From compliance to collaboration: critically reflecting on the process of embedding an Indigenous Graduate Attribute in an undergraduate business program.

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ABSTRACT
Calls for Australian universities to embed Indigenous content into curriculum are more than a decade old yet this work remains largely incomplete. Institutional commitments made at senior level to achieve these outcomes can lack direction, guidance, and support at the coalface. Using a critical reflection methodology this paper outlines the approach undertaken by a group of Indigenous and non-Indigenous academics to embed a contextualised Indigenous graduate attribute into a traditional undergraduate business degree with multiple majors. The results indicate that collaborative approaches based on relationships and trust and supported with clear guidelines and processes can achieve positive outcomes. A focus on professional capabilities can enhance non-Indigenous staff confidence to teach this content and allay concerns about misappropriation of Indigenous Knowledges.

Keywords: Indigenous, curriculum, critical reflection, business, graduate attribute

Over the past two decades there have been numerous calls upon Australian universities to commit to ensuring all students engage with Indigenous Australian content in curriculum to build capabilities to work with and for Indigenous peoples and communities. However, embedding Indigenous content can be challenging. Although Indigenous academics are best placed to support the development and delivery of culturally informed curriculum, there are currently not enough Indigenous Australians employed in academic roles at Australian institutions to meet this need (Universities Australia, 2011, 2017). Non-Indigenous academic staff often don't know where to start or how to go about embedding Indigenous content, nor how to contextualise it to discipline areas. Without adequate training or support, they fear making mistakes. Using a critical reflective methodology, this research details the experience of both Indigenous and non-Indigenous academic staff engaged in a collaborative and supported process to assure the implementation of contextualised Indigenous graduate attribute into an undergraduate business degree at one Australian university.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Three decades ago, the 1990 Royal Commission of Inquiry into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody (Johnstone, 1991) highlighted the need for training and development of Australian professionals to overcome reliance on neo-colonial frameworks and general ignorance of Indigenous cultures, worldviews, historical and contemporary contexts (Bodkin-Andrews, Page, & Trudgett, 2022; Gainsford & Evans, 2017). Calls for inclusion of an Indigenous Graduate Attribute (IGA) within universities so that all graduates may be able to develop professional capabilities to facilitate better outcomes with Indigenous peoples and communities began as early as 2007 with the work of the Indigenous Higher Education and Advisory Council (IHEAC) (Bodkin-Andrews, et al., 2022). Indigenous scholars have added their voices to this call, highlighting the importance of an IGA to enhancing the competence of the Australian workforce by producing graduates who engage productively and work collaboratively for the advancement of Indigenous peoples and communities (Anning, 2010; Behrendt, Larkin, Griew, & Kelly, 2012). At the sectoral level, these calls were echoed by Universities Australia (2011) in their *National best practice framework for Indigenous cultural competency* and reinforced in their 2017 Indigenous Strategy which set the following target for implementation:

> By 2020, universities commit to have plans for, or have already in place, processes that ensure all students will encounter and engage with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultural content as integral parts of their course of study. This will give all Australian university graduates in the future the chance to develop their capabilities to work with and for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and communities (Universities Australia, 2017, p. 30).

The Universities Australia's Indigenous Strategy (2022-25, p.55) again calls on Australian universities to include 'Indigenous content in curricula that is meaningful, appropriately developed and appropriately resourced'.

On the whole, Australian universities remain committed to embedding Indigenous content with 14 universities now having a specific IGA and many more including some form of cultural capability graduate attribute (Universities Australia, 2020). Nevertheless, further investment in initiatives and resources is required. Similar to any major change initiative, whole of university approaches including senior executive sponsorship, organisational strategic imperatives, coupled with clear policy and governance processes, adequate resourcing and staff training are seen to be effective in achieving positive outcomes and real impact (Acton, Salter, Lenoy, & Stevenson, 2017; Gainsford & Evans, 2017; Universities Australia, 2011).

