

# Chapter 9

## Indigenizing the Business Curriculum at an Australian University



Kerry Bodle and Levon Blue

**Abstract** This chapter is written as a dialog between the authors and commences with how Dr Kerry Bodle developed a new course engaging with First Peoples in various business contexts. Discussed is how First Peoples' perspectives were embedded into existing business courses in the university's Business School. The authors also discuss the importance of relationship building and how teaching philosophies underpin their beliefs about teaching First People's perspectives in higher education.

### Background

This chapter outlines Dr Kerry Bodle's experience developing a First Peoples<sup>1</sup> curricula in a third-year undergraduate business course at an Australian university. Dr Levon Blue was invited by Kerry to deliver the inaugural guest lecture on financial literacy education practices in a First Nation community for the Engaging with First Peoples third-year business course. Levon was not aware of the course's origins or of Kerry's involvement in its development. Both Kerry and Levon are academics with First Nations heritage; Kerry is a First Nations person from Australia, and Levon is a First Nations person from Canada. They came to know each other when Levon was a PhD candidate and was hired to complete some research assistant work for Kerry. Levon and Kerry have continued working together and are now chief investigators on an Australia Research Council Discovery Indigenous grant, *Empowering First Peoples Business Owners Through Improved Financial Literacy*, with co-investigators Professors Lorelle Frazer, Scott Weaven and Mark Brimble. Kerry is employed by

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<sup>1</sup>First Peoples, First Nations, Indigenous and Aboriginal may be used interchangeably in this chapter.

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Griffith University in the Business School and is the first Aboriginal accounting academic with a PhD to become a Certified Practising Accountant (CPA) in Australia. Levon has previously taught undergraduate preservice teachers in the School of Education and Professional Studies at Griffith University and now works in the Carumba Institute at Queensland University of Technology (QUT). In this role, Levon has co-taught capacity building workshops to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander postgraduates from many disciplines.

This chapter is written as a dialog between the authors and commences with how Kerry developed a new course engaging with First Peoples in various business contexts, how First Peoples' perspectives were embedded into existing business courses in the Business School. The authors also discuss the importance of relationship building and how teaching philosophies underpin their beliefs about teaching in higher education.

## Embedding First Peoples' Perspectives in a New Course

Levon: Can you share how “Engaging with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples in Business Communities,” the third-year undergraduate business course, came to be?

Kerry: I was invited by the Pro-Vice Chancellor of Business and the Dean of Learning and Teaching to design, develop and convene “Engaging with First Peoples in Business Communities.” The university was looking for a course that was “mixed-mode” (on-campus and online) and delivered in intensive mode (two lectures and a workshop held twice a week over the four-week period).

It took two years to research the eight topics and gather all the relevant resources. During that time, I also took several courses on how to designing and developing courses that aligned with Griffith's learning and teaching principles. The course was finally delivered in a summer semester in 2015 using online pedagogy, based on the Quality Matters online course design framework and a storytelling teaching pedagogy (McDrury & Alteirio, 2001). I also incorporated my family's journey, combined with visual art and critical reflection, to form the pedagogical practices throughout this course.

Levon: How did you design the course?

Kerry: The learning and teaching decisions about curriculum development and resources were informed by the university's teaching and online frameworks to ensure the course's focus was acknowledging, valuing and promoting First Peoples' epistemologies (or *Aboriginal ways of knowing*). To focus on Aboriginal ways of knowing, it was necessary to undertake a process of *backward mapping*: I worked my way through the units from the final assessment piece back to the first lesson. Backward mapping (McTighe & Wiggins, 2010) involves three stages. The first stage identifies the desired results of the course—what should students know and be able to do on course completion. The second stage explores the criteria students could

be assessed against and the types of evidence they will need to demonstrate. Criteria refers to "... attributes or rules that are useful as levers for making judgments" (Sadler, 2005, p. 179) about students' work. The last stage of backward mapping involves the learning plan. This stage considers how the activities and lessons will lead to the desired outcomes (McTighe & Wiggins, 2010). Backward design begins by designing your assessment items and then determining the learning outcomes<sup>2</sup> for the course and learning activities.<sup>3</sup>

Levon: Can you explain how you embedded First Peoples' perspectives into a new course in the Business School?

