Part II
Policy and Policy Issues

Chapter 2
Understanding the Nexus Between Equity and Indigenous Higher Education Policy Agendas in Australia

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Introduction

Education is often considered a lifelong journey that starts in early childhood and involves participation in primary and secondary schooling, followed by potential participation in vocational education and training (VET) and higher education (SCRGSP 2014). Participation along this education trajectory is a key contributing factor in economic participation and labour market success in Australia (SCRGSP 2014). Unfortunately, not all people get the same opportunity to access and participate in lifelong education, which impacts upon their ability to secure and maintain well paid and fulfilling employment opportunities over the longer term. There can be various barriers and challenges that get in the way. Many of these relate to unfair and socially unjust experiences of marginalisation or disadvantage. These challenges result in many sub-populations being under-represented or achieving sub-optimal outcomes when participating in Australia's education system (James et al. 2008; Cardak and Ryan 2009; Edwards and McMillan 2015). In Australia, we often refer to these sub-populations as 'equity groups.' Indigenous people are considered, within a national policy context, to be one such 'equity group.' This chapter aims to

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J. Frawley et al. (eds.), *Indigenous Pathways, Transitions and Participation in Higher Education*, DOI 10.1007/978-981-10-4062-7_2

provide a more nuanced understanding of the synergies and discordance between equity and Indigenous higher education policy agendas in Australia.

Understanding the National Equity in Higher Education Policy Agenda

Policy concerns about addressing equity in higher education in Australia have been debated and refined for nearly four decades (Rizvi and Lingard 2011; Pitman 2015). A White Paper on higher education was released by the Minister for Education in 1988, which first raised the need to promote greater equity in higher education (Dawkins 1988). A subsequent discussion paper was released in 1990 entitled *A Fair Chance for All* (James et al. 2004). This document was instrumental in setting the agenda for the development of a national equity policy framework and respective equity indicators (James et al. 2004). In 1994, four national equity indicators often referred to as the 'Martin Indicators' were developed in relation to access, participation, success and retention in higher education (Martin 1994). This was closely followed by a report on *Equality, Diversity and Excellence: Advancing the National Higher Education Equity Framework* with a series of equity-focused recommendations released in 1996 (NBEET 1996). A discussion paper entitled *Higher Education at the Cross Roads* was released in 2002 and reiterated that students from disadvantaged backgrounds remained under-represented in Australian universities (Commonwealth Department of Education, Science and Training 2002). In 2003, a package of policy reforms developed in the form of *Our Universities: Backing Australia's Future* was released (Nelson 2003). This included equity-related funding streams and programs, such as the Indigenous Support Fund, equity scholarships, and the establishment of the Indigenous Higher Education Advisory Council. These policy investments ultimately led to Australia being perceived as a strong global leader in addressing equity in higher education (James et al. 2004; Coates and Krause 2005).

A notable feature of Australia's policy discourse was the identification of six designated equity groups (Martin 1994; Pitman and Koshy 2014). These include:

- Low socio-economic status (LSES) students
- Students with a disability
- Indigenous students
- Students from regional and remote areas
- Women in non-traditional areas of study
- Students from non-English-speaking backgrounds

These equity groups have remained stable for the past 25 years and have more recently been included, again, within the drafting of the *Framework for Measuring Equity Performance in Australian Higher Education* (Pitman and Koshy 2014).

Interestingly, in more recent times, a *Review of Australian Higher Education* (Bradley et al. 2008) has continued to reiterate the importance of increasing the number of under-represented groups within Australia's higher education system – including Indigenous people, people with low socio-economic status, and those from regional and remote areas. The Bradley Review reinforced the notable lack of participation and achievement among equity groups in higher education in Australia when compared to the general population, despite significant policy in-roads (Edwards and McMillan 2015; Pitman 2015). The panel argued that the participation of equity groups in higher education warranted an even greater focus in future higher education strategy and policy development (Bradley et al. 2008). This call to action acted as a catalyst for the Australian Government to reinvigorate its policy commitment to equity in higher education, particularly in relation to providing enhanced pathways and transitions into higher education for equity groups (Pitman 2015). Recent investments have included:

- Program funding to build the aspiration, expectation and capacity of equity groups to participate in higher education
- Funding of various research projects to build an evidence-base about interventions most likely to work in promoting successful participation of equity groups in higher education
- Ongoing support to sustain the National Centre for Student Equity in Higher Education
- Commissioning of a Framework for Measuring Equity Performance in Australian Higher Education
- The emergence of Equity Practitioners as a legitimate role to work within the Australian higher education system to support students from various equity groups to thrive at university.

Naturally these investments have provided a more supportive environment for Australian universities to develop and implement programs aimed at increasing participation among equity groups. As a direct result, small incremental successes in enrolments have been noted among low SES (LSES) students across Australia over the last few years (Pitman 2015).

While increased supports for equity groups are both necessary and highly valued, it is becoming increasingly evident that targeted programs and activities which are tailored to the needs of each separate equity group are also required. Arguably the most disadvantaged equity group is that of Indigenous students. Evidence suggests that members of this particular equity group may also belong to other equity group categories. For example, a remote Indigenous student from a LSES background clearly falls into some equity groups. Historically, funding for Indigenous higher education programs has been provided separately to that of other equity groups (Coates and Krause 2005). We discuss these investments in more detail shortly. That is, Indigenous participation in higher education has been epistemologically constructed as both part of, and separate to, a broader equity in higher education policy agenda. The following section examines the unique policy setting relating to Indigenous participation in higher education in Australia. We then use

this information to unpack the synergies, difference and possibilities between these two higher education policy contexts.

Understanding the National Indigenous Higher Education Policy Agenda

Higher education has a critical role to play in improving the socio-economic position of Indigenous people, their families and their communities (MCEETYA 2001; Behrendt et al. 2012). However, pathways into higher education are often complex to navigate, and the systemic and practical challenges and restraints faced by Indigenous learners can ultimately hinder their participation in higher education (Thomas et al. 2014). The Productivity Commission consider that a successful transition from school can be defined as the proportion of young people aged 17–24 years who are participating in post-school education or training or employed (SCRGSP 2014). Yet, we already have data that shows that for more than a decade Indigenous students have been more likely to enter higher education as older or mature age students in contrast to direct entry from school (MCEETYA 2001; Behrendt et al. 2012). This adds a further layer of complexity when developing strategies aimed at attracting Indigenous students to, and supporting and retaining their participation in, university. Therefore, unless we see significant improvements in primary and post-primary education outcomes for Indigenous people in Australia, alongside strategy development that recognises unique pathways for Indigenous adult learners, we argue Indigenous students are likely to remain significantly under-represented in the higher education system. In turn, this perpetuates the higher levels of social and economic disadvantage they too often experience (Thomas et al. 2014). As Andersen and others (Andersen et al. 2008, p. 2) aptly explain,

> For Indigenous students, participating in higher education is not simply a matter of deciding 'yes' or 'no' to university. While enrolment occurs at the individual level such choices are socially patterned. Our students who make it through to enrolment choices are the survivors of a long process of attrition that begins even before formal schooling. Research in this area, while usually only including Indigenous students as one of the clusters of 'equity groups'…. stresses the overwhelming role of social, economic, political and cultural factors in shaping and facilitating the choices for students and their families.

Given the above information, it is not surprising, albeit concerning, that within higher education settings Indigenous students have high attrition rates, low retention and completion rates, and a high failure rate (Devlin 2009; Behrendt et al. 2012; Bandias et al. 2013). This is indicative of the challenges Indigenous learners face before and upon entering the higher education system. It also demonstrates that a focus on pathways alone, without consideration of the support structures and systems that underpin those pathways, can be problematic. In the words of Devlin (2009, p. 1), 'Australia has failed Indigenous people in relation to higher education equity, and we must understand why, in order to do better.'

This is an important point of reflection, as throughout the late 1980s and early 1990s there was a steady increase in Indigenous specific programs in higher education in Australia (Trudgett 2010; Pechenkina and Anderson 2011). This included the establishment of Indigenous Support Units, which have now been firmly embedded into nearly all higher education institutions across Australia (Pechenkina and Anderson 2011). While there is contention between how many programs emerged and within exactly what timeframes (Trudgett 2010), it is generally agreed that there has been significant growth in Indigenous programs and support units and that this, by and large, has supported Indigenous participation in higher education. Also, there was considerable investment in the sector in 2003, which saw the establishment of the Indigenous Support Fund and the Indigenous Higher Education Advisory Council. Unfortunately, a recent decision of the current Australian Government to abolish the Indigenous Higher Education Advisory Council is regrettable (Cormann 2015) and represents a significant step backwards for Indigenous higher education leadership and Indigenous higher education policy development in Australia.

With the growth in Indigenous Support Units, there was a parallel investment in the establishment and delivery of Indigenous specific enabling programs and initiatives to support Indigenous students to transition into higher education, particularly during their first year of study. These enabling and support programs span aspiration-building, such as pre-entry 'taster' days and camps; the provision of free or heavily subsidised accommodation and travel, including the national *Away From Base* program; literacy and numeracy assistance; Indigenous academic preparation and bridging programs; Indigenous mentoring and tutoring; Indigenous/equity scholarships; and specific Indigenous learning and study spaces, among others (MCEETYA 2001; Andersen et al. 2008; Devlin 2009; Behrendt et al. 2012; Thomas et al. 2014). They have played an important role in ensuring Indigenous students feel supported when entering university and have ultimately promoted equity in access and outcomes. In particular, they have provided a more culturally safe environment for Indigenous students to undertake study (Bandias et al. 2013). While the establishment of Indigenous Support Units and respective program implementation has been a welcome investment over the past couple of decades, there are risks associated with these supports being perceived as a panacea for Indigenous students (Page and Asmar 2008). That is, there may be other supports across universities that sit outside of Indigenous specific units, which are well resourced and not being fully utilised. There may also be more significant and active roles that university faculties and schools can play in integrating more structured supports for equity groups (including Indigenous students) within their specific learning and teaching settings.

At this juncture, it is useful to acknowledge that the Australian Government initiated the *Review of Higher Education Access and Outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders* in April 2011 (Behrendt et al. 2012). This is commonly referred to as the Behrendt Review (Behrendt et al. 2012), and the panel released its final report in July 2012. This report provided a range of recommendations to improve access, participation and achievement in Indigenous higher education in Australia. Recommendations related to:

- Achieving parity for Indigenous students and staff in the higher education sector
- Unlocking capacity and empowering choices through school, enabling programs, access to information and other pathways
- Focusing on Indigenous success including the provision of support through Indigenous Education Units and faculties, and building professional pathways and responding to community need
- Provision of Indigenous specific support to universities and students including Indigenous tutorial assistance; support for ATSI (Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander) students from regional and remote areas; and financial support to ATSI students
- Valuing ATSI knowledge and research by acknowledging ATSI knowledge and perspectives; investing in higher degrees by research and research training and building ATSI research capability
- Supporting ATSI staff
- Enhancing university culture and governance
- Developing an ATSI higher education strategy and a monitoring and evaluation framework

Our intent is not to revisit the in-depth detail already provided in the Behrendt Review. However, an important finding of the Behrendt Review relates to the need for systemic change in university culture, governance and leadership practices. It is argued that distributed responsibility for Indigenous higher education outcomes across all faculties and among all senior management positions within Australian universities is needed (Behrendt et al. 2012). That is, while Indigenous Support Units have played a pivotal role in the incremental development of Indigenous higher education, a range of other systemic issues also needed to be addressed. Similarly, the way in which we monitor and evaluate the facilitators of, and barriers to, Indigenous students accessing, participating and achieving in higher education is critical. It is pleasing to know that the draft framework for measuring equity performance in Australian higher education has incorporated a range of Indigenous indicators (Pitman and Koshy 2015).

Understanding the Synergies and Discordance Between National Equity, and Indigenous, Higher Education Policy Agendas

There are some reasons why the nexus between national equity, and Indigenous, higher education policy agendas is important. In our experience, this nexus can be both synergistic and discordant. We argue that a better understanding of the synergies can provide scope for progress. Conversely, a better understanding of the discordance can help in alleviating the tensions that may hinder progress among and between various equity groups. We discuss these issues in more detail below.

Synergies

We have identified three common threads central to the nexus between equity and Indigenous higher education policy contexts in Australia. These relate to (1) the values on which the policies have been developed; (2) the nature of the issues being identified and addressed within equity and Indigenous high education policy frameworks and reviews; and (3) the continually emerging and compelling evidence-base about what does and does not work to inform revisions of the policies and to guide future program investments. We discuss each below.

Values

It is well established that equity policy is underpinned by principles of social justice, fairness and inclusiveness (Rizvi and Lingard 2011; Pitman 2015). Similarly, these principles are embedded metaphorically, not necessarily explicitly, in most contemporary Indigenous policy discourses focused on 'closing the gap' or 'overcoming disadvantage' (COAG 2009; SCRGSP 2014). That is, the principles underpinning the policy discourses are closely related – there is an axiological harmony. However, this does not mean the policy discourses themselves are closely related. As Rizvi and Lingard (2011, p. 9) assert:

> Policy-making is a fundamentally political process, involving an assemblage of values with other considerations, through various political calculations. In education, policy processes have to juggle a range of values, such as equality, excellence, accountability and efficiency, often simultaneously, against a calculation of the conditions of possibility. This means that policy-makers have to assemble, organise and order values, configuring them in such a way as to render them more or less consistent and implementable. This requires privileging some values ahead of others.

