

Respect with Jim Walker

Voiceover

Welcome to “Indigenising Curriculum in Practice” with Professor Tracey Bunda and Dr Katelyn Barney.

Prof Tracey Bunda

Hi everyone, I’m Tracey Bunda and welcome to our podcast series Indigenising Curriculum in Practice. I’m a Ngugi/Wakka Wakka woman and the Professor of Indigenous Education at The University of Queensland.

I’d like to start the podcast by acknowledging Country and the various Countries from where our listeners are located and pay my respects to Elders past, present and emerging. I acknowledge the ongoing contributions of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples to society at local, national and international levels.

I’m joined by my colleague and co-host Dr Katelyn Barney.

Dr Katelyn Barney

Hi everyone. I’d also like to acknowledge the traditional owners of the land on which we are recording, and also where you are listening from, and pay my respects to their ancestors and their descendants who continue to have strong connections to Country. I also want to acknowledge that where we are recording has always been a place of teaching and learning.

I’m a non-Indigenous woman living and working in Meanjin.

In this series Tracey and I interview Indigenous and non-Indigenous academics about how they are Indigenising curriculum within the Faculties at the University of Queensland.

Prof Tracey Bunda

Together we are going to ask questions to unravel the why, the how and the when of Indigenising Curriculum.

Dr Katelyn Barney

Our theme for this episode is based on the principle of respect, and our guest today is Jim Walker from the School of Earth and Environmental Sciences at University of Queensland. Welcome Jim.

Jim Walker

Thanks Katelyn, thanks Tracey.

Prof Tracey Bunda

Jim, would you mind to introduce yourself in whatever way is comfortable for you?

Jim Walker

I’m an Elder of Yiman and Goreng Goreng First Nations peoples. I’m also a lecturer within the School of Earth and Environmental Sciences here at the University of Queensland, Chair of Murray Moora Aboriginal Corporation, member of the Board of Directors for Foundation for Aboriginal and Islander Research Action, otherwise known as “FAIRA” but also, I’m on

the Board for Earthwatch Australia, and I'm also chair of their Scientific Advisory Committee. I'm also on the Scientific Advisory Committee for the Terrestrial Ecosystems Research Network which is a global network that investigates and monitors the ecosystems across the globe. And telling that story is to give you an idea as to I identify as Indigenous first, and then what I do secondly, because I've always found that I may be chair of an advisory committee, but I've been Aboriginal all my life, and so it means that we don't hang our Indigeneity up behind the door when we walk into a room.

Dr Katelyn Barney

Can you talk a bit about how you're Indigenising curriculum in Science?

Jim Walker

In the first instance, I'm actually working within the School of Earth and Environmental Sciences. So, what I've been doing there is opening the doors to Indigenous knowledge for non-Indigenous academics. I did this through launching a number of lunchbox series seminars; in that it was about cultural awareness for non-Indigenous academics but also Indigenous academics to get an idea of the history, the politics of Indigenous Australia, something that we as Indigenous people, we just take as a matter of course because we've lived it but there's a lot out there who don't know, and there's a fear amongst non-Indigenous peoples and academics that, "Well, why do you react the way you do?"

And once they know the history, and especially the intergenerational trauma that comes with us, then they have a better understanding as to why we may not necessarily be so accepting, but also, give them a reason as to why they've been fearful – why have they been fearful all this time when there is nothing to be fearful about, because we're accepting people. As long as people show respect to us, then we will envelop them within our society and with what we do.

Prof Tracey Bunda

Jim, one of the things that you talked about was that notion of respect, and that's the theme for this particular podcast, and you spoke about how non-Indigenous academics are coming to understand respect for our knowledges – how do you do that for students?

