


TRANSGRESSIONS - CULTURAL STUDIES AND EDUCATION

Indigenous Education

**A Learning Journey for Teachers,
Schools and Communities**

Nina Burridge, Frances Whalan
and Karen Vaughan (Eds.)



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Indigenous Education

TRANSGRESSIONS: CULTURAL STUDIES AND EDUCATION

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This book series is dedicated to the radical love and actions of Paulo Freire, Jesus “Pato” Gomez, and Joe L. Kincheloe.

Cultural studies provides an analytical toolbox for both making sense of educational practice and extending the insights of educational professionals into their labors. In this context *Transgressions: Cultural Studies and Education* provides a collection of books in the domain that specify this assertion. Crafted for an audience of teachers, teacher educators, scholars and students of cultural studies and others interested in cultural studies and pedagogy, the series documents both the possibilities of and the controversies surrounding the intersection of cultural studies and education. The editors and the authors of this series do not assume that the interaction of cultural studies and education devalues other types of knowledge and analytical forms. Rather the intersection of these knowledge disciplines offers a rejuvenating, optimistic, and positive perspective on education and educational institutions. Some might describe its contribution as democratic, emancipatory, and transformative. The editors and authors maintain that cultural studies helps free educators from sterile, monolithic analyses that have for too long undermined efforts to think of educational practices by providing other words, new languages, and fresh metaphors. Operating in an interdisciplinary cosmos, *Transgressions: Cultural Studies and Education* is dedicated to exploring the ways cultural studies enhances the study and practice of education. With this in mind the series focuses in a non-exclusive way on popular culture as well as other dimensions of cultural studies including social theory, social justice and positionality, cultural dimensions of technological innovation, new media and media literacy, new forms of oppression emerging in an electronic hyperreality, and postcolonial global concerns. With these concerns in mind cultural studies scholars often argue that the realm of popular culture is the most powerful educational force in contemporary culture. Indeed, in the twenty-first century this pedagogical dynamic is sweeping through the entire world. Educators, they believe, must understand these emerging realities in order to gain an important voice in the pedagogical conversation.

Without an understanding of cultural pedagogy’s (education that takes place outside of formal schooling) role in the shaping of individual identity–youth identity in particular—the role educators play in the lives of their students will continue to fade. Why do so many of our students feel that life is incomprehensible and devoid of meaning? What does it mean, teachers wonder, when young people are unable to describe their moods, their affective affiliation to the society around them. Meanings provided young people by mainstream institutions often do little to help them deal with their affective complexity, their difficulty negotiating the rift between meaning and affect. School knowledge and educational expectations seem as anachronistic as a ditto machine, not that learning ways of rational thought and making sense of the world are unimportant.

But school knowledge and educational expectations often have little to offer students about making sense of the way they feel, the way their affective lives are shaped. In no way do we argue that analysis of the production of youth in an electronic mediated world demands some “touchy-feely” educational superficiality. What is needed in this context is a rigorous analysis of the interrelationship between pedagogy, popular culture, meaning making, and youth subjectivity. In an era marked by youth depression, violence, and suicide such insights become extremely important, even life saving. Pessimism about the future is the common sense of many contemporary youth with its concomitant feeling that no one can make a difference.

If affective production can be shaped to reflect these perspectives, then it can be reshaped to lay the groundwork for optimism, passionate commitment, and transformative educational and political activity. In these ways cultural studies adds a dimension to the work of education unfilled by any other sub-discipline. This is what *Transgressions: Cultural Studies and Education* seeks to produce—literature on these issues that makes a difference. It seeks to publish studies that help those who work with young people, those individuals involved in the disciplines that study children and youth, and young people themselves improve their lives in these bizarre times.

Indigenous Education

A Learning Journey for Teachers, Schools and Communities

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The Wellumbulla Mural is a visual acknowledgement of Country, paying homage to the Land and the Ancestors of the Northern Beaches, Sydney. Wellumbulla welcomes and celebrates the many students and their families that visit and contribute to our community.

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Ethical considerations related to the conduct of research in the schools in which the New South Wales (NSW) Quality Teaching Indigenous Project (QTIP) was conducted, prevents us from naming each school and the members of the action learning teams who participated so enthusiastically in the project. Suffice to say here that all twenty schools deserve a sincere thank you for their participation in the project, for attending the project conferences with wonderful displays which detailed the progress of their work, and for communicating project outcomes to the research team through the NSW Department of Education and Training (NSW DET) (now the NSW Department of Education and Communities).