In the case of the nexus between equity and Indigenous higher education policy agendas, re-asserting the values base could be beneficial. This could assist the (re) shaping of the political contexts in which policy decisions are made. This is particularly important in relation to the Indigenous education policy landscape, including the higher education policy arena, which has been subsumed in a broader Indigenous affairs policy discourse. As has previously been noted, Indigenous affairs policy in Australia is in a period of upheaval (Russell 2014). The conflation of more than 150 programs into five mega thematic areas as part of the Australian Government Indigenous Advancement Strategy (IAS) is one such example. As a result of the implementation of IAS, there has been a notable decrease in Indigenous affairs funding across Australia. Funding for the Indigenous Tutorial Assistance Scheme (ITAS) has been ring-fenced to some extent, but is now being channelled through the IAS implementation process via the Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet, in contrast to being delivered through the Commonwealth Department of Education. A more nuanced and explicit values-based discussion, consistent with a broader equity higher education agenda, could potentially alter the way in which Indigenous

higher education is currently positioned within the federal policy landscape. We acknowledge this has both its strengths and weaknesses. However, aligning policy discourses through a values-based dialogue can reinforce a sense of unity among equity groups. In turn, this may create (or further build) a critical mass that is currently divided between two different policy discourses. This has potential to enhance collaborative efforts through program implementation involving equity groups, including Indigenous students, within and between Australian universities.

Nature of Equity Issues

Given that the values base of equity and Indigenous higher education policy agendas are closely aligned, it stands to reason that the nature of equity issues addressed through policy and program responses could be similar. The alignment of recommendations in the Bradley Review (Bradley et al. 2008) and Behrendt Review (Behrendt et al. 2012) illustrate this point well. That is the fundamental issues affecting all equity groups relate to access, participation, success/achievement, retention and completion. This provides a unique opportunity to better align equity and Indigenous higher education policy discourses, and subsequent program and systemic investments, at institutional, regional, state, national and global levels. While there may be additional issues for some equity groups or different approaches and strategies to address common issues between equity groups, there are also opportunities to work collaboratively. Working in partnership assists us to unpack overlaps and to find common ground with a collective purpose. We argue the way in which universities have spatially, organisationally and structurally separated or siloed equity and Indigenous higher education policy agendas, and respective support programs and infrastructure, acts as a barrier for enabling greater cohesion, integration and interdependence between equity groups. It has also created an artificial hierarchy between some equity groups and competition for limited resourcing. This is unproductive for pursuing collaborative arrangements, where and whenever possible. The adoption of a strengths-based approach, which focuses on better aligning and cross-pollinating evidence-informed equity and Indigenous agendas in higher education, is needed. However, we equally acknowledge the potential risks and associated counter-arguments of diluting critically important Indigenous equity-focused programs in higher education. There is clearly a need for both.

Evidence

There has been an unprecedented growth in research focused on student equity in higher education. A useful example is the 2014 and 2015 grant funding rounds coordinated by the National Centre for Student Equity in Higher Education (NCSEHE). Evidence generated through these research projects is disseminated in real time

through an extensive network of equity-focused researchers, practitioners and policy-makers across Australia. There is also a range of large cohort and longitudinal studies underway in Australia, which assists us to explore and better understand the needs and aspirations of various equity groups. Such studies are listed in (Table 2.1).

Similarly, there are a range of Indigenous higher education research initiatives across Australia funded through a range of sources such as the various nodes of the National Indigenous Research and Knowledges Network. This is supported by Indigenous leadership through the National Indigenous Higher Education Consortium. Evidence dissemination is a feature of regular conferences and forums of these networks and consortia.

There are also a number of well-resourced equity and Indigenous higher education programs that have received competitive and ongoing funding through the Federal Higher Education Participation and Partnerships Program (HEPPP). Many of these programs have been evaluated. While the Australian Government has not conducted a meta-evaluation of the process, impact and outcomes of the HEPPP, there is certainly a solid evidence-base arising from individually funded projects which can guide future policy and program development in this space. The NCSEHE publications provide overall evidence of 70 case studies used throughout the 37 public universities (NCSEHE 2013, 2014). In particular, this evidence can assist in building, sustaining and scaling-up successful equity and Indigenous programs across Australia. Indeed, previous authors have explicitly advocated for culturally respectful and evidence-based evaluation of existing programs that have been designed to address Indigenous equity in education (Devlin 2009). Devlin (2009, p. 4) convincingly argues:

> What is needed is a systematic, independently validated evaluation of these [equity initiatives] individually and as a whole. Without such evaluation, we cannot say with certainty 'what works' in improving Indigenous equity. The evidence may well be available there, but it has not yet been systematically gathered, nor have the outcomes yet been considered carefully enough, nor has what is known been peer-reviewed and reported in appropriate academically rigorous outlets.

To assist in this regard, the National Centre for Student Equity in Higher Education has delivered a series of workshops in monitoring and evaluation, specifically the adoption of program logic modelling, to support enhanced documentation of equity program outputs, including those related to Indigenous higher education pathways. Similarly, findings generated through Indigenous focused HEPPP projects were recently shared at a national forum entitled 'Engagement at the Interface: Indigenous Pathways and Transitions into Higher Education' facilitated by the Office of Pro Vice Chancellor – Indigenous Leadership at Charles Darwin University in October 2015. Evidence generated through some of these projects is presented throughout this book.

Table 2.1 Longitudinal studies on equity groups needs and aspirations

Lead University	Project Title
La Trobe University	University access and achievement of people from out-of-home care backgrounds
University of Newcastle	Equity Groups and Predictors of Academic Success in Higher Education
University of Newcastle	Choosing University: the impact of schools and schooling
University of Melbourne	Developing a national framework for supporting rigorous equity programme evaluation
La Trobe University	Are LSES students disadvantaged in the university application process?
CQUniversity Australia	Best practice bridging: facilitating Indigenous participation through regional dual-sector universities
NCVER	Do individual background characteristics influence tertiary completion rates?
Flinders University	Educational outcomes of young Indigenous Australians
Deakin University	Secondary School Graduate Preferences for Bachelor Degrees and Institutions
University of South Australia	Exploring the experience of being first in family at university
University of Southern Queensland	Resilience/Thriving in Post-Secondary students with disabilities: an exploratory study
Australian Council for Educational Research (ACER)	Completing university in a growing sector: is equity an issue?
University of Tasmania	Exploring the retention and performance of students with disability
Australian Council for Educational Research	Investigating the relationship between equity and graduate outcomes in Australia
University of Western Australia	Labour Market Outcomes of Disadvantaged University Students
Queensland University of Technology	The digital divide for Indigenous students in Learning Management Systems
University of Canberra	Best practice in supporting Indigenous students with disability in higher education
La Trobe University	Assessing descriptors of academic programme inherent requirements
University of Melbourne	A national review of the participation of people of refugee background in higher education
University of Newcastle	Capability, Belonging and Equity in Higher Education: Developing Inclusive Approaches
University of Adelaide	Exploring the experience of LSES students via enabling pathways
University of Tasmania	Supporting students with Autism Spectrum Disorder in Higher Education
Deakin University	Moving beyond ‘acts of faith’: effective scholarships for equity students
Curtin University	Access and Barriers to Online Education for People with Disabilities

Discordance

While we have identified clear synergies between equity and Indigenous higher education policy agendas, there are also discordant threads. These relate to epistemological and ontological dissonance between Western knowledge and Indigenous knowledge systems; the impact of colonisation on Indigenous students, when contrasted with other equity groups; the importance of culture, cultural competence and cultural safety; and the political context in which policy and program decisions are made (which we have previously discussed). We discuss each further below.

Epistemological and Ontological Dissonance

It is well documented that Indigenous knowledge systems are based on a strong sense of cultural identity, kinship, social and emotional wellbeing, spirituality, and connection to country. These are particularly important considerations within an Indigenous higher education policy landscape (Morgan 2003). As Morgan (2003, p. 36) aptly describes:

> Despite the growing support for the principles and practice of equal opportunity and multiculturalism, and the growing appreciation and apparent accommodation of Indigenous knowledges in Western institutions, higher education is still dominated by a Western worldview that appropriates the views of other cultures. To thrive in a tertiary environment, Indigenous peoples, as with others from more holistic/ contextual cultures, have little choice but to participate in research and teaching programmes that either devalue or do not recognise their cultural identities.

As asserted, the Western knowledge paradigm that underpins the administration, management, research and teaching that occurs in most higher education institutions in Australia rarely aligns with Indigenous student epistemologies and ontologies (Sonn et al. 2007) and tends to dismiss concerns about Indigenous sovereignty (McCarty et al. 2005; McCarty and Lee 2014). There is little doubt that Indigenous Support Units have played a pivotal role in addressing this divide (Andersen et al. 2008; Trudgett 2009; Behrendt et al. 2012). Indeed, these units have been born out of a recognition that Indigenous students need to have a safe and culturally appropriate environment in which to study and learn (Andersen et al. 2008). They are a critical element of what a good Indigenous support structure looks and feels like within higher education in Australia (Behrendt et al. 2012). However, Equity Support Units (or the various iterations thereof) and Indigenous Support Units are often geographically and organisationally separated. That is, they often lie in different physical locations of the university and may even sit in different faculty areas. This means there is a systemic divide both spatially and organisationally within two intertwined policy domains – they are defined as being both similar and different.

There are good reasons for spatial separation. In the case of Indigenous Support Units, a dedicated space can support building a culturally safe study and work environment for students and Indigenous academics. There is strong evidence indi-

cating that this is an important element for supporting Indigenous participation in higher education (Dudgeon and Fielder 2006; Universities Australia 2011). From a theoretical perspective it represents a decolonisation of university spaces. From a practical viewpoint it creates a space that supports the development of self-identity, which in turn recognises the place of Indigenous knowledges, culture and sovereignty within an institutional setting (McCarty et al. 2005; Syron and McLaughlin 2010). However, this also distances Indigenous students and academics from other 'equity groups' who share similar barriers when attempting to access and participate in higher education. We argue this concept of 'othering' can perpetuate stereotypes and prejudice, thus reducing the potential to develop collective impact between Indigenous students and other equity groups.

However, Equity and Indigenous Support Units are not enough on their own. More often than not, Indigenous students are expected to learn and study in an academic environment that is faculty based, and in most cases geographically, philosophically and structurally distant from Indigenous Support Units. This was emphasised in the Behrendt Review, which acknowledged that Indigenous leadership must be a whole-of-university endeavour (Behrendt et al. 2012). While there is growing scholarship about how Indigenous epistemologies and ontologies can be incorporated into the curriculum of individual disciplines, in our experience implementation progress can be slow and often relies on a highly motivated staff member to drive such change.

Impact of Colonisation

There is substantial literature outlining the impact of colonisation on Indigenous cultures both in Australia and globally, including that relating to participation in higher education (Morgan 2003; Thaman 2003). Most Australian universities have partnered with Reconciliation Australia to develop Reconciliation Action Plans (RAP). This has been particularly notable over the last decade. RAPs acknowledge the atrocities of the past and the systematic erosion of Indigenous culture and provide an ongoing organisational commitment to build the trust and respect of Indigenous staff, students and the local Indigenous community. Drawing from the RAPs within our own universities such commitments include:

- Building on existing, mutually respectful and beneficial relationships between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians;
- Promoting an understanding of Indigenous culture and history;
- Directing strategies towards the increased participation of Indigenous Peoples as students and staff in the full range of university activities;
- Continuing a commitment to indigenous research and development; and
- Developing a physical environment with sensitivity and respect for Indigenous traditions and beliefs through consultation with the local Aboriginal community.

These unique commitments are a critical step in making Indigenous students feel valued within higher education settings. They must continue to be actioned.

Culture, Cultural Competence and Cultural Safety

In addition to RAPs, some universities have taken significant steps to embed Indigenous knowledges into higher education curriculum (Behrendt et al. 2012; David et al. 2013), including a focus on Indigenous graduate attributes (Anning 2010). Other universities have taken steps to increase the cultural competence of their staff (Scott et al. 2013). Indeed, Universities Australia (2011) has developed a National Best Practice Framework for Indigenous Cultural Competency in Australian Universities. However, cultural competency development is a contested space and may not be restricted to Indigenous culture, which may mean there is very little Indigenous content incorporated into some training programs (Grote 2008). Nevertheless, the implementation of curriculum that incorporates Indigenous knowledges, the development of Indigenous graduate attributes and the delivery of cultural competency training are all important systemic steps in recalibrating the balance of power between Western and Indigenous knowledge systems. At present, most universities are still navigating ways to ensure staff are culturally competent and that learning environments are culturally safe for Indigenous students. Further work in this area needs to continue.

Conclusion

Throughout this chapter we have examined the unique policy discourses associated with both the national equity in higher education agenda and the Indigenous higher education agenda. In doing so we have described how these two policy discourses are different, yet intimately intertwined. We have then described the synergies and discordance between these two agendas to illuminate the strengths and opportunities for promoting further alignment. While we have not fully unpacked what a strengths-based approach can look like in this context, we are confident that this chapter will spur a deeper discussion and inform further research prioritisation in this space. We acknowledge that there is no ‘magic bullet’ in achieving improved participation of equity groups and Indigenous students in higher education. However, there is capacity to enhance the cohesion, integration and interdependence between them, where values and world views coalesce. We trust that other chapters throughout this book provide further guidance in this regard.

Acknowledgements The authors would like to acknowledge the useful feedback provided by Ms. Donna Robbins on early drafts of this chapter. James Smith would like to thank the National Centre for Student Equity in Higher Education for supporting a Visiting Fellowship throughout 2015 to undertake the necessary research to conceptualise and develop the content of this chapter.

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Chapter 3
What Do We Know About Community Engagement in Indigenous Education Contexts and How Might This Impact on Pathways into Higher Education?

