

Reciprocity with Keane Wheeler and Murray Phillips
(T: Tracey K: Katelyn M: Murray Phillips KW: Keane Wieler)

T: Hi everyone, I'm Tracy 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 cohost, Dr Katelyn Barney.

K: Hi everyone, I'd also like to acknowledge the traditional owners of the land where we're recording and also where you're 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're recording has always been a place of teaching and learning. I'm a non-Indigenous woman living and working in Meanjin. In this series, Tracy and I interview Indigenous and non-Indigenous academics about how they're Indigenising curriculum within the faculties at the University of Queensland.

T: Together we are going to ask questions to unravel the why, the how and then when of Indigenising curriculum.

K: Our theme for this episode is based on the principle of reciprocity. Our guests today are Dr Keane Wieler and Professor Murray Phillips from the School of Human Movement and Nutrition Sciences at the University of Queensland. Welcome.

T: If you could introduce yourselves in any way that you feel comfortable. Murray, would you like to start off?

M: I'm Murray Phillips, and as Katelyn mentioned, I'm from the School of Human Movement and Nutrition Sciences. I'm a historian of sport by trade, so I've worked in different capacities in different contexts, mainly about sport history. Over the last 15 years, I've been involved with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Island communities. I've been working with communities at Cherbourg, a couple of central desert communities, Papunya and Yuendumu and more recently in the Torres Strait. We work with community on a reciprocal basis on the kinds of things they're interested in. When we talk sport it's a really popular topic and it's a really great topic to talk to Aboriginal and Strait Islander communities because they love talking about the sporting experiences, and it's a soft topic for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. It's a topic they're really happy to talk about. It's a really powerful way for us to actually understand their histories and their culture and their identities. That's the work we do. We work with mob and working with ways in which we can understand their historical trajectories, particularly in terms of their identities and cultures from a long time ago right through to contemporary times.

T: Keane?

KW: Thank you. My name is Keane Wieler. I'm an Ngarabal man from Northern New South Wales. My family are from Deepwater in Northern New South Wales. I grew up on

Ngunnawal, Ngambri country around Canberra. I now live on Gubbi Gubbi country up on the Sunshine Coast and work here in beautiful Jagera, Turrbal country in Brisbane. My work in research focusses a lot around what is the health of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Island peoples, and how can we, in a framework of excellence, actually promote health in culturally responsive ways. A lot of what I do involves me going into community and working out how we as researchers can actually give back to community through meaningful research that allows community to one, take on the challenges of living in any community, but two, also, to do so in cultural responsive ways.

K: Thanks Keane and Murray. That sounds like really exciting research that both of you are doing. We know that you're both working together and collaborating on teaching. Can you tell us a bit about the course that you're teaching together and how the collaboration between the two of you works?

KW: The course that we teach, the abbreviated name is Indigenous Studies, but the long version is Indigenous Studies for Exercise Professionals, Nutritionists, and everything else that sits under our discipline. Basically it's a course designed solely for human movement and nutrition science students, and they come into the course having done very little histories around Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander histories, but they also are very raw in terms of where they've come from a cultural perspective. They've covered, at length, how to take a heart rate, how to perform skin fold tests, how to do a vertical jump test. All of these Western base measures. They come into our course and suddenly they're thrown into a context which is definitely around this Indigenising the curriculum, and there we cover areas such as identity and how the formation of identity occurs within Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. Then also, that moves into reflexivity and the importance of establishing reflexivity and developing up your standpoint as an exercise professional. Then we go into some of the rights-based approach to engaging with mob, and then we move into cultural responsiveness and those sorts of things.

It's a broad course, but at the same time, the students really benefit particularly from the reflexivity angle that we take. Everything that the student does is about reflecting on their own positionality, their own upbringing, and where they've actually been in the past, and then how that informs their professional practice. Murray?

M: Keane, that's a really good synopsis of what we do. How we do it is probably pretty interesting as well. We have modules of roughly four weeks. In the first week we have a lecture where we provide content for the students. In the second week we give them a series of readings. We don't have a lecture time, per say, we get them to do the readings away. Then the third week we come back and we do a yarning session, and that can be either a full large yarning circle or smaller yarning circles and then we combine them at the end. That's really an effective way both to get the students to engage with the content material, but also to articulate their positions. We've got principles around how we're going to yarn, respectful kind of discussions. It's been a really effective way for students to engage with us as individuals and us as collaborators, because one of the privileges for me is actually to work with Keane. I'm really fortunate, because as much as we're working with the students, I'm also learning the process of working with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. I've been really fortunate for the last couple of years to work with Keane. He's an excellent professional and a great communicator with the students.

