Indigenous pedagogies for decolonisation: listening for resonance and making connections

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Indigenous Pedagogies

For Decolonisation:

*Listening for Resonance*

*And Making Connections*

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Dedication

I dedicate this thesis to my father, Norbert Biermann, and my grandfather, Kurt Biermann, both of whom are/were committed educators who believed in the transformative power of pedagogy. I hope to continue their legacy in different ways.

Also, I dedicate this work to my daughter Sienna and my son Julian, hoping that for them decolonisation will become a meaningful reality.
Acknowledgments

I would like to acknowledge the lands of the Bundjalung nation, on whose ground I carefully tread. In particular, I would like to pay my respects to the Ancestors, Elders and Custodians who have always exerted, and will continue to exert, their sovereign responsibilities of looking after the land and the people who live with it. I hope to show through my work that I honour your sovereignty and am inspired by your philosophies.

I also want to express my deepest thanks to my family, and in particular my partner Elissa, who has been incredibly supportive with this thesis and my long hours of study and work in general. My children, on the other hand, helped me see things I would otherwise have missed. Danke!

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Finally, whenever I was in need of inspiration and refocusing, Huey turned it on.
Abstract

The dominant discourse of Indigenous education in Australia has constructed an Indigenous subject that is passive, lacking and in need of assistance. Federal, State and Territory Governments have targeted countless reports, policies and programs at what they believe to be the overwhelming underperformance of Indigenous students. Yet despite these reports, policies and programs, fundamental inequalities remain and Indigenous students continue to be observed, discussed and marginalised. In this sense, Indigenous education is always education for or about Indigenous people. This thesis presents the view that despite a shift away from a cultural deficit view of Indigenous students in the 1980s, a pedagogical deficit view has been maintained, which perpetuates the discourse of passivity, failure and neediness.

After examining the literature on Indigenous pedagogies over the past three decades in light of critiques of their underlying assumptions, this thesis will propose a decolonising turn and consider alternative conceptions of Indigenous pedagogies as education through, or based on, Indigenous philosophies and methodologies. This approach is premised on the recognition of Indigenous intellectual sovereignty by way of respectful dialogue, willingness to learn and non-appropriative negotiations of meaning. By rupturing the familiar racialised discourse and reinserting Indigenous sovereignty into the local educational context, a whole new field of post-colonial possibilities opens up that recognises Indigenous people’s agency and intellectual sovereignty.

Drawing on recent developments in North America and Aotearoa, this thesis suggests that the recognition of and engagement with Indigenous philosophies through locally negotiated pedagogies provides an opening for re-energising the educational experience for Indigenous and other learners, transforming the education system through innovative approaches as well as contributing to decolonisation in Australia today. It is argued that this engagement must be inextricably linked to a human rights-based approach to education which supports agency, respects autonomy and creates shared spaces. Bringing into play recent developments in Indigenist research methodologies, the thesis is an explicit reflection of the author’s situatedness as a recent migrant in relation to Indigenous peoples, settler/invader descendants and other migrants in contemporary Australia. Seen in this light, the thesis is a story about creating homes, extending relatedness and sharing responsibility.
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Chapter 1  Opening
Introduction

For too long, the discourse of Indigenous education in Australia has been built on a framework of passivity, failure and neediness.¹ Federal, State and Territory Governments have targeted countless reports, policies and programs at what they believe to be the overwhelming underperformance of Indigenous students.² Yet despite these reports, policies and programs, fundamental inequalities remain and Indigenous students continue to be observed, discussed and marginalised. In this sense, Indigenous education is always education for or about Indigenous people. Couched in the language of cultural difference, equity and access, the dominant paradigm has focused on designs based on Indigenous lack without fundamentally questioning the utility of the philosophical assumptions built into the Western system. This has resulted in the marginalisation of Indigenous

¹ Throughout this thesis, I use the word Indigenous to refer to the First Peoples of what is today known as Australia, except when talking about a particular people/nation or when referring to other concepts and ideas which might be based on different terminology. As opposed to Aboriginal, the term Indigenous is inclusive of Torres Strait Islander identities and also reflects the language in international human rights discourse. I am aware that the term “Indigenous” can also carry a homogenising, colonial quality, but as will become apparent, I offer it in a spirit of recognition of its inherent plurality. When referring to other First Peoples around the world generally, I use the word indigenous in keeping with the language of international human rights, but with a lower case first letter to distinguish it from the Australian context.

² There have been too many such reports, policies and programs over the past three decades to provide a detailed description of their content within the confines of this thesis. However, some recent examples of the ongoing attempts to describe, quantify and tackle the “problem” in Indigenous education include The National Report to Parliament on Indigenous Education and Training, 2001. Canberra: Department of Education, Science and Training, c2002. This was the first in a series of what have now become annual reports to parliament. In NSW, a recent review covered similar ground: New South Wales Aboriginal Education Consultative Group Inc (AECG), and New South Wales Department of Education and Training (DET), “The Report of the Review of Aboriginal Education. Yanigurra Muya: Ganggurrinyama Yaarri Guurulaw Yirringin.Gurray. Freeing the Spirit: Dreaming of an Equal Future” (Sydney: NSW Department of Education and Training, 2004). Selected recent policy and program responses include the Aboriginal Education Policy (Sydney: Aboriginal Education Unit, NSW Department of School Education, 1996); David McRae et al., What has worked (and will again): The IESIP Strategic Results Project. Education and Training for Indigenous Students (Canberra: Australian Curriculum Studies Association and National Curriculum Services, 2000); Australian Principals Associations Professional Development Council, Dare to lead (available from http://www.apapdc.edu.au/daretolead/); accessed 30 May 2007.
agency, knowledges and philosophies, and the failure to produce substantial improvements to the dismal educational outcomes for Indigenous learners. Instead of recognising and appreciating the value, importance and quality of Indigenous philosophies and methodologies in ongoing negotiated practices of cultural exchange, the education system has largely consisted of “target group” assimilationism, blind to its own ineffectiveness and the missed opportunities for all learners.

Discussions about Indigenous pedagogies in particular have highlighted the colonial character of understanding Indigenous education solely in terms of education for or about Indigenous people. This thesis presents the view that despite a shift away from a cultural deficit view of Indigenous students in the 1980s, a pedagogical deficit view has been maintained, which perpetuates the discourse of passivity, failure and neediness. I argue that acknowledging and respecting Indigenous sovereignty and inscribing engagement with Indigenous philosophies, processes and values into the education system provides a valuable paradigm change not only for Indigenous students, but for all learners. Discussing alternative conceptions of Indigenous pedagogies, I will highlight the decolonising potential of a reinterpretation of Indigenous education as education through, or based on, Indigenous philosophies and methodologies. This approach is premised on the recognition of Indigenous intellectual sovereignty by way of respectful dialogue, willingness to learn and non-appropriative negotiations of meaning. In doing so, it will problematise essentialising notions of culture and authenticity as inherently colonial,
and instead engage the dynamic reality of the ‘cultural interface’.\(^3\) By rupturing the familiar racialised discourse and reinserting Indigenous sovereignty into the local educational context, a whole new field of postcolonial possibilities opens up that recognises Indigenous people’s agency and intellectual sovereignty.