James A. Smith, Steve Larkin, Dean Yibarbuk, and John Guenther

Introduction

This chapter aims to provide a critical commentary about what is known about 'community engagement' in Indigenous education contexts and how this might impact on pathways into higher education. But first, it is useful to understand the concept of 'community engagement' in a broader sense. Indeed, the term 'community engagement' means many different things to different people. There are various definitions across many disciplines with a general lack of consensus in academic scholarship and grey literature about how community engagement is actually best defined (Ramachandra and Mansor 2014). Likewise, the terms 'community' and 'engagement' are equally contested (Campbell 2008a, b; Dempsey 2010). Whilst some scholars have argued that a logical typology of community engagement involves information sharing, consultation and participation (Johnston 2010), the International Association for Public Participation has outlined five incremental phases of public impact – inform, consult, involve, collaborate and empower (IAP2 2007). Others have offered differing approaches, critiques and tools to unpack what is meant by community engagement (Dempsey 2010; Kotze et al. 2013). A popular

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J. Frawley et al. (eds.), *Indigenous Pathways, Transitions and Participation in Higher Education*, DOI 10.1007/978-981-10-4062-7_3

definition of community engagement adopted by the UN through a consultative process states:

> Community Engagement is a two-way process by which the aspirations, concerns, needs and values of citizens and communities are incorporated at all levels and in all sectors in policy development, planning, decision-making, service delivery and assessment; and by which government and other business and civil society organisations involve citizens, clients, communities and other stakeholders in these processes. (United Nations 2005, p. 1)

Generally speaking, 'community engagement finds itself expressed through bottom-up approaches, community ownership, "relevance" to the community, and collaborative approaches' (Campbell and Christie 2008, p. 6). In our view, the challenge of seeking a universal definition of community engagement is unproductive. Nevertheless, an understanding of how community engagement is 'done' is important. Is it something that is 'done' by one entity (such as a government organisation) to another (such as a community) – perhaps with particular 'rules of engagement' with targets in sight? Is it something that is 'done' between two entities (such as a school and parent council) where there is mutual benefit from the 'doing'? Or is it more of a symbiotic process where the boundaries of partnering entities merge as a systemic whole? (see Guenther 2015a, b for a discussion of these concepts).

Yet it is equally important to recognise that it has now become a very popular term in public policy discourses relating to health, education, employment, natural resource management and welfare systems at state, national and international levels. Whilst we recognise that there has been some discussion and theorising about stakeholder engagement in organisational theory scholarship (e.g. see Foster and Jonker 2005; Greenwood and Van Buren 2010), we argue that a more nuanced understanding of the different ways community engagement is conceptualised, theorised and practiced within educational settings in Australia is becoming increasingly important (Johnston 2010). One reason is that the term is now commonly used in a range of research, policy and practice contexts without due consideration of what this means, why this might be important, and how it can be done. Indeed, community engagement is being used somewhat incoherently in strategic plans and frameworks; in ministerial announcements; in government policies; as outputs in service level agreements; as a key requirement during the implementation of various education programs; in ethics proposals; and in commissioned reports and reviews. At present little consideration is given to theoretical and practice implications associated with community engagement. That is, it is mentioned everywhere, but there is a general lack of awareness about what community engagement looks and feels like in reality. In fact, more often than not, it is being used as a catch-all feel-good phrase that gives a sense of purpose, value and connectedness to the work we do.

For some, it is the ethical practice and principles that underpin the way community engagement is enacted that are most important, such as the development of trust, reciprocity and sustainability; for others it is the process, such as acting in a socially just and equitable manner in the way decisions are made; and for others it is about the impact or outcome achieved through community engagement, such as a notable improvement in educational aspiration or achievement. Within an education

context all of these aspects of community engagement are intimately intertwined. Within an Indigenous education context there is an added cultural and political dimension that also comes into play. Interestingly, much commentary on community engagement fails to acknowledge the social, cultural, political and economic dimensions and their respective impacts. This chapter aims to provide a descriptive account of the way community engagement is currently described, understood and employed in education contexts in Australia. We pay particular attention to the implications this has for promoting Indigenous higher education pathways. To achieve this, we ask five key questions:

1. What do we know about Indigenous community engagement?
2. What do we know about Indigenous community engagement in education contexts?
3. What do we know about community engagement in higher education?
4. What do we know about Indigenous community engagement in higher education?
5. What are the opportunities for improved Indigenous community engagement in Indigenous higher education contexts?

We now discuss each of these questions in turn.

What Do We Know About *Indigenous* Community Engagement?

Indigenous community engagement work is happening in a range of contexts both nationally and globally. This includes but is not limited to Indigenous health, education, water and land management and housing sectors (Campbell 2008a, b; Williams 2008; Watts 2012; National Collaborating Centre for Determinants of Health 2013). Generally speaking, recognising the impact of colonisation on both education systems, and respective community engagement approaches, is important (Madden et al. 2013). This has a significant bearing on the way Indigenous and non-Indigenous people interact and exchange information within community engagement contexts (Verran and Christie 2008). Finding alternative community engagement methods that privilege Indigenous epistemologies, ontologies and axiologies are important (Verran and Christie 2008; Madden et al. 2013). We hypothesise that incorporating Indigenous knowledges and practices into the development of Indigenous community engagement tools, and therefore increasing the potential to improve the way in which Indigenous community engagement occurs in practice, will ultimately strengthen Indigenous education outcomes in Australia. Whilst there has been little application of decolonising theories in relation to Indigenous community engagement practices in Australia, there is certainly room for such application. Indeed, understanding how power is negotiated in community engagement activities is fundamental (Head 2007) and is worth of further exploration in Indigenous community

engagement contexts. Larkin (2015) has examined Indigenous higher education contexts using Critical Race Theory (CRT) to convincingly argue that the centralisation of race and racism; a commitment to challenging the dominant ideology; a commitment to social justice; the centrality of marginalised voices; transdisciplinarity; and interest convergence, are all important considerations. Inherent in these discussions is the concept of power and power relations. The context of engagement is also important. Community engagement in an urban area will take on a different form than engagement in a remote community. Furthermore, outsiders engaging in an inside space need to be self-aware not only about the nature of the context but the nature of assumptions they bring to their role in engagement. We suggest the same general considerations could apply to the way Indigenous community engagement is approached, particularly within education settings.

What Do We Know About Indigenous Community Engagement in *Education Contexts*?

In Canada, education policy and curriculum documents encourage the participation of Indigenous community members as a key component of Indigenous education reform (Madden et al. 2013). The implementation of such approaches has resulted in barriers such as unwelcoming schools, professionalisation of classroom teaching, colonised classrooms and unilateral decolonisation being identified as key concerns (Madden et al. 2013). Such research has emphasised the importance of the multiple perspectives of key community stakeholders such as Indigenous students, parents, elders, families, teachers and cultural support workers. There are multiple examples of successful Indigenous community engagement and consultation processes in the education and training sector across Australia. Yet we note that there has been no systematic review and subsequent critical analysis of the success factors of such programs. There has also been minimal evaluation work completed with sufficient theoretical rigour. Whilst we acknowledge this is urgently required, particularly in relation to the benefits of involving Indigenous people and incorporating Indigenous knowledges and practices, it extends beyond the immediate scope of this chapter. Similarly, there are organisations supporting enhanced Indigenous community engagement processes in this space. The NSW Aboriginal Education Consultative Group Inc. and Stronger Smarter Institute are two notable exemplars. We do not provide additional case studies here to illustrate such work, but acknowledge that enhanced profiling of reputable organisations building capacity in Indigenous community engagement work would be useful for practitioners and policy-makers working in Indigenous education and training contexts. Such efforts would help in extending theorising about, and further investments in, Indigenous community engagement in education settings.

Recent research has found that family-strengthening programs are widespread throughout Australia and are frequently used to enhance relationships between

students, families and schools as a means to improve education outcomes for Indigenous students (Guenther 2014). Further research needs to occur to better understand the longer term outcomes of such work. Whilst the evidence suggests there are many benefits for participants in such programs, the long term community impact of these types of programs, collectively, has not been evaluated. Research conducted by the Cooperative Research Centre for Remote Economic Participation's (CRC-REP) Remote Education Systems project shows definitively that community members see successful schools as those where parents and community members are actively involved in their children's education. What's more, they want to have a greater say in the system's response to schooling in communities (Guenther 2015b; Guenther et al. 2015).

We also know that community engagement is being incorporated into Indigenous education policy contexts in Australia. Using A Share in the Future – Indigenous Education Strategy 2015–2024 as an example, 'engagement' has recently been identified as one of the five major elements to improve Indigenous education outcomes in the Northern Territory (Northern Territory Department of Education 2015a). One goal of 'engagement' outlined in the strategy is that 'parents and communities are engaged with purpose to support their children throughout their learning journey' (Northern Territory Department of Education, p. 9). Yet the target and performance measure relates to the 'proportion of Indigenous students in government schools attending four or more days per week' (Northern Territory Department of Education, p. 11). For us, there is an uneasy disjunction between the goal and the measure and a lack of consideration for the theory of change behind the interventions and their outcomes. Whilst we recognise that attendance is used as a proxy measure for 'student participation' in the Measurement Framework for Australian Schooling in Australia (White 2015), there is a myriad of ways to measure parent and community engagement, such as Indigenous engagement in school governance, levels of parental participation in classroom activities or an increase in student and family aspirations for educational success. These measures are in stark contrast to the desired outcome described in the strategy which focuses on consistent school attendance (which incidentally aligns with a parallel national policy investment known as the Remote School Attendance Strategy). Interestingly, there is no measure in relation to educational achievement which one could argue is a more appropriate measure than school attendance.

Due to the vagueness in the way both 'engagement' and 'community engagement' have been defined in the strategy, the corresponding actions outlined in the implementation plan lack an explicit connection to the goal, target and performance measure. The actions span a single provider girls' engagement program; a community engagement charter to set the expectations to drive respectful and purposeful relationships between schools and communities; and the implementation of a whole system approach to behaviour management and wellbeing in all schools (Northern Territory Department of Education 2015b). Using the development of a Community Engagement Charter as an illustration, the implementation of this action has initially involved mandating school principals to develop a charter within their school. At the timing of writing this chapter, a Family and Community Engagement

Framework and a Community Engagement Charter template had been distributed to school principals across the Northern Territory (Northern Territory Department of Education 2016). The framework asks a series of questions relating to communication, partnerships to learn, community collaboration, decision-making and participation (Northern Territory Department of Education 2016). It also outlines best practices with respect to strong family and community engagement (Northern Territory Department of Education 2016). Noteworthy is that the Family and Community Engagement Framework developed by the Northern Territory Department of Education is completely disconnected from the territory-wide Remote Engagement and Program Strategy launched only 5 months prior by the Northern Territory Department of Local Government and Community Services (Northern Territory Government 2015).

With respect to the expectation for school principals to develop a Community Engagement Charter, little guidance has been provided to school principals about how community engagement should be negotiated within each remote Indigenous school context; what indicators would be used to measure and monitor the success of the Community Engagement Charter and how they would be held accountable in relation to the charter. Therefore, one can expect that the intensity and nature of community engagement will differ markedly across Northern Territory communities. Activities could potentially range from a one-off school event or open day to an intensive family engagement program or an out-of-hours culture and language program involving information exchange between students, teachers and other community members. The possibilities are endless. We are strong advocates for schools and communities to have the ability to think innovatively and work flexibly to plan and implement community engagement activities. However, it is equally important to understand the purpose and desired outcome of community engagement in Indigenous education settings. Too often this is poorly defined and therefore fails to acknowledge and value an underlying philosophy of community engagement as a means to empower and enable active citizenship.

What Do We Know About Community Engagement in *Higher Education*?

Globally, universities have increasingly focused efforts on campus-community engagement and/or university-community engagement (Winter et al. 2006; Dempsey 2010). As Dempsey (2010, p366) comments 'Universities increasingly cast themselves as engaged institutions committed to building collaborative relationships with community-based stakeholders.' Typically, community engagement in higher education is often described as a cluster of activities that include, among others, service learning, programs and research that address specific social, economic and political needs (Bernardo et al. 2012). From an Australian perspective,

Winter et al. (2006) provide a more detailed analysis suggesting that key dimensions of community engagement in higher education include:

- Teaching and learning
- Curriculum design
- Policies
- Research
- External Relations
- Social and Cultural Engagement
- Partnerships with school and educational providers
- Economic engagement
- Organisation and participation of students

The reality is that community engagement is now a common term used in university-wide strategic plans, with some universities having developed their own specific community engagement strategies and/or established dedicated community engagement roles and responsibilities. There is even a journal dedicated to the topic – *Australasian Journal of University-Community Engagement*. Interestingly, community engagement is now also used as a common assessment criterion in academic staff promotion processes in many Australian universities. For example, the Charles Darwin University (CDU) academic staff promotion policy indicates that the following factors are assessed in relation to community engagement:

- Significant and valued contributions to a profession, industry partner or to government
- Significant and valued contribution to communities, especially remote, regional and Indigenous communities
- Significant and valued contribution to CDU Equity goals

Whilst these are worthy endeavours, it is unclear how these factors are assessed and who is best positioned to make such assessments. Arguably, community stakeholders would be best positioned to make such assessments but in our experience this is rarely the case.

As Winter et al. (2006, p. 225) explain, 'the local orientation of community engagement is a distinct part of its appeal, offering regional outcomes for communities, opportunities for local students, and projects that are tangible and achievable.' However, community engagement is not necessarily an easy endeavour. Clifford and Petrescu (2012) argue that sustainable university-community engagement involves three intertwined dimensions – internal, external and personal. These factors involve a complex interplay between balancing organisational and community priorities, negotiating power relations and positioning oneself with respect to others. In our experience, these are remarkably similar factors to negotiate in the context of Indigenous community engagement work. One can assume that these dimensions are therefore more pronounced in Indigenous community engagement which focuses on supporting pathways into higher education.

What Do We Know About *Indigenous* Community Engagement with Respect to Pathways into Higher Education?