KW: One of the great things about the readings that we've embedded in the course is that they're from the big names in Indigenous studies. There's the Moreton-Robinson's and alike. [0:07:31.2 Rigny] and all of these sort of people. It's some of those foundational understandings of Indigenous methodology and how we then link up with their professional practice is the important thing. We do that through the vehicle of reflexivity. As Murray said, one of the key components of the course is actually the fact that we've got these modules set up which are themed, but in the middle of each module, they do a reading week. In that reading week, they're expected to go away and read the prescribed readings and think very deeply about them and come back to class and be prepared to actually justify their positionality based on the readings and what they've learnt from the readings. It's this sort of cycle of a more didactic measure of lecture, then followed by the readings and then followed by the yarning session, which is really successful. The students actually say to us that they like the space that it gives them in order to think about the topic deeply. They say that the readings are very difficult to actually complete because they're confronting, but at the same time, they're challenging in terms of their complexity. But also, at the same time, they like the fact that they're given time, that they would either be in class, but actually given time to just have think about what's happening and explore their own positionality based on the research.

T: One of the principles that has been formed for Indigenising curriculum is reciprocity. That's what the focus of today's podcast is. Listening to you both, is teaching your students how to be culturally responsive, would you see that as an act of reciprocity?

KW: Definitely. But I also think what Murray and I do is we sort of role model reciprocity within classes. We teach it together. It's not Murray teaches a class, I teach a class, it's that we actually co-facilitate each class. What we do through that as well is I will actively question Murray about his positionality, and Murray will do the same with me, and so through that interaction, we're actually showing the students that it's okay to be challenged in this context and it's okay for a non Indigenous person to ask an Aboriginal person about their positionality and vice versa. But also, by asking the students to respond to active questioning about their positionality, and their cultural responsiveness, what we're trying to do is challenge their implicit bias and really challenge that notion of the blinders are on, I can't see what's in front of me, to just opening the mind a little bit but focussing on themselves and their reaction.

When, for example, I teach reflexivity, I teach it based on acceptance and commitment therapy, which is a very mindful practice which talks about where in your body are you feeling it? What does it look like? What's the shape? What do the edges look like? We're actually sort of describing it as we move through the process before we actually start talking about values based partnerships, giving back to community, which is all part of reflexivity. And then going into setting smart goals and things like that, which is also an important part of reflexivity. We go through this sort of process, but at the end of it, the students hopefully feel like they've been supported in their journey of reflexivity, but through this reflexivity and then exploring cultural responsiveness, they've been open to change and that will promote reciprocity through give back and that into community.

M: The only thing I would add to that is that the reciprocity is, we try to transmit that through talking about our research as well. We talk about our experiences with mob and with community over a long period of time and the ways in which we've interacted with community, giving back to community, talking to community, making sure that their voices are listened to. The healthy respect that we have in our research, we use those as examples in our teaching. For a lot of these kids, they're going out to work in schools, they'll be working with Aboriginal communities as exercise physiologists. Again, it's about developing that reciprocity and the respect and cultural awareness through our activities and classes.

K: It's great to hear about how you're co teaching. You're saying you're not just one person doing one week and then the other the next week. You're kind of modelling how Indigenous and non Indigenous people can work together. Do you have advice for other non Indigenous staff about how they could Indigenise the curriculum?

M: Keane has been invaluable for me, challenged me on so many levels and made me rethink positions in my understanding. The students can see that and they can understand what I'm going through, making sure that I'm communicating in effective ways with Aboriginal communities and with the students about their capacity. I think there are a lot of challenges for non Indigenous people working in the space. My advice would be to get a great collaborator like Keane, and work with him over a period of time and develop an understanding, an awareness, and a genuine collaboration through the teaching and learning process.

T: That's very honourable. Did you want to add anything to that Keane?

KW: Yeah. I think it's also important to acknowledge that not every Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander person will want to teach Indigenous studies. I think that's totally fair. But at the same time, I think we are in the best position to teach that content and that experience. I think it's strengthened by the fact of Murray having an openness to constructive criticism, but also us working together to make an experience that is authentic for the students. For example, one of the publications that Murray had published years ago had language in it that was probably not acceptable in today's terms. We do spend time in class talking about language and the use of language and I would point out to Murray "You've used this term, and this term, and this term. How do you actually feel about the position of your paper in contemporary society given that you've used what is now deemed inappropriate language?" We have a very open conversation about that and to Murray's credit, he's all for it, he says yeah, I totally accept that. Did that sort of challenge you in strange and wonderful ways, Murray?

