly relates to the dominant cultural group seeking control around education (Mignolo, 2007a) and the dissemination of education. Mike's covert performance of resistance, hidden in popular discourse, perpetuates the marginalisation of Indigenous knowledges and standpoints—remaining "outside, at the margins" (Kilomba, 2010, p. 27) of the university. This allows for Westernised knowledge to maintain its hegemonic position within the walls of the university.

It is interesting the lengths to which some students perceive they must go to in order to successfully pass an Indigenous education course. A very concerning challenge raised by Mike, Eve, as well as myself, centred around some students paying “lip service” to pass EDUC2090. Cambridge Dictionary defines “lip service” as “to say that you agree with something but do nothing to support it” (Cambridge University Press, 2021a, para. 1). Within Indigenous spaces and discourse, the notion of paying “lip service” is not new to Indigenous peoples (Barry, 2020; Harmon, 2018). Within a government context, Aboriginal academic Maureen Ah Sam, further defines “lip service” as “nothing but rhetoric” (Australian Broadcasting Corporation, 2005, para. 6) that hinders efforts of reconciliation between Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples. While Mike and Eve discussed the notion of “lip service” in the course, arguably the most direct example of “lip service” comes from the student letter I received before my first week of teaching in the course. This student wrote, “Just play the game for 13 weeks and move on afterwards”. At the end of the letter, the student then signed off with “White colonial pig” – a similar sign off to Mike who wrote “EDUC2090 course hater”.

In thinking with Maldonado-Torres (2007), this group of students would rather avoid legitimate engagement with EDUC2090, as this legitimate engagement is perceived as a threat to their power and ontological relationship with knowledge, the Australian university landscape and broader society. This type of pre-service teacher behaviour is associated with a minority group of students. However, given that students are arriving at university with these views, it still suggests that some schools in Queensland are not placing sufficient value on embedding Indigenous studies and perspectives in the curriculum. This challenge and Mike’s resistance have policy implications for pre-service teachers teaching in alignment with Graduate Standards 1.4 and 2.4.

Recommendation for academic teaching teams

The following recommendation, based on empirical evidence, is a practical and viable way to attempt to combat some of the key classroom challenges identified in this research.

“Shared Talk”: A pedagogical strategy for compulsory Indigenous education

Shared Talk is a strategic pedagogical approach for academic teams in Indigenous education. It is based on the idea of a pre-emptive strike process with students in Indigenous education (Thorpe, 2018) and grounded in the Indigenous knowledge principle of respect (Davis, 2018). The Cambridge Dictionary (Cambridge University Press, 2021b) defines “pre-emptive” as “[something that is] done before someone else can act, especially to prevent them doing what they had planned” (para. 2). Carless (2007) adds to this definition and states that pre-emptive acts by teachers in education may be considered “a form of anticipatory intervention in support of learning” (p. 172). For example, Indigenous academic, Thorpe (2018) uses a pre-emptive strike process in classrooms through an activity titled “Can of Worms”. This activity allows for students to engage in reflection towards Indigenous education at the beginning of the unit. Thorpe (2018) embeds this activity to manage potential classroom acts of pre-service teacher resistance in Indigenous education and to shift students’ understanding on Indigenous matters.

The Shared Talk approach involves teaching teams engaging in an open and relational dialogue with students at the initial stages of the Indigenous education course. This dialogue, enacted by teaching teams, suggests to pre-service teacher cohorts/groups that they may experience some challenges throughout the Indigenous course similar to Sara and Mike. Importantly, the approach does not assume that *all* pre-service teachers will experience particular challenges, and this should be stated to cohorts or

smaller groups. This strategy is aimed at those pre-service teachers (at UQ or other Australian universities) who may be struggling with agency and belonging at the interface and in the broader course. By explicitly identifying some of these challenges (for example, key challenges 1, 2 and 4) at the beginning of the course and unpacking them in a relational, collaborative manner with students (as students are able to ask any questions they may have), this process facilitates learning. It also fosters mutual respect between staff and students as it involves both groups carefully listening to each other around certain challenges and discourses situated in the Indigenous education space. Building relationships and gaining respect in Indigenous contexts can be nurtured through listening well (Ungunmerr, 1998).