Drawing on similar recent developments in North America and the Pacific,\(^4\) this thesis suggests that the recognition of and engagement with Indigenous philosophies through locally negotiated pedagogies provides an opening for re-energising the educational experience for Indigenous and other learners, transforming the education system through innovative approaches as well as contributing to decolonisation in Australia today. It is argued that this engagement must be inextricably linked to a human rights-based approach to education which supports agency, respects autonomy and creates shared spaces.

**Rationale**

A fundamental rethink of Indigenous pedagogies and, by extension, Indigenous education is appropriate for at least five reasons: the ongoing failure by the dominant education system to provide quality education for Indigenous children (and many other marginalised learners); the general

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\(^3\) Martin Nakata, “The cultural interface: An exploration of the intersection of Western knowledge systems and Torres Strait Islanders positions and experiences,” (PhD Thesis, James Cook University, 1997).

\(^4\) Due to the limited space available in this thesis, it is not possible to provide a detailed comparative study of the many developments taking place. Therefore, I will provide a very brief overview of some cases and thus highlight some supporting points for my argument.
absence of pedagogies that successfully teach to diversity; the disconnecting nature of dominant pedagogies; the lack of recognition, understanding and appreciation of Indigenous philosophies, knowledges and processes; and the urgent need to decolonise the teaching process for all learners. I will now address each of these aspects in turn.

In no uncertain terms, the Productivity Commission states that ‘Indigenous students continue to be the most educationally disadvantaged student group in Australia’.\(^5\) Year after year, official statistics tell the seemingly unchanging story of educational segregation, which continues despite recent decades of targeted policies, programs and reports on Indigenous education at a territory, state and federal level. The Commission further qualifies this statement by pointing out that there is lower participation in early school programs,\(^6\) significantly lower literacy and numeracy rates in primary school,\(^7\) higher drop-out rates\(^8\) and less than half the likelihood of non-Indigenous students to continue to Year 12.\(^9\) These Australia-wide figures are mirrored in NSW, where a report on Indigenous education in 2004 found that less than ten per cent of Indigenous children attended pre-school,\(^10\) that substantial gaps in basic skills tests have not been reduced ‘despite a multitude of mainstream and targeted Aboriginal literacy and numeracy programs’,\(^11\) and that, subsequently, the gap in learning between

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6 Ibid, 6.3.
7 Ibid, 6.6.
8 Ibid, 3.8.
9 Ibid.
11 Ibid, 84-85.
Indigenous and non-Indigenous students reaches 30 to 36 months in Year 7.\textsuperscript{12} Knowing these figures makes one conscious both of the enormity and urgency of the task ahead, as well as the dimensions of failure of decades of targeted programs.

However, one also needs to be mindful and supportive of the success of the many Indigenous students who have persisted despite the odds being stacked against them. This is important both in terms of acknowledging and respecting their individual strength and as further proof of the fallacy of using an educational “target group” approach based on a binary of difference (to other cultural groups) and sameness (within the group). Indigenous students might be structurally marginalised and Indigenous communities disempowered by the way the education system operates, but they are also as internally diverse as any other group. This reality, however, is not reflected within the dominant discourse on Indigenous education which creates a homogenising view of difference/sameness and thus produces endless opportunities for experts to develop appropriate reactive “target group” pedagogies, rather than questioning the ability and quality of the education system to teach to diversity.

The contemporary discourse on Indigenous education in Australia is symptomatic of a dominant view within the education system that tends to perceive diversity as synonymous with “challenge”, “problem” or even “threat”. As discussed by Andrea Allard and Ninetta Santoro, students who

\textsuperscript{12} Ibid, 112.
are “different” from the dominant mainstream in terms of their ethnicity, language, (dis)ability, sexuality or socio-economic background are less likely to do well at school.\textsuperscript{13} According to Anne Hickling-Hudson and Roberta Ahlquist, the education system does not positively incorporate and address student diversity and instead perpetuates a pedagogical monoculture that has shifted the blame for failing at school onto those who don’t achieve.\textsuperscript{14} The marginalisation, blaming and othering of those students that don’t “fit in” to our school system are testament to the manifest failure to substantially engage, appreciate and celebrate this difference. Glenn Woods et al. point out that this increasing “blame the victim” mentality has led to a myriad of “special” (i.e. “not-normal”) programs and initiative targeted at “low achievers”.\textsuperscript{15} Ultimately, in the words of Chris Riley, ‘our schools are set up to exit kids that don’t fit the system’.\textsuperscript{16}

Many schools have a hard time even acknowledging, beyond tokenistic gestures, the diversity that exists within their student (and staff) population as a matter of fact, let alone celebrate and embrace it as part of any kind of positive school-wide pedagogy. There is a clear need to broaden teaching

\textsuperscript{15} Glenn Woods et al., “Learning within Kuntri,” unpublished paper (Lismore, Southern Cross University, 2003).
\textsuperscript{16} Chris Riley, “Our kids need good role models, the adult community, to step up to the plate for the sake of our young,” (keynote address to the \textit{Third International Conference on Pedagogies and Learning}, Springfield, University of Southern Queensland, 27\textsuperscript{th}-28\textsuperscript{th} September 2007).
methodologies by systematically changing pre- and in-service teacher training towards a sharper focus on diversity education. Yet, according to Carmen Mills, the current approach to diversity education for pre-service teachers at Australian universities is taking place in an add-on or piecemeal fashion, often with little or no success.\(^{17}\) While teacher education, school funding, the syllabus, and administrative and other structural impediments certainly leave a lot to be desired in this respect, the pedagogy at the coalface of the individual classroom is a significant factor in the alienation or inclusion experienced by students day in and day out. Jennifer Gore illustrates what is, in many ways, a manifest and profound educational concern, when she notes,

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\text{…the incredible “continuity in pedagogical practices” over time despite decades of educational reform. That is, despite a constant flow of new techniques and new curriculum, new ways of understanding learning and new forms of work organisation in schools, there appear to be some aspects of pedagogical relations and pedagogical practice which have altered little during the past century.}\(^{18}\)
\]

While teaching diverse groups of people in diverse settings and locations, the Australian education system nonetheless clings to an imagined white middle class norm of how education is to be done.\(^{19}\) This imagined norm favours an individual, abstract and teacher-centred interpretation of education over one that emphasises collective, concrete and student-

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centred learning. While it might appear to be well-suited to a globalised world economy, it is increasingly being challenged by those concerned about its debilitating effects on both local communities and students’ overall skills and capacities.\textsuperscript{20}

As a consequence of the educational disconnection from their environment, Keith McRae argues that over the past few decades, ‘many young people have become passive participants, spectators, recipients of second-hand knowledge, attitudes and values, increasingly removed from real first-hand experiences’.\textsuperscript{21} Similarly, David Orr’s criticism that we are ‘educating young people to be mobile, rootless and autistic towards their places’ points to a serious lack of relationship-building and connection to the life-sustaining processes of the local environment.\textsuperscript{22} This physical, emotional, spiritual and intellectual disconnection and abstraction can be felt in curricula and pedagogy as well as in more subtle contexts such as the schools’ architecture and design.\textsuperscript{23} More broadly speaking, as a result of the dominance of one cultural worldview, the fragmentation and specialisation of knowledge and the standardisation of an abstract curriculum, there has been a loss of relevance and connection with the reality of many students’ immediate lives, evidenced by rising levels of


\textsuperscript{21} McRae, \textit{Outdoor and environmental education}, 4.

\textsuperscript{22} David Orr, cited in Sobel, \textit{Place-based education}, ii.