M: It certainly made me go back and read that paper again. It's like a time capsule in terms of the way in which language has become more and more important and definitive about how we refer to people. Yes, it was challenging, but like I said, I think it's really appropriate for the students because they're going to be challenged in their careers in similar kinds of ways. In the way in which the landscape is changing so quickly, they're going to need to be resilient, also reflective about their attitudes to teaching and learning.

T: I'm going to pick up on that concept of challenges and just switch it a little bit from the relationship of you two collaborating and teaching. If you could think about the

challenges for the learner in Indigenous studies, how you've been able to meet those challenges for the students. When a non Indigenous student, in particular, comes to greet this knowledge that we as Indigenous people are sharing, it can be quite confronting. What's been your experiences?

M: Some interesting experiences. When we first started this course, it was people's choice to join it, and that's a really privileged space to be in because these students are joining in, taking this class voluntarily, and they're wanting to know, they're willing to listen, they're willing to engage, they're open to conversations. That's a lovely position to be in. More recently, this course has become compulsory for some parts of our degrees. That's changed the dynamic and I do think that has made it more challenging in many ways. We're getting more challenges from students or students that are uncomfortable, and you can tell by their verbal language and also by the way they're moving and so on. We have to be able to create a dialogue in which they can challenge issues and things on respectful basis. If we establish lines of argument and reasoning, whereby it's a healthy respect for everybody there, then we can engage with those issues. They're some of the principles we try to instil in the students as we develop. Particularly in our yarning sessions, where it is open for discussion, where a lot of things are brought up that are challenging for non Indigenous people and challenging for Indigenous people as well.

KW: I think equally so, we benefit in this course wholeheartedly from the fact that many of the students in the course value sport and exercise and physical activity. What we do is we centre the course around discussions of sport and exercise and physical activity. That allows us a vehicle to communicate on common grounds with the students rather than just presenting what could be challenging information and challenging positions and really challenging them aggressively on their implicit biases. I think what we do is we leverage off the love of sport within the student cohort that undertake our course. For example, we had a very recent discussion in last class around Latrell Mitchell and Cody Walker who are Aboriginal Rugby League players.

The discussion started off as we do about the weekend results and who does what and all those sort of things, but it quickly progressed and we flipped it into racism in sport and would Latrell Mitchell be getting the same sort of criticisms if we was a non Indigenous player. Okay, so you're arguing about that, this is great, lets discuss further and unpack this and what it actually means. Okay, now let's link up to some of the theories that we've been learning about this semester. I guess what we really try and do is harness the collective interest in sport and exercise to communicate a message of change and challenge their implicit biases.

K: That challenge of the course changing to be a compulsory course is really interesting and of course there's some literature around that and what happens in terms of it being a compulsory course as well. The book is called *Indigenising Curriculum in Practice*. Is there one key point that you'd like to add further around *Indigenising curriculum* in your space?

KW: As you probably understand from what I've said so far, I think reflexivity is absolutely vital in any *Indigenising the curriculum* content. I think it is the foundation of behaviour change. If you don't truly want it yourself within you, then you're not going to make the change that's going to happen. For me, for any *Indigenising the curriculum* parts of modules, the foundations are actually around this reflexivity. I was recently presenting

at a conference and talking about the fact that for many of the human resource programs that are actually run in universities and government and these places, they're actually based on history or professional practice, and that only gets to the tip of the iceberg. So, by going through a reflexive practice and actually getting to assumptions and positionality and whiteness, you're actually starting to tackle the bigger iceberg that's down below the surface. For me, Indigenising the curriculum comes down to reflexivity, and I think that's probably the vital component that I would have in there. Murray?

M: I agree with that totally. What I would add to it is there needs to be really good scaffolding around these courses. There's got to be support for the teaching staff, and the scaffolding has also got to extend to the schools in which the courses are taught. That's the political space, is how these courses fit into the curriculum, and that they're not trivialised or tokenised in any way, shape or form, and that the staff in general are on board with this process. The support not only comes from within the course itself, but in the broader degree structures and the priority that the school places on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Island affairs more broadly. Then it doesn't sit as an icon or an island, sitting disparate from everything else, it's actually integrated into the school an integrated into the degree programs fully.

T: I think they're really great points. To be able to be reflexive, to be able to be a deep thinker in this space, to think about not only what we're learning now but how it applies to my whole discipline, and then how I'm going to apply that once I get out there in the big wild world. That's what's going to change that political space around this particular discipline. But [0:21:28.0] value of critical Indigenous studies, I think you guys are doing critical Indigenous studies. I want to thank you very much for coming today.

KW: Thank you.

K: Thanks for joining us for another episode of Indigenising Curriculum in Practice.

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