

## **Cultural capability with Karina Maxwell and Kate Thompson**

(T: Tracey K: Katelyn KM: Karina KT: Kate)

- 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 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 co-host, 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 are recording has always been a place of teaching and learning. I'm a non-Indigenous woman living and working in Meanjin. In this series, Tracey 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 the when of Indigenising curriculum.
- K: Our theme for this podcast is based on the principle of cultural capability. And our guests today are Karina Maxwell and Kate Thompson from the School of Nursing, Midwifery and Social Work at the University of Queensland.
- T: Kate and Karina, can I ask you to introduce yourselves in whatever way feels comfortable?
- KM: Hi, yura. My name is Karina Maxwell and I have a middle name that has been assigned to me by the elder of our family, which is Jawang. And Jawang means in the Jandai language, magpie. And I see that as very much I'm protective. It's about being protective and intelligent as well as a social creature, which is pretty much me.
- T: I would agree with that, Karina.
- KM: Thank you. So my mob are the Ngugi people of Quandamooka. I'm a social worker, graduated from here in 2007. Just about to transfer over to a PhD from my Masters of Philosophy, which was confirmed last week in child protection.
- T: Deadly. Kate?
- KT: Kate Thompson. I'm a proud Gooreng Gooreng and Yuggera woman. I was born and raised in Bundaberg and moved to Brisbane to study social work here at UQ. Since studying and finishing my studies, I moved on to a community controlled organisation working with fostering kinship carers, supporting children in out-of-home care. From there, I'm now back at UQ. I'm doing my PhD looking at cultural connection and identity for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children in out-of-home care.

- T: Thank you both.
- K: So Karina and Kate, you co-teach a course together that's about working with Indigenous peoples and communities in the School of Nursing, Midwifery and Social Work. Can you tell us a bit about that course, and particularly we know that you teach students about how to do an acknowledgement of Country, which we think is a really important thing.
- KM: This course is mandatory for the three disciplines you mentioned, so nursing, midwifery, and social work. This year we have 500 students enrolled in the course, this is undergrad and post grad students. I guess it's about teaching them some practical skills as well as an understanding of the historical and present day and generational trauma, et cetera. We have a practical tutorial around teaching students about undertaking and acknowledgement of Country.
- KM: From students experiences in the course in previous years and research studies showed that students just aren't comfortable to do an acknowledgement of Country in the workplace. So we thought we can dedicate time in our classes to tell them what an acknowledgement of Country is, how it's done, who can do it, and what to include in it, and how to make it meaningful to the event or situation.
- KM: Additionally, we explain the difference between an acknowledgement and a welcome as well, but definitely we teach them about catering it to the audience and even to what's going on politically or anything else. Put a message in there as well, making it personal.
- T: I'm interested that the course is mandatory. I'm really interested to find out what is the student response from having to enrol in this particular course. Have you got feedback from the students since you two have been teaching?
- KT: We've been in the course for seven years now, I think this is our seventh year. And I think it was in our second year of the course that it became mandatory for all disciplines. From that year, we had quite hesitant students. They were very hesitant to engage, they were almost angry, they didn't know why they had to do it, and they would just sit in class with their arms crossed. But over the years we've had students who have been much more willing to engage. They've got a smile on their face. We had, I think the most amount of students show up for our first lecture this year, and they're just so excited to learn. So their attitudes have definitely changed since it's been made mandatory.
- T: Kate, I think you raised a really interesting point there in terms of seeing the change over a period of time for students and attitudes changing. So what do you think makes a student change their attitudes about learning from an Indigenised curriculum?
- KT: I think some of that is the way we present it. We're human beings. Some people who have never met an Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander person before, we're very open, we're very much saying to them, "This is a comfortable space. You can ask any question here. It's a comfortable and safe space to do this." And you see that a bit. I remember some feedback from one student who had done the course before and for other reasons had to change and go back. And they said that they thought they'd done a lot of study in

this area and thought they knew everything and they learned more. And very much we've seen quite a few students embracing and really wanting to work more and work in community controlled organisations, working more with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people throughout.

T: One of the design principles developed as part of the UQ Indigenising curriculum process is cultural capability. And you were talking about the cultural capability that you're doing in terms of teaching the students about an acknowledgement of Country, so when they're in practice that they can do this. Could you talk about other things that you're teaching the students through your course that's helping them to become culturally capable?

KT: So we do a lot of things in the course to help students firstly even understand what cultural capability means and what cultural safety means. We like to model everything that we are teaching them, so we take our time doing an acknowledgement of Country. We are very mindful of the fact that we are saying Indigenous terms from all over the world, so we take our time to learn how to say that and we say, "If we don't know how to say it, we'll learn how to do it. If we don't learn, we'll give it our best shot and someone can correct us in class if we're wrong." And we just open that up to say that we're learning, we don't know everything, we don't expect you to know anything or everything either, being open to the fact that no one in the room is an expert and it is a safe space to learn. We will make mistakes and we'll learn from those mistakes. And that's part of that journey to being culturally safe and responsive and capable in our practices.

KM: And I guess too, in addition to that around modelling, we're always very respectful towards students. We'll always answer any queries they have as well. And additionally around terminology, it's one of the things that we definitely model and expect them to model that back or could...

T: Could you just explain that a little bit further, Karina for people who are listening when you talk about terminology?

KM: Terminology is like what we like to be called. The preferred terminology is Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, and that's what we always model when we're speaking to people as well and that's us showing respect as well and we expect the same in return. And we'll even mention that in assessments as well about using the right terminology. It may seem to some that we're being a bit, I guess nitpicky, but this is really important stuff and it is very important to get it right so that all of these disciplines are going to work frontline with people. It's really important to get that terminology right.