Whilst there are national requirements for universities to report against Indigenous student access, participation, retention and success in higher education; Indigenous involvement in university governance; and Indigenous employment strategies (Kinnane et al. 2014), there is nothing that explicitly requires a broader commitment to Indigenous community engagement. This is problematic. Smith et al. (2015) assert that Indigenous community engagement is a key principle and process that should underpin all program development aimed at supporting Indigenous learners to enter higher education. This was something highlighted regularly during presentations at a national forum held in Darwin in October 2015, which was funded through the Australian Government 2014 Higher Education Participation Program National Priorities Pool. The forum was entitled 'Engagement at the interface: Indigenous pathways and transitions into higher education' and involved bringing together 130 participants (the majority working in Indigenous higher education contexts) from across Australia. Despite a deep interest in the topic of Indigenous community engagement among participants, at this point in time there is very limited published evidence about exactly what Indigenous community engagement can look and feel like with respect to promoting pathways into higher education. This does not imply that there is a lack of action in this space. Quite the contrary, as Kinnane et al. (2014, p. 80) point out,

> Many universities collaborate with schools and communities to provide outreach to a greater number of Indigenous students. These programmes are diverse and are making great strides nationally in raising the aspirations of young Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students about 'going on to uni.' Valuing and engaging with family and community is a common theme of those universities with successful programmes.

Indeed, there is an emerging literature which argues that it is critically important for universities to build trusting and respectful relationships with Indigenous students, their families and the communities to which they belong, to successfully engage in discussions about pathways into higher education (Behrendt et al. 2012; Fredericks et al. 2015). Some Australian universities have invested in Indigenous engagement positions, programs, strategies and frameworks, or have embedded an explicit Indigenous community engagement focus into Reconciliation Action Plans. The scope and functions of these investments varies tremendously, further emphasising that Indigenous community engagement is being conceptualised in different ways within higher education environments in Australia. We argue that the nature, processes and impact of such engagement is important. This is illustrated convincingly in relation to the Community Aspirations Program (CAP-ED) delivered through Central Queensland University:

> The project team took the time to develop, maintain and sustain relationships with community members and service providers, and this paid off in their trust and support for the programme, which provided an opportunity to share as it was implemented. Communities were initially hesitant to engage with the project. However, as soon as the project employed

> Indigenous staff who were connected with the communities and had local knowledge, community engagement became much easier. Early engagement fostered additional engagement as the team developed greater knowledge and opened dialogue between the communities and the universities. While it can be challenging to build into projects opportunities for discussion and deep engagement, the efforts pay off through greater opportunities for development, empowerment and change. By developing deep relationships with Elders and community members, the CAP-ED team designed a programme with community ownership of both the process and the outcomes (Fredericks et al. 2015, p. 61).

The concepts raised by Fredericks et al. (2015) highlight important considerations when engaging Indigenous students and families in discussion about higher education. A commitment of time and sustained engagement is a central feature. Employment of local Indigenous staff is equally important. These are key learnings to consider when investing in Indigenous community engagement in higher education contexts. However, at this point in time, there is a paucity of quality research and evaluation data to make firm evidence-based recommendations about what works best and why and in what circumstances (Frawley et al. 2015). Further investments in comprehensive and rigorous program evaluations and collaborative research approaches would help to grow a stronger evidence base in this regard.

What Are the Opportunities for Improved Indigenous Community Engagement in Indigenous Higher Education Contexts?

The aforementioned discussion has led us to identify four major opportunities for improving Indigenous community engagement in higher education. These include:

1. Redefining community engagement from Indigenous standpoints
2. Appropriately resourcing Indigenous community engagement activities
3. Continuing to build an evidence base to learn from recent Indigenous community engagement investments
4. Move beyond the rhetorical language used in many policy documents and frameworks

Each of these focus areas is discussed briefly below.

Redefining Community Engagement from Indigenous Standpoints

If we want to see improvements and further investment in the area of Indigenous community engagement in higher education, then we need to place greater attention on the potential contribution of Indigenous knowledges and practices. This involves a number of key elements. Firstly, a heightened level of theorising about Indigenous community engagement would be beneficial. This could include the incorporation

of theoretical approaches such as Indigenous Standpoint Theory; Whiteness Theory or Critical Race Theory. Noting the outstanding work already done by Indigenous scholars in this field both in Australia (e.g. Moreton-Robinson 2006a, b; Arbon 2008; Ford 2010; Nakata et al. 2012) and internationally (e.g. Bishop 2011; Chilisa 2012), we hypothesise this would see a fundamental shift in the way Indigenous community engagement is approached by universities. It would see a shift away from a Eurocentric worldview, to a paradigm more closely aligned to Indigenous epistemologies and ontologies. Secondly, if we start to view Indigenous community engagement in this way, the probability of pursuing community engagement that is framed in a more culturally respectful and responsive way is much more likely. As a consequence, we may find that the doing of engagement takes on a different dynamic, such that those who were once the targets of engagement become the initiators of engagement. This would be consistent with both ways learning approaches frequently advocated in the Indigenous education space (White 2015).

Appropriately Resourcing Indigenous Community Engagement Activities

A significant challenge faced in many universities in Australia is ensuring that a sufficient quantum of funds is allocated to pursue quality community engagement work. Given that emerging evidence suggests that time, sustained engagement and whole-of-community engagement approaches are important elements in what Indigenous community engagement constitutes (Fredericks et al. 2015; Smith et al. 2015), we know that additional resources are usually required in comparison to mainstream university-community engagement contexts. In many universities, this includes a commitment to increase a core investment in financial and human resources, which contrasts the more frequently accessed time-limited nationally competitive funding sources. Within a tight fiscal environment, the realisation that appropriate resourcing is a key factor is not always well received. However, if we want to see improvements in Indigenous education outcomes, then it is a necessary non-negotiable step. Within the context of regional and remote Indigenous community engagement the need for additional resourcing becomes even more critical. Factors such as travel, accommodation, inclement weather, sorry business, use of interpreters, Indigenous leadership and governance capacity, and remuneration for Indigenous expertise and cultural brokerage (in the form of sitting fees or employment of local community members) frequently come into play. There is currently insufficient evidence about what the real costs are, in relation to human and financial capital, to do this well. Similarly, there has been a lack of investment in professional development, education and training by governments and other institutions (such as universities) to enhance Indigenous community engagement efforts. Given that community engagement has both theoretical and practice elements that are not necessarily well understood, respective outcomes for the Indigenous communities we wish to engage are often suboptimal.

Continuing to Build an Evidence Base to Learn from Recent Indigenous Community Engagement Investments

We have pointed towards an emerging evidence base about Indigenous community engagement in higher education in Australia. But we have also explained that additional collaborative research and more sophisticated forms of evaluation and monitoring are required (Smith et al. 2015). The recent national forum on Indigenous pathways and transitions into higher education, coupled with recent investments in Indigenous higher education aspiration building programs through the federally funded Higher Education Participation Program, indicate that there is a groundswell of work happening in this area. Therefore, there is great potential to build a substantial evidence base about Indigenous community engagement relatively quickly. We argue that this should be a key research and policy reform priority within the Indigenous higher education space.

Move Beyond the Rhetorical Language Used in Many Policy Documents and Frameworks

As mentioned in the Introduction, and later illustrated using a Northern Territory Indigenous education policy example, the way in which Indigenous community engagement is conceptualised in policy documents and strategic frameworks needs be critically analysed and challenged. At present, there is a high degree of ambiguity in such documents, which ultimately leads to a lack of accountability with respect to improving Indigenous education outcomes. Within higher education contexts, this means being explicit about how Indigenous community engagement is defined, who defines it and who does it. We argue that the foundation for such work is best developed in collaboration with key community stakeholders including Indigenous Elders, students, their families, community-based organisations and where relevant their employers or schools. To do this with integrity requires an approach where the assumptions of academia, and those of context in which engagement is done, are unpacked together. There is considerable opportunity for non-Indigenous and Indigenous scholars to work together on this, building theories and practical applications at the 'cultural interface' (Nakata 2007) which will assist in the development of community actions that truly meet the needs and aspirations of Indigenous people. This will, however, require careful negotiation. Community engagement is occasionally perceived as an outcome rather than a process to achieve an outcome. This has led to some Indigenous communities becoming confused and perhaps disillusioned by the purpose of such engagement. As emphasised earlier, this is further exacerbated by the lack of investment in professional development activities about what good community engagement looks and feels like.

Conclusion

In this chapter, we have incrementally examined the concept of community engagement in relation to (a) Indigenous community engagement; (b) Indigenous community engagement in education; (c) community engagement in higher education and (d) Indigenous community engagement in higher education. This descriptive analysis has outlined the various strengths and weaknesses of such approaches based on current scholarship. In doing so, we highlight that a critical analysis of existing Indigenous community engagement programs in education settings is needed, including more theoretically rigorous and more complex and comprehensive evaluation processes. We have also used existing policy discourses to illustrate some of the challenges educators face when attempting to make transitions from policy into practice with respect to Indigenous community engagement. We then briefly discussed some of the opportunities for improving Indigenous community engagement in the higher education sector. This includes redefining community engagement from Indigenous standpoints; appropriately resourcing Indigenous community engagement activities; continuing to build an evidence base to learn from recent Indigenous community engagement investments and to move beyond the rhetorical language used in many policy documents and frameworks. We argue that if steps are taken to improve the quality and quantum of Indigenous community engagement work occurring in the higher education sector in Australia in this way, then we are on a strong path for improving Indigenous pathways and transitions into university.

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Chapter 4
A Design and Evaluation Framework for Indigenisation of Australian Universities

Lester-Irabinna Rigney

Introduction

What strategies are Australian universities using to increase Indigenous participation? Do whole of institution approaches work and are they sustainable? Indigenous Australians remain seriously under-represented in higher education (COAG 2008). The barriers to higher education for Indigenous students have been previously identified and well documented (Pechenkina and Anderson 2011). To improve outcomes, the recent Behrendt Review of Indigenous Higher Education recommended the deliberate involvement of Indigenous Australians in the work, study and governance of universities while shifting accountability for Indigenous outcomes to senior university leadership (Behrendt et al. 2012). Behrendt and her colleagues required universities in collaboration with Indigenous peoples to adopt a 'whole of institution' approach to improve Indigenous outcomes by using a standardised set of measurable parity targets and strategies (Behrendt et al. 2012, p. 162). Drawing on the work of Behrendt et al., this chapter defines the concept of 'Indigenisation' as the institutionalised change efforts towards Indigenous inclusion that uses a 'whole of university approach underpinned by principles of recognition and respect for Indigenous peoples, knowledges and cultures'. This chapter analyses the development and implementation of the University of Adelaide's[1] (henceforth Adelaide) whole of institution Indigenous Education Strategy between 2012 and 2014. The author of this chapter was a key architect of the strategy with the responsibility to institutionalise, as normative practice, Indigenous inclusion. This 10-year strategy generated multiple change efforts across five academic faculties and four administrative divisions. This chapter presents a conceptual *Design and Evaluation*

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J. Frawley et al. (eds.), *Indigenous Pathways, Transitions and Participation in Higher Education*, DOI 10.1007/978-981-10-4062-7_4

Framework for Indigenisation (DEFI) that underpins the analysis of institutional change. This DEFI framework has five major dimensions that defined the Adelaide education change: (1) assembling resources; (2) engagement; (3) working together; (4) building confidence; and (5) excellence and equity. This framework is potentially valuable for government and practitioners evaluating university change practices beyond single isolated approaches towards innovative whole of university approaches to improve Indigenous participation.

University Sector Background

Previous research has traced the rapid growth historically of Indigenous involvement in higher education between the 1970s and 1990s (Bin-Sallik, 2000; Biddle et al. 2004). Over the past decade, countless sectorial and government policies as major drivers of external change in universities have concluded that the rate of Indigenous student school completion and transition-to-university remains significantly lower than their non-Indigenous peers (Behrendt et al. 2012; Universities Australia 2011; Department of Education and Training 1989; DPMC 2015). The year 2008 saw a convergence of large-scale mainstream policy change to higher education seeking to achieve excellence and equity; set national innovation priorities; and increase Australia's standings in international higher education. These key sectorial touchstone reports include:

- 2008 Review of the National Innovation System (Cutler Review)
- 2008 The Review of Australian Higher Education (Bradley Review)
- 2011 Universities Australia National Best Practice Framework for Indigenous Cultural Competency in Australian Universities (Universities Australia)
- 2012 Review of Higher Education Access and Outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander People (Behrendt Review)

This chapter is informed by these major government reports and their vast literature sets. It argues that although the plethora of higher education and equity literature reviewed here is insightful, it has dealt little with the implementation of a 'University-wide' approach to Indigenous inclusion towards improvement of outcomes. Theoretical blind spots include a definition of 'Indigenisation' or a 'framework' for its implementation from an Indigenous perspective that privileges Indigenous values, interests, aspirations and epistemologies (Rigney 2001, 2006; Behrendt et al. 2012). This research gap possibly explains why there is no agreed universal definition of Indigenisation or a model of cultural standard that supports it in university.

In response to the Bradley Review for massive expansion, the Government uncapped the number of university places towards a 'universal' higher education system that improved access to students from lower socioeconomic, rural and regional backgrounds. The Behrendt Review goals aligned to Bradley sought to improve Indigenous participation rates to the same level of other Australians. In

2010, Indigenous Australians made up only 1.4% of all university enrolments yet their numbers were 2.2% of the Australian working age population (Behrendt et al. 2012).

To address this challenge, the Australian Government's funding scheme Higher Education Participation and Partnerships Program (HEPPP) financed many successful university outreach activities to improve greater participation of disadvantaged students (especially Indigenous and low socioeconomic status (HEPPP 2016). However, these contributions have often been isolated and difficult to sustain both over time and across the higher education sector (HEPPP 2016).