Special acknowledgement is reserved for the seven participating schools that allowed members of the research team to visit their schools, conduct interviews and focus groups, view and note wonderful examples of student work and to engage with teaching staff and the local Aboriginal community members in a collaborative sharing of knowledge, learning and expertise.

The University of Technology, Sydney (UTS) research team would like to thank most sincerely the local Aboriginal communities in which the seven schools were located for their willingness to engage with us over the lifespan of the project. They were open, welcoming and willing to share their knowledge and understandings of Aboriginal culture and history as well as their efforts to embed this local knowledge in school activities. This contributed to the overall success of the project. The academic partners who worked closely with the action learning teams also deserve acknowledgement for the advice and assistance provided to the schools participating in the project. A very special thank-you to Kerin Wood, NSW DET project officer whose was tireless in her efforts to connect regularly with each of the schools to ensure that the project progressed as flawlessly as possible given the complexities present in school contexts.

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We as teachers, academics and citizens of Australia, believe that education is a strong foundation for reconciliation between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal peoples. We trust that this book will assist this process by empowering teachers to engage with their local Aboriginal communities and embark on a collaborative educational journey that will enrich their teaching and provide innovative and meaningful educational experiences for their students.

Nina Burridge, Frances Whalan and Karen Vaughan

FOREWORD

I have always maintained that ‘good pedagogy for Indigenous students is good pedagogy for all students.’ The Quality Teaching Indigenous Project (QTIP) focused on improving outcomes for Indigenous students in schools hinged on the effective improvement in pedagogy that the Quality Teaching framework is soundly based. Critical areas in the Quality Teaching framework were effectively driving the project’s agenda around Cultural Knowledge. These areas included high expectations, fundamental improvement in literacy and numeracy with innovative approaches through Information and Communication Technology (ICT) and digital media technologies used successfully to engage Indigenous students. The schools involved engaged in this challenge through the effective use of Action Learning. They managed to improve student outcomes, obtain various levels of Indigenous community engagement (so essential in tackling Cultural Knowledge) and provided those Aboriginal staff, teachers and key leaders in schools, with considerable encouragement to make a difference for Aboriginal students in their respective schools. This book provides the background and achievements of these school studies to clearly articulate to varying degrees their successes. Indigenous education is primarily a game of relationships based on mutual cross cultural respect, and the hard data results of the program while critical in any evaluation, must be at least equally assessed with the quality of the learning journeys that each of the schools undertook with their Indigenous communities.

Cultural Knowledge is the element least seen in classrooms of the Quality Teaching framework in evaluations undertaken across the state by its developers Jennifer Gore and James Ladwig. Coding of thousands of teacher lessons have demonstrated that teachers seem reluctant or unsure of venturing into this space – a space, which is so critical to the ongoing successful engagement of Indigenous students in their classrooms. These school studies provide evidence that when well supported and specifically trained (or in these cases undertaking Action Learning) teachers take the plunge and engage fruitfully and meaningfully with their Indigenous community in genuine lessons around Cultural Knowledge. The school studies highlight some of the positive learning outcomes that were achieved. With the additional support of innovative teaching practices and current technologies, designed by the teachers, and in close collaboration with Indigenous workers in the schools and their Indigenous communities, Indigenous students can be engaged with improved outcomes from schooling.

Teachers and schools cannot effectively engage in teaching Aboriginal studies or perspectives without meaningful engagement with the Indigenous community and without whole school responsibility for this engagement. Indigenous community members generally give their time voluntarily, have limited time and cannot be engaged on a piecemeal basis. The school studies reaffirmed the need to ensure Aboriginal studies was clearly a holistic responsibility of the school to ensure the effective use of busy Indigenous community members. Most

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critically, ensuring high quality scope and sequence around implementation of Aboriginal studies/perspectives were effectively managed and systematically implemented in each school. While there is ample evidence in the school studies of effective engagement with the Indigenous community it was disappointing to note that Aboriginal parent involvement didn't enjoy the same levels of engagement. While at least one school mentioned the important role of Personal Learning Plans (PLPs) for Indigenous students as part of the process of increasing this level of active collaborative student management, parents/carers roles must be given at least equal levels of engagement as the broader Indigenous community partnerships so evident in the examples were afforded.