Bodkin-Andrews et al, (2022) highlight the complexities involved in including Indigenous knowledges in curriculum including the misrepresentation, contradictions and violations of intellectual property rights and cultural protocols that may occur. Manton, Williams, and Hayen (2023) explain how deficit narratives and stereotypical assumptions can be reinforced by the uninformed use of easily available information such as the Australian Government's Closing the Gap framework. For these reasons, embedding Indigenous content is best done by Indigenous academics but there is a shortage of candidates who possess both discipline-based curriculum expertise and deep cultural knowledge (Gainsford & Evans, 2017; Wolf, Sheppard, Le Rossignol, & Somerset, 2018). Those that are employed, find themselves overburdened with responsibility and expectations to design, deliver, mentor, advise, collaborate (Delbridge et al., 2022) and educate others about Indigenous perspectives (Manton, et al., 2023). Additionally, as Bullen & Flavell (2017, p.589) note, the cultural burden of teaching this content for Indigenous academics can be 'high stakes … requiring significant resilience and capacity to manage racism both overt (e.g., racist statements from students and colleagues) and covert (e.g., institutional racism)'. Non-Indigenous staff are often reluctant to include Indigenous content citing an already overcrowded curriculum, concerns about student resistance, lack of contextual relevance to the discipline (Bullen & Flavell, 2017; Ranzijn, McConnochie, Day, Nolan, & Wharton, 2008) alongside lack of confidence and lack of requisite knowledge and skills to effectively teach the content and manage any overt racism in the classroom (Burns, 2013, Manton et. al., 2023, Moodie, 2019, Wolfe et al, 2018).

Universities therefore face the dual challenges of a shortage of Indigenous academics and non-Indigenous academics who lack of knowledge of, and are hesitant to engage with, this work. Ways to address this challenge, include development of clear curriculum guidance frameworks, alignment of content to professional standards or capabilities, access to authentic case studies, and individual training and development (Wolfe et al, 2018). Indeed, calls for non-Indigenous staff to be engaged in cultural competence training, and in delivery of relevant and appropriate IGA content across diverse curriculums are decades old (Behrendt et al., 2012, Ranzijn et al., 2008). This paper outlines an example of a guided and supportive process whereby discipline based academics work collaboratively with Indigenous and non-Indigenous curriculum specialists to embed Indigenous content.

CONTEXT: UTS MODEL

The University of Technology, Sydney (UTS) has committed to a whole of institution approach to the development of an IGA framework and has been progressively expanding and resourcing this commitment. The UTS Indigenous Policy, underpinned by the philosophical principle that Indigenous education is for all Australians, commits the university to two key policy objectives:

- 4.12 (4) develop Indigenous competency among its students by creating an environment in which all UTS students have the opportunity to gain knowledge of Indigenous Australians

- 4.12 (5) ensure that all UTS graduates have a professional capacity to work with and for Indigenous Australians. (UTS, n.d.)

Under the auspices of the Office of the PVC Indigenous (Leadership and Engagement), an Associate Dean Indigenous Teaching and Learning was appointed in 2021 to lead the Indigenous Graduate Attribute (IGA) strategy, develop an IGA curriculum framework, and establish a governance process to embed the framework in core curriculum across the University. As a strong signal of the importance assigned to this initiative, the University also committed to fund the appointment of a team of three Indigenous and three non-Indigenous academics to work collaboratively alongside

faculty staff to support the rollout of this work. Staff within this Indigenous Teaching and Learning Team (ITL Team) work in partnership with faculty-based discipline teams and provide curriculum-design guidance, support and feedback on the IGA implementation aligned to the UTS professional capability focus. To ensure all curriculum content has Indigenous consultation, the ITL Team meets weekly to collaboratively review course plans with proposed IGA content and assessments and provide feedback to Faculty. In addition, the team provides professional development to academics across the University via monthly IGA workshops and scheduled sessions on cultural capability and culturally safe classroom practices.