The Bradley Review (2008) highlighted that the Group of Eight (Go8) universities featured in the 'bottom percentile' of all Australian universities in the enrolment of low socioeconomic status (LSES) students. Adelaide is a member of the Go8 alliance consisting of the largest and oldest Australian universities, intensive in research. While in 2012 Adelaide led the Go8 in LSES and Indigenous enrolment, as an institution it remained below the national average.

Responding to this challenge, Adelaide in 2013 created an improved institutional wide approach to equity, championed by the senior leadership of Professor Quester (Deputy Vice-Chancellor and Vice-President – Academic); and Professor Bebbington (Vice-Chancellor and President). This Adelaide case study is drawn from a distinct period of education change between 2012 and 2014.

University Case Study Context

Adelaide is a public university in South Australia and was established in 1874. Its long-standing commitment to equity and inclusion saw Adelaide become the first university in Australia, and only the second in the world, to admit women to academic courses almost 40 years before Oxford in 1920. Adelaide's first science graduate was also its first women graduate, Edith Emily Dornwell, who graduated in 1885 (University of Adelaide 2016). Adelaide was the first Australian university to recognise Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Ethnomusicology by establishing the Centre for Aboriginal Studies in Music (CASM) in 1972.

Building on the success of CASM, Adelaide developed Indigenous access entry schemes and teaching programs throughout the 1980s, leading to the establishment of a dedicated Centre for Aboriginal Education – Wirltu Yarlu in 1996 and the Yaitya Purruna Indigenous Health Unit in 2003 (University of Adelaide 2013b). The University of Adelaide cumulative change and investment included several initiatives to improve Indigenous staff and student access and success:

- 2003 and 2014 University of Adelaide Reconciliation Statement
- 2009 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Employment Strategy

As predecessors to a whole of institution strategy, these Indigenous initiatives achieved incremental successes yet Indigenous staff and student participation remained under 1% of state population parity of 2% (University of Adelaide 2013a).

To boost change efforts to meet the needs and aspirations of Indigenous staff and students Adelaide put in place effective leadership to manage the reform. In 2012 the causal contract for the Indigenous Employment Senior Project Officer was made permanent. The re-designation of a senior Aboriginal academic to Dean of Indigenous Education resulted in the genesis of the university-wide Tarrkarri Tirrka Integrated Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Strategy 2013–2023 (University of Adelaide 2013a). The Tirrka strategy employed a Project Officer to assist the Dean with the reform.

This innovative coalition reported directly to the strong leadership position of the Deputy Vice-Chancellor Academic. While the Dean's position was outside the Indigenous student equity centre it sought change effort from the centre's Indigenous Director and staff. Change efforts and forces would now be shaped and influenced by this new whole of university approach with a philosophical value proposition that 'Indigenous education is everybody's business'.

The goals of greater diversity were reaffirmed in the new University Strategic Plan known as 'The Beacon of Enlightenment' 2013–2023 (University of Adelaide 2013c). The convergence of both 'Tirrka' and 'Beacon' strategies co-created internal targets for faculties and administrative units and the normalisation of senior staff accountability for Indigenous education. The Adelaide Tirrka strategy incorporated previous Indigenous approaches and actions into one coherent direction and purpose. Priority improvement areas included (University of Adelaide 2013a):

- Significantly improve Indigenous participation from under 1% of state population parity in 2012 to 2% parity by 2024
- Boosting Indigenous research
- Recognising Indigenous perspectives in courses

Definition and Framework for Analysis

Drawing on the work of Behrendt et al. (2012) this chapter defines the concept of 'Indigenisation' as the institutionalised change efforts towards Indigenous inclusion that uses a whole of university approach underpinned by principles of recognition and respect for Indigenous peoples, knowledges and cultures.

Since the Adelaide Indigenisation Strategy involved issues of equity and participation of Indigenous students in university, an innovative matrix designed by the National Centre for Student Equity University of South Australia was adapted for the analysis in this study (Gale et al. 2010). Gale's Design and Evaluation Matrix for Outreach (DEMO) comprises ten characteristics listed under four strategies to evaluate successful university programs designed to improve participation in university for low SES and Indigenous communities. These include (1) assembling resources; (2) engagement; (3) working together; and (4) building confidence (Gale et al. 2010).

Table 4.1 A Design and Evaluation Framework for Indigenisation (DEFI)

Category	Characteristics	Comment
1. Assembling resources, actors, partnership	Actors and people rich	Create a positive organisational culture for improved results.
	Building engaged, supportive and collaborative environment	Build leadership team.
	Faculty and Indigenous partnerships established	Faculty financial support and/or incentives.
	Implement university-wide Indigenous strategy	
2. Engaging learners, faculties, academics and researchers	Build Professional Learning communities for continuous opportunity where teachers can redesign/share curricula and pedagogy to support new alignment of ideas.	What culturally responsive curricula and pedagogies used?
	Recognition and validation of diverse epistemologies	Data shared.
	Measurable outcomes and impact monitored and reported	Successes replicated and scaled up across the university.
		Opportunities for cultural competency.
3. Working together	Indigenous community partnerships.	What is faculty university and Indigenous community, commitment to University-wide strategy?
	Faculty and administration commitment	
	Indigenous staff not left with the burden to do all the work of Indigenisation	
	Increasing visibility of Indigenous cultures across campuses	
4. Building confidence	Support faculty and school leadership addresses challenges of Indigenous staff and student retention and success	Empowering all staff and confidence through professional learning communities.
	Measurable outcomes/impact	Sustainability of reform.
	Scale up and share internal successes	
5. Excellence and equity	Culturally responsive curricula, teaching and research that validate Indigenous knowledges	Excellence and equity basis of strong Indigenous university-wide strategies. Does institutional system rise to the challenge?
	High expectation relationships by all parties	
	Indigenous STEM participation	

While Gale's matrix (Gale et al. 2010) provided a robust research and evaluation framework for this Adelaide case study, it required updating to strengthen its matrix to capture a richer set of specific themes that take into consideration the institutional culture of the University of Adelaide. Consequently, Gale's matrix has been adapted and termed A Design and Evaluation Framework for Indigenisation (DEFI) (Table 4.1). The following categories have been added to Gale's matrix to capture complex nuances. These include:

- Engaging learners, faculty, academics and researchers
- Excellence and equity

This DEFI framework offers a useful evaluation tool for institutionalised change efforts towards Indigenous inclusion that involves:

- Aims, goals and targets as drivers of change in these programs
- Actors and stakeholders that develop and maintain programs
- Quantifiable, measurable and clear outcomes

The DEFI framework was used to develop the broad themes and a set of questions that underpins the analysis. The framework includes five major dimensions (Table 4.1):

1. Assembling resources, actors and partners
2. Engaging learners, faculties, academics and researchers
3. Working together
4. Building confidence
5. Excellence and equity

Results

Evidence of results include:

Indigenous Students (2012–2014)

- Overall 10-year target 2013–2020: Achieve Indigenous undergraduate and postgraduate student enrolment rates reflective of state population parity to 2% of total students by 2020.
- 2012 Baseline Indigenous students: 183 total; Commencing 78.
- 2013 Indigenous students: 207 total (Tirrka target 190); Commencing 82. (Tirrka target 102). Largest cohort on record in Adelaide's history.
- 2014 Indigenous students exceeded: 206 (Tirrka target 202); Commencements 102 (Tirrka target 105). Largest cohort on record in Adelaide's history.
- 2024 – 2% parity Indigenous students target: 430 total; Commencing 170 (University of Adelaide 2012b, 2013a, b, 2014b).

Indigenous Staff (2012–2014)

- Overall 10-year target 2013–2020: Achieve Indigenous staff employment rates reflective of state population parity to 2% of total staff by 2020.
- 2012 Indigenous Staff: 25 total (Tirrka target 25).
- 2013 Indigenous Staff: 42 total (Tirrka target 30), 16 academics, 26 professional staff; 16 males, 26 females.
- 2014 Indigenous Staff: 40 total (Tirrka target 35), 15 academics, 25 professional staff; 16 males, 24 females (University of Adelaide 2012b, 2013a, b, 2014b).

The previous decade before 2012, Indigenous total student enrolment numbers stagnated to fewer than 180. In 2014 all educational change efforts internally saw Indigenous student numbers reach beyond 200, the largest cohort on record in the University of Adelaide's history. In 2014 Indigenous staff doubled and had already met 2015 annual targets. These snapshot findings indicate how across schools and faculties this internal force of change by a central strategy was responsible for growth that defines a distinct periodization between 2012 and 2014.

The rate of improvement indicates targets were on track to reach parity before 2020. For brevity in this chapter, data on Indigenous staff and student overall numbers are used to tell the story of educational change. Further, data to explain internal Adelaide change forces can be accessed in other publicly available documents (University of Adelaide 2012a, b, c, 2013a, b, c; 2014a, b; 2016).

Assembling Resources, Actors and Partnerships

Adelaide's Indigenisation strategy involved assembling a diverse range of practices, stakeholders and actors to pursue change and vision for equity. This generated cross-faculty response with multiple change efforts and forces deliberately searching for different patterns of innovations.

Whole of Institution Strategy

The Tirrka strategy (University of Adelaide 2013a) was embedded in larger University's Strategic Plan (Beacon of Enlightenment) and aligned to government priorities of 'Closing the Gap' on Indigenous disadvantage (Commonwealth of Australia 2015; COAG 2008). These inter-related change forces and their convergence on the institution had an accumulative effect on a standards-based reform to achieve 2% Indigenous parity rate within a decade. An audit of all Indigenous programs identified strengths and areas for improvement with solid agreement by faculty for improvement. Unlike previously, all internal Indigenous student and staff data were shared regularly and located centrally for ease of access by all areas. Annual faculty accountabilities of progress were reported to the Vice-Chancellor and Council. The university-wide strategy relied on finite resources. Increasing faculty understanding of how to leverage and complement their existing resources to fulfil their strategic goals proved to be critical.

Governance

The Indigenous Education and Engagement Committee monitored the implementation of the Tirrka strategy. Chaired by the Dean of Indigenous Education, members included faculty representation, Indigenous staff and students and the Indigenous student equity unit. Each faculty and administrative unit had an internal Gender and Equity Diversity Committee chaired by a faculty funded Associate Dean of Diversity and Inclusion to operationalise change action. All faculties developed measurable targets within their faculty strategic plan that aligned to the institution-wide Tirrka strategy.

Stakeholder Partnerships

Strong community engagement was established through a Memorandum of Understanding established between the university and the local Kaurna Aboriginal Elders (Kaurna Warra Pintyanthi and Karrpanthi Aboriginal Corporations). Various long-standing and new university-wide Indigenous pilot projects engaged the community in partnership including some areas of the university impervious to change. Briefly these involved reconciliation staff and student awards; Indigenous Law students' entry pathways and pastoral care mentoring; Indigenous law students study-abroad tour; Marni Wingku Indigenous school student outreach program; Indigenous student music showcase; Children's University; Indigenous Community Reconciliation barbeque; the annual Lowitja O'Donoghue Oration; and philanthropic scholarships. Even though most innovations continued over a 2-year period, some were uneven in outcome and did not reach the institutionalisation stage where they became routine and effortless on the part of actors or faculties. This is in large part due to staff leaving, shifting economic priorities and/or faculties' responses to differing change pressures.

Engaging Learners, Faculties, Academics and Researchers

The sustainability of educational change and how institutional forces using a whole of university strategy have exerted their influence is evident in the pursuit of the professional learning community (PLC) at Adelaide. The theory of professional learning communities was central to this project's change effort method to develop faculty and system-wide capacity-building for sustainable teacher improvement and student learning. DuFour (2014, p. 2) emphasises the powerful collaboration that characterises professional learning communities that produce:

a systematic process in which teachers work together in teams to analyse and improve their classroom practice, engaging in an ongoing cycle of questions that promote deep team learning.

Professional Learning Community for Institution Change

An effective professional learning community was established to provide the conditions for teachers to redesign curriculum and pedagogy that focused on improving Indigenous student learner achievement. This enabled continuous opportunity for staff to think, learn and express ideas about the process of greater Indigenous participation. The professional learning community workshops introduced teachers to the 'Tirrka' and 'University Beacon' strategies and connected to international theory on improving Indigenous outcomes. Utilising action research approaches of professional learning and knowledge production, faculty representatives were trained to implement curricula and pedagogical changes then to in-service their faculty colleagues. These professional learning community workshops created opportunities for dialogue on how to imagine and envision Indigenous presence in the faculty (Rigney et al. 1998; Rigney 2011a, b; Ladson-Billings 1995, 2009; Howlett et al. 2008; Frawley et al. 2015). Indigenous knowledges and epistemologies are valued and represented across the academic agenda (Sarra et al. 2011; Smith 2003; Rigney 2001, 2006; Matthews 2012; Matthews et al. 2005). The key characteristics of this professional learning community include plurality of knowledges, values and ways of knowing; shared values and vision; collective responsibility for Indigenous Education; collaboration focused on learning in curricula and pedagogy; individual and collective professional learning; and reflective professional enquiry and support networks (Kinnane et al. 2014; Miller et al. 2012; Hauser et al. 2009; Gunther 2015). This project built a culture of support, collaboration and collective professional learning. This pedagogical change approach is one well worth pursuing as a means of promoting school and system-wide student improvement.

Indigenising University Curriculum

To increase the depth and breadth of Indigenous knowledges across a range of faculty disciplinary areas, Indigenous Knowledges and Society Studies Major was developed within the Bachelor of Arts. Managed by the Indigenous student equity centre, the new Studies Major was successfully offered on the city campus. An Indigenous University Preparatory Program (UPP) was also offered both at Adelaide and regionally at Port Augusta to increase pathway access for city and rural students. Conceptual pedagogy theory, teaching techniques and research approaches used by experienced staff managing the Studies Major were shared in professional learning community workshops.