Kerry: Embedding First Peoples' perspectives into the curriculum of a standalone course enabled me to design the course from the ground up. I had to create a story around "what should students know and be able to do" once they graduate. Then, I realigned the course's aims and objectives with a specific graduate employability attribute: cultural capability when working with First Peoples in Australia. Each of the learning outcomes were carefully designed to focus on reflecting First Peoples' history, knowledge and culture in a business context. I also had to constructively align (Biggs, 2014) the learning outcomes with the assessment and then develop each week's teaching and learning activities. The learning outcomes for students completing this course were as follows:

- critically analyze First Peoples' ways of knowing, being and doing in the context of history, culture and diversity in business communities;
- critically reflect on how one's own culture, life experiences and worldview as well as dominant cultural paradigms influence perceptions of, and interactions with First Peoples;
- identify ways to engage in culturally appropriate, safe and sensitive communication that facilitates trust and the building of respectful relationships and effective partnerships with First Peoples, individuals, organizations and communities in a business-related context;
- identify and list workplace protocols and cultural safety issues that need to be understood when working with First Peoples, organizations and communities;
- outline culturally appropriate protocols and practices required to ensure sustainable community engagement with First Peoples' business communities; and,
- differentiate between governance and leadership in First Peoples and non-First Peoples communities.

The assessments were designed authentically so that students would be capable of working with First Peoples from Australia within an organization, or work in remote communities after graduation. I decided that the course assessments would not follow the traditional ways of assessing students (for example, online quizzes, mid-term exams and a final exam or essay). Instead, students were required to complete digital

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<sup>2</sup>There are three types of learning outcomes. The program learning outcomes, the course learning outcomes and the teaching session learning outcomes.

<sup>3</sup>The learning activities are aligned to the teaching session learning outcomes.

assessments. Students used symbols and graphics from the Web or manually drawn pictures to create electronic posters; they also used PebblePad and/or PowerPoint to create their portfolios and presentations (hereafter referred to as ePosters, ePortfolios and ePresentations). This course had three pieces of assessment: ePoster (Assessment 1), ePortfolio (Assessment 2) and ePresentation (Assessment 3). The first assessment, the ePoster, required students to communicate concepts in a graphical format that were associated with one of the eight topics covered in this course. The topics included:

1. Course Introduction, and History of First Peoples in Australia;
2. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Culture in Business Contexts;
3. Communication and Consultation: Ways of Being, and Ways to Communicate in Business Contexts;
4. Cultural Diversity: Benefits for Businesses;
5. Culture Awareness, Competency & Safety in the Workplace: Protocols and Practices;
6. Community Engagement: Protocols and Practices;
7. Community Leadership & Governance; and,
8. Government Policies & Practices.

One student designed an ePoster addressing topics 1 and 8, that illustrated their family's story about the Stolen Generations. The student used the left side of the ePoster to illustrate a point of view from the First Peoples' (Yapa) perspective and the right side to show the Western view. A legend was developed to explain what the symbols and colors on the ePoster meant. The student illustrated the story of an Aboriginal mother whose child was taken away. The written component that accompanied the ePoster provided some contextual history about Australian government policies between 1909 and 1969 regarding attempted assimilation of First Peoples children into the non-First Peoples mainstream culture. The student went on to explain how the generation of children who were removed from their Aboriginal families and placed in the care of others became known as the Stolen Generation.

The second course assessment involved writing a reflective journal. The students were assessed on their ability to apply core concepts of First Peoples' culture and context; reflect on their learning about cross-cultural issues in a business context; and take what they have learned that would enhance their employability skills.

The final assessment, an ePresentation, asked students to research one of the eight topics from the course and deliver a three to five minute video ePresentation. This assessment item required students to use the course aims and learning objectives as a guide. I was able to assess students on how they developed knowledge of the course content, how they conducted research and how they identified links between the understandings explored by the course and how these understandings could be applied after graduation. Students were encouraged to engage with the course material, reflecting on how these issues related to their own cultural knowledge, experiences, values and beliefs. At all times, students were reassured through constructive feedback and/or by asking questions so that they felt supported and that they understood the meaning of each issue. It was important for students to express

their ideas, as words can change their meaning when spoken and heard, so they were invited not to be afraid to hear the sound of their own voice or story.

I used the course curriculum as a way to stimulate students' awareness and interest in understanding how First Peoples are still impacted by their experiences from past government policies and practices. The curriculum, my pedagogical practices and the assessments were the catalysts to bringing about change. The digital assessments were designed to stimulate dialog, providing opportunities to students to reflect on their own cultural experiences, so that they could make sense of their understanding of First Peoples' perspectives in both a historical and a business context. I believe embedding First Peoples' perspectives is not just about adding stories or facts; it starts with self-reflection. The assignments were designed to engage students and enable critical reflection.