Jim Walker

For students, I think it's within the curriculum; town planning students – I teach into undergraduate and postgraduate areas within the school, and when you do that, then students then start to have another look at our knowledge systems. It's one whereby the students then turn around and say, "I never knew that", or "I never thought about it this way". The other day I did a lecture on corporate sustainability to a number of international master students; what they didn't realise is that when I start to speak about the value of sustainability to Indigenous populations, they thought I was referring to Australia but then there were some students there who turned around and said, "I never thought about that because that then applies to Indigenous peoples from where we come from", and that's important because they then carry that message forward.

For students, both Indigenous students, I think that it's good for them to see another Indigenous face in front of the class because quite often, we don't see that. As we do question knowledge, we've got to have Indigenous knowledge within that system, and what I find is that students have to also be assessed against that knowledge because you don't know

whether they've heard, and I guess you could call that "deep listening" because we want to know whether they really understand, and the best way to do that is to assess it.

Dr Katelyn Barney

Elsewhere Tracey has spoken about the process of Indigenising curriculum should not just be the work of Indigenous academic staff and also, a project that was led by a colleague of ours, Professor Maria Raciti, found that the vast majority of non-Indigenous academics were open to the idea of embedding Indigenous perspectives but they had a range of concerns and fears about things like student resistance or simply getting it wrong, or not knowing who to ask for assistance. Do you have any advice for non-Indigenous academic staff about how they could contribute to indigenising curriculum?

Jim Walker

Those lunchbox seminar series that we did breaks down those barriers, gives them an introduction into what we're talking about when we talk about Indigenising the curriculum. We can't do this by ourselves; we need those allies, and I see them as allies, and they should see themselves as allies as well. We should convey that to students and to others because we know to take Australia forward, we have to have that reconciliation. In doing so, we certainly need allies both within academia and elsewhere in mainstream Australia but we also need for our students to understand that efforts by non-Indigenous academics are full of goodwill in the main, and I think that they should appreciate that, and if they really feel strongly about it, then come along and be an academic because we need more of you.

Prof Tracey Bunda

This podcast series is trying to talk to exactly those non-Indigenous academics who don't know where to start. What would you advise them to do?

Jim Walker

I think it starts with conversations, and I think it starts with networks, and you've got to develop those networks, reach out to other academics, Indigenous academics. I think attending and undertaking cultural awareness, but also, look for the Indigenous voice in what you're teaching, look for those Indigenous authors because, as I tell my students, I want to hear the Indigenous voice if you're writing anything about an Indigenous issue, because we have those voices out there. They're not voices that were born of academia; they are voices that were born from experience, from struggle, and I think that that's what we need to see reflected within curriculum.

Prof Tracey Bunda

Jim, you're obviously passionate about being an academic and teaching in this space, and this podcast series is called "Indigenising Curriculum in Practice" – what does that mean to you in relation to teaching and learning? What are the passions that you've got there that you want to be able to share with others?

Jim Walker

I think it's recognition. Before coming to the School of Earth and Environmental Sciences, I was with the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Unit. The passion I had there was for a history that hadn't been told, for a politics that wasn't understood. Since I've come to the School of Earth and Environmental Sciences, it's about the passion there is centering Indigenous knowledge within science in an area that hadn't heard of it, or had ignored it before, and I think that once you open the door, this curriculum has now gone to 17 modules

across a number of different courses from town planning, environmental management, conservation policy, globalisation, sustainability, human geography, and the like.

And so, once that door is open, I think that then we see that knowledge flow out and you can actually see the nods of heads, realising that there is another knowledge system out there that they hadn't seen. Do we need to integrate it? That's debatable. I think that sometimes you've got to have these two parallel knowledge systems that maybe converge every now and again. There should be recognition, especially that there is an Indigenous knowledge system there, particularly in science.

Dr Katelyn Barney

Thanks so much, Jim, for sharing some of your experiences in centering Indigenous knowledges within the curriculum. It's great to hear about your experiences, and thanks for joining us for this episode of "Indigenising Curriculum in Practice", and we hope you can join us for another episode.

[End of recording]