

Country with Coen Hird and Steven Salisbury

(T: Tracey K: Katelyn S: Steven C: Coen)

Welcome to Indigenising Curriculum in Practice with Professor Tracey Bunda and Dr Katelyn Barney.

T: Hi everyone. I'm Tracey Bunda and welcome to our podcast series, "Indigenising Curriculum in Practice." I'm an Ngugu/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'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 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 episode is based on the principle of Country and our guests are Associate Professor Steven Salisbury and Coen Hird from the School of the Environment in the Faculty of Science at the University of Queensland. Welcome.

T: Do you want to introduce yourselves in whatever way is comfortable for you?

C: I'm Coen. Nice to be here. I'm a Trawlwoolway Pakana. My family's from the Briggs Line down in North East Lutruwita Tasmania. I'm wrapping up my PhD at the moment in Amphibian Ecology and Physiology and popping into an academic position following that to stay in the sciences.

T: Uber deadly. Thank you. Steve if you can introduce yourself now.

S: Thanks for having me here today. My name's Steve Salisbury and I'm of Dutch and English heritage. Second generation, born in Australia. I grew up in Gundungurra and Dharug Country in what's also known today as the Blue Mountains. About the last 20 years or so I've been in South East Queensland. My work is as a palaeontologist and that's gotten me all around the country and it's given me lots of opportunities to work with mob in different areas. It's through that experience that I pushed for what we now refer to as Indigenising Curriculum in our school. It's through that that I got to meet Coen. We've been working together around that theme now for a few years.

T: Thanks Steve. Would you two mind to talk about your working relationship together? As somebody's who's just in the throes of completing their PhD, congratulations Coen.

Too deadly. You've had the benefit of being a student working with Steve. Possibly a staff member working with Steve.

C: I met Steve as a student and he was my lecturer. It was really when I properly met Steve was afterwards. He'd put together a bit of a survey for staff and HDR students about engagement they were doing on Aboriginal lands. And whether or not the people had issues with how things were being done etcetera. I think I sent through a pretty detailed response. And he replied and said, "I think we should meet in person." But it was clear pretty quickly that we were thinking along the same page and from there we could really mobilise to make some changes. But no it's been good and Steve's been good in being able to actually take a bit of work on himself. Rather than having me and other mob shoulder a lot of that work. So it's been pretty good.

T: Which is good. I agree because there's not many mob within the Science Faculty. Steve did you want to respond to that as well? Your working relationship with Colin.

S: Yeah as Coen said I think it's probably around 2019 or so I realised that in our school there wasn't much engagement going on. I wanted to try and work out who was out there and who was doing what. Thankfully that's how I met Coen and a number of other staff and students. But the numbers were low and not a lot was happening. Since then we've really been working on trying to improve the level of engagement that we have with First Nations Peoples in the places where we teach. One of those really important areas is with regard to field teaching because that's where can really start to make a difference.

T: I think it's really important too. It's something that we haven't really raised within Indigenising Curriculum that this is also about the students as well. Not only the non-Indigenous students but the Indigenous students too.

K: We're really interested to talk to you about that field teaching. Can you tell us a bit about that and where you take the students?

S: One of the things we do in the School of the Environment with a lot of the subjects that we teach. It's really important to get the students out of the classroom. Out of the lecture theatre and into the bush. So we try to create immersive learning experiences. Very hands on and based around seeing and doing things. It dawned on me at some point that that way of teaching, that being immersed in a place and really linking the place to experiences and knowledges that you're gaining, is very much how a lot of Indigenous cultures teach. Thinking about that a really obvious aspect of it was involving Indigenous peoples more in the process of how we teach our students and also getting the students to realise why we need to do that.

C: I really found the value in field teaching. I think one of the ironies that we see in how the sciences work in field teaching as an Indigenous student is the tendency to really objectify the natural world. As that's just part of the culture of science and how the philosophies and thinkings of how contemporary science has done has been built. It's a lot at odds with Indigenous sciences and ways of thinking and knowing that we bring to science as Indigenous peoples. There are tensions doing field science. But they're not just limited to being an Indigenous person that non-Indigenous people as well I think really benefit from being able to go into the field in a more relational way. Or in a way

that can allow them to have that love and that connection with the natural world that they might not pick up from a textbook.