It was pleasing to see demonstrated the movement away from traditional Aboriginal society as the starting point for implementation of Cultural Knowledge. Indigenous communities rightfully demand that Aboriginal studies/perspectives should be grounded in the here and now in our communities. Obviously at some stage there will be a need for mapping back from contemporary times to building understanding of the social and cultural traditions which underpin our contemporary lives. It is so easy for unthinking, isolated educators with little or no contact with their local Indigenous community to treat contemporary Aboriginal society as invisible and only foster static pictures of traditional society captured in time and space, with no acknowledgement of the enormous changes that have taken place in the last 200 plus years. Perhaps our biggest achievement is illustrated by what Dr Robert Morgan once said to a journalist some 30 odd years ago when asked "what is the most important thing you celebrate during NAIDOC?" He quickly responded with "Our survival as peoples in this country."

The Action Learning model encouraged in this project provided several important criteria for success. The project's strength lay in the responsibility for the program resting with those volunteers in the school who formed the team to drive the project agenda. The most successful teams were based on a 'facilitative leadership' model which empowered all participants. In the stronger teams their success was further cemented with maximising genuine Indigenous partnerships with both Indigenous staff and local Indigenous communities. This model could only have existed with the support of noted school leadership which provide the mandate for such high levels of individual collaborative management freedom.

The unique capacity to be supported by academic partners together with Kerin Wood's project management skills proved invaluable in most school sites. The success of such support was heavily reliant on the match between the academic partner's skills, knowledge and capacity with the project's aims and direction. There is clear evidence in this book that such partnerships were productive for teachers, students and Indigenous communities. If given the flexibility to mix and match project stages with appropriate academic partners' attributes, the better the potential outcome. Overwhelmingly, the role and levels of positive support, especially at critical clarifying points of the project, proved invaluable.

Of critical importance in the project evaluation were the messages around sustainability of the school projects. Fundamentally it was consistently recognised that sustainability in any significant form was reliant on two prime conditions,

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teachers' limited time and funding to provide the opportunity for the key elements around aspects of action learning like teacher reflection. While I understand busy timetables and teaching responsibilities, it is professionally unsound to marginalise Indigenous education action to an additional load that needs special funding. Indigenous students demand the same attention as any group in a school and while outcomes remain minimal for these students, schools must accept their mainstream responsibilities for effectively engaging them in the day to day inclusive educational good practices like the ones demonstrated in this book. The challenge to principals and teachers is to establish the means to achieve similar outcomes through 'bolted in' not 'bolted on' strategic approaches.

I was interested and intrigued by several of the key milestones some of the hung their successful outcomes on – Aboriginal murals, bush tucker gardens, flying the Aboriginal Flag and specialised Aboriginal resource/support rooms being established. The first Aboriginal education policy was launched in 1982 and I would have thought that given its looming 30 year anniversary that schools would have moved considerably beyond such important milestones. It just reaffirms that this battle still continues and it will only be won by ensuring Quality Teaching, Cultural Knowledge and ensuring inclusive classrooms are conquered one by one as this project has exemplified.

Educational equity for Indigenous students will not come easily. Many more teachers and educational leaders will need to be recruited to make a difference. However, there is no greater indictment on our profession as the apparent inability to educate what is only around 2.5% of the Australian population. I applaud those teachers, Indigenous educators, principals, Indigenous parents/carers and community who will take the lessons here and build on them to ensure our Indigenous students' futures in this country.

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ABORIGINAL EDUCATION POLICY CONTEXTS AND LEARNING PATHWAYS

INTRODUCTION

Aboriginal education in Australian policy contexts have been informed by a large number of reviews and reports. Central to each has been the investigation of injustice, inequity of access to educational resources, racism and discrimination that impact on Aboriginal students' access to educational opportunities offered to mainstream students. As the recent review of Aboriginal education in New South Wales found "education systems around the nation have been unable to deliver the same levels of success for Aboriginal students as they do for other students" (NSW AECG & NSW DET, 2004, p. 12). Absenteeism and suspensions, high mobility, low (English) literacy and numeracy skills, a culturally exclusive curriculum and low retention rates for Aboriginal students have acted to alienate their engagement in school activities that offer educational opportunities to most mainstream students. Consequently the endemic gap in educational achievement and outcomes for Aboriginal students has been and continues to be the focus for successive Commonwealth and State governments. Over many decades, Australian governments and education systems have attempted to craft solutions to decisively address systemic inequalities for Australia's Aboriginal students.

A common theme emerging from a plethora of reviews and subsequent reports is that a long history of poor outcomes for Aboriginal students is rooted in complex social, cultural, environmental, economic and health factors which in concert comprise and disadvantage the achievement prospects for Aboriginal students (NSW AECG & NSW DET, 2004). Even with the best intentions and injection of considerable funding and system-wide approaches for improving Aboriginal students' academic achievement, governments and education systems have failed to address this achievement gap. Traditional approaches such as setting achievement targets without attention to what will change the pedagogy in classrooms and professional development for teachers and developing a deep understanding of local Aboriginal culture and history has not achieved the desired outcomes.

Clearly it was time for new approaches that focused on what could be addressed in the classroom with quality teachers who undertook new ways of including Aboriginal education in their teaching and learning implemented in partnerships with local Aboriginal communities. *Junaaygam*¹ arising from the review of Aboriginal education in New South Wales were drawn from consistent messages arising from the data. Extending quality teaching and learning, applying Aboriginal cultural knowledge and collaborating in partnerships with local Aboriginal communities were the key themes along with the specific recommendations that underpinned an initiative for whole school reform through professional learning. These approaches represent only part of a solution and will have limited success if

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issues such as social dislocation, disengagement with schooling, teacher negative attitudes and low expectations for Aboriginal students are not also addressed. In addition, new approaches and building greater understanding of the benefits of integrating local Aboriginal culture and history into the curriculum for all students as opposed to an “alternative curriculum” for Aboriginal students was required.

The study of action learning and Aboriginal education discussed in this book arises from a systemic vision for reforming teacher professional learning, forming and strengthening partnerships with local Aboriginal communities, by taking a new approach to including local Aboriginal culture and history through *Quality Teaching* (NSW DET, 2003). Schools’ participation in the Quality Teaching Indigenous Project (QTIP) reported in this book was a targeted initiative to address specific recommendations in *The Report of the Review of Aboriginal Education* (2004) highlighting professional learning on Indigenous issues found to improve Aboriginal student learning and engagement. In addition, the New South Wales model of pedagogy, as described in *Quality Teaching in New South Wales Public Schools* (May 2003), informed professional learning activities in the project schools. Teachers were selected to join school-based action learning teams and then to identify their professional learning needs and design their projects. The teams engaged in cycles of action learning to implement their projects. Among the main aims of the project was to provide teachers with the opportunity to strengthen their professional learning about Aboriginal cultural knowledge and its application in culturally appropriate pedagogical practices in the classroom. The ultimate objective was improving student engagement and learning outcomes as well as to strengthen relationships with the local Aboriginal community.

Overview of the Chapters

The book details a study of Aboriginal education in three parts. Part One introduces the policy context for Aboriginal education in schools in New South Wales, Australia’s most populous state. It also summarises the findings from a project for school-based professional development specifically designed to integrate Aboriginal cultures and histories into teaching and learning in twenty schools. Chapters in Part Two provide detailed commentary on seven schools who participated in the project. Each school story provides unique insights into how schools and communities can form sustained partnerships that impact on the quality of teaching and learning for Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal students. Part Three outlines a way forward arising from the findings of the project.

PART ONE

Chapter One provides the policy context for Aboriginal education in New South Wales schools. Changes in policy direction calling for new approaches to diminish the achievement gap for Aboriginal students through investment in reforming teacher professional development are examined. Nina Burridge and Andrew Chodkiewicz provide an account of how Aboriginal education in New South Wales

and indeed nationally, is marked by a number of distinct periods from colonial attempts to segregate and deny access to educational services for Aboriginal students to policy contexts aimed at closing the gap created by the injustices, racism and inequality created by previous policies and social attitudes. Aboriginal education policies in New South Wales provide an overview of the development of Aboriginal education in a historical context from 1788 to the present. Commentary in this chapter covers periods of major policy shifts that until the late 1960s saw Aboriginal children suffer under a system of discrimination that variously separated, segregated, excluded, ‘protected’ or removed them from their families. The contribution of the discussion on the policy shifts provides a context for a deeper understanding of current Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander education programs and policies that seek to enable Indigenous children and young people to gain access to educational opportunities offered to all students.

Frances Whalan and Kerin Wood follow in Chapter Two with a discussion of the historical policy contexts in ‘Action learning based professional development’ which introduces a systemic approach to whole school reform focused on integrating Aboriginal cultures and histories into whole school pedagogical approaches. This chapter further outlines how The Quality Teaching Indigenous Project in New South Wales grew from an imperative to enhance Aboriginal students’ learning based on specific recommendations from *The Report of the Review of Aboriginal Education* (2004), while also integrating Aboriginal cultures and histories in high quality pedagogy for all students. School projects focused on making local Aboriginal cultural knowledge relevant to non-Indigenous as well as Indigenous students, and aimed to raise all students’ understanding of, and engagement with, local Aboriginal cultural knowledge. Principles for developing inclusive learning environments by focusing changes in teaching practices through school-based professional development are outlined. The importance of addressing Aboriginal cultures and histories within State curriculum frameworks to develop teachers’ deep knowledge, skills and values that strengthen the sense of Aboriginal identity and understanding among a whole community is elaborated. As such this chapter sets the scene for the following chapters that document school-based initiatives to address specific recommendations in *The Report of the Review of Aboriginal Education* (2004).

An overview of research methods and findings is presented in Chapter Three. Nina Burrige, Andrew Chodkiewicz and Frances Whalan summarise the analysis and findings arising from an evaluation of the impact on participating schools. The research methodology was designed to capture evidence of the extent to which: teachers and their teaching practices were inclusive of Aboriginal cultural knowledge and how this changed as a result of the project; the impact these inclusive practices had on teacher and student learning, and in particular on how they enhance learning for Aboriginal students; and the effectiveness of collaboration with local Aboriginal communities in teaching and learning practices in enhancing learning outcomes for students. The analysis provided insights into teachers’ professional learning in terms of how the schools developed inclusive partnerships with local Aboriginal communities and how teachers valued the time afforded by the project resources to

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reflect on their pedagogical practices, and to work collaboratively with colleagues and community on improving their teaching practice. Finally in this chapter analysis of the data about the impact of these inclusive practices on teacher and student learning is reported.

PART TWO

The seven chapters in Part Two highlight a range of professional development practices teachers participated in to better integrate Aboriginal cultures and histories into classroom pedagogy. Each of the school studies in different contexts describes how teachers developed a deeper understanding of the importance of local Aboriginal cultural perspectives in their teaching. In Chapter Four, Stacey Quince exemplifies how engaging students through using a range of Information and Communication Technologies (ICT) was the pedagogical underpinning for integrating Aboriginal cultures and histories for Year 7 students at Coral Secondary School. At this school the project focused on teacher professional development as an integral part of the reform process to ensure that teachers gained the knowledge required, both in terms of engaging with Aboriginal cultural perspectives and in developing ICT skills to support student learning. Aboriginal student engagement in the development of ICT projects gave the students a sense of ownership and identity. The school's approach empowered the students by recognising and acknowledging in a substantial way their important personal connection with their culture. This ensured the students had a voice in how their cultural identity and knowledge was represented within their school community.

In the next chapter Nina Burridge and Christine Evans provide insights into a unique secondary school context for Aboriginal students. Magenta Secondary School hosts a very small, but significant, enrolment of Aboriginal students, most of whom come from rural and regional areas. The school action learning project team focused on developing this group of students' self-identity through research into family histories and personal narratives. Students' personal stories became e-narratives incorporating *In Design*, *Photoshop*, *Marvin* and other software programs to build interactive stories of their Country and families. In this chapter the project team's challenge was to make connections with the parents and the home communities of their Aboriginal students. In this school, the complexities that arose from the unique residential nature of Aboriginal students' school attendance shaped the project team's action learning focus. Questions of whose cultural knowledge was accessed to inform the perspectives on Aboriginal cultural knowledge are examined and how the challenges were addressed by the strategies adopted by the project team.

Carmine School's ICT focus for action learning in the development of the Wiradjuri cultural activity is highlighted in Chapter Six. Again Nina Burridge and Christine Evans capture the unique context of Carmine School that caters for students in the Kindergarten-Year 12 range with special medical needs from disadvantaged backgrounds. Students, mostly from regional and remote areas,