University Staff Inter-cultural Competence Workshops

A series of Staff Inter-cultural Competence Workshops were developed to build teacher skills. Practitioner enrolment in inter-cultural competency reached its height in 2014 with 151 university staff members (target 30) participating in workshops, with feedback collected to support the idea that such workshops improved the confidence of staff in Indigenous matters. To develop maximum exposure to inter-cultural competence, an online Aboriginal Cultural Awareness module was developed and included as compulsory in all new staff-induction processes. It was expected by 2023 that over 6000 staff would complete the online induction.

Working Together

One of the historical obstacles to greater Indigenous participation in Australian higher education was that the task for its transformation was left to the few inside universities (Page and Asmar 2008). In contrast, the high importance of relationship building, partnerships and high-quality professional development is a feature of the Adelaide case study. Creating a secure and welcoming learning culture to building staff professional confidence and collaboration was proven to be the most effective.

Higher Burden on Indigenous Staff

The work of Page and Asmar (2008), and Pechenkina and Anderson (2011), suggests that a whole of institution approach to Indigenisation can place a higher burden and multiple demands on small numbers of Indigenous staff and Indigenous equity centres. These staff accept or resist particular reforms according to their perceptions and philosophies of who is responsible for Indigenous matters across the institution. Adelaide's project confirms such challenges exist but can be mitigated when added leadership, staff and resources for the reform are not drawn from Indigenous equity centres. While Indigenous staff are important stakeholders to change processes, the use of an institution-wide reform requires a greater role of the faculty-based staff to be responsible for faculty Indigenous matters. This complemented rather than placing additional burden on Indigenous student equity centres.

Building Indigenous Staff Capacity

Indigenous staff were important stakeholders in internal Adelaide change processes; therefore, retention and building staff capacity were critical change elements. Indigenous staff employment across Adelaide ranged from junior professional staff to early career academics. Most Indigenous staff rarely applied for promotion or tenure. Moreover, junior Indigenous staff did not access internal competitive faculty conference grants crucial to advance their careers. This challenge required change if staff retention was to be achieved. The Taplin Indigenous Bursary for International Education was established with philanthropic support to increase the capacity to retain Indigenous staff (University of Adelaide, 2012c, 2013d). Successful participants accessed these grants to increase publications for promotion and tenure purposes. In 2013–2014, ten staff/students travelled to deliver refereed papers at recognised international conferences at University of British Columbia, Canada; Oxford University, England; The Smithsonian Institute, United States; and the Royal Infirmary Hospital in Edinburgh, Scotland. This innovative reform was open to all areas and complemented localised faculty grants rather than their replacement. Equally, this innovation was a temporary action implemented over 5 years to build enough individual capacity and confidence to apply for prestigious faculty staff grants.

Increasing Visibility of Indigenous Cultures Across Campuses

Studies conclude that culturally compatible environments engage Indigenous students in universities and reinforce their sense of belonging (Biddle et al. 2004; Gale et al. 2010). Adelaide's actions to increase Indigenous participation included continuous improvement to Indigenous students' services and to expand the physical profile of Indigenous cultures on all its university campuses. In 2013 the Indigenous equity centre Wirltu Yarlu underwent a US$1 million renovation. Investment in building renovations also occurred in regional Port Augusta that offered the Indigenous University Preparatory Program. The valuable and rich contribution of Indigenous culture to the University and Australian life was celebrated during Reconciliation and National Aboriginal and Islanders Oberservance Day Committee (NAIDOC) festivals. In 2012 the University of Adelaide's new US$100 million, 6 Green-Star rating engineering building was given a local Kaurna name, Ingkarni Wardli meaning 'place of learning or enquiry'. This naming symbolised the special relationship Adelaide shares with the Kaurna people, the original custodians of the land on which the university is situated. These activities all fostered genuine engagement and partnerships with local Indigenous peoples that strengthened the external support for internal changes.

Building Confidence

Building staff confidence to enact a collective institution culture and philosophy for Indigenisation was central to building the confidence of all reform actors.

Empowerment of Staff

Fostering an engaged, supportive and empowered university community at Adelaide centred on respectful communication to build a positive profile of change efforts. However, the innovative reforms at Adelaide were challenged at the beginning with staff surveys indicating high anxiety about lack of expertise, confidence or familiarity with Indigenous knowledges, histories and interests. Change efforts over the first 2 years of Tirrka strategy implementation invested 60% of resources and time-building confidence and developing appropriate skill sets for action. This investment in staff confidence was to ensure that the reform change lasts and spreads.

Inter-disciplinary forums were regularly used to foster a safe, caring and supportive environment to resolve challenges to increase change efforts. Strong collaborative leadership was required from faculty senior management, the Dean of Indigenous Education and the Deputy Vice-Chancellors. Clear concise and regular communication from the leadership on the aims and targets of the change effort was a key feature of the Adelaide reform. This leadership promoted a faculty culture that aligned these change efforts to faculty values, philosophy and graduate attributes. Adopting an educative rather than punitive approach to change behaviour established an appealing physical environment for collaboration through engaging pedagogies.

The change strategy dictated top-down highly prescriptive targets and allowed flexibility for faculties to determine projects. The findings indicate the less experienced the reform actors were with Indigenous issues, the more prescriptive in ideas for change. Collaborative projects in partnership with more experienced practitioners in other faculties produced support for the new alignment culture. These experienced equity actors promoted strong collaborative inter-relationships across the university and took on a role of equity-reform champions and mentors. Leveraging these actors' energy, leadership and power led to cumulative and sustainable improvements in equity structures, systems and progress beyond their faculty borders.

Sustainability

Hargreaves and Goodson's (2006, p. 5) empirical studies on institution educational change over time in the United States and Canada conclude that 'ultimately the sustainability of large-scale education change and reform of institutional culture can only be addressed by examining reform from a longitudinal change over time'. These authors conclude that most institutional reforms have a limited 'shelf life of 5 years'. Hargreaves and Goodson (2006) argue that universities because of their size, bureaucratic complexity and subject traditions have proved to be impervious to change. Challenges to the sustainability of any reform include staff changes over time; student demographic shift; loss of funding and good will; and staff suffering reform fatigue.

During 2012–2014, Adelaide experienced large-scale external change pressures including response to the Bradley and Cutler Reviews and alteration to the Tertiary Education Quality and Standards Agency (TEQSA), Australia's independent national regulator of the higher education sector. Wave after wave of external reforms challenged faculties, their budgets and staff. Yet the Adelaide project only had a small minority of resistant actors. While several large-scale external reforms did impact workloads and human goodwill, the Adelaide findings suggest that a combination of external government forces and key distinct internal institutional characteristics, supported by a coherent university-wide Indigenous equity strategy, holds the strongest promise for designing and implementing effective early interventions. Over a 2-year period (2012–2014) the Adelaide project yielded measurable improvement in Indigenous participation.

Hargreaves and Goodson's (2006, p. 5) findings conclude that many 'innovations can be implemented successfully with effective leadership, sufficient investment and strong internal and external support, yet very few innovations reach institutionalisation stage where they become routine and effortless'. Producing 'deep improvement that lasts and spreads remains an elusive goal of most education change efforts' over time (Hargreaves and Goodson 2006, p. 5). The Adelaide experience indicates that change innovations to university cultures can be implemented but their sustainability and long-term educational change over time are yet to be determined and remain inconclusive. Hargreaves and Goodson (2006) remind us that both top-down and bottom-up approaches combined with both pressure and support are important strategy techniques to achieve change traction.

Excellence and Equity

The research of Pechenkina and Anderson (2011), and Anderson (2014), confirms the need for equity pathways to university to increase Indigenous participation rates. These authors also call for Indigenous STEM Excellence pathways for those

students who excel academically, specifically in the areas of Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (STEM).

Indigenous Participation in STEM Disciplines

For Indigenous students, school completion rates and transition-to-university statistics, particularly in STEM (science, technology, engineering and mathematics)-related programs, remain significantly low (Dreise and Thomson 2014; Sriraman and Steinthorsdottier 2007). Improving literacy and numeracy is considered to be one fundamental element to increasing Indigenous participation in STEM at university, while other initiatives work from the belief that programs traditionally not prioritised by Indigenous students need to become more visible and orientation to these relatively unfamiliar programs made available (Behrendt et al. 2012; Universities Australia 2011; Burton 2004). Dreise and Thomson's (2014, p. 1) research shows that on average 'Indigenous 15-year-olds are approximately two-and-a-half years behind their non-Indigenous peers regarding scientific, reading and mathematical literacy'. Nevertheless, concerning STEM subjects, the Program for International Student Assessment (PISA) data indicates that Indigenous students value mathematics (Thomson et al. 2013) and are more interested in contextualised science content (Woods-McConney et al. 2013) than their non-Indigenous peers.

Indigenous interests in STEM fields have recently surged. For example, in November 2014, the recently formed Australian and Torres Strait Islander Mathematics Alliance held its inaugural conference, bringing together community leaders, educators and the business sector 'to consider ways forward to improving the mathematics outcomes of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students, and hence life opportunities' (ATSIMA 2014). The first National Indigenous Engineering Summit was held at the University of Melbourne in June 2015 as part of the federally funded Indigenous Engineers: Partners for Pathways program. This summit brought together a range of stakeholders 'to exchange ideas and develop strategies for creating and supporting pathways that will assist Indigenous Australians into the engineering profession' (Prpic 2015, p. 2).

Education change at Adelaide for Indigenous STEM inclusion transferred easily to mainstream faculty efforts to internationalise teaching, research and services. For instance, the science, engineering and business areas typically rely on student income from countries around the world, particularly Asia. The specific conditions at Adelaide included a vibrant, complex mosaic of different cultures, religions and identities with over 21,000 students, 6000 international students and over 3500 members of staff across three campuses including Singapore. As a result, intercultural competency was already mainstream in the Engineering Faculty.

At Adelaide, the STEM Faculty areas had low Indigenous enrolments but high retention and completion rates. Adelaide's STEM Faculty leadership and staff were strongly committed to the reform. For these areas, their perceptions of 'excellence' involved getting diversity and equity processes right. Indigenous change efforts

were not seen in isolation from other reforms present in the faculty. These included culturally appropriate terminology reflected in staff work (non-discriminatory language); diversity encouraged and celebrated (religious festivals celebrated), inclusive services and spaces (Muslim Prayer rooms). Adelaide teachers, researchers and faculties responded conscientiously to increased diversity with programs to capture students' interests to strengthen their sense of belonging. When Indigenous students make the transition from school to university and encounter an institutional culture that makes them feel like they belong, they are more likely to succeed and reach their potential (Anderson 2014; Villegas and Lucas 2007). Although the Adelaide case study is a snapshot of short-term education change it does highlight those organisational standards, systems and cultures that are culturally responsive that can accelerate Indigenous success rates.

Summary Case Study Characteristics

A summary of the Adelaide case study characteristics indicate that university-wide approaches can be implemented with the following principles and enablers:

Principles

- Strong leadership
- Development of institution-wide Indigenous strategy
- Internal and external resources
- Indigenous employment
- Foster engaged and supportive university community
- Build internal professional learning communities to share best practice
- Indigenous data shared and monitored regularly
- High expectations of system and staff
- Regularly track progress and performance reporting
- Strong Indigenous community engagement
- Indigenisation of teaching and research programs
- Indigenous knowledges and epistemologies valued and represented across academic areas

Enablers

- Leadership
- Resources to support enactment
- Well-trained high-quality staff
- Foster supportive environment to resolve challenges
- Collaborative staff learning and teaching training
- Inter-cultural competency
- Create a positive institution culture for improved results
- A capable and culturally responsive organisation
- Indigenous success drives all actors and actions

Conclusion

A university qualification is considered one of the main strategies to raise aspirations, build capacity and address Indigenous disadvantage in Australia (Hunter and Schwab 2003). Despite significant public policy attention and effort over the past two decades, Indigenous Australians remain seriously under-represented in higher education (Worby and Rigney 2006). To understand the concept of educational and institutional change in culture for Indigenous improvement, the university-wide reform at Adelaide described in this chapter identifies and describes five change forces that include assembling resources; engaging learners; working together; building confidence; and excellence and equity. The Adelaide findings and evidence suggest whole university initiatives have impacted on influencing the structure, culture and identity of this university during 2012–2014. The chapter finds that there is no simple formula for successful university-wide education change. Strong intervention strategies require a suite of multi-faceted responses to the particular needs of different institution groups. Strategies should be developed and implemented in partnership with a range of stakeholders, supported by secure funding sources and informed by a sophisticated excellence and equity orientation.

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Chapter 5
Indigenous Knowledges, Graduate Attributes and Recognition of Prior Learning for Advanced Standing: Tensions Within the Academy

Jack Frawley

Introduction

What counts for knowledge in higher education programs is not the prerogative of the West, nor should it be. The Bradley Review (2008) emphasised two points regarding this: first, the valuing of Indigenous Knowledges (IK) in the academy; second, the need for a particular Indigenous graduate attribute. The Behrendt Review (2012) recommended that Australian universities should take these issues on board, albeit with an initial focus on teaching and health professionals. The Bradley Review (2009, p. 33) stated that 'it is critical that Indigenous knowledge is recognised as an important, unique element of higher education.' The Behrendt Review (2012, p. 94) concurs, stating that 'Indigenous knowledge, translated into practical curriculum, teaching practices, and graduate attributes, makes important contributions to helping professionals meet the needs of Indigenous communities.' Parent (2014) suggests that for IK to be respected as legitimate, universities need to ensure that IK is acknowledged within institutional policies and practices. Goerke and Kickett (2013, p. 63) assert that IK in the higher education environment should be aligned and integrated 'between policies, programs, practice and professional development.'