Bodkin-Andrews et al., (2022) argue that it is critical that universities reflect carefully on their teaching and learning practices as they implement IGAs across their disciplines. They view reflectivity as key to transformative learning within institutions. Manton and Williams (2021) posit that engaging in critical self-reflection and evaluating practice is essential to developing cultural responsiveness of the workforce. Such reflection is often used as a tool to encourage students to explore their own positionality and privilege as well as 'move beyond the limited lens of colonial knowledges' (Bodkin-Andrews et al., 2022, p. 105) and deepen their understanding of Indigenous perspectives (Bullen & Flavell, 2017). Reflection has also been used in training of preservice teachers to encourage them to reflect on their worldviews and critically evaluate curriculum and pedagogy that 'excludes Aboriginal Knowledges … in favour of Western hegemonic approaches (Burgess, Thorpe, Egan, & Harwood 2022, p. 926) and in the training of law students (Burns, 2013). Critical reflection has been used in professional settings as a method for practitioners to learn and improve their practice (Fook, 2011) and effect cultural change (Universities Australia, 2011) and has been used elsewhere by teams of Indigenous and non-Indigenous academics to reveal learnings (see. Gainsford, Gerard & Bailey, 2020). Accordingly, the remainder of this paper reports the critical reflection and associated learnings from a team of Indigenous academic curriculum and content specialists, non-Indigenous curriculum academic experts, and discipline-based academic staff involved in the implementation of an IGA. The course is a typical undergraduate business program with multiple majors. By engaging in

critical reflection, we hoped to achieve learnings that could be applied to future courses and other university wide policy initiatives. The next section outlines our research methodology.

METHODOLOGY

Critical reflection is a qualitative research approach whereby participants are encouraged to examine their own subjective interpretations. It is defined by Fook (2011, p. 56), as 'a way of learning from and re-working experience'. Mezirow (1990, p.199) explains that 'critical reflection involves a critique of the presuppositions on which our beliefs have been built' while 'learning may be defined as the process of making new or revised interpretation of an experience.' The process of critical reflection involves participants detailing their experience, then reflecting on this experience dialogically with colleagues with a focus on integrating theory and practice (Fook, 2011, Thompson & Pascal, 2012). Fook (2011) divides this reflective process into two stages, the first to unearth assumptions in the recounting of the experience and the second to uncover important values and beliefs that can then enable participants to remake or reinterpret their experience.

Fook (2011) argues that because new meaning created via this critical reflection is jointly crafted, participants are essentially co-researchers. The five researchers in this study were all engaged in in the process of implementing the IGA into the Bachelor of Business program. Each had a different role in the process as shown in Table 1 below.

Table 1: Co-researchers and roles

Co-researcher	Role in process
Assoc Prof Annette Gainsford, Associate Dean, Indigenous Teaching & Learning, ITL Team Indigenous Wiradjuri	Review, oversight, and final endorsement of IGA implementation
Danielle Manton, Senior Lecturer, ITL Team Indigenous Barunggam	Review, feedback, and advice on IGA implementation
Kath Attree, Senior Lecturer, ITL Team Non-Indigenous	Support Faculty of Business course teams in the design and development of IGA content and assessment.

Professor Chris Bajada, Professor of Economics Non-Indigenous	Course Director for Bachelor of Economics and Discipline lead for Economics major within the Bachelor of Business
Dr Rosemary Sainty, Lecturer in Management Non-Indigenous	Discipline lead for Management major with the Bachelor of Business

Each person recorded their responses to the following three reflective questions related to their involvement in the implementation process:

1) What were your initial thoughts, feelings, reactions when first advised that you would need to complete this work?

2) What was your experience of the process?

3) What learnings have you taken from this that you can apply to your practice?

These reflections were collated by the principal researcher and shared amongst the group. Individual reflections were imported into NVivo, analysed, and coded in line with Fook's (2011) approach above. Initial assumptions participants had about the process were identified. Attention was also paid to the values or beliefs expressed and the learnings gained. The findings and learnings were shared and discussed in a dialogical exchange amongst the team via email to reach consensus.