Shared Talk may take place in either a lecture theatre, tutorial room or outside the classroom. In terms of duration, the Shared Talk approach is flexible in nature and context dependent, meaning that the strategy may last for 10 or 20 minutes or perhaps longer. It is recommended that teaching teams use their best judgement in terms of duration and location at the initial stages of the course to navigate this strategy. This pedagogical approach also requires a shared teaching responsibility among the academic teaching team so that this approach is not solely left to the Indigenous teacher/s on the teaching team to embed (Hogarth, 2019). Non-Indigenous teaching staff are encouraged to implement this strategy.

Shared Talk is essentially designed to disrupt and redirect some of the patterns of thinking and behaviour that were evidenced in the stories of Sara and Mike. Teaching teams may share and/or display the stories of Sara and Mike to pre-service teacher cohorts/groups via technology. In practice, topics that teaching teams may focus on could include key challenges 1, 2 and 4 from this article. These include students stepping into the course with mixed feelings, limited prior engagement with the space and resistance. This resistance could be explored in relation to stepping into a compulsory learning space, learning particular Indigenised or decolonial topics or concepts such as white privilege, studying Indigenous education as a sole unit of study (rather than the content being part of a broader multicultural unit of study), or discussing how a small group of students may feel as though they need to engage in “lip service” in order to pass the course. Further topics may include non-Indigenous pre-service teacher identity and how some students may see Indigenous education as “not their place” (Rom, 2022). This may also be a time to address appropriate language terminology for students.

The Shared Talk pedagogical approach is an open and relational dialogue (not prescriptive) enacted by teaching teams. It highlights to nervous, anxious, hesitant or resistant students that the teaching team is aware of these challenges and will seek to work with students to assist with their navigation of the Indigenous course. It is important that teaching teams reinforce this message of support. This approach aims to potentially lessen or reduce the key challenges identified by Sara and Mike by openly identifying and discussing these challenges and, thereby, creating a safe learning space for all students. This may then allow for students to shift and engage with course curricula in more productive, critical and less resistant ways early in the course, rather than being “stuck” in more resistant learning patterns as evidenced by Sara and Mike. The approach seeks to shift pre-service teachers’ ways of thinking around Indigenous education from epistemically dominant and violent positions in education into more culturally competent positions at the interface. Therefore, this strategy may foster student agency and preparedness to professionally work in alignment with Graduate Standards 1.4 and 2.4 as graduate teachers.

Conclusion

Working in Indigenous education and at the cultural interface at university is a complex task and process, filled with opportunities and also fraught with challenges and tensions (Bullen & Flavell, 2017; Phillips, 2011; Rom, 2022). This is because these courses challenge students' relationships with our nation-state. This article has addressed and examined the key classroom challenges 1, 2 and 4 within the broader 11 key challenges that the research found. It has identified challenges that sit external to the control of teaching teams, including students arriving at university ill-prepared from schools and remaining resistant to learning aspects of Indigenous education. For example, Sara shared, "At the start, I held a pretty certain view of the world and Australia that I didn't necessarily want changed". Also, Mike shared, "Before starting EDUC2090, I'd never had much to do with Indigenous studies in my schooling". Stakeholders including AITSL ought to understand that attempts to improve the cultural competency and responsiveness of ITE students (the majority of whom are non-Indigenous), requires a consideration of coloniality and hegemonic knowledge discourses that are situated in Education at university.

This research has also provided evidence to suggest that some schools in Queensland need to place greater emphasis and value on embedding Indigenous knowledges and perspectives. These processes need to occur or continue to occur within Queensland schools so that by the time pre-service teachers enter the compulsory Indigenous education space at university, they are more equipped to navigate these classrooms, including being introduced to concepts such as white privilege. I argue that if schools in Queensland, and those who lead and work in these institutions, place a greater level of value towards Indigenous education and studies, then this may potentially reduce pre-service teacher acts of overt and covert resistance towards studying Indigenous education. This will mean that our future teachers are better placed to professionally work in alignment with Graduate Standards 1.4 and 2.4 and to adopt culturally competent and responsive ways to work with Indigenous students.

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