The Behrendt Review (Behrendt et al. 2012) proposed that IK should be an element of graduate attributes (GA). Graduate attributes involve higher education sector–defined categories of fundamental skills, people skills, thinking skills and personal skills (AQF 2013). These inform curriculum design and the provision of learning experiences and are the core values within universities that graduates develop on successful completion of studies (Barrie et al. 2009). The Behrendt Review (2012) states that 'appropriately crafted Indigenous graduate attributes have

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J. Frawley et al. (eds.), *Indigenous Pathways, Transitions and Participation in Higher Education*, DOI 10.1007/978-981-10-4062-7_5

the potential to significantly alter the cultural competence of the nation's professional workforce in the future and to improve outcomes for their Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander clients' (Behrendt et al. 2012, p. 193). Behrendt et al. (2012, p. iv) also suggest that universities develop 'Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Teaching and Learning Frameworks that reflect the inclusion of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander knowledge within curriculums, graduate attributes, and teaching practices.' This call for Indigenous-specific or Indigenous-referenced IK and GA implies teaching and learning of both within the academy, and some form of measurement. One university confirms this requirement to 'include cultural competence as a graduate attribute, with measures of acquisition for all students' (University of Sydney 2012).

IK and GA are bound to values, including diversity, respect, sensitivity, cultural awareness and inclusion. Pitman (2011, p. 65) states that when universities define values 'as curriculum outcomes, then an argument might be made for learners to use RPL … [recognition of prior learning] … to accredit them.' RPL is a process that is available for all students studying in the Vocational Education and Training (VET) sector. In the higher education sector, RPL is more widely viewed as contributing to advanced standing (or credit). One university states that its *Advanced Standing for Previous Studies and Recognised Prior Learning* policy recognises that previous formal study and RPL may contribute to further formal study and to establish the equivalence of academic achievement regardless of the similarity or differences of the education processes involved (James Cook University 2015).

This chapter aims to consider the presence of IK within Australian universities, evidenced by relevant policies and procedures, and discuss the tensions that surround IK within the academy.

Literature

Indigenous Knowledge

Battiste (2002) notes that IK has been a growing field of enquiry for some years and defines IK as embodying

> a web of relationships within a specific ecological context; contains linguistic categories, rules and relationships unique to each knowledge system; has localised content and meaning; has established customs with respect to acquiring and sharing of knowledge (not all Indigenous peoples equally recognise their responsibilities); and implies responsibilities for possessing various kinds of knowledge. (Battiste 2002 p. 14)

Parent's (2014) definition emphasises the multiplicity of IK systems that 'encompass the technological, social, economic, philosophical, spiritual, educational, legal and governmental elements of particular Indigenous cultures throughout the world' (Parent 2014, p. 59). Parent (2014) also draws attention to the dynamism and the multiple dimensions of IK:

> As IKs are context-specific and interwoven within a given community's lived experience, they are dynamic and ever-changing to reflect environmental and social adaptations. Indigenous Knowledges are therefore not a singular body of knowledge but are multi-dimensional and pluralistic in that they contain many layers of being, knowing, and modes of expression. (Parent 2014, p. 59)

Likewise, Nakata et al. (2008) discuss the multiplicity of IK meanings and its reference to experiences and understandings:

> This 'Indigenous' knowledge may simply mean 'experience' of the world as an Indigenous person, it may mean historical understanding passed down from the Indigenous perspective, it may mean local knowledge, or community-based experience, or traditional knowledge, all of which are not well-represented in course content, if at all. (Nakata et al. 2008, p. 138)

The transformative nature of IK in the academy (McGovern 1999) is characterised by inclusiveness and diversity (Van Wyk 2006) and by the ways that IK 'can be used to foster empowerment and justice in a variety of cultural contexts' (Kincheloe and Steinberg 2008, p. 136). Nevertheless, Macedo (1999) cautions that a 'global comprehension of Indigenous knowledge cannot be achieved through the reductionist binarism of Western versus Indigenous knowledge' (Macedo 1999, p. xi). Nakata (2004) believes that 'the whole area of Indigenous knowledge is a contentious one' (p. 19) and cautions about what can be achieved in higher education 'in relation to controlling Indigenous content or in shaping knowledge and practice to be uniquely and identifiably Indigenous' (Nakata 2007a, p. 225).

Within formal education, Nakata's (2004) concern is that in making the curricula more inclusive, it has 'encouraged extraction of elements of Indigenous ways of understanding the world – mathematical knowledge, astronomy, stories, mythology, art, environmental knowledge, religion, etc. to fit with the curriculum areas' (Nakata 2004, p. 25). Nakata (2007a) also stresses the importance of understanding some vital issues about IK in the academy:

> It is important for those wanting to bring Indigenous knowledge into teaching and learning contexts to understand what happens when Indigenous knowledge is conceptualised simplistically and oppositionally from the standpoint of scientific paradigms as everything that is 'not science.' It is also important to understand what happens when Indigenous knowledge is documented in ways that disembodies it from the people who are its agents, when the 'knowers' of that knowledge are separated out from what comes to be 'the known', in ways that dislocate it from its locale, and separates it from the social institutions that uphold and reinforce its efficacy, and cleaves it from the practices that constantly renew its meanings in the here and now. And it is also important to consider what disintegrations and transformations occur when it is redistributed across Western categories of classification, when it is managed in databases via technologies that have been developed in ways that suit the hierarchies, linearity, abstraction and objectification of Western knowledge – all of which are the antithesis of Indigenous knowledge traditions and technologies. (Nakata 2007b, p. 9).

Graduate Attributes

The Australian Qualifications Framework (AQF) conflates generic learning outcomes (GLO), used within the VET sector, and GA as 'transferable, non-discipline specific skills a graduate may achieve through learning that has application in study, work, and life contexts', and categorises these as 'fundamental skills; people skills; thinking skills and personal skills' (AQF 2013, p. 94). The AQF notes GA are defined by each higher education provider.

Universities have focused on GA for over ten years (Oliver 2011). GA are used to inform curriculum and learning outcomes (Barrie 2009). They have been defined as core abilities and values which are both needed socially and professionally, and which are developed in students during their studies and experiences in higher education (Barrie et al. 2009). More recently, graduate attributes have been expressed as belonging to a 2020 vision for higher education where the system produces graduates with not only the requisite knowledge and skills but also a third component which involves

> a broader element variously described as understandings, capability or attributes (that) permits the individual to think flexibly or act intelligently in situations which may not previously have been experienced, (with) a commitment to lifelong learning or to responsible citizenship, or the insights derived from practical experiences. (Bradley et al. 2008, p. 6)

Recognition of Prior Learning for Advanced Standing

Definitions of recognition of prior learning in the higher education vary from quite tight notions of credit to conceptions of it as 'a reflective process with impact on the learning process' (Stenlund 2010, p. 784). RPL for Advanced Standing (RPLAS)[1] can often be viewed in instrumental terms (Castle and Attwood 2001), with university policies not considering RPLAS on purely epistemological grounds or equity of learning experiences (Pitman and Vidovich 2013). RPLAS builds on the principle that adults have useful experiences that are worthy of recognition, and these experiences form a basis for further personal, professional and academic development (Castle and Attwood 2001, p. 64). RPLAS should be both a bridge (de Graaff 2014) and a development tool (Armsby 2013) that spans the workplace and the academy and provides an opportunity for self-development and space for knowledge claims. Although RPLAS remains a challenge to institutions to recognise the diversity of people's opportunities for learning (Pouget and Osborne 2004), Pitman (2011, p. 237) contends that 'RPL policies are evidence that informal learning is not only accepted, but attains the same status, or rank, as learning achieved in a more traditional, formal environment.' RPLAS should widen access to education through validating informal and non-formal learning (Pitman and Vidovich 2013).

[1] My use of RPLAS encompasses the literature that relates to issues of RPL in higher education.

Pouget and Osborne (2004, p. 58–59) suggest that the higher education sector should respond 'to the need for a single credit system – the single currency, rather than the exchange rate mechanism – which recognises achievement in all domains,' where RPLAS is seen to be about learning as well as assessment. Valk (2009, p. 88–89) believes that although universities have policies that recognise RPLAS, few practise it, with much 'high-level scientific and political discussion but much less action.' Valk's (2009) analysis notes some obstacles: the general focus of higher education provision, staff attitudes, staff workload issues and financial considerations. Pitman and Vidovich (2012, p. 771) assert that universities 'enact policy symbolically, for position-taking, rather than for any pragmatic reason.'

Approach

There are 43 universities in Australia, including one specialist university and two overseas universities. To investigate the topics of IK, GA, and RPL in the academy, relevant university policies, procedures and reports were accessed through each university website and then reviewed. The focus of the review was to determine the presence of IK in the academy, realised through university policy and reports that make reference to the teaching and learning of IK; to determine the number of Indigenous-referenced GA evident in Australian universities' GA statements; and to undertake an analysis of RPLAS, through a social inclusion frame, to identify themes that align with the espoused principles of IK and Indigenous-referenced GA in the academy.

Outcomes

Indigenous Knowledge and the Academy

University statements regarding the presence of IK are expressed in Indigenous education statements (IES),[2] reconciliation action plans (RAP),[3] strategic plans or frameworks, or not at all. University participation in IES is compulsory, whereas RAP is voluntary. Universities report on IES yearly expenditure relating to out-

[2] The Indigenous Education Statement (IES) is used to determine a university's eligibility for Indigenous Support Program (ISP) funding. Universities in receipt of ISP funding are required each year to provide the Commonwealth with a report on the expenditure of the grant amount and on progress towards improved educational outcomes for Indigenous Australians as set out in the goals of the National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Policy.

[3] The Reconciliation Action Plan (RAP) program is a framework for organisations to realise their vision for reconciliation. An RAP enables organisations to commit to implementing and measuring practical actions that build respectful relationships and create opportunities for Indigenous people.

comes and future plans to meet ongoing responsibilities for Indigenous student achievement in higher education, including assessing and reporting on progress towards improved educational outcomes for Indigenous Australians as set out in the goals of the National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Policy (AEP), one of which encompasses understanding of, and respect for, Indigenous traditional and contemporary cultures. IES reports often refer to evidence in University strategic plans or reconciliation statements. Examples of university Indigenous education statements that reference IK include the following:

- Develop curriculum that can be incorporated into all courses to ensure cultural awareness and sensitivity is part of graduate attributes (University of Canberra).
- Recognise Indigenous knowledge as a distinct knowledge paradigm within learning and teaching practices (Macquarie University).
- Embed relevant Indigenous knowledge in all courses in support of the commitment to the Indigenous graduate attributes (Western Sydney University).
- Imbue student learning at all levels, [including] the commitment to respect Indigenous Knowledge, values, and culture (University of Western Australia).

RAP is an action plan to identify and pursue opportunities to advance reconciliation as part of the university's core teaching and research activities. Examples of university RAP statements that reference IK include the following:

- Incorporate Indigenous Australian content into all of the university's undergraduate course offerings, and embed related descriptors into the university's graduate attributes (Charles Sturt University).
- Include Indigenous perspectives in all Curtin undergraduate courses and postgraduate coursework awards (Curtin University).
- Continue to embed Indigenous knowledges and perspectives into all undergraduate courses (Edith Cowan University).
- Embed Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Knowledges and perspectives in appropriate university curricula to provide students with those knowledges, skills, and understanding when working alongside Indigenous peoples (Murdoch University).

Most if not all universities reference IK through either individual RAP and/or their IES reports. Of the 43 listed universities, at the time of writing, IK is referenced as follows: in RAP (14); in IES (16); in both RAP and IES (1); in strategic plans or frameworks (7); not referenced at all (5).

The presence of IK requires the appropriate inclusion of Indigenous content and practice so that students gain inclusive perspectives through IK and experiences. Evidence for the application of IK in the academy is through the curriculum, which can be either university-wide or through specific courses within the university. These courses could be stand-alone, discipline-specific, integrated or restricted. A stand-alone course would be one in which IK is at its core, for example, a Bachelor of Indigenous Studies, which has been designed to communicate and generate a better understanding of Indigenous world views. IK in discipline-specific courses is specific theoretical and practical knowledge required for a professional discipline,

for example, a Bachelor of Arts (Indigenous Studies) that aims to develop knowledge and understanding of Indigenous cultures and societies within the Australian community and a broader international context. An integrated study is one in which IK is included within a course, for example, within an astronomy course that includes a focus on the ways in which Indigenous people understand and utilise the stars, or an environmental course where Indigenous fire practices are studied. Restricted offerings are courses for Indigenous students only, for example, the Bachelor of Contemporary Australian Indigenous Art, which has been designed to prepare Indigenous students to become professional artists and is planned by Indigenous principles and philosophies, including respecting Indigenous laws concerning the ways in which techniques and images may be used.

The application of the IK in some universities, whether stand-alone, discipline-specific, integrated or restricted, informs the shaping and attainment of graduate attributes.

Indigenous-Related Graduate Attributes and the Academy

At the time of writing, 12 universities include either an Indigenous-specific GA statement or a GA that implies an Indigenous dimension, including statements on cultural competence:

- Able to engage meaningfully with the culture, experiences, histories and contemporary issues of Indigenous communities; and practice ethically and sustainably in ways that demonstrate *yindyamarra winhanga-nha* – translated from the Wiradjuri language as 'the wisdom of respectfully knowing how to live well in a world worth living in' (Charles Sturt University).
- Demonstrate respect for, and acknowledgement of, ideas and knowledge of others; appreciate Indigenous culture and history (University of New England).
- A global world view encompassing a cosmopolitan outlook as well as a local perspective on social and cultural issues, together with an informed respect for cultural and indigenous identities. An ability to engage with diverse cultural and Indigenous perspectives in both global and local settings (Southern Cross University).
- Include cultural competence as a graduate attribute, with measures of acquisition for all students (University of Sydney).
- Aim to ensure that all UTS graduates have Indigenous professional competency as appropriate to their profession (University of Technology Sydney).
- Demonstrate knowledge of Indigenous Australia through cultural competency and professional capacity (Western Sydney University).
- Have an understanding of the broad theoretical and technical concepts related to their discipline area, with relevant connections to industry, professional, and regional and indigenous knowledge (Charles Darwin University).