I designed a survey to investigate students' pre- and post-attitudes toward ePortfolios as a useful vehicle for facilitating critical reflection and learning. The students were asked questions in the survey based on their experience on the usability of ePortfolios, technical support and *effectiveness* in their learning (see Bodle, Malin, & Wynhoven, 2017). We found that more than 80% of students said that ePortfolios were useful vehicles for facilitating critical reflection, for compiling and demonstrating evidence of learning and skill development.

Levon: Thank you for sharing your insights about embedding First Peoples' perspectives into a new course. Can you share how you embedded First Peoples' perspectives into an existing course?

## **Embedding First Peoples' Perspectives into an Existing Course**

Kerry: Embedding Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander perspectives within an existing course begins with examining the learning outcomes to determine which ones can be "Indigenized." For example, a financial planning course includes the learning outcome: demonstrate a range of generic and behavioral skills required to be an effective professional. This learning outcome was selected to "Indigenize".

In this financial planning course, students were provided with a set of modules containing resources (First Peoples' videos, peer-review papers and other government documents), pertaining to history, communication, community engagement and government policies and practices. Students were instructed to work independently through the modules in their own time. Then, the convenor discusses cultural diversity when engaging with First Peoples in business as potential clients. The assessment instructs students to consider the cultural protocols and implications when providing financial advice, the communication protocols they would have to be aware of, and how they would address them.

When designing that assessment, I asked myself, "How can I design authentic assessment items that engage students in a meaningful way that develops a deep

understanding of First Peoples in Australia?” Norton (2008) described an authentic assessment as one that includes development of real work skills and active construction creative responses connected to skills. Developing a deep understanding was important because Angelo (2012) argues that when students can only pass assessments by demonstrating deep learning, the likelihood of plagiarism is reduced. I then considered the learning activities I could use that are authentic First Peoples resources, readings and videos relevant to each specific topic covered. This was an important step—considering what students want to learn rather than what an educator wants to teach ensures that appropriate learning activities are aligned with the course’s learning outcomes (Norton, 2008). For the videos selected for students to watch I asked, “What videos could be included within this course that highlight the importance of First Peoples in this context?”

Levon: How did you work with the existing learning outcomes when embedding First Peoples’ perspectives into an existing course?

Kerry: With any course you need to consider the program’s learning outcome (PLO) that students will achieve an employability skill where they will be capable of working with First Peoples when they complete the course. The learning outcomes of the course must be adapted so that the learning activities and the assessments are aligned. Angelo (2012) asserts that “good teaching is inextricably intertwined with good curriculum design, which is about planning and aligning what to teach, how to teach and how to assess ...” (p. 92). It is much like a brick wall ... the bricks are representative of the curriculum design, and the mortar represents the teaching pedagogy; if you do not have strong mortar, it will collapse. One example where I assisted in embedding First Peoples’ perspectives into an existing course was a first-year capstone tourism course: People and Places in the Service Industries (1005THS). The overall program learning outcome was to demonstrate an appreciation of the importance of First Peoples’ culture and context. The learning outcomes for the course were:

- Explain socio-economic and environmental relationships between people, geographical features of “places” with the tourism and hospitality context;
- Apply concepts and theories to propose improvements to “real-life businesses” in the service industries;
- Analyze cultural diversity, identities, personalities, and visitor motivations and behavior in tourism and hospitality experiences; and,
- Evaluate how tourism and hospitality places are developed and managed to cater to diverse visitor markets.

The areas identified as being capable of being “Indigenized” using First Peoples’ perspectives were:

- The importance First Peoples in Australia's "place" in the relationship between people and "Country";
- "Real-life businesses," which could include the businesses and tourism spots on Traditional Owners' lands such as North Stradbroke Island;
- Adding First Peoples in Australia's culture to the "cultural diversity"; and
- Providing information on community engagement protocols for First Peoples.

The existing assessment was redesigned so that students could compare and contrast traditional Western perspectives and First Peoples' perspectives when conducting field research. Students then had to prepare a reflective critical analysis to demonstrate their active engagement and participation in the field trip.

## **Teaching philosophies and relationship building in higher education**

Levon: I would like to talk with you about the relationships you developed with the students. When I was invited to give a guest lecture, I noticed that you formed strong relationships with your students and the students wanted to continue learning outside the lectures. Can you explain how you formed relationships with your students? What is your teaching philosophy and how does your teaching philosophy guide your practice as a university educator?