T: Would you mind to talk about the cultural safety modules that you're using in your teaching?

KT: The cultural safety in practice modules were developed with the health and behavioural sciences Indigenising curriculum work party. These modules cover several different topics, including the historical context of this country. It includes community controlled organisations and how to incorporate cultural safety in practice. So there is one module dedicated to that where we really want students to reflect, these are the things that I've

learned. This is the theory, these are some of the skills I might already have, how can I adapt my behaviours to be more culturally safe and responsive in my practice?"

T: Thanks Kate, and that's really important, particularly stepping into the professional fields that the students will be.

K: You mentioned the importance of students reflecting on their positioning and obviously that's really important. We're wondering about how do you teach reflection and also how do you assess it?

KT: To assist the students, we use an adapted model of Gibbs reflective framework or cycle. This really gets students to define the concept at the beginning to prove they know what they're talking about. Then we get them to talk about their feelings, their thoughts, and any emotions they might be having about this situation. So we sometimes ask them, "In class we spoke about White privilege, how did that make you feel? What was your initial reaction? Write that down." And then we go into, "Why did you feel that way? What is it that brought up that emotion? What historical or what personal values or family values have influenced that reaction?" And then the final step is an action plan, where to from here. You know that this is a reaction you may have, what can you do with that? How can you build your knowledge and skills to not let that impact your practice?

T: I can see the connection between students being able to respond in a genuine way, particularly because you've set up a safe classroom and then later on being able to be authentic in their relationships with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. So I think that's a really good strategy or pedagogy to have within the teaching context.

KM: And we know with history there's a lack of trust especially in the professions that these students will go into, that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples have. So it's really, really important to be genuine and to be open and build up a rapport first as well.

T: And I think when we are Indigenous and we're the teachers, we also know that the historical record is long lasting, it's sad, it's devastating, it can make students, particularly our non-Indigenous students who've not been exposed to this, feel really quite crushed. And so the opportunity to be able to reflect on their own location as non-Indigenous people in the historical context, particularly because non-Indigenous people have benefited from the dispossession of Indigenous people. That is really important in terms of building that relationship.

KM: We also, through all of that, additionally forever disclaiming, be aware this is going to be heavy content. There might be things that are raised for you, reach out to us. If you need to leave the room, that's fine too. And I remember some assessments in the past where you could see in their writing how much they were impacted, where we'll reach out to them and say, "Hey, are you okay? Do you need to link in with anyone or have a chat with us as well?"

K: And that's really important to make that safe space, isn't it, in the classroom for everybody? And your teaching team is Indigenous and non-Indigenous teaching staff. Can you talk about how that works in practice and what's the role of non-Indigenous people within this teaching space?

KM: We can't do everything. There's 500 students. We're a small number, 3.2% in the overall Australian population, way smaller in the academic world. Kate and I work hard at a screening process, making sure that the non-Indigenous staff we have on board are trusted allies, and that's how we work with that. And we very much stress this to students as well, that we can't do everything. It is about our trusted allies as well, and even more important now since the referendum that we rely on our trusted allies.

KT: So we have a teaching team of around 16 people, 11 of those are teaching and marking into the course, and then the rest are marking. So in our screening processes, we take the time to get to know the people, but then we also take the time to say, "We are teaching from our perspectives, have you done that before? What's your experience? Where's your knowledge from?" Most of the people who we are working with, we've worked with in previous roles, whether that be in a community controlled organisation, in university, or in just a completely different setting. When we are preparing our tutors and teaching team, we take the time to go through the tutorial content. We have a meeting on Zoom of about an hour, an hour and a half, and we go over, "This is the content, do you have any questions? What doesn't make sense to you? Is this something you're uncomfortable to teach? Why might you be uncomfortable? Can we make that a bit easier for you?"

We don't force any of our teaching team to talk about white privilege if they don't want to. It's not always our space to be teaching that, so we don't expect anyone to do that if they're not comfortable. But in saying that, we encourage people to reflect, what makes you uncomfortable about that. And I think if we can prepare our staff to be culturally capable, then they're better off teaching our students to be culturally capable. And it's all about taking the time to do that.

T: The podcast is called, Indigenising Curriculum in Practice. What does that mean to you in relation to your teaching practice within the university?

KM: I love Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people so much. I mean, it's who I am, it's my family. The work that I do is all about supporting and making sure that it's the right support. I strive for students to have that same love I guess, and show respect and value the voices of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples so, so important in the spaces that they're working in to be able to build that rapport and to then be able to get the right information to then address whatever's going on for the people that they're working with. So important to build and continue that support throughout.

T: Kate?

KT: For me, I think Indigenising curriculum means bringing our perspectives and our worldviews, our knowledges to the forefront. It's getting people to understand that their ways of knowing, being and doing aren't the only way, and we must engage with other people's worldviews. We must understand that this exists, which comes back to what we teach in the course about cultural safety. You have to be aware of yourself and your worldviews and how that impacts your practice. And if students can understand that then I think we're doing our job.

K: Thanks so much Kate and Karina for joining us to tell us a bit about what you're doing to make students and staff more culturally capable in nursing, midwifery and social work. It's great to hear about how you're working together and with non-Indigenous staff, particularly excited about how you're teaching students to do a meaningful acknowledgement of Country, which is really important. And thanks for joining us for another episode of Indigenising Curriculum in Practice.

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