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Inclusive Pedagogies: the development and delivery of Australian Indigenous curricula in higher education

MONA EL-AYOUBI

Charles Darwin University, Australia

ABSTRACT

The construction of Indigenous knowledge within a western framework has been important in translating Indigenous issues and knowledge to mainstream Australia via educational systems. However, the production of Indigenous curricula is often essentialised and framed within binary locations, reliving traditional processes of assimilation and denying cultural identity and the diversity of student experience. This is because dominant educational frameworks intrude, through representation, reproduction and recontextualisation, Indigenous knowledge and identity. As a consequence, the development of genuine, alternative Indigenous curricula and pedagogy are inhibited.

This paper explores the important role of inclusive curricula in supporting alternative processes of knowledge production and pluralistic approaches where the emphasis is on enhancement of active learning through collaboration and consultation. Inclusivity in the classroom recognises the diverse needs of learners, offers a range of teaching, learning and assessment approaches, and incorporates Indigenous knowledge systems through authentic learning experience that draws on Indigenous and non-Indigenous voices and knowledge frameworks.

The paper also highlights the need to refigure constructions of difference and identity so as to provide meaningful mapping to support the development of content, assessment, methodology and delivery to integrate western and Indigenous frameworks within higher education curricula. This approach presents the opportunity to rethink pedagogic practices, to present diverse perspectives and contexts so as not to restrict or hinder the development of Indigenous curricula and pedagogy.

Introduction

Public debate about Indigenous education in Australia is also a debate about underlying issues defined by social, historical and cultural forces. Low Indigenous participation in higher education continues to be an issue, even after decades of debate, reviews and government policies. A snapshot of some statistics indicates the disparities surrounding Indigenous education. For example, in 2003, there were 5,364 Australian Indigenous enrolments in a bachelor degree compared with 498,526 non-Indigenous enrolments. Low retention and completion rates for Indigenous students are also cause for some concern. Department of Education, Science and Training (DEST) figures indicate Indigenous students successfully completed 68% of subjects undertaken compared with 87% of non-Indigenous students (DEST, 2002). The estimate of Indigenous higher education bachelor degree completions for the 2003 student population was 13% compared with 19.1% for non-Indigenous students. In 2000-2002, attrition amongst Indigenous students in the first year of study was around 35%-39% compared to 22%-23% for non-Indigenous students (DEST, 2006).

Discussions about equitable access, participation, appropriate strategies and approaches to Indigenous education have historically fuelled extensive debate amongst community, government organisations and the public in general.

Policy reviews and reforms: the shaping of Indigenous education

It is important to contextualise Indigenous education in the Australian tertiary sector by examining historical national policy, and the reviews and reforms that have shaped Indigenous education.

Substantial government policies emerged in the late 1980s and early 1990s which impacted enormously on Indigenous education. A significant change was the national Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Policy (AEP), implemented by the Australian Government on 1 January 1990. It set out 21 long term goals for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander education and articulated the following main themes:

1. involvement of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in education;
2. involvement with decision making;

3. equality of access to educational services;
4. equity of educational participation;
5. equitable and appropriate educational outcomes.

Reform in Indigenous participation and educational outcomes continued in the 1990s with the aim of increasing participation in higher educational institutions. For instance, in 1993, the Australian Government announced a review of the AEP, its principal aim being to assess the progress in 'redressing the educational 'disadvantage' suffered by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.' The review addressed the monitoring of educational outcomes and the adequacy of the consultation mechanism for Indigenous participation in decision-making. The Review Committee noted a growing criticism of the AEP, as it was still perceived to be assimilationist with a strong emphasis on a mainstream approach to delivering education to Indigenous people.

Indigenous leaders and academics called for direct Indigenous participation in policy direction. These concerns were addressed through the review processes and contributed to the inclusion of the development of a significant goal in the AEP that was directly related to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people's involvement with decision-making. The Review of the AEP also proposed that the responsibility for educational programmes be shifted to the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission (ATSIC) or an independent bureau to provide Indigenous people with more autonomy in decision-making and administrative processes. This proposal was not implemented and ATSIC is now defunct.

The review also noted the importance, relevance, and appropriateness of curricula for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students, and for all non-Indigenous students, to enhance their knowledge and understanding of Aboriginal cultures and societies. Questions were raised concerning what constitutes appropriate curricula and pedagogy and the institutional framework that would allow this to succeed. The 1993 AEP review was a watershed as it formally directed Indigenous involvement in educational decision-making and inclusion of Indigenous issues and content in pedagogic practice.

Finally, the importance of Indigenous cultures was recognised at a national level and discourses of Indigenous pedagogic approaches were emerging. The AEP stipulated that higher education institutions establish and facilitate participation of Indigenous members of the community in decisions regarding the planning, delivery and

evaluation of educational programmes . Indigenous representation in educational administration, curriculum advice, liaison offices and academic support positions were to become features of higher educational institutions. Indigenous people were finally being recognised as the subjects rather than the objects of the discourse. These new voices in the academy generated considerable debate regarding the production of Indigenous knowledge within the curricula in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander centres across Australia.

The construction of Indigenous knowledge

The emergence of the Bachelor of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies (BATSIS) programme at the then Northern Territory University (NTU) (now Indigenous Knowledge Systems at Charles Darwin University) was in response to the AEP's recommendations. The BATSIS curriculum and rationale articulated inclusive features and Indigenous academic representation in the delivery of the programme (see FATSIS, 2000); however, the construction of Indigenous knowledges within the curriculum was heavily laden with dominant western approaches to teaching and learning. For example, the Indigenous pedagogic framework incorporated mainstream methodology where delivery and assessment were no different to traditional pedagogic practices, i.e. lectures, tutorials, essays, tutorial presentation etc. This methodology acknowledges a framework for inclusion, yet fails to embed alternative teaching and learning practices or Indigenous pedagogy in the construction and delivery of the curriculum. In the BATSIS programme for example, there continued to be a lack of community engagement, substantive Indigenous participation and a strong presence of dominant non-Indigenous voice in curriculum design and delivery. These criticisms have been consistently articulated by Indigenous academics (e.g. Moreton-Robinson, 2000).

Problematic in this instance was that the translation of the AEP at an institutional level in mainstream higher education was limited in its application, as the construction of Indigenous knowledge remained in the domain of the dominant culture.

Paying lip service to cultural difference in education is no longer uncritically accepted. The intellectual space to theorise difference within educational policy and planning is considerably more expansive than practice suggests. In contemporary North Australia, difference and cultural identity are both political and economic pursuits that appear fixed in ideologies impacting on the construction of inclusive

curricula, minimizing inclusive approaches to the development of an Indigenous pedagogy.

For inclusive approaches to be explored practically, it is important to rethink traditional interpretations of identity and consider identity as fluid and changing. For instance, as Langton (1981, p.17) has pointed out, '... [I]dentity for any individual is a multivariate composition, non-fixed, situational, and continually maintained and transformed by culture.'

A framework is thus needed that articulates difference beyond simple and assumed notions of Indigenous identity. Difference needs to be conceptualised with the recognition of the social and political constructs which position Indigenous identity within fixed spaces. The de-essentialisation of represented identity and subjectivities is crucial in defining strategies and approaches to create effective tools in the classroom, as it provides educators with a language and a vocabulary to interact with issues of inequality and thereby engage in social criticism of the politics of difference. This means refiguring difference outside binary oppositions where Indigenous knowledge is built on a Eurocentric interpretation and where educational philosophy is aligned with standardised assessment. 'Binary thinking references all forms against the self, generating alternative versions of sameness, and effectively defining the terms in which the Other is allowed to exist.' (Carter, 2004, p.8)

Stepping outside such constructs and deconstructing teaching and learning practices provides a fundamental understanding of the political, social and cultural issues that underpin pedagogic practice. This brings to prominence the productive nature of Indigenous representations and knowledge, thus underscoring the current problem in contemporary pedagogic practices where recontextualisation of identity occurs and assumptions are made about how Indigenous students learn. Such practices suppress and distort the Indigenous voices, excluding alternative perceptions of identity and pedagogy. Therefore, addressing inclusive philosophy at a policy level is inadequate in itself. Battiste (2002, p.20) suggests that what is needed is new pedagogical schemes of learning and 'a process that includes raising the collective voice of Indigenous peoples, exposing the injustices in our colonial history, deconstructing the past by critically examining the social, political, economic and emotional reasons for silencing Aboriginal voices ... legitimating the voices and experiences of Aboriginal people in the curriculum, recognising it as a dynamic context of knowledge and knowing ...'

Historically, the inclusion of Indigenous knowledge within the corpus of the academy in Australia was crucial in developing frameworks for theorising Indigenous knowledge systems and validating them as legitimate knowledge structures. The recognition of the value of incorporating Indigenous knowledge systems was largely driven by social and political developments; however, this incorporation was fundamental in changing attitudes and perceptions about alternative epistemologies. Provisions for inclusion were substantiated through the development of higher education programmes, with mechanisms for Indigenous community input and a focus upon the individual Indigenous experience. Indigenous knowledge therefore became part of the educational mainstream and was no longer confined to marginalised positions in disciplines that studied Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

The BATSIS degree formally offered the delivery of alternative epistemologies but was predominately structured like many undergraduate programmes, with specialised streams, core, prerequisite and elective units as its essential features. In the accredited documentation, the BATSIS programme claimed that it 'endeavours to establish the issues of Indigenous knowledges in the repository of knowledges in universities.' It 'offers an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander perspective and critique of subject matter dealing with past and evolving Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander society and culture' (FATSIS, 2002). However, the delivery of many of its subjects was also similar to other undergraduate programmes in other disciplines, where lectures, tutorials and assessments complied with expected western institutional frameworks. There was little room for deviation from this form, thus confining Indigenous knowledge to codified and framed functions of the university. However, the course documentation signalled flexibility in the pedagogic delivery, where methodology and practice conveyed Indigenous world views and incorporated a framework that could differentiate BATSIS from other higher education programmes. This was to come in the form of articulated objectives and aims in the accreditation, where Indigenous representations and voices, the involvement of Indigenous communities and the utilisation of practical fieldtrips, ensured that Indigenous representations were being upheld. However, the formal and practical application of inclusion does not necessarily correlate. Articulating inclusion of alternative knowledge systems in this instance posited an Indigenous pedagogy grounded in theory but poorly applied in practice. Acknowledging difference in this manner is inadequate.

Difference veiled in coexistence with the broader cultural framework is problematic and can be seen as a form of oppression. As Mohanty (1989-1990, p.181) claims:

Difference cannot be formulated as negotiation among culturally diverse groups against a backdrop of presumed cultural homogeneity. Difference is the recognition that knowledges are forged histories that are ripened with differentially constituted relations of power; that is, knowledges, subjectivities, and social practices are forged within asymmetrical and incommensurate cultural spheres.

By constructing identity through preconceived differential cultural classifications, there is a danger of homogenising students and thus limiting the learning experience and knowledge in the classroom, which may ultimately impact upon the participation and retention of students. Such essentialised construction of difference racialises identity through its institutional cultural components of racism, and therefore their conflation with power and privilege (Bowser & Hunt, 1996).

The discipline of White Studies has articulated important critical discourses in this area. Much of the focus in this field is on deconstructing knowledge frameworks that are bounded in the ways that Whiteness operates as the norm to define 'Others' and is thus used to maintain its power and privilege (Giroux, 1997). Moreton-Robinson, who has contributed significantly to the field of White Studies, notes that:

[T]heir pedagogy is inclusive of the race of the Other but masks the subject position ... which they teach. In denying whiteness as a racial identity, race is removed from white agency in their analyses and this can diminish their students' scope for self-reflection as an anti-racist practice.
(Moreton-Robinson, 2000, p.131)

Such Indigenous theorists have stressed the need to consistently rethink, analyse, construct and deconstruct perspectives in our pedagogic domains, in order to reflect on the positions produced and represented. Moreton-Robinson, in her provocative investigations of cultural representations and practice, asserts:

An engagement with the politics of difference as multiple standpoints, oppressions, subjectivities, subject positions, identities and locations provides us with a way of understanding the heterogeneous and heteronymous representations of gender, sexuality, ethnicity, race, class and nationality. However, the effect of such theorising is to make a politics of difference in practice colour blind in terms of whiteness and power evasive in that all differences are rendered equally significant.
(Moreton-Robinson, 2000, p.63)

Such representations have been overwhelmingly criticised by the academy. Indigenous academics stress the need to stop writing about the 'Other' and stress the importance of listening to the voices of Indigenous peoples of Australia, without stereotype and homogenisation. Dominant culture asserts difference as divisive and divergent. Pedagogies remain limited in their potential to encompass knowledges of a diverse nature, voiced and positioned by the subjects of investigation, thus making them exclusive. Kumashiro (2000, p.29) suggests that in crafting anti-oppressive pedagogies 'educators need to acknowledge and affirm differences and tailor their teaching to the specifics of their student populations.'

This paper has argued that essentialised binary locations of Indigenous identity relive colonial processes through policy frameworks and through dominant cultural constructs. Such positionalities are problematic because of the impact that they have on educational frameworks as they intrude, represent, reproduce and recontextualise Indigenous knowledge and identity, thereby inhibiting alternative Indigenous curricula and pedagogy. Indigenous knowledge systems cannot be reinterpreted and re-represented in order to fit into dominant cultural domains. Articulating the inclusion of difference alone in undergraduate programmes is insufficient in dealing with inclusive pedagogies.

Inclusive pedagogies in theory

Articulating voice and plurality is therefore crucial in negotiating difference. Giroux (1992, p.140) argues that central to this discourse is the engagement of students in knowledge where they 'move in and out of borders constructed around coordinates of difference and power'.

Conceptualising difference in this way has, to a certain extent, been adopted and espoused by postcolonial and critical theorists. Giroux (1992) and Aronowitz & Giroux (1991) have called for a radical pedagogy defined as 'border pedagogy'. They rightly address issues of power and politics, and challenge institutional and ideological boundaries that have been historically constructed in the form of privilege and exclusion. Giroux (1992, p.135) notes, 'Border pedagogy offers students the opportunity to engage the multiple references that constitute different cultural codes, meaning and languages.' He suggests this framework engages teachers and learners in critical questions about 'how knowledge is taught, how knowledge relates to students' lives, how students can engage with

knowledge, and how pedagogy actually relates to empowering both teachers and students' (Giroux, 1992, p.140).

Other authors such as Asher & Crocco (2001, p.135), stress that educators need to 'consider the intersections of history, geography, language, class and culture as dynamic, context-specific markers of identity as they create curricular spaces for students to present their own stories on their own terms.'

More recent authors, such as Dudgeon & Fielder (2006, p.396), utilise Bhabha's (1994) 'third space' and suggest that 'third spaces are created as ways of thinking and doing, as social and psychological, connected to individual agency and political action as part of making space within everyday institutional life.'

What is clearly needed is a flexible process that takes into account the individual and group contexts where learners move and 'cross borders', and can explore 'third spaces' across and within intercultural places.

Teaching and learning strategies or models therefore need to determine how pedagogic discourse and Indigenous knowledges are constructed and delivered, in order to unpack changing teaching and learning contexts. In the Australian national framework for example, the production of curricula in terms of content, methodology and structure is dependant on institutional requirements, governed by the mechanisms of national policy (e.g. AEP). Thus the alignment with funding opportunities is also an alignment with managerial rationality, driven by modernist ideology, inequities and the power issues discussed earlier. The curriculum is therefore specifically constructed and is vested in economic and bureaucratic interests before it is even delivered and practised in the classroom. 'Any curriculum is the outcome of exercises of power. Power is exercised in attempts to define what the curriculum should be; that is, power is the successful imposition of one's preferred meaning upon a situation' (Pusey & Young, 1979, p.28). Such problems underlie pedagogic practice because the selection, pace and evaluation of curricula are placed in a framework that is specific and limited to institutional goals, thus further limiting multi-layered frameworks such as 'border pedagogy' and 'third space' processes for inclusiveness.

Inclusive pedagogies in practice

How then do educators formulate strategies that support learning spaces where difference is negotiated by the individual learners,

rather than prescribed by constructed ideological assumptions of difference? Can conceptual frameworks provide tools that can practically be employed in the classroom, where meaning occurs across time and across diverse cultural contexts and where boundaries of identities have room to shift?

An institutional framework is needed which explicitly articulates ways that embed inclusiveness, practically, and pedagogy; i.e. a model that identifies specific tools to address multiple identities in the production of the curriculum, and where pedagogic practice itself is essential in beginning to bring to the fore the problem of essentialising cultural difference. A theoretical and analytical tool allows for teaching and learning spaces that promote anti-essentialist perspectives that value diverse social and cultural experiences, thus challenging the dominance of western knowledge and hegemony (Graham, 1992). It is important that teaching and learning methodologies engage academics and learners in multi-layered binary categories within pedagogic practices. According to Asher (2005, p.1080-1081), educators need to 'develop pedagogical practices that attend consciously to the different stories that they and their students bring to the multicultural classroom where they create a site for engaging hybrid identities and cultures via critical, self-reflexive analyses on the part of both teacher and student.'

The establishment of a teaching model to embed the principles of inclusive pedagogies is essential and needs to be reflected in the production of curricula, in the content delivery and in the contextualisation of Indigenous knowledges and discourses. Such a starting point supports the formulation of inclusive practices through the learning objectives identified, the teaching and learning strategies planned, the assessment activities and the graduate outcomes. The inclusion of Indigenous learning approaches, expectations and cultural perspectives in higher education that differ from standard mainstream practice is fundamental to practical and inclusive practice. For example, 'Aboriginal epistemology is found in theories, philosophies, histories, ceremonies, and stories as ways of knowing. Aboriginal pedagogy is found in talking or sharing circles and dialogues, participant observations, experiential learning, modelling, meditations' (Battiste, 2002, p.22).

What is needed are practical approaches that are successful in practice and incorporate inclusive pedagogies beyond acknowledgement of difference and diversity. Curriculum design can encourage teaching and learning strategies that deliver Indigenous knowledge systems and Indigenous ways of knowing by explicitly articulating inclusive processes of learning. This includes the recognition of various

learning styles, the varied background and experience of students, active engagement with learners, collaboration, flexibility and responsiveness to diverse Indigenous cultural groups.

Developing teaching practices that contextualise authentic learning is an important tool in developing appropriate Indigenous methodologies. This may include a range of resources and methods; for example, active learning integrated in the classroom provides opportunities for reflective and blended approaches where students engage with diverse knowledge systems through observation and interaction. This could include a range of methodologies such as problem-based learning, or derivatives such as case-based learning or inquiry-based learning employed through observation and hands-on experience. Incorporating real-life experiences to enhance the inclusion of multiple perspectives is paramount to a successful approach. Academics can facilitate opportunities for students' self-efficacy, teamwork and interdisciplinary collaboration through a variety of interactions including small group work, collaborative learning, peer learning groups, peer assessment and special interest groups.

Inclusion of Indigenous and non-Indigenous input presents opportunities to voice diverse perspectives so as to establish a space for the analysis of race, power and ideological constructs reflected in both content and methodology. For example, higher education programmes such as BATSIS can incorporate in their methodology and delivery a framework for deconstructing the past through critical pedagogies. It can provide a forum for the presentation of alternative histories and alternative knowledge constructions. 'The pedagogical implication of this access to alternative knowledges is that they form the basis of alternative ways of Indigenous Australian control and delivery ...' Dudgeon & Fielder (2006, p.405). This allows space for Indigenous and non-Indigenous collaborations to ensure the cultural and academic integrity of the programme. Dudgeon & Fielder (2006) highlight the importance of 'third spaces' in the classroom by incorporating representation and participation of the local Indigenous community in delivery of courses and curriculum development, thus allowing for learning processes to be informed by community experience and perspectives. They also suggest the importance of privileging Indigenous Australian knowledge with emphasis on experience and perspectives of Indigenous Australians in academic contexts.

These processes allow for dynamic engagement with fundamental questions about how knowledge is taught and how students engage

with such knowledge. The process of collaboration and consultation described is an active mechanism that supports the development of content, methodology, assessment and delivery, and integrates as well as blends western and Indigenous frameworks within higher education curricula. These inputs to production and methodology of curricula are at the core of an inclusive process. '... University curriculum can provide ... opportunities to learn by doing, with as much community involvement and teaching by indigenous people as possible: emphasising ... 'showing' or modelling rather than explaining, and use models and examples to demonstrate concepts, in particular from the local environment and resources' (Nichol, 2005, p.6).

Institutional mechanisms and frameworks can actively de-essentialise processes to refigure difference and identity and contribute to further development of inclusive, diverse and collaborative approaches to teaching and learning. Such framing supports the creation of alternative knowledge systems and alternative pedagogic practices by enhancing learning through the creation of pluralistic teaching and learning spaces. Establishing an 'interchange' between western and Indigenous learning models extends beyond the existing singular positions of learning. This approach makes the process of pedagogy explicit, by allowing various methodologies to be practised in the classroom and thus integrating multiple approaches to learning. The move away from binary positions begins to support the development of theorising Indigenous pedagogy so as to formalise Indigenous knowledges beyond official documentation and government and institutional principles.

The formal inclusion of Indigenous voices in teaching methodology would enhance Indigenous participation and provide avenues for the presentation of Indigenous knowledges that go beyond token gestures and mainstream practices that only pay lip service to Indigenous involvement. In this way, Indigenous issues, knowledges and experiences can be understood from various domains of identity and differences. The inclusion of Indigenous voices allows for alternative representation and subjectivities, eroding homogenised assumptions regarding Indigenous identity and knowledge.

Conclusion

Indigenous identity can no longer be confined to a mono-culturally conditioned subjectivity in contemporary Australia. Complex and heterogeneous realities do exist in the classroom as well as within various Indigenous knowledge systems. The recognition of these

structures is vital in supporting mechanisms in which to embed inclusive processes in the development and delivery of Australian Indigenous curricula in higher education, thus eroding binary positional constructions. The incorporation of Indigenous and non-Indigenous voices in higher education programmes provides opportunity for the production of unique pedagogies that blend Indigenous and non-Indigenous knowledge, providing learners with choice and catering for diverse student needs. In this context, various ways of perceiving culture and knowledge are presented through multiple identities and representations. Such a framework provides scope for learning to occur in multiple domains and 'in-between' spaces with provisions for diverse experience and access to attaining skills from a number of world views.

Hendricks & Quinn (2000, p.456) have written that 'If we are committed to pedagogy of access then we have a responsibility to ensure that our practice is inclusive: to make our understandings of epistemology clear to students and to be explicit about what our expectations are.'

It is important to go beyond the rhetorical learner-centred approaches and policy frameworks and actually deconstruct pedagogic methodologies to ensure that these are explicitly mapped and articulated in curricula. The development and delivery of Indigenous programmes, for example, need to be informed by discourses of difference and pluralism so that educators can critically evaluate practices and explore ways in which to engage students with the learning materials.

In conclusion, Indigenous pedagogy is a complex domain encompassing a number of contested zones. Indigenous knowledge systems need to be understood in relation to social, cultural and historical contexts. The production of Indigenous content theorised and validated in the academy alone is not sufficient. What is important is the discourse of identity and difference in understanding recontextualisation processes that embed notions of power and issues of race, and which in turn determine and impact on pedagogic practices.

De-essentialised processes of difference and identity contribute to the development of inclusive, diverse and collaborative approaches that maintain the integrity of alternative knowledge systems and alternative pedagogic practices to enhance learning and create pluralistic teaching and learning spaces. Such an integrative approach attempts to recognise and support the diverse needs of students

and creates discourses for a variety of perspectives and voices in Indigenous knowledge systems and in contemporary Australian culture. Configuring inclusive pedagogies offers an opportunity to rethink our curriculum production and development as well as pedagogic practices to ensure the reflection of pluralistic strategies to present diverse perspectives which do not restrict identity in fixed and singular spaces.

Inclusive development and delivery of Australian Indigenous curriculum in higher education brings to the fore the need for continued debate and critical discourses about existing practices and methodologies. It highlights the need for further research and explorations about explicit mechanisms in which to support learner-centred principles and good inclusive practice.

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About the author

Mona El-Ayoubi is an Academic Consultant in Educational Design with the Teaching and Learning Development Group at Charles Darwin University, Australia. Her role has a focus on supporting the development and enhancement of teaching and learning practices among higher education academics in the university in both internal and e-learning mediums. She has extensive experience in the humanities and social sciences and has lectured in Indigenous studies, sociology and cultural studies. She has contributed significantly to all elements of curriculum development including accreditation and re-accreditation of tertiary programmes.

Her work has incorporated multidisciplinary approaches to teaching and learning which focus on collaboration and cooperative relationships. She is committed to enhancing critical teaching and learning skills to develop diverse pedagogic practices which are learner-centred. She values inter-cultural communication, difference and culture, and has a keen interest in languages.