FINDINGS

Initial reactions

The assumptions participants brought to the process varied depending on their roles. Annette, drawing on her extensive experience working across Indigenous curriculum design and development, wrote 'I acknowledge that most academics come to embedding Indigenous perspectives in curriculum with fear and apprehension'. Although Kath was 'excited by the challenge to work with the Faculty of Business on a complex course' she was influenced by past negative experience and 'worried that it might be difficult to get academics on board to engage with the process'. A further concern of Kath's was that the work wouldn't be prioritised e.g., 'they [discipline-based academics] often see this work as impinging on their research time, don't see it as counting toward promotion'. A concern brought by

Annette was that without 'early contact' and 'strong faculty relationships' the IGA content would be 'othered' (i.e., viewed as a standalone) rather than contextualised within the discipline. Kath similarly believed that 'relationships, connections and 'goodwill' were important to achieve a positive outcome and was fearful that as a new employee at the University and a non-Indigenous person, with 'no prior relationship with the team' she would encounter resistance or not 'be taken seriously'. Interestingly, Danielle, as an Indigenous academic came to the task 'excited by the possibilities. … This was an opportunity for us as Indigenous peoples to showcase and celebrate our ways of working, demonstrating our ways work for all peoples'.

For the discipline-based academics, the lack of a prior clear process brought frustration and confusion to the task. Chris noted that Faculty sentiment arising from previous attempts to integrate an IGA viewed the process as 'moving one step forward and two steps back' with stakeholders feeling 'frustrated' as 'discussions halted, and the process stalled'. For Rosemary, although initially having her 'interest piqued', 'being curious' and volunteering to attend a workshop, her perception of the 'onerous pre-reading' and 'ambitious agenda' associated with earlier training dampened her enthusiasm and confidence e.g., 'I felt very aware of my lack of Indigenous knowledge and cultural competence. I felt I had a long way to go before I could contribute meaningfully'. Annette was conscious that because actions implemented prior to her being appointed had 'stalled due to lack of understanding, direction and resourcing' this placed an 'imperative' on her to develop a framework and deliver a more streamlined process.

Negative sentiment coding was conducted in NVivo on all five reflections. Image 1 below provides a word cloud of the most frequent terms. The time involved was a strong factor for all participants. The language of compliance was also evident in reflections. For example, Rosemary talked about being 'required' to attend workshops and 'responsibility' falling on her shoulders as the coordinator of the management major. She felt that the 'cognitive load' of new initiatives being 'constantly handed down' was reflected in poor internal employee voice survey scores revealing higher job stress and feelings of lack of control amongst academic staff.

Actual experience

As the process of implementation rolled out, discipline-based academics were provided with a combination of workshops, clear guidelines, a framework, and a dedicated ITL team member to support them implement the IGA in their disciplines. The focus of the approach was on contextual content to build student professional capabilities. Noticeably, the language used in the researchers' reflections changed to a more positive tone in response to this question (ref Image 2: Positive sentiment). Relationships, connection, a team approach, the provision of professional development and support to aid understanding and develop capabilities were all positive sentiments. Annette talked about how the workshops allowed her to build 'strong rapport' with academics and how the clear process 'eased the fear and apprehension'. Chris also reflected that the process was 'clear in its progression … had realistic milestones [and] was accompanied with support and constructive feedback … undertaken through a conversation style approach'. Rosemary reflected on the value of communication that clarified 'where and how progress had been made' helped her 'begin to understand the intention of strategically scaffolding Indigenous content across majors to develop [students] professional capabilities.'

Image 1: Negative sentiment   **Image2: Positive sentiment**

Kath's assumption of resistance was not borne out. Rather, she reflected how, 'all the academics that I have engaged with have shown genuine interest and willingness to commit to this process and work collaboratively.' Likewise, Danielle mentioned that she was 'relieved and impressed by the way the academics have embraced this work… [and] committed to improving their own

knowledges as well as ensuring their curriculum is strengths based and authentic.' Kath's worry about her non-Indigeneity was offset by the 'reassuring oversight from the wider ITL Team which consists of both Indigenous academics with lived experience who are strong curriculum and discipline experts, and non-Indigenous academics with both discipline and curriculum expertise.' Invaluable support from her Indigenous colleagues to 'identify resources, re-frame approaches' in this 'Indigenous led space' with everyone working 'collaboratively to develop capabilities and confidence' was 'comforting'. Danielle also mentions 'scaffolding and support' of the team approach as being something she is able to utilise in her practice. Rosemary similarly describes the benefit of this supportive and collaborative approach in her reflection e.g.

> From our first meeting we were quickly able to identify subject modules where Indigenous perspectives would naturally fit and indeed enhance the subject's content. For example, in topics on wellbeing, workplace flourishing, and psychological and cultural safety. … Kath was able to provide me with excellent references for the teaching content - something I would have really struggled with. I was excited by these as they offer so many great possibilities in the classroom.