Kerry: My teaching philosophy is based on storytelling and involves sharing stories (often referred to as *yarning*) about how the past government policies and practices impacted my grandmother, my mother and myself. I share that my grandmother (Moola Conbar) was made a ward of the state at the age of two. She was assigned on a work permit by the Aboriginal Protector to a family in outback Queensland. When my grandmother fell pregnant with my mother to a white man (who denied paternity), she was subsequently sent to Cherbourg to give birth to my mother. When my mother was three, she was taken as part of the Stolen Generation. I tell students how these policies have affected me and my family. I was raised in a Salvation Army home from the age of five to fifteen and was an unmarried mother at the age of sixteen. I struggled with two cultural identities as I went through school and eventually my academic working life. By telling students my story, I engaged them in the course content. The cultural safety I provided to students allows them to relate to their own cultural experiences, fostering relationships. I also believe the foundation of all First Peoples is connection to country, family and relationships.

The course I developed evolved by using innovative, non-traditional teaching pedagogy and learning styles, shifting the focus from the teacher (and a top-down structure) to one of student participation, reflection and active learning. Martin's (2014) handbook on the role of Aboriginal Knowledges in twenty-first Century Higher Education describes four approaches to curricularizing Aboriginal Knowledges: the transactional, interactional, relational and transformational approaches. My approach to embedding Indigenous perspectives in business courses is best

described as the transactional approach. Martin (2014) described the transactional approach as occurring only at the subject level, where disciplinary knowledge and professional knowledge dominate, followed by curriculum knowledge. This means that concepts are drawn from the dominant discipline area, framing what is possible. This results in incorporating Aboriginal perspectives as examples of a topic or issue or as content designed to address professional knowledge requirements (for program accreditation), similar to the Teacher Professional Standards discussed in Chap. 8.

Although the transactional model is not promoted by Martin (2014) as the preferred approach, it is the best approach possible without structural transformation from within the institution. Other chapters in this book have highlighted similar issues with changing the institution: this has not yet been achieved. However, in the course I designed, students were encouraged to ask questions, seek answers and share their own cultural knowledge, stories and opinions to connect to the course content and learning outcomes. As many students in the course were from different cultural backgrounds, sharing a bit about their backgrounds helped to develop a comfortable environment that encouraged reflection in class and during the online collaborative sessions. The importance of following a reflect-inquire-reflect learning approach was used in White, Anderson, Gower, Byrne, Bennet, Quin, and Darling (2019) Engaging and Partnering with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Parents and Caregivers project. Although their project was not about higher education, the approach described how learners moved through the reflect-inquire-reflect learning approach to seek answers and may be applicable in higher education.

Sharing stories enabled students to understand and relate to all aspects of the course content. Through the ePortfolio/Reflective journal assessment, the students were able to apply core concepts of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander society (knowledges, traditions and culture). They could also highlight the application of appropriate use of protocols when engaging with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and their businesses and wider communities. This allowed students to learn independently through the use of narrative inquiry, reflection and critical analysis. One student told me how much they were enjoying the class and the stories I was sharing. The student also mentioned how the stories shared motivated them to research and watch videos about Aboriginal culture.

Levon: I think we have many common threads in our teaching philosophies. My teaching philosophy is underpinned by four essential elements: rapport, criticality, care and collaboration.

Kerry: How do you apply that in your teaching practice?

Levon: To build rapport with the postgraduate students, we invite a traditional owner (and colleague) of the land to do a “Welcome to Country.” They emphasize that on these lands, we will work together in a spirit of generosity, with mutual respect and will support each other. The main motivation is to build rapport with students, to try to establish an environment where students feel comfortable. I also share a bit about my background and then ask students to share a few things about themselves.

With undergraduates, I share my own stories to help shift the deficit views some preservice teachers hold about diversity and disadvantage. My mum was a teenager when she had me, and my dad is Aboriginal. I lived most of my childhood in a



low-income household with two loving parents. Encouraging preservice teachers to understand their own backgrounds and socio-cultural contexts, including privilege, may also enable more respectful relationship in the classroom (Frankenstein, 1990). To establish rapport with undergraduates, I usually ask students to share their name, their favorite thing and their favorite song. I then keep a list of the students' favorite songs and before each tutorial begins, I play some of their music. To develop collaborative learning approaches, I use active learning techniques such as inquiry-based learning. This student-centered approach to learning involves working in small groups on real-world problems in a positive and inclusive learning environment.

Criticality is fostered by the type of content, questions and assumptions that are challenged in discussions during our time spent together. I realized I needed to offer two different styles of being together, as I sometimes deliver lectures followed by a tutorial. In the large lecture theaters, if it was difficult to have much interaction, until I introduced digital tools such as Kahoots (online interactive quiz). I was often told by undergraduates they came to the early morning lecture just for the Kahoot. Undergraduates wanted time to get to know each other during tutorials, so I include small group and paired activities. In the postgraduate workshops, which were often over multiple days, postgraduates found their own time at lunch, during breaks and in the evening to develop relationships and network.

