

Respect with Sonia Roitman and Greg Kitson

V: Voiceover T: Tracey K: Katelyn S: Sonia G: Greg)

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V: Welcome to Indigenising Curriculum in Practice, with Professor Tracey Bunda and Associate Professor Katelyn Barney.

T: 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 you, our listeners, are located, and pay my respects to Elders past and present. I acknowledge the ongoing contributions of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples to society at local, national and international levels.

You may very well ask what is the connection between acknowledging Country and Indigenising curriculum? It's important for us to think about Indigenous knowledge systems that have helped inform practice on country. And that's exactly where universities are located. They are located on Aboriginal Country. And the knowledge that we bring to our students about country will enable those students to have a more meaningful relationship with this country. I'm joined by my colleague and cohost, Associate Professor Katelyn Barney.

K: Hi, everybody. 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 at the University of Queensland.

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

K: Our theme for this podcast is based on the principle of respect, and our guests today our Associate Professor Sonia Roitman and Greg Kitson from the Urban Planning Program at the University of Queensland.

T: Welcome, Sonia. Welcome, Greg. Would you like to introduce yourself in whatever way is comfortable for you? Sonia, maybe if you start.

S: Thank you. Thank you very much for the invitation. So I'm Sonia Roitman. I'm in the Urban Planning Program, here at UQ. As you can tell from my accent, I'm originally from Argentina, and I've been here at UQ for 11 years.

G: My name's Greg Kitson. I'm Wakka Wakka. I'm a graduate of the Regional and Town Planning Program at the University of Queensland, completing my PhD in Indigenous

Community Planning at Griffith University, and I work all across Queensland actually, delivering Indigenous community planning, consultancy work, that I teach back into UQ.

K: Thanks, Greg and Sonia. Can you talk a bit about how you're Indigenising curriculum in Planning? What's been the process for that?

S: The Urban Planning programs are accredited professionally by the Planning Institute of Australia, and around 2020, PIA as it's called was trying to include Indigenous content in the planning programs, and it was not very clear how to do it. Each university started doing different processes, and what we have been doing here is we started to map which courses have any sort of Indigenous content, who delivers that, what sort of activity, whether there is any literature included or not, and we've been doing that since 2020.

And also, it's important to consider whether people who are delivering the lectures are Indigenous or non-Indigenous. And in addition to that, and this is why we have Greg as one of our guest speakers, and he's going to tell you about that, but in addition to that, we also have an advisory group, and also Greg sits in that advisory group as Indigenous planner, I would say.

G: Outside of the formal process that Sonia has referred to in 2020, I think the Indigenisation here started, for me, complaining to lecturers, possibly even Sonia, that there was no content about Aboriginal people inside the Regional and Town Planning program, apart from Native Title and cultural heritage. And that was more around planning approvals, it wasn't actually about the community. I found that quite problematic, coming through the program. Finishing the Honours, I actually focused on Indigenous Community Planning, which set everything else in train for me. I was told, "Oh, you should maybe consider research." I took up the PhD, ran into Sonia again, and we started collaborating on teaching, guest lecturers, and bringing that into the program.

S: If we could add to that, for planning, the whole role of the communities is very important, and how you include diversity, how you respect the different groups that are in our cities, is very important. So I teach a course on Community Engagement, and this is where Greg teaches in.

T: We have developed a set of principles for Indigenising curriculum at the University of Queensland, and one of them is about respect. So I'm really interested to hear how you teach, Sonia if I could focus on you, how you teach students respect for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities. Greg, I'm going to ask you to think a little bit about how do you teach respect for Indigenous land, Indigenous waters, Indigenous ways of doing within Country? I think it's a real challenge, and I think people would be interested.

S: I think one challenge for us is, first of all, that there are many students who don't know much about Indigenous issues. Those are domestic and international students both. We have lots of international students who are very interested and very curious to know about Indigenous issues, but sometimes they don't know how to start or where to start. So I think that information is the starting point, giving information and trying for them to see perhaps a different perspective.

And then, of course, it's about inclusion and diversity, and how you need to perhaps value the role that diversity brings, because we are all different, and because we are different, we want different things. So it's very important to understand the different roles that different groups play, in planning how we want to shape our cities.

G: In terms of respect, through the teaching, one of the first resources I used was actually UQ's own Acknowledgment of Country. I pitched it to the students that yes, you can say these words as many times as you like, but if there's no meaning behind it, you're going to have difficulties understanding how to actually connect with the community. The teachings out of that, at the beginning of some of the lectures, was to let students know that they can acknowledge Country through their work. I didn't refer to them putting the acknowledgment in their assignments or essays, but actually demonstrating through the content that they've engaged somehow with the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community, and to weave that through their experience. I think also, too, some of the graduate outcomes now focus ...

T: Yes, that's correct.

G: ... and I thought it's important to actually demonstrate to them that it's actually within the corporate sphere here and the thinking around what you will be when you graduate from the University of Queensland.

The respect also went a bit further. It did concentrate on Country, and that conceptualisation of the Aboriginal world. I also made sure that there was mention of Aboriginal groups outside of Australia, so that there is a global Indigenous community out there, and the learnings that they will get through the teachings here may also be beneficial if they return to their international students in this program. So that respect, but also too, making sure that paying students, as a respectful way that they're actually getting good quality education.

K: What were the challenges?