Learnings from the process

Fook and Gardner (2007) discuss how participants often feel powerless within organisations. Senior executives make the decisions, and these are seen as being imposed on staff at lower levels who are required to implement them. In an increasingly complex organisational environment staff fear the consequences of the wrong decision. Rosemary describes in her reflection how, although initially keen, she came to view the IGA implementation 'as yet another requirement handed down the food chain' on top of a host of other requirements. The actual experience was one however where she was able to gain value for both herself and her students and where the 'heavy lifting required for IGA compliance' was undertaken collaboratively. Chris reflected on the importance of the work, citing 'the great deal of goodwill by academics [in the disciplines] to working with and for Indigenous peoples to improve outcomes.' He described how the process of 'realistic milestones, 'constructive feedback', and 'frequent touchpoints' and 'small steps' helped to 'fit with the workload of academics' and

provided the 'right balance of intervention and support'. The value for him was in 'making a difference' via Indigenous content and assessments that 'provide a new lens through which [students] see important societal issues in economics …. that will 'shape student thinking' and result in more empathic and consultative approaches to policy decision making.

Whereas the discipline based academic staff had experienced the implementation process as quite lengthy, Kath had expected to be able to complete the work in a timelier manner: 'I misunderstood the size of the task ahead. The need to work with eight course teams on eight different majors will require a significant investment of time'. She reflected on the importance of building relationships and connections to work effectively with discipline-based staff. Reflecting on the experience of working with Faculty of Business staff encouraged her to 'ask for testimonials to emphasise to others that this work can be both positive and affirming'. She was able to identify simple ways to improve her practice e.g., 'examples of IGA content in subjects or courses to illustrate practice to future teams' also to 'regularly reinforce and reassure teams regarding available support and resources'. Annette reflected on the importance of 'robust relationships built on trust' as well as a 'clear processes' and a 'systematic approach which 'resulted in the IGA being embedded in a meaningful discipline specific approach to enhance the student experience'.

CONCLUSION AND CONTRIBUTION

In their discussion on Indigenising curriculum, Gainsford and Evans (2017, p.61) argue that "implementing changes to the core business of universities (i.e., the undergraduate degree) requires many parties aligned under a clear direction and committed to achieving a cultural change agenda. As per any change initiative, success relies on supportive executive level leadership, adequate resourcing, training, and support. To ensure that this work is done sensitively and appropriately, it is important that this work is performed under the leadership of Indigenous educators. At UTS we are fortunate to have strong senior leadership for our IGA implementation. The university investment in a team of six academics, led by an Indigenous Associate Dean to embed this work, places the institution as a leader in the sector in relation to IGA implementation. We acknowledge that not all institutions have similar

priorities or resources available. Notwithstanding this investment, our critical reflections of the process of implementing IGA content into an undergraduate business has illustrated how Indigenous and non-Indigenous academics working collaboratively with a clear framework and process can achieve a positive outcome, overcome fear and hesitancy on behalf of non-Indigenous academics, and build their capacity and confidence to deliver this content. Our focus on building students' professional capabilities to work with and for Indigenous Australians rather than embedding Indigenous Knowledges has enhanced the confidence of non-Indigenous staff to teach this content. It also helps allay concerns about misuse or misappropriation of Indigenous Knowledges. The approach therefore provides a model that could be adopted by institutions on a smaller scale at the faculty or discipline level.

Lastly, in describing our model, we do not mean to discount or negate the need for transformative approaches to engender change nor the need for consultative, shared, partnership-based approaches involving Indigenous communities (as advocated by Manton & Williams, 2021). We acknowledge that there are many approaches to embedding Indigenous content in curriculum to effect change such as 'on-Country' or place-based learning programs which have been found to result in profound shifts in understanding, behaviour, attitudes, and approaches (see for example Burgess et. al., 2022). While our process is only one attempt in the journey towards reconciliation in higher education, it does provide an example of how both Indigenous and non-Indigenous academics working together can achieve outcomes. As Rosemary writes "the process has been based on relationship and resources [and this] lays a solid foundation for further work'.

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