\textsuperscript{23} Orr, “Reassembling the Pieces,” in \textit{Ecological Education in Action}, eds. Smith and Williams, 229-236.
absenteeism, low achievement and disinterest in school. While everyone is diminished by a disconnection from the richness of complex relationships with their environment, children from marginalised backgrounds in particular appear to suffer stigmatisation and low achievement as a result of this disconnection.

Underlying the disconnection and lack of appreciation of diversity, according to Tony Birch, is the spectre of ‘a nation that is yet to escape its colonial psyche’. Sharing his analysis, Ghassan Hage portrays Australia as an ‘unfinished […] colonial project’ with a dominant ambivalence between deliberate forgetting and what Irene Watson describes as cannibalising Indigenous culture in an attempt to establish lawfulness beyond question. The fact that Hage refers to the project as unfinished is an acknowledgment of the strength of the enduring Indigenous sovereign will and its resistance to both erasure and easy co-option. The unwillingness by so many Indigenous people to accede to demands for assimilation or be drafted into the role of “just another culture” within a multicultural but hierarchical society continues to rub salt into dominant society’s wounds of original illegitimacy. In order to move beyond this position of illegitimacy, the reconciliation process needs to go deeper than

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superficial acknowledgements of custodianship and begin to seriously consider the idea of ‘sharing spaces’. As Kaurna Elder Uncle Lewis O’Brien said,

[sharing the space, or reconciliation should not be inclusive of Indigenous people at the expense of our difference [...] If sharing the space strategies do not lead to Indigenous economic, cultural, legal, social and political empowerment, then sharing the space becomes another synonym for assimilation. [...] The true worth of a nation must be measured by the way it promotes the sharing of cultural, legal, economic and political space with its First peoples. The sharing of country is useless without the sharing of power.]

Apart from being a legal, social and political process, sharing spaces also requires an intellectual engagement with Indigenous sovereignty through the process of decolonisation. Rather than understanding decolonisation solely as an empowerment process of Indigenous peoples, I believe it also has to entail the deflation of white power as well as dominant Australia’s responsibility to question its own advantage in light of how this position inhibits non-hierarchical engagements with others. An important step in beginning this process lies in decolonising the teaching process through re-inscribing notions of Indigenous sovereign philosophies and knowledges at the local level. Woods speaks about the intractable problems and potential solutions:

I define the problem for all of us as this. The dominant Anglo/Celtic ethnic majority have a lot of problems, with dominance being the main one. The community learning challenge is to learn how to overcome advantage, not addressing disadvantage. Many Australians need to stop seeing the homogenous

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Aboriginal Australia they have constructed and start to getting to know the Indigenous people on whose land they dwell. People must recognise the power structures they are advantaged by and stop using their membership to disadvantage others. We must be able to identify and define our roles especially when our role is as an agent of colonial governance. These will be lessons best learnt in communities we agree to exist in, not the institutions that perpetuate the status quo.\textsuperscript{30}

In a similar visionary vein, Stephen Muecke contends that a changing national identity based on decolonisation and reconciliation needs to be less the business of historians and more the business of philosophers, for it is not just a question of extending a timeline or uncovering a new archive. This new time is tied in with questions of justice (sovereignty), meaning, ceremony and nationhood.\textsuperscript{31}

**Contribution**

As Veronica Arbon remarks, ‘Academia is the emerging site where decolonising and counter-hegemonic acts are now beginning to occur’.\textsuperscript{32}

What possibilities exist, then, for inquiries into Indigenous pedagogies as based on sovereign Indigenous philosophies and methodologies to contribute to decolonisation in education? Marie Battiste’s observations in the Canadian context are relevant here; she remarks,

> Canadian administrators and educators need to respectfully blend Indigenous epistemology and pedagogy with Euro-Canadian epistemology and pedagogy to create an innovative Canadian educational system. [...] The pedagogical challenge of Canadian education is not just reducing the distance between Eurocentric thinking and Aboriginal ways of knowing but engaging decolonized minds and hearts.\textsuperscript{33}

\textsuperscript{30} Woods et al., “Learning within Kuntri”.
This thesis, as well as earlier ruminations on its ideas, thus contributes to conversations about Indigenous education in each of these five dimensions.\textsuperscript{34} Firstly, it challenges long-held racialised deficit notions of Indigenous education and Indigenous pedagogy as particular types of education for Indigenous people, who can not succeed in mainstream programs. Secondly, it proposes an alternative approach to Indigenous pedagogies based on the recognition of sovereign Indigenous philosophies and methodologies, which are valid and valuable for the educational process of all learners. Thirdly, it contributes to addressing the ongoing crisis in the provision of quality education for Indigenous children and promotes self-determination and human rights for Indigenous peoples in education. Fourthly, it articulates the importance of non-Indigenous people engaging sovereign Indigenous philosophies in order to begin the process of decolonisation. And finally, it suggests how such a process might be started through negotiating Indigenous pedagogies at ‘the cultural interface’ of the local level.\textsuperscript{35}

\textbf{Structure}

This first chapter, \textit{Opening}, has introduced the problematic of Indigenous education – that is, a discourse determined by a needs-based view of

\textsuperscript{34} The ideas expressed in this thesis have developed gradually over the past year or so. I have discussed particular aspects of this thesis, individually and in collaboration with others, in a range of conference presentations and publications throughout the past year. See appendices of this thesis or: Soenke Biermann, “Being Human in the Classroom: Indigenous Pedagogy and Human Rights Education,” in \textit{Activating Human Rights in Education: Exploration, Innovation, Transformation}, eds. Christopher Newell and Baden Offord (Deakin West, ACT: Australian College of Educators, 2008), 109-116; Soenke Biermann, “Indigenous pedagogies and environmental education: Starting a conversation” \textit{International Journal of Pedagogies and Learning} (forthcoming); Soenke Biermann and Marcelle Townsend-Cross, “Indigenous Pedagogy as a Force for Change” \textit{Australian Journal of Indigenous Education} (forthcoming).

\textsuperscript{35} Nakata, “The Cultural Interface”.

Indigenous peoples that does not recognise sovereign Indigenous philosophies, and instead takes a “target group” approach that continues to fail Indigenous learners. After having provided other rationales for change, the chapter discussed some of the opportunities and pitfalls that lie in re-articulating Indigenous pedagogies within a strengths-based framework.

The next chapter, *Ethical Encounters*, will present a discussion of how the subsequent inquiry might reflect in its process the philosophical positions and values espoused in its content. The chapter establishes the context and the ground rules within which an ethical inquiry can be conducted. It also entails a reflection on my situatedness in regard to the research topic and the philosophical and methodological paradigms, Critical Theory and Indigenist Research, that are not only present in my analysis, but reflect my own cultural identity and understanding.

Following on from there, the *Context* chapter will situate the inquiry within discourses of sovereignty, Indigenous education and transformative pedagogy. These three lenses through which to view Indigenous pedagogies have been chosen in order to anchor my argument in the past, present and future, and ensure that the discussion does not lose sight of the sovereign nature and transformative potential of Indigenous pedagogies that is integral to this thesis.

The *Discussion* chapter then condenses the analysis to Indigenous pedagogies and examines in more detail how these have been conceived of
in the past. It will focus on three key examples to show the links between anthropological observation, the tailoring of reactive and needs-based pedagogies and their relationship to dominant themes in the discourse of Indigenous education.