My teaching philosophies are also informed by my research (Blue, 2016), in particular, the importance of finding out the needs of students and understanding the importance of context. My research interests shape my teaching practice. I believe that preservice teachers need to understand the importance of caring for their students. Being cared for and caring for others is essential for adequate academic achievement, according to Noddings (1995). I tend to connect care to having high expectations in my students' ability. Many students will tell me that they are not smart enough, and I remind them of the research by Dweck (2006) on mindsets and how, with effort, anyone can be "smart" enough. My students get to hear and understand the power of "yet," a term Haimovitz, Kenthirarajah, Walton and Dweck (2014) refer to when a student has "not yet" acquired certain knowledge and/or skills. These moments, when a student questions their ability to succeed, keep me interested in teaching. As they allow me to demonstrate that I care and will support their learning so that they can understand the content they are grappling with.

Kerry: I believe you get the best from students when they feel they are being heard and are "culturally safe" in the classroom including students from overseas.

In my experience, students with from overseas who speak English as a second language usually do not participate in open class discussions. This could possibly be due to cultural differences and a lack of confidence in speaking English in the classroom. By providing a safe teaching environment, I make students feel more comfortable in vocalizing their own experiences to demonstrate the similarities and differences to First Peoples' issues and perspectives.

Levon: As an educator, I feel it is important to foster a positive environment so that students want to attend and feel they belong. This belief is connected to my concept of teaching, which is student-centered and influenced by positive pedagogies—the practices educators use to develop individualized learning goals with their

students “that target the development of positive cognitions, emotions and experiences” (O’Brien & Blue, 2017, p. 1). With student-centered activities, it becomes easy to foster student’s positive learning identities, providing them with opportunities to experience success and reinforcing that it is okay to make mistakes in the time we have together.

I also support my students outside of classroom hours, as Chickering and Gamson (1987) state that good teaching practices include students being supported outside of the class time by approachable, interested educators. My students have continually told me how supported they feel by my prompt replies to their emails. Being available, interested and aware of what my students are facing fosters “rapport” (Rowan & Grootenboer, 2017). Although rapport is classed as a relationship-centered pedagogy, I would argue it is also a student-centered approach to learning.

My personal philosophy aligns with student-centered approaches, including “teaching as supporting student learning” and “teaching as an activity aimed at changing students’ conceptions or understanding” (Samuelowicz & Bain, 1992, p. 100). As a critically reflective educator, I evaluate my teaching through the four lenses Brookfield (2005) identified. These include understanding what the literature says about effective teaching, asking my colleagues about their effective experiences, looking my students in the eye and performing an autobiographical account of my teaching experiences.

Kerry: As educators in higher education we need to work collaboratively with our colleagues by embracing First Peoples culture and peoples, not from a deficit model of thinking, but by recognising First Peoples as resilient, innovative and for their entrepreneurial culture.

Levon: Bringing about change and transforming education practices that stem from a deficit perspective is something I have had experience doing. What I noticed is that when you review generic content and think about its relevance in a First Peoples’ context (e.g., the community I am a member of), the need to bring in First Peoples’ perspectives becomes obvious. What I mean by that is, teaching financial literacy education on a First Nation Canadian reserve. As discussed in Chap. 2, needs to consider the life experiences of community members. What are the options for employment? What are the options for getting loans? Why is the reserve so isolated? What has happened in history that continues to contribute to high unemployment and poverty rates for First Nations people? How does the Canadian Indian Act<sup>4</sup>, including the certificate of possession of land, constrain First Nations people ability to own land? I guess what I am getting at is the need to teach without doing harm, as harm may be unintentionally done when the context is not fully understood.

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<sup>4</sup>The Indian Act was enacted in 1876 to control Aboriginal people and communities. More information can be found at <https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/background-the-indian-act-1.1056988>

## Concluding Comment

This chapter described Dr. Kerry Bodle's experience developing a First Peoples curricula in a third-year undergraduate business course at an Australian university. The focus of the chapter was on the business course titled "Engaging with First Peoples in Business Communities," to demonstrate how it came to be developed and implemented and how the students received lessons on history and culture from a business perspective. Dr Bodle also shared how she approached Indigenizing the business curriculum in higher education by embedding First Peoples' perspectives into an existing course. However, more research is required to guide practices about embedding First Peoples' perspectives in higher education for both staff and students. University-wide support is also required to enable transformational changes in higher education practices to ensure that embedding First Peoples' perspectives becomes a priority for all.

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