S: I guess the learning is also for students to learn, and this is what I think Greg does, and contributes with his learning about all these cultural protocols that you need to know when you go into a community, right? And, for us, in all courses, it's very important to understand that, as a planner, and this could be as a development practitioner or as a social scientist, you cannot be just parachute in and arrive into a community, right? You need to establish relationships, and in order to establish relationships, you need to build trust, you need to invest a lot of time [laughs], lots of informal conversations. And there are some times when different institutions, or even the university, doesn't allow for that to happen. We want everything to be very quick, fast, and it's not going to happen.

I guess, in terms of the teaching, one aspect that we have found challenging is that there are not many Indigenous planners here in Queensland, but in Australia in general. So when we want to provide content from the perspective of an Indigenous planner, it's Greg or maybe a couple more, but it's not many. So we need to have more students, and then later graduates.

- T: Greg, when you're teaching, what do you find the students find the most challenging in their learning?
- G: If I think about delivering those guest lectures over the last 3-4 years, they find challenging when we start talking about issues around colonialism, racism, discrimination, which isn't the sole focus of the actual lectures, but it's letting students know that the built environment profession and the education does lag behind other areas and sectors within universities. And there is also a connector there, to its role in those sorts of parts of how Australia came to be.
- So I do notice that there are a few people wriggling around in their seats. [laughs] But I think it unsettles in a good way, and I've been told, from feedback from Sonia and also Sarah, that students make comments that they felt it was very useful information to take it there. But that's certainly not the focus.
- Sometimes I think there is maybe, I wouldn't say they're uncomfortable, but just covering off on the key concepts of country, but within the planning context, the link for people really is demonstrating its links to sustainability. I think that's the connector, and you can see people are really starting to realise, "Oh, okay, I can actually work in this."
- T: Yeah, you give them a framework from which they can go, "Okay, I've got ideas."
- S: Mm, so last year I remember there was one student who said to Greg, "Thank you so much. I've been waiting for the whole semester to have this conversation, which didn't happen in other courses."
- T: Yeah. I think in Indigenising Curriculum, particularly in the social sciences area, where you do raise issues around colonisation, we do have to tell the students, who haven't been exposed, "It's okay to be uncomfortable. This will be the first time you may be hearing this. Of course you're going to be uncomfortable."
- K: And it's important for students who are possibly going to be urban planners in the future to think about that built landscape is on Aboriginal land, and what does that mean, as well. And Sonia, you also teach students about activism and community planning. How do you include Indigenous perspectives in that?
- S: In one lecture that we have that is on activism, of course they usually hear the usual names for very famous international planners, but I usually refer to [Eddie Koiki] Mabo. And I start that conversation with a picture that is a piece of art that is in the Queensland Art Gallery, and I say, "Have you seen this?" and of course most people will not have seen it, or will not recognise who he was. So then we start a conversation about how important he was, and what's his legacy.
- And it's very interesting, because some people might have heard, of course, about land tenures and titling and all the legal issues, but they don't connect that with a piece of art or with a real name, on someone who was living not that far from here.
- K: I think that's really great to use art, as well, as a kind of visual stimulus for students to think about that as well, in relation to planning.

As part of the podcast, we've found from discussions with non-Indigenous staff, that people can be unsure, particularly non-Indigenous staff, about how they might go about appropriately including Indigenous perspectives. A colleague of ours, Maria Raciti and colleagues, have written about that as well.

Do you both have any advice for non-Indigenous staff who are keen to include Indigenous perspectives in their teaching but are unsure about where to start?

S: I guess, for me, and taking it more as a personal reflection, it starts also by informing yourself and trying to understand more about what is this about. I think that sometimes the problem is with some people who just want to tick the box instead of really going more in-depth, trying to understand what this is about.

G: I just like to advise an educated leap of faith, really, if they haven't actually tried something. I think there's plenty of Aboriginal people inside the university system that can be approached, and will perhaps assist that non-Aboriginal academic to find a connection with the Indigenous material within the coursework that they're doing, and to get it right, I guess.

But one thing that I guess is not a concern, but it's for academics to be able to separate out the cultural competency material from their actual material that they should be teaching in their course, and not to use that cultural competency ... It's like the induction when you start at university, it's just that general, not to bring that through the coursework. Because I think they'll get that in coursework, our students will get some of that in coursework anyway. But I see that as a separate part. That's more about like an employee induction type information that you might get, about Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and cultures.

K: What has Indigenising curriculum meant for you, and for the learning that your students are undertaking as well?

S: It's mostly diversity, so in diversity. Also something that is very important is that in planning, you have sometimes a bit of a difficult contradiction between some planners who think that they are the experts. So there is, on the one hand, the role of the technical knowledge, on the other hand, you have the role of local knowledge and experiential knowledge.

And this is what communities, this could be Indigenous or non-Indigenous, bring to the table. In planning issues, this becomes super-important, and in many cases even more important than the technical knowledge. It's part of the learning of the students that they might not be the experts all the time, and they need to pay attention to communities, and to the experiences that they bring.

G: If I bring it back to the respect, it means I have the opportunity to respect Aboriginal people that fought to get inside of universities in the first place, and to really uphold the values of the community, through the teaching space.

But I also get to show, I guess myself, but other Aboriginal students, but all of the students that attend, that Aboriginal people were planners too. A lot of the things that

we're talking about come from our world as well. That we do have a lot in common with each other.

Also just showing differences in worldviews, and leaving a positive legacy as an Aboriginal man, for younger Aboriginal people coming through, and really just honouring ancestors, people say in the struggle, but yeah.

K: Thanks so much, Greg and Sonia, for talking about how you're working in partnership, in collaboration in teaching. It's great to hear about that, and also how you're using art to teach students in urban planning, to include Indigenous perspectives and to think about whose land we're living on and working on.

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

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