- Have an understanding of Indigenous Australian issues and cultures (James Cook University).
- Social and ethical responsibilities and an understanding of indigenous and international perspectives (Queensland University of Technology).
- Intercultural and ethical competencies: adept at operating in other cultures; comfortable with different nationalities and social contexts; able to determine and contribute to desirable social outcomes, demonstrated by study abroad or with an understanding of Indigenous knowledges (University of Adelaide).
- Respect Indigenous knowledge, cultures and values (University of Melbourne).
- Respect Indigenous knowledge, cultures and values (Curtin University).

As noted above, Indigenous-related GA are often associated with the concept of cultural competence. The concept of cultural competence is discussed more comprehensively elsewhere in this book (see Sherwood and Riley-Mundine), but in brief, cultural competency has been defined as

> Student and staff knowledge and understanding of Indigenous Australian cultures, histories and contemporary realities and awareness of Indigenous protocols, combined with the proficiency to engage and work effectively in Indigenous contexts congruent to the expectations of Indigenous Australian peoples (Universities Australia 2011, p. 3)

Also, Universities Australia (2011) sets out five themes that are associated with the guiding principles for developing cultural competency within the university environment. One of the five themes specifically addresses teaching and learning, with a recommendation that universities include Indigenous cultural competency as a formal GA: 'Recommendation 2: Embed Indigenous cultural competency as a formal Graduate Attribute or Quality' (Universities Australia 2011, p. 32). Of the 12 universities that make reference to IK in their GA, the University of Sydney and Western Sydney University specifically refer to cultural competence as a GA, with the University of Sydney further adding to include 'measures of acquisition for all students'.

The RPLAS Factor

While most universities describe the purpose of RPLAS policy, a smaller number make explicit statements about guiding policy principles. An analysis of RPLAS from a social inclusion theory perspective can assist with understanding the approaches taken by Australian universities. Social inclusion can be viewed as degrees of inclusion where the 'narrowest interpretation pertains to the neoliberal notion of social inclusion as access; a broader interpretation regards the social justice idea of social inclusion as participation; whilst the widest interpretation involves the human potential lens of social inclusion as empowerment' (Gidley et al. 2010, p. 7). The key phrases associated with each of these interpretations (Fig. 5.1) have parallels with the language around RPL.

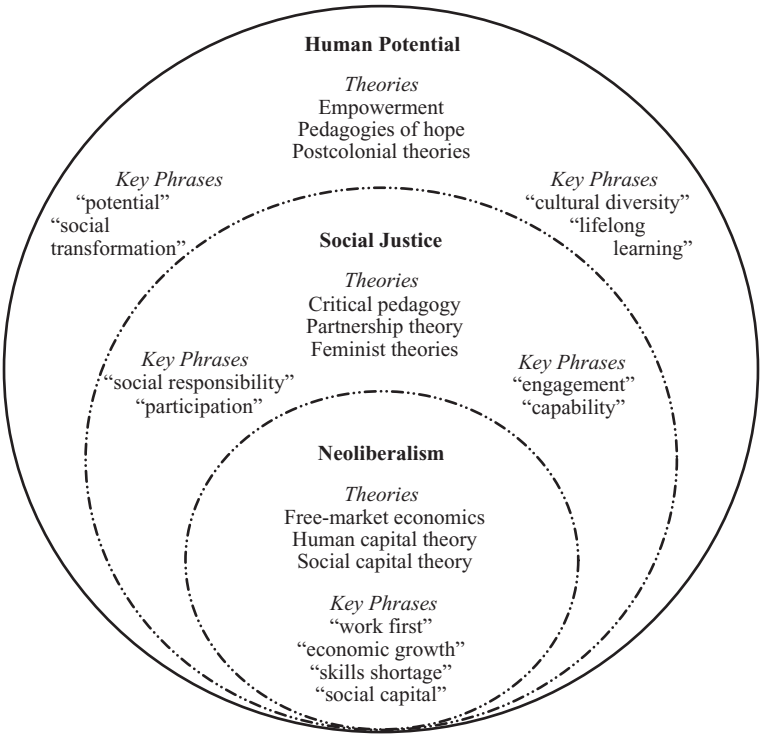

Fig. 5.1 Spectrum of Ideologies Underlying Social Inclusion Theory and Policy (Source: Gidley et al. 2010, p. 8 © 2009 Dr. Jennifer M. Gidley)

Most university policies that recognise RPLAS focus on practice rather than principles; however, the 18 universities that make specific reference to principles use the language of a social justice ideology (10) or human potential ideology (8). Key phrases in the former focus on participation, in particular with the notion of 'life experiences'. The latter include statements on 'lifelong learning', 'diversity', and 'inclusiveness'. Nevertheless, when it comes down to the practice of RPLAS, the underlying ideology is that of human liberalism with a strong focus on human capital theory. Coleman (1988, S100) states that 'human capital is created by changes in persons that bring about skills and capabilities that make them able to act in new ways.' The focus of the application process is, in most cases, providing evidence of the skills and capabilities attained in previous studies or life experiences. Examples of questions and statements on RPLAS forms that reflect human capital theory include:

- What skills do you already have that relate to this program/course (RMIT)?
- Provide detailed explanations of prior work and/or professional experience for assessment (Notre Dame University).

- Address how you achieved all the required learning outcomes of objectives through your professional and/or work experience (Murdoch University).
- What type(s) of non-credentialed programs/training/study have you undertaken and experience acquired since leaving school relevant to this application (Victoria University)?

Discussion

Tensions

The presence of IK and Indigenous-referenced GA in the academy presents some tensions. Nakata (2002) states that the intersections of different knowledges and discourses produce tensions, and that 'Indigenous students often feel the contradictions and tensions within having to align to one or the other' knowledge systems (Nakata 2007b, p. 10). The same could be said for some non-Indigenous students who for possibly the first time experience IK in 'curriculums, graduate attributes and teaching practices' (Behrendt et al. 2012, p. iv). Nakata (2007b) also notes other tensions around the complexity of IK, the dislocation of IK from contexts and the 'disintegrations and transformations … [of IK] … when it is redistributed across Western categories of classification.' IK present tensions for universities, for both Indigenous and non-Indigenous students: how are these assets (Nakata et al. 2008) recognised regarding what students bring to the academy, how are they measured, and what are the possibilities? To this can be added, how is IK contextualised, embedded, taught and assessed in a discipline area? In discussing decolonising teaching and learning processes, Zubrzycki et al. (2014, p. 20) add further questions:

- Who should develop and teach Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander content?
- What type of training and professional development of educators is needed?
- How should the content be delivered?
- What type of student assessment reflects this pedagogy?
- How can the learning environment be culturally safe and secure for all students and staff?

Nakata et al. (2012) propose that an answer to some of these questions lies in a pedagogy that engages students

> in open, exploratory, and creative inquiry in these difficult intersections, while building language and tools for describing and analysing what they engage with. This approach engages the politics of knowledge production and builds critical skills—students' less certain positions require the development of less certain, more complex analytical arguments and more intricate language to express these arguments. Pedagogically, we propose this as a way to also prevent slippage into forms of thinking and critical analysis that are confined within dichotomies between primitivism and modernity; and as a way to avoid the

> closed-mindedness of intellectual conformity, whether this is expressed in Indigenous, decolonial, or Western theorizing. (p. 121)

In parallel with tensions around IK, further questions can be asked about how GA are developed, assessed and assured (Oliver 2011, p. 9). For graduates to successfully establish a GA that characterises their qualities and those of the university (University of Sydney 2015), there needs to be alignment of national and local policies with on-the-ground teaching and learning practices (Goerke and Kickett 2013, p. 62). Research on national graduate attributes (Barrie et al. 2009) shows that there is a range of ways in which Australian universities approach how graduate attributes are 'reviewed, assessed or assured' (Goerke and Kickett 2013, p. 70). Goerke and Kickett (2013, pp. 70–71) advise that to maintain a degree of transparency regarding the outcome associated with GA, there needs to be 'comprehensive curriculum mapping tools along with the auditing of policies.'

A report on graduate employability skills (Cleary et al. 2007, p. 1) investigates:

- How universities currently develop and integrate employability skills into their programs of study
- How universities teach employability skills
- How universities currently assess students' employability skills
- How graduate employability skills might be assessed and reported upon

The report stated that although there is variance in GA across Australian universities, there is a link between employability skills and GA, and that 'universities' graduate attributes also address employability skills' (Cleary et al. 2007, p. 12). This creates a further tension. If it is accepted that within the higher education sector the recognition of prior learning is viewed as contributing to Advanced Standing, it will follow that the granting of credit acknowledges 'life experiences' *ipso facto*; this would extend to students who are seeking credit for existing employability skills gained through life experiences.

Balance

To a certain extent Australian universities have heeded the call from both the Bradley Review (2008) and the Behrendt Review (2012) for a valuing of IK in the academy through the curriculum, teaching practices and GA. Nevertheless, this has created some tensions that need to be considered and addressed. First, the questions raised by Nakata (2008) require answers or solutions, not least the transformation of the academy that is informed by what Nakata (2002) terms the cultural interface. The cultural interface is 'the intersection of Western and Indigenous domains... the place where we live and learn, the place that conditions our lives, the place that shapes our futures and more to the point the place where we are active agents in our own lives – where we make our decisions – our lifeworld'. The cultural interface has commonalities with the concepts of both ways (Wunungmurra 1989; Marika et al. 1992;

Ober and Bat 2007) and interculturalism (Abdallah-Pretceille 2006; Coll 2004; Frawley and Fasoli 2012), as these are concerned with similar notions of space where systems, organisations, communities and people meet and interact, where there is balance, where knowledge is negotiated and where new knowledge is shared equally. Second, it is equitable and just that potential students who are contemplating higher education have access to a process that recognises what they bring to the academy, not just giving credit for prior studies but recognition of their life experiences and that this recognition is aligned with course content and course outcomes.

If it is accepted that IK and GA are central to teaching and learning in the academy, it must also be accepted that these can in some way be measured, not just for course assessment but also for the RPLAS process. If RPLAS is seen simply as a 'device to map one body of knowledge (e.g. working knowledge) against another (e.g. academic knowledge) rather than an exploration of the relationship between the two' (Cooper and Harris 2013, p. 448–449), then this becomes problematic to the intent of IK and GA. The 'knowledge' question has for a long time been contentious (Cooper and Harris 2013) and extends to some areas: categories of knowledge, forms of knowledge and knowledge differentiation. For Castle and Attwood (2001), the underlying issues are the relationship between different forms of knowledge, their status and their visibility. Questions about how trans-disciplinary and critical knowledge can be embraced or negotiated through RPLAS, and can be mapped onto academic knowledge, remain a tension (Cooper 2011; Hamer 2012). This is in part due to these types of knowledge not easily being translated into academic knowledge (or disciplinary knowledge) where relative power is retained 'when subjected to the academic rules of the game' (Cooper 2011, p. 53). If there is an assumption about the differentiation of knowledge, then this requires RPLAS applicants and assessors to be provided support 'to navigate their way into different academic discourses' (Cooper and Harris 2013, p. 448–449) and to negotiate around 'what counts as equivalent knowledge in the context of an academic course' (Pokorny 2012, p. 130).

When universities understand the professional realities of applicants and make use of the knowledge gained through the RPLAS process, then 'the act of teaching changes from one of traditional transmission to one of accompaniment, facilitation, and organization of knowledge' (Pouget and Osborne 2004, p. 60). Research by Cooper and Harris (2013, p. 460–461) shows that 'knowledge is as much about cultural and institutional practices as it is about conceptual hierarchies' and that 'these cultural practices translate into distinct organisational environments within which RPL has to take place.' This could result in transformation where RPLAS 'represents a radical challenge as to the nature and locus of knowledge' (Pouget and Osborne 2004, p. 62).

Conclusion

There is no denying that RPLAS can be complex, time-consuming and confusing for the participants, including the applicants, assessors and administrators. Added to this are the unique contexts and institutional environments in which RPLAS takes place (de Graaff 2014) all of which pose certain challenges (Castle and Attwood 2001). These challenges range from the ways in which higher education institutions position themselves in term of RPLAS policy, epistemology, ontology and pedagogy through to the more prosaic, but nonetheless important considerations of resourcing. Tensions can also be experienced by participants who are engaged in a more transformative approach yet are required to be in alignment with regulated higher education RPLAS policies, processes and structures (Whitington et al. 2014). Frick et al. (2007) believe that higher education institutions need to contextualise RPLAS and that their intended approach must be clearly made. Otherwise, RPLAS will 'remain a marginalised academic endeavour if adequate resources are not allocated to its development and implementation' (Frick et al. 2007, p. 150). This is none more so than for the positioning of IK in the academy and its contribution to the formation of GA.

In universities' IES and RAPs, the language focuses on 'diversity', 'inclusion', 'awareness', 'sensitivity' and 'respect'. Likewise, discourse in universities' GA that makes specific reference to IK includes notions of 'respect', 'diversity', 'engagement' and 'values'. This is the language of transformation. For IK to be valued in the academy, universities need to go beyond 'either/or' thinking to 'both/and' possibilities (Gidley et al. 2010) so that Indigenous and non-Indigenous graduates can interact productively and creatively across cultural boundaries, and engage meaningfully and constructively with each other and with the academy.

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