Following this Discussion, the Resonance chapter offers alternative interpretations of Indigenous pedagogies based on the acknowledgment of Indigenous intellectual sovereignty, the recognition of their transformative potential and the desire for decolonisation. Along with highlighting the potential benefits of such a re-think, the chapter will take a brief look at similar developments in the Pacific and North America.

The final chapter, Connections, concludes this stage of the inquiry by discussing the importance of this research both on a personal and a wider social level. Finally, it will suggest starting points for creating locally negotiated Indigenous pedagogies as innovative teaching methodologies for all learners, backed up by commitments to social justice, human rights and power sharing arrangements between Indigenous and non-Indigenous communities. Far from being over, this is where the real conversation will need to begin in order to translate sovereign recognitions of Indigenous philosophies into effective, localised, negotiated Indigenous pedagogies with real outcomes for learners, communities and the wider process of decolonisation.
Chapter 2  Ethical Encounters
Introduction

Having introduced the topic of inquiry for my thesis in the previous chapter, this chapter will serve to explicitly establish the relationships between myself as the researcher and the subject matter. This means relating my background and motivation, as well as my philosophical approach to research in terms of its paradigmatic situatedness within a set of uneasy postcolonial discourses. In the following sections, this chapter will thus contain an introduction of myself in the context of this research process, along with a discussion of how the paradigms of Critical Theory and Indigenist Research shape my world and my work. It will conclude by honestly outlining the tensions and limitations within which this thesis operates.

To begin with, in accordance with a value-explicit Indigenist Research Paradigm, I now give the following introduction of myself to establish a relationship with the reader. Aileen Moreton-Robinson explains this protocol in the following way:

Introducing one’s self to other Indigenous people is to provide information about one’s cultural location, so that connections can be made on political, cultural and social grounds and relations established.

While I am not an Indigenous person, I believe that following such a protocol is the most ethical way for me to proceed, as it establishes my

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36 This will be discussed further below. For initial orientation, see for example Karen Martin, “Please knock before you enter: An investigation of how Rainforest Aboriginal people regulate outsiders and the implications for western research and researchers,” (PhD Thesis, James Cook University, 2006); Shawn Wilson, “Research as Ceremony: Articulating an Indigenous Research Paradigm,” (PhD Thesis, Monash University, 2004).

37 Aileen Moreton-Robinson, *Talkin’ up to the white women: Indigenous women and feminism* (St Lucia, Brisbane: University of Queensland, 2000), xv.
own story and thus lays the ground for further connections to be made. I therefore give the following introduction of myself:

My name is Soenke Biermann, son of Norbert and Ursula Biermann from the north-eastern region of Nordrhein-Westphalen, Germany. I grew up in an alternative household in northern Germany, where I developed a close attachment to the land based on an ethics of care. I have a particularly strong connection to the huge tidal mudflats of the Wattenmeer, a dynamic area rich in biodiversity. However, as a saltwater person, I feel affection and responsibility for the ocean wherever I am. Since coming to Australia, I have lived in Bundjalung country with my partner and our two little children. The reason why I undertake this research is because we all need to decolonise, fight oppression and injustice, and embrace egalitarian relationships – there is no being neutral in the conflict between the dominant and the marginal. In Lila Watson’s famous words:

If you have come to help me, you are wasting your time. But if you have come because your liberation is bound up with mine then let us work together.38

In terms of perspective and approach, this thesis thus represents a non-Indigenous standpoint that has not been formed and conditioned by the Australian experience of colonialism. My cultural roots, my philosophies, my language are of another. Having spent my formative years in a country that continues to grapple with the responsibility for the Holocaust, I continue to carry the burden of my ancestors’ complicity in what Juergen Habermas has rightly called the ‘moral catastrophe’ as well as the spark of hope that is to be found in resistance against overwhelming domination.39 It is a different kind of shame and guilt than that carried by many non-Indigenous Australians, but it is none the lighter. I believe it is the task of

39 Juergen Habermas, Die nachholende Revolution (Frankfurt/Main: Suhrkamp, 1990), 152.
such descendants to right our ancestors’ wrongs, restore balance and, whenever we have a choice, seek responsibility rather than shelter.

Discounting the option of ‘taking refuge within a profession or nationality’, Edward Said similarly observes that, ‘[p]olitics is everywhere; there can be no escape into the realms of pure art and thought or, for that matter, into the realm of disinterested objectivity or transcendental theory’. He goes on to characterise somebody that does not take such refuge as a public intellectual, as ‘exilic and marginal, as amateur, and as the author of a language that tries to speak the truth to power’. In order to be ethical in speaking truth to power, the intellectual cannot be a coloniser him- or herself, but must maintain the traveller’s role in a new country.

An intellectual is like a shipwrecked person who learns to live in a certain sense with the land, not on it, not like Robinson Crusoe whose goal is to colonize his little island, but more like Marco Polo, whose sense of the marvellous never fails him, and who is always a traveller, a provisional guest, not a freeloader, conqueror or raider.

This description resonates deeply with my own understanding of both being a migrant on Indigenous land and a critical thinker. In the following sections, I will tease out these resonances by outlining the respective traditions of Critical Theory and Indigenist Research that I am drawing on in more detail.

41 Ibid, 16.
42 Ibid, xiv.
43 Ibid, 44.
Critical Theory

Having founded the leftist Frankfurt School of the 1920s, Critical Theory’s early leading thinkers – Theodor W. Adorno, Max Horkheimer and Herbert Marcuse – outlined their ontological beliefs by pointing to the centrality of injustice and oppression in shaping the lived world and people’s experiences, yet defying the orthodoxy of Marxism.\textsuperscript{44} Epistemologically, this reality, shaped by social, political and other forces, can only be understood in a subjectivist/transactional – and thereby relational – form through the value-mediated interaction between researcher and situated others, not in dualist or objectivist categories. It thus follows that the methodology has to follow both a dialogical and a dialectical path: engage others in a dialogue that takes a dialectical form to transform blind acceptance of appearances into ‘more informed consciousness’.\textsuperscript{45} Paulo Freire’s theory of dialogical action encapsulates and articulates these methodological considerations.\textsuperscript{46}

The neo-Marxist critique of capitalist modernity developed by these early theorists provided the basis for other intellectuals’ departure from dominant positivist and postpositivist paradigms. Over time, Critical Theory diversified into a series of overlapping strands that focussed on and developed numerous perspectives on the central issues of injustice and


oppression. While there are now fundamental differences between, for example, neo-Marxist, genealogical, poststructuralist deconstructionist and postmodern forms of social inquiry, critical theorists remain committed to ‘transformative endeavours’ and ‘emancipatory consciousness’.\(^{47}\) Overall,

> [c]ritical research can best be understood in the context of the empowerment of individuals. Inquiry that aspires to the name critical must be connected to an attempt to confront the injustices of a particular society or sphere within society.\(^{48}\)

One of the major axiological distinctions between Critical Theory and the dominant positivist and postpositivist paradigms is this immanent imperative for action and change. According to Horkheimer, the creation or increase of knowledge is only ever the basis for affecting specific or broader social change, never a goal in itself.\(^{49}\) Understanding that hegemony most effectively functions when oppression is ‘accepted as consensus’, critical theorists contribute to emancipation by exposing contradictions in the appearance of dominant systems.\(^{50}\) This is done in a value-explicit, openly political way that emphasises self-reflection:

> Critical social research assumes that the world is changed by reflective practical activity and it is thus not content to simply identify the nature of oppressive structures but to point to ways in which they can be combated through praxis.\(^{51}\)

This of course necessitates what Watson calls ‘a meditation on discomfort’:\(^{52}\) a questioning of my own lawfulness, my own sovereign

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\(^{48}\) Ibid.