T: By having those field teaching experiences that the students are learning what you want them to learn. How do you know that they're learning that? That connection to Country.

C: I think they're not necessarily building a connection to Country as we might think about it as Aboriginal people. But they're building relationships with aspects of Country such as the natural world. There are connections and commonalities that we might have with that. It allows Indigenous people to connect to Country themselves in a way. But one of the great ironies I think of being in the field in a lot of these courses especially how they've been done. And something that's been driving us and what we do. Is that there is really a great irony around the fact that you're out in the natural world with these culturally significant animals, plants and places without the consent of the local mob. And often without their knowledge. Often doing things and practices in ways that they would potentially not appreciate if they were to know. So that's one of the power imbalances of just being in a university space. But it's something we've been thinking how can we address? The obvious answer to begin with is to connect and build relationships to the local mob.

T: And that's what you were talking about Steve in terms of developing those relationships. And possibly codesigning with community so that there isn't that breach of protocol that Coen's talking about.

S: Building on what Coen was talking about we recognised early on that one thing that wasn't happening was respect for traditional owners and respect for Country through that. The approach has been in the first instance to reach out and ask about what we're doing. Then start a discussion around how can we do this together. This is new ground for teaching in the field. Because normally it's all figured out and you just go and you do your thing. Then you go back and that's it. What we wanted to do was make sure that everything we were doing and that we wanted to do and that importantly the things that we learnt about was done with consent of traditional owners.

For me it was about initially creating a relationship and then creating space within the teaching for an Indigenous voice. Because a key aspect that I started to realise and it's very much a key component of Indigenising the Curriculum is when it comes to Indigenous knowledges we don't want to just appropriate those knowledges. We want students to understand what sharing protocols look like. A key one that I've learnt is that for a lot of knowledges it's really important who delivers that. And in what context. It dawned on us at some point. It's really clear when you are going on someone's Country and you want to learn about that Country it has to come from the right people. It has to be on their terms and in a situation that they feel safe and comfortable with. So haven't been very prescriptive about how it happens because it's going to be different for different mob in different areas. It's going to be different things that they know or want to share with the students.

But I just try really hard to create a space where that can happen. And let them decide what they want to share and how they want to do it. My job really is to make sure the students understand why we're doing it that way. The things they are learning, they're

remembering it not only in the context of the place where they're learning it. But also in the context of the people that are sharing that information with them. That's very much at the heart of respecting Country. Respecting knowledge holders. I feel like that's one of the main challenges that we need to start to come to terms with, with regard to content within Indigenised curricula.

- T: It's really important too in terms of a philosophy that is situated under Indigenised curriculum because it's not perpetuating those colonial practices. So you're not teaching students to be the next generation colonisers. But the next generation decolonises which is important. Katelyn.
- K: Can you talk about where you take the students? What Country and why you choose those locations to take students? Also another question we're wondering about is obviously there's costs involved in taking students on field teaching. Could you talk a little bit about that?
- S: The first place where we started to experiment in this area was on Butchulla Country on K'gari. Fraser Island where I'd been taking students there since the early 2000s. It wasn't really until Butchulla got native title in 2014, 15 that I was able to make a connection with someone and start the process of trying to work out how we work together. Essentially where we've ended now is a key aspect of coming anywhere onto new Country is being properly welcomed by the right people. So we make sure that on arrival the students are welcomed to Country. We arrange that there's time to do that. From that point on it's really about who can be there and how much time have they got. And how do we fit it all in into what we're trying to do.

We've had some field trips to K'gari where we've had male and female traditional owners with us the whole time. They've accompanied us to various places and made sure the students know about the ways to behave around certain areas. Places they shouldn't go and why. Places they can go. How to think and tread in those areas. Other times we've only been able to have one person come out and welcome the students. Then we just try and arrange that we can have a bit of a yarn and they can talk to the students about Butchulla cultural heritage or give them a bit of an overview of where they're going. What they're going to do and what they need to think about.

That's now evolved into a situation where Butchulla Aboriginal Corporation have recently set up their own Butchulla enterprises. A little company that's aimed around delivering things that are important to get to them. One of those is K'gari cultural tours. They now have some young up and coming rangers. Butchulla people that are now being trained to do cultural tours. They're really getting to cut their teeth with our students. It's been fantastic seeing that there's a chance now for young Butchulla men and women to stand in front of a group of university students. And work out how to deliver information around their Country in a way that they're comfortable with. And doing it on different locations around the island.

I'm quite happy to see that happen and hopefully it's going to lead to more and more opportunities for them to be doing that to a broader audience. Because up until now a lot of what people learn about K'gari when they go there is from non-Indigenous tour guides. Which I know rubs a lot of people the wrong way. So it's really important that we get the right people talking about their own Country and their own stories the way

they want to do it. We're just trying to make that happen in our teaching. In this journey that we've been on, helping people understand why it's important to do things differently is what's allowed us to finance what we're doing. Because initially there was no budget for Indigenous engagement within our school. I had to go every single time and plead for some small amount to be able to pay people for a welcome to Country or for their fuel or a ferry trip or whatever.

But as there's been an increased understanding of why we are doing this, heads of schools and executive officers start to go, "Wow we need to have a budget for this." So we've gone from nothing to now actually having a budget that we can start to work with and make funds available to facilitate all these sorts of things. Not just a field trip but whatever it is that's going to help Indigenise curriculum. That's been a really key step for us. Because once you get into this space you realise how many things we need to be doing differently. No one wants to do anything for free. So if we're going to follow through with Indigenising curriculum and the reconciliation action plan they're a lot of things that funds need to be directed to to make them happen. Particularly when we're talking about engaging with people external to the university. They don't want to do it for free either. So it's important that we properly remunerate people for all the sort of things that we get them to do.

- T: Coen what becomes important for you in terms of teaching? Because you're going to step into the academic space now. What becomes really important for you in terms of Indigenising curriculum for your future students?
- C: I think support for revision will be a big part. Because I know coming through the undergraduate system and the postgraduate system that the content that we inherit as teachers largely erases our knowledges. And scientific histories of disciplines that we must make the appropriate corrections. That's a workload in itself. So I think that's an important thing. Another thing that's really important to me is like how Steve points out. It's important that people will understand why we're Indigenising curriculum. I think that in my circles I've noticed there's been a lot of positioning and the philosophies that underpin it as maybe like an equity diversity and inclusion project. But a failure to engage with deeper reasons as to why we will be doing this. Such as the validity of our knowledges and their rightful place in discourses around knowledge. And respect for Indigenous intellectual sovereignty as well. It's important to have people around you that can understand that and help you in delivering that challenging task. But my experience has been teaching students, they are usually far more open and interested in these things than a lot of the teachers. I think it's going to be a long journey but one that we can make happen.
- S: I was just going to say as we've been talking about this, it was only just the other day I realised something about Indigenising curriculum that I didn't understand fully before. I didn't appreciate. Initially I thought it was all about what sort of information we provide to the students. But I've come to realise and it's thanks to the design principles and having a good think about them that's only one small part of it. The bigger part of it, this is what Coen was alluding to is how we do lots of things. How we do what we do. That can be part of teaching. It can be in administration. It can be in all aspects of university life. It's really about changing the culture of the university. If through helping people, students and staff realise why it's important to engage with traditional owners wherever we go and whatever we're doing. If that's helping change the culture then that's good.

K: Thanks Steve and Coen for sharing a bit about the field teaching that you're doing. Coen it's great to hear about your shift from student into academic as well and the work you're doing in relationship building with traditional owners. Both of you thanks so much. Thanks for joining us for another episode of Indigenising curriculum in practice.

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