

Intersecting and Overlapping Spaces: Combining teacher and student perspectives to identify threshold concepts in Indigenous Australian Studies.

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This presentation will outline a research project focused on learning and teaching in Australian Indigenous Studies. Indigenous Studies as an exciting, emerging discipline holds considerable promise for university educators interested in learning and teaching. The discussion in Indigenous Studies pedagogy to date has largely focused on curriculum and content, with a growing body of literature for example, related to the inclusion of Indigenous Knowledges (Thaman, 2003). However there is less written about or empirical work related to, how students learn or indeed don't learn, in Indigenous Studies. This is important because in Australia there continues to be a significant gap between Indigenous and non-Indigenous health and socioeconomic outcomes and much of the work to enhance outcomes is done collaboratively with non-Indigenous professionals. As we continue today to seek to 'close the gap' between outcomes for Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians, more than 200 years post colonisation, our university graduates will need to develop deeper understandings of this complex colonial legacy than their predecessors (Behrendt, Larkin, Griew & Kelly, 2012). It is vital that those of us who are teaching Indigenous Studies make the best of our opportunities to foster critical thinking in our students, so that our graduates may think beyond the simple binaries of black and white (Nakata, Nakata, Keech & Bolt, 2013) which too often impede practice. The threshold concepts framework, including the notion of the liminal space or 'stuck places' (Meyer and Land 2006), offers a useful, discipline focused approach, for exploring how students learn in Indigenous Studies. In this multidisciplinary field these conceptual spaces are likely to be complex (Cousin, 2010). As a potential site of student struggle, there is overlap with a second space in Indigenous Studies classrooms given the common combination of Indigenous teacher and non-Indigenous students. Nakata's notion of the Cultural Interface (2007), the contested space between Indigenous and non-Indigenous knowledge systems, offers a further useful framework within which to consider the complexity of the Indigenous classroom. This presentation will expand on the notion of the Cultural Interface to explain some of the layers of the classroom and use the key features of the threshold concepts framework to elaborate on some common student learning problems. The presentation will also report on preliminary findings from a qualitative research project drawing on both teacher and student perspectives, designed to identify threshold concepts in first year Indigenous Studies curricula. Identifying the key threshold concepts in first year, should provide a useful tool for developing enhanced curricula to foster student learning and engagement in Indigenous Studies.

References

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