\(^{50}\) Kincheloe and McLaren, “Rethinking Critical Theory and Qualitative Research,” in *Handbook of Qualitative Research*, eds. by Denzin and Lincoln, 141.

status, my own moral presence in this place where I live. Coming to Australia as a recent migrant provides me with a comparative, multicultural and multilingual perspective which is an expression of my intercultural identity. What I can contribute to discussions about Indigenous education and decolonisation is an expression of my unique identity and perspective, located in a field of relatedness to others who have spoken before and who will speak after me. In keeping with recent expressions of Indigenous standpoint theory and Indigenist research methodologies, I offer my observations along with my own critically reflective situatedness within the conversation.\textsuperscript{53} By bringing autonomous, but related stories ‘alongside’ one another, we can enrich our understanding without overlaying or replacing others’ identities.\textsuperscript{54} It is a respectful, ethical and egalitarian way of conducting research, growing shared bodies of knowledge and creating more considered responses to complex challenges. For me, this is the essence of Indigenist research methodologies, which will be discussed in more detail below

**Indigenist Research**

Over the past ten years, Indigenous thinkers and academics from around the world – predominantly Canada and Australia – have been engaged in mammoth projects of cultural translation: the articulation of Indigenist Research paradigms and methodologies based on Indigenous philosophies,


\textsuperscript{54} Martin, “Please knock before you enter”, 200.
yet framed in the language of Western academia. This is no small feat, since far from being a neutral player in the West’s history of colonialism and oppression, the Academy has been a driving force in shaping colonial attitudes and practices. Eduardo and Bonnie Duran hold that, embedded in scientific discourses on “the other”, the assumption ‘that phenomena from another worldview can be adequately explained from a totally foreign worldview is the essence of psychological and philosophical imperialism’. Furthermore, according to Polly Walker the processes of the academy are ‘structurally violent’, too, since they, seek to bring about the inclusion of non-Europeans and/or non-European achievements in canonical subject matters, while leaving the methodological and conceptual parameters of the canon itself essentially intact.

While these and other accounts of the continuing reproduction of intellectually oppressive discourses on Indigenous peoples within the academy serve to highlight the frustration many Indigenous academics and communities continue to experience, the articulation of Indigenist Research Paradigms has the three-fold effect of ‘creating methodological space’ for Indigenous researchers within the academy, setting out parameters for egalitarian research relationships with and responsibility

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toward Indigenous communities, and decolonising the academy from within.

Before these effects could be felt, however, several Indigenous researchers expressed the need to decolonise methodologies and articulate Indigenous expressions of academic research during the 1990s, which Karen Martin describes as the ‘Recent Aboriginal research phase’. Discussing predominantly methodological and axiological aspects, Lester-Irabinna Rigney names ‘resistance as emancipatory imperative’, ‘political integrity’, and the ‘privileging [of] Indigenous voices’ as the key elements of Indigenist Research.

In a similar vein, Cora Weber-Pillax then calls for research methods to be of and for the community, warning that deconstructionism and postructuralism are merely tools, not ends in themselves. She advocates the use of synthesis as a unifying concept based on Indigenous ontologies and epistemologies, and emphasises the importance of personal integrity in research relationships. Finally, Weber-Pillax demands that ‘Indigenous

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62 Martin, “Aboriginal People, Research and Neo-Colonial Futures”.

63 Rigney, “Internationalisation of an Indigenous Anti-Colonial Cultural Critique of Research Methodologies”
research has to benefit the community’ and states that unless it leads to action, ‘it is useless to me or anyone else’.  

Judy Atkinson, on the other hand, translates the Indigenous concept of dadirri into an Indigenous research methodology to use in her research for a PhD thesis. Dadirri, as explicated in English by Ungunmerr, is a ‘special quality, a unique gift of the Aboriginal people. It is inner deep listening and quiet, still awareness – something like what you call contemplation’.  

In a Western sense it translates primarily as a research methodology, yet for Indigenous peoples it is more than that:

> It is a way of life that gathers information in quiet observation and deep listening, builds knowledge through awareness and contemplation, which informs action.  

At the same time, Martin provides a chronology of Aboriginal research in Australia and details how it has been shaped in its various phases by colonial obsessions, attitudes and prejudices. She sees its present form in the transformation from ‘Recent Aboriginal research’ (1990-2000) to ‘Indigenist research’ (2000 +) where research is not only cooperative or focussed on Indigenous knowledge, but relies on, and is shaped by, Indigenous methodologies. Martin then proceeds to document this paradigmatic change by proposing an Indigenist Research model based on Indigenous ways of being (ontology), ways of knowing (epistemology),

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66 Atkinson, Trauma Trails, 16.
67 Martin, “Aboriginal People, Research and Neo-Colonial Futures”.

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and ways of doing (methodology),\textsuperscript{68} which she develops more fully and refines in her PhD. Here, Martin declares ‘the ontological premise of relatedness’ to be core to both appreciating and utilising Indigenist research models.\textsuperscript{69} Knowledge of the self is central in this undertaking, as it allows a dialogue of ‘autonomous but inter-related’ subjects, resulting in an extension of relatedness instead of a replacement of others’ identities.\textsuperscript{70}

Shawn Wilson brings together Indigenous ontology, epistemology, methodology and axiology into an undertaking to conduct research as ceremony, thereby articulating his Indigenous philosophy.\textsuperscript{71} Like Martin, Wilson translates what is already there, but goes further in his paradigmatic differentiation to Western methodologies by collapsing academic distinctions and reducing Indigenous Research to what is at the same time incredibly complex and a fact of life: relying on, understanding, building, and being accountable to relationships.\textsuperscript{72} In other words: ‘relationships don’t shape reality, they \textit{are} reality’.\textsuperscript{73}

\textbf{My Situatedness}

My research is thus informed by two paradigms that together shape the world in which I live, think and act. According to Egon Guba and Yvonna Lincoln, a paradigm is

\textsuperscript{68} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{69} Martin, “Please knock before you enter”, 99.
\textsuperscript{70} Ibid, 206.
\textsuperscript{71} Wilson, “Research as Ceremony”.
\textsuperscript{73} Shawn Wilson, personal communication (Lismore, NSW, 2005).
a set of basic beliefs (or metaphysics) that deals with ultimates or first principles. It represents a worldview that defines, for its holder, the nature of the “world”, the individual’s place in it, and the range of possible relationships to that world and its parts.  

While one of these paradigms, Critical Theory, is concerned with the exposure and transformation of oppressive structures and unequal power relations, the other, Indigenist Research, is determined by egalitarian relatedness and relational accountability. The former represents my cultural background, the latter my adopted home and together they shape my current situatedness at the intersection of Indigenous Studies, Education and Cultural Studies, where I have developed this inquiry.

As this is an Honours thesis, with all the constraints on resources, depth and time that this implies, its scope is necessarily limited. It is not an in-depth field study, nor an all-encompassing theoretical account. The thesis does not propose a singular solution to historically constituted complexities, nor does it suggest that this could actually be achieved by any one person. Instead, what this thesis does is present an initial, tentative exploration of an important yet under-theorised concept. It is only the first step, albeit an important one, in bringing together the discourses of transformative pedagogy and Indigenous education at the ‘cultural interface’ of the contemporary Australian education system.  

I want to be explicit about not seeking to define one universal model of Indigenous pedagogy. As this thesis will argue, localised articulations are needed to provide the basis for understanding the nature and complexities of such

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75 Nakata, “The cultural interface”.
pedagogies. Instead, what this thesis contributes is a challenge to the
dominant discourse as well as an opening up of a discursive space and an
impetus to articulate more fully this important area of Indigenous
philosophies and methodologies.

This thesis comes in the form of a theoretical inquiry and intellectual
engagement with the idea of strengths-based Indigenous pedagogies,
viewed through the discourses of Indigenous education, sovereignty and
transformative pedagogy. Although perhaps unusual in terms of its
disciplinary situatedness (between Indigenous studies, education and
cultural studies) or its analytical approach, it clearly emanates from within
the academy, with all the baggage this entails. Being cognisant of the
limits and dangers of Western epistemology, especially in regard to my
topic, I nevertheless feel that I have to move towards other shores from
within my own cultural context. In this respect, the following inquiry
represents my attempt to establish resonances with other ways of knowing,
being and doing, to relate without replacing and to show that respectful
engagement is possible from particular positions within a diverse Western
framework.

To me, resonance speaks to discourses of sovereignty and transformative
pedagogy, in that it allows both individual autonomy and the confluence of
multiple autonomous actors for a shared but contingent purpose. It does
not erase difference by requiring constant consensus, but allows
autonomous agency to express one’s unique identity. Resonance requires
autonomous actors to come together to share stories, however, and rather than just being an echo chamber, gives a three-dimensional expression to the subsequent amplification of energy that can occur when similar wavelengths overlap. That moment of resonance, however, is fluid, contingent and consensual, and does not remain static, relying on the synchronicity of both frequency, length and direction of both waves. It is a function of the fluid interplay between autonomy and connectivity. It also represents a different path than the idea of ‘incommensurable difference’, as espoused by Moreton-Robinson, for example. As mentioned above, resonance does not erase difference to create sameness; rather, it looks for common understandings in autonomous inter-relatedness.

In terms of situating my approach within a matrix of recent non-Indigenous engagements with Indigenous philosophies, it is useful to contrast it with those of two others. Muecke’s work on Indigenous philosophy relates closely to many of the themes in this thesis. Speaking against the dominant approach to Indigenous research as a dialogue between white experts and black objects, he clarifies that his approach

… is no journey towards any indigenous philosophy that might be out there somewhere in the bush, as if your narrator were just another whitefella on the quest for something to be discovered. So, in order to avoid coming back with that same old story, this philosophy will have to start here, in the middle of things. As for you indigenous communities whose struggles for justice I am at all times mindful of, I am neither borrowing from you nor trying to give you anything, except in dialogue when I quote the words of your scholars and offer

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77 Muecke, Ancient and Modern.
my own. In the end it will be up to the readers to make their own assemblages, just as I have, for here there can be no final word.\textsuperscript{78}

A very different approach may be found in Eugene Stockton’s work on Indigenous spirituality.\textsuperscript{79} While he is appreciative of Indigenous religious thinking, he uses the metaphor of grafting a new (Christian) religion onto the rootstock of Indigenous ideas and understandings and thus finding salvation and turning Australia into a promised land. He perverts a great objective – seriously recognising and engaging Indigenous worldviews, philosophies and value systems – by adopting a “thanks for keeping the seat warm” stance that erases an active Indigenous presence in the present from his methodology. So ultimately, a worthwhile goal ends up leading into an almost classic neo-colonial moment: “well-intentioned” but methodologically and axiologically unsound, epistemologically negligent and ontologically offensive.

The conclusions I have drawn for my own research thus include self-conscious and self-critical engagement with white privilege,\textsuperscript{80} recognition of Indigenous sovereignty and agency, an emphasis on human rights and the importance of not “speaking on behalf of”,\textsuperscript{81} and being explicit about my own background and motivation.\textsuperscript{82} I believe that through embodied, 

\textsuperscript{78} Ibid, vii.
honest, self-critical and respectful dialogue, a non-Indigenous scholar such as myself can engage with ideas about Indigenous pedagogies.
Chapter 3  Context
Introduction

Having outlined the topic and research methodology, this chapter will establish the relationship between the topic and three separate but interrelated discursive fields I have identified as central to my inquiry: intellectual sovereignty, Indigenous education and transformative pedagogy. While intellectual sovereignty refers to unresolved questions around national legitimacy in the aftermath of colonialism, the field of Indigenous education embodies the colonial struggle over control, direction and process. Transformative pedagogy, on the other hand, is concerned with challenging and moving beyond the status quo towards a more equal, just and sustainable future. At the nexus of these three discourses, Indigenous pedagogies are situated in an uneasy tension between their historically conceived racialised nature as a special type of pedagogy for Indigenous learners, and their potential re-articulation as decolonising agents of transformation. I will now consider these three lenses in turn before focussing more fully on Indigenous pedagogies in the next chapter.

Intellectual Sovereignty

Sovereignty is ours. It has not been changed by invasion and Sovereignty must never be changed by invasion.  

Before beginning to discuss and analyse Indigenous education, and Indigenous pedagogies in particular, it is important to revisit one of the central tenets of this thesis: that conversations about Indigenous education

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and Indigenous pedagogies cannot be divorced from the unresolved questions around Indigenous sovereignty. The acknowledgement of and respectful engagement with Indigenous philosophies is inseparably entwined with the recognition of Indigenous intellectual sovereignty and the accompanying need to work towards also recognising other dimensions of Indigenous sovereignty. If Indigenous sovereignty remains unrecognised and non-Indigenous sovereignty unchallenged, discussions about Indigenous education are ultimately stuck in a colonialist paradigm blind to its internal contradictions: that its own legitimacy rests on the denial of Indigenous peoples’ rights. Sovereignty is such a central and enduring concept because it is the foundation upon which all other institutions, processes and systems are built: it is the foundational bedrock of legitimacy. Before discussing intellectual sovereignty in particular, it is useful to consider the concept of sovereignty more broadly as it relates to the law, Indigenous peoples and non-Indigenous Australia.

Sovereignty has been dubbed by some as a ‘bothersome’ concept.\textsuperscript{84} Underneath what appears to be an authoritative term with a pithy definition – ‘the supreme authority in an independent political society’\textsuperscript{85} – lies a wealth of ‘confusion, misunderstanding and disagreement’.\textsuperscript{86} The concept’s origins as a legal and political term lie somewhere in the Christian Europe of the sixteenth and seventeenth century, and are tied to

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\item[\textsuperscript{85}] Leslie Rutherford and Sheila Bone, eds., \textit{Osborn’s Concise Law Dictionary}, 8\textsuperscript{th} ed. (London: Sweet and Maxwell, 1993), 307.
\item[\textsuperscript{86}] Andrew Heywood, \textit{Political Theory: An Introduction}, 2\textsuperscript{nd} ed. (London: Macmillan Press, 1999), 90.
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both the emergence of the modern European nation-state and the parallel
development of a system of rules determining conduct between such
nation-states, i.e. *inter-national law*.\(^{87}\) The Treaty of Westphalia in 1648
‘which ended the Thirty Years War and the political hegemony asserted by
the Roman Catholic Church’ marked a new re-conceptualisation of power
within Europe.\(^{88}\) New political and legal ideas about nation-states,
sovereignty and inter-national law emerged and resulted in a shift of
understanding that regarded territory as the property of the monarch to one
that conceptualised it as jurisdiction: a sphere upon which the state’s will
was to be projected.\(^{89}\)

In the modern sense, therefore, sovereignty is primarily concerned with
territorial jurisdiction – internally *and* externally. For it is internal
sovereignty, or the effective exercise of political power within the territory
of the state, which gives rise to external sovereignty, or the validity of the
title to that territory as against *other* states.\(^{90}\) To highlight the differing
interpretations that persist even today, Holder and Brennan have
established four categories of meaning for sovereignty, including
‘unlimited unilateral [state] competence’, ‘freedom of the state to act
within the area of competence circumscribed by international law’,

\(^{87}\) Philip Falk and Gary Martin, “Misconstruing Indigenous sovereignty: Maintaining the

\(^{88}\) S. James Anaya, *Indigenous Peoples in International Law*, 2\(^{nd}\) ed. (Melbourne: Oxford
University Press, 2004), 19.

\(^{89}\) Sean Brennan, Brenda Gunn and George Williams, *Treaty – What’s sovereignty got to
do with it* (Sydney: Centre for Public Law, UNSW, 2004; available from:
http://www.gtcentre.unsw.edu.au/publications/docs/treatyPapers/Issues_Paper2.pdf);

\(^{90}\) Brennan, Gunn and Williams, *Treaty – What’s sovereignty got to do with it.*
‘territorial jurisdiction’ of a state or ‘international personality’ of a state.\textsuperscript{91} These differences notwithstanding, we must be able to discuss sovereignty at a more meaningfully integrated and culturally pluralistic level. In order to free the term from the language of the state in which it is usually couched, and begin a conversation that focuses on moral as well as legal understandings, there is need to distil the essence of the idea into a complex, yet comprehensible characterisation. For the purposes of this discussion, therefore, sovereignty can perhaps best be understood as the relationship (or title) to land, based on continuous collective human presence and representation of that collective presence and relationship to outsiders.

Since there is now a growing chorus of voices affirming the existence of original Indigenous sovereignty and doubting the legitimacy of the British acquisition of sovereignty,\textsuperscript{92} there is a real degree of uncertainty about the legal and moral foundation of the Australian state. In light of ongoing assertions of Indigenous sovereignty and this legal vulnerability of the Australian state, it appears that resolving the question of sovereignty is of utmost importance to the processes of reconciliation and decolonisation. More poignantly, it would involve conciliation, since original negotiation was the crucial missing element in the first place. As Gary Foley contends,\textsuperscript{93}

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a question mark remains over the fact that Australian parliamentary and judicial systems are still unable to justify the legality of their acquisition of sovereignty over this land. The failure to resolve this issue will ensure that the contest over sovereignty will continue for many generations to come.  

For the Australian state, despite the connotations of uncertainty and vulnerability that are inherent in any negotiation, this is a matter of building a morally and legally secure foundation from which to begin a fairer and less self-conscious future. For Indigenous peoples, it will be a matter of strategy that can only be worked out and decided at a community level: what can be gained and what might be lost by engaging in negotiations with the coloniser. Again, the examples of other indigenous nations around the globe and their experiences with treaty-making might provide useful lessons and food for thought. In regard to the US, Wendy Brady remarks that,

Native Americans have achieved, through warfare of resistance, treaties and the establishment of nation states, the main elements of sovereignty. These include what Wolfley (1999: 293) describes as: “a secure land base, functioning economies, self-government, and cultural vitality”.  

In the absence of official recognition of Indigenous sovereignty in contemporary Australia, many Indigenous people have nevertheless continued to assert and exercise their sovereign rights in numerous contexts and circumstances, even though without due recognition. ‘Aboriginal power’, to use Muecke’s words,

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haunts Australian politics like a spectre. Like the Phantom, the ghost who walks, there are activists out there who are the children and grandchildren of people who refused to lie down and die. Perhaps in the way that Marxism has been the spectre of world politics, Aboriginal power has asserted itself through the patient exercise of sovereignty, intellectual intervention and appeals for justice. And, despite all the struggles, the regular announcements of victory, assimilation, reform or ten point plans, Aboriginal power persists.  

In this context, Indigenous philosophies and legal systems also contain other bases for explaining a people’s relationship to their country and non-Indigenous Australians must realise that their frame of politico-legal reference is not the only one or, indeed, a particularly good one. In the spirit of such plurality of meaning, Birch talks about the need for non-Indigenous Australia to come to the table and reconsider its place within an Indigenous social and moral context, and alludes to ‘principles of Indigenous sovereignty, amongst which are a respect for Indigenous knowledge systems and the historical landscapes from which they were created’. Furthermore, as Watson reminds us,

Aboriginal sovereignty is different from state sovereignty because it embraces diversity, and focuses on inclusivity rather than exclusivity. Aboriginal sovereignty poses a solution to white supremacy in its deflation of power.

Against this backdrop of multiple interpretations of the meaning of sovereignty, Rigney has used the concept of intellectual sovereignty to explain that by making Indigenous knowledges, identities and scholarship visible, Indigenous people’s humanness also moves into the spotlight and can then be used to challenge colonial arrangements and unequal power.

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95 Muecke, *Ancient and Modern*, 120.  
96 Birch, “’The invisible fire’,” in *Sovereign Subjects*, ed. Moreton-Robinson, 114.  
relations. In a similar vein, Martin has argued that Indigenist research can become a site of realising Indigenous sovereignty through moving within sovereign processes and knowledges and reclaiming these vis-à-vis the state. The discourse of intellectual sovereignty thus contains both the unanswered questions about the legitimacy of the Australian state as well as the transformative potential of intellectual reclamation in moving beyond colonial ideas and practices.

**Indigenous education**

The discourse of *Indigenous education* in Australia has been framed almost exclusively in terms of mainstream education for *Indigenous students*, with the corollary of teaching all students something *about Indigenous Australia*. Despite good intent, this is ultimately an objectifying deficit-view that sees Indigenous students as having educational problems or issues that require remedying or addressing. Thus, the NSW *Aboriginal Education Policy*, for example, states its unequivocal goals as:

- To promote the educational achievements of Aboriginal students.
- To educate all students about Aboriginal Australia.

As Foucault reminds us, knowledge and power are inextricably linked through discourses, which actively delineate and shape the reality of

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99 Martin, “Please knock before you enter”, 205.

100 *Aboriginal Education Policy*, 1.
individuals’ identity within society. In this particular discourse, Indigenous education is positioned as somehow different from “normal”, mainstream education and requiring “special” policies, programs and practices to address the present and continuing “underachievement”. The emphasis on the link between difference and failure is expressed in the “cannot” philosophy identified by Margaret Valadin. She observes that despite various changes in Indigenous education over the past few decades today’s children have been told repeatedly that they cannot learn in a mainstream school; they cannot work on their own; they cannot study at tertiary colleges on their own or in mainstream courses. Consequently the future options of our young people are severely curtailed by this “cannot” philosophy. This same “cannot” philosophy denies our young people the sense of achievement and reward to be gained from overcoming hardship, so much a part of our traditional heritage.

In order to make sense of recent changes as well as continuities Cathryn McConaghy provides a useful framework for analysing various approaches to Indigenous education. While her particular focus is Indigenous adult education, the framework she has developed can also be applied to the case of Indigenous pedagogies more generally. Central to McConaghy’s analysis is the concept of ‘culturalism’, or the ‘formation of categories of cultural difference’. McConaghy specifically identifies scientific

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102 Margaret Valadin, _Aboriginal Education – Development or Destruction: The Issues and Challenges that have to be recognised. The Sixth Frank Archibald Memorial Lecture_ (Armidale: University of New England, 1992), 8.

103 Cathryn McConaghy, _Rethinking Indigenous Education: Culturalism, Colonialism and the Politics of Knowing_ (Flaxton: Post Pressed, 2000).

104 McConaghy, _Rethinking Indigenous Education_, 43. Here, McConaghy builds on Edward Said’s concept of Orientalism as the production, organisation and legitimisation of discourses of knowing about ‘the Orient’ and more specifically on Bain Attwood’s adaptation of this idea to the Australian colonial context in the form of Aboriginalism. See Edward Said, _Orientalism_. New pref. ed. (London: Penguin, 2003); Bain Attwood and John Arnold (Eds), _Knowledge, power and Aborigines_ (Bundoora, Vic: LaTrobe University Press, 1992. Attwood’s exploration of Aboriginalism strikes a cord with
culturalism and its marriage to anthropology and cross-cultural psychology as crucial to gaining the epistemic authority of the scientific method. This relationship also explains the crossing over between anthropological research and educational theory development which this thesis will discuss later on. McConaghy concludes that it is scientific culturalism which has been a central tenet of all major traditions in Indigenous education since the 1930s. Qualifying this observation, McConaghy discusses the notion

... that a scientifically rigorous study of Indigenous “culture”, or the results of such a study, are fundamental to any issue in Indigenous education. Further, this description of Indigenous culture enters the field as a set of normative narratives: as “already read”…

In her subsequent argument, McConaghy identifies the major traditions of Indigenous education as pastoral welfarism, assimilationism, cultural relativism and radicalism. She argues that these divisions are thematic and parallel, rather than strictly temporal and linear, although they also reflect the changes in attitude towards Indigenous people throughout the twentieth century. In consequence, this means that while a later approach might reject or stand in opposition to pre-existing ones, it does not simply supersede them but adds to the repertoire of competing ideas. This analysis of dominant conceptual frameworks in Indigenous education roughly corresponds with an established model such as Gary Partington’s who identified traditions of segregation, assimilation and what he calls ‘the

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Langton who discusses the construction and representation of Aboriginality through the media. See Marcia Langton, Well, I heard it on the radio and I saw it on the television: an essay for the Australian Film Commission on the politics and aesthetics of filmmaking by and about Aboriginal people and things (North Sydney: The Commission, 1993).

105 McConaghy, Rethinking Indigenous Education, 85.
shift to a cultural model’ and ‘the empowerment model’.\textsuperscript{106} However, the significant difference between the two analyses is McConaghy’s argument that, despite their fundamental differences in methods and intentions, all these major traditions share the unquestioned assumption of a divide between Indigenous and non-Indigenous people along the lines of a “two race” binary: an existential fault line of cultural incommensurability. The next section will briefly explore each of the four traditions outlined by McConaghy and attempt to locate some present day-examples within them. It must be noted, however, that often various approaches are working in concert and individuals make strategic use of opportunities to effect change by drawing on the subversive potential of seemingly conservative traditions.

Pastoral welfarism is grounded in the civilising mission of colonialism and assumptions of Indigenous incapacity, which can only be remedied by specific interventions of white experts, thus positioning Indigenous people ‘as the hapless victims of the twentieth century’.\textsuperscript{107} Pastoral welfarism is perhaps not as common (or overt) today, but can be observed in any educational project that begins with an assumption of student lack and requires the intervention of white experts.


\textsuperscript{107} McConaghy, \textit{Rethinking Indigenous Education}, 149.
The assimilationist tradition in Indigenous education is characterised by what McConaghy calls ‘colonial mimicry’. In this tradition, Indigenous people are urged to better and remake themselves as “honorary whites”, that is, become ‘almost the same but not quite’, as an underlying view of inferiority persists despite rhetoric to the contrary. It is characterised by citizenship training, vocationalism and the desire by the dominant culture to contain diversity. As such, assimilationism is a powerful tradition that is yet to be overcome, especially since its resurgence over the past decade of conservative rule.

Cultural relativism, while breaking with previous traditions and rejecting a cultural deficit view of Indigenous people as incapable, reinforces notions of cultural differences by locating culture as the key to both explaining educational failure and developing pedagogical solutions. It was this change in thinking and tentative appreciation of Indigenous cultures that led to the first discussions about Indigenous pedagogies in the 1980s. Partington argues that

> [t]he move to cultural models for the provision of education represented a landmark in Indigenous education. While these models did not ensure empowerment of Indigenous people, they did at last acknowledge the validity of the culture of the people.

Today, cultural relativism is probably the most dominant concept in Indigenous education in Australia and incorporates a variety of approaches, including one based on equity and another based on reform.

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108 Ibid, 152.
109 Ibid, 156.
While Geoff Munns,\textsuperscript{111} and Gary Partington and Jan Gray\textsuperscript{112} share some of its views, the most vocal proponent of the equity approach is Chris Sarra, an influential Indigenous educator who has worked as a teacher, principal, administrator and lecturer. His stance is based on his personal experience at Queensland’s Cherbourg State School where, as the school’s principal, he led a team of dedicated teachers and turned around the school’s statistics from rock bottom to state average within three years.\textsuperscript{113} He argues that the solution to addressing the crisis in Indigenous education lies predominantly in higher expectations of the capacity of Indigenous children, promoting positive Indigenous identities, disciplined school environments, and strong leadership.\textsuperscript{114} Sarra contends that it is up to teachers and administrators in each school to make a difference, and has founded the Indigenous Education Leadership Institute to support them in their work.\textsuperscript{115}

\textsuperscript{111} Geoff Munns, “’They just can’t hack that’. Aboriginal students, their teachers and responses to schools and classrooms,” in \textit{Perspectives on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education}, ed. Gary Partington (South Melbourne: Thomson Social Science Press, 1998), 171-188.
\textsuperscript{112} Gary Partington and Jan Grey, “Classroom management and Aboriginal students,” in \textit{Reform and Resistance in Aboriginal Education: The Australian experience}, eds. Quentin Beresford and Gary Partington (Crawley: University of Western Australia Press, 2003), 164-184.
\textsuperscript{113} Chris Sarra, “Rigorous Learning Outcomes – The right of every student,” (keynote address to the \textit{Yapaneyepuk Indigenous Education Conference}, Melbourne, 27\textsuperscript{th}-28\textsuperscript{th} May 2007).
\textsuperscript{114} Chris Sarra, \textit{Young and Black and Deadly: Strategies for improving outcomes for Indigenous Students} (Deakin West, ACT: Australian College of Educators, 2003).
The reformist approach to Indigenous education, espoused by Robert Andrews and Paul Hughes,\(^\text{116}\) is based on the argument that in order to improve outcomes for Indigenous students the state needs to inject Indigenous culture into the school system. This should be done through training more Indigenous teachers, teaching non-Indigenous teachers about Indigenous cultures and histories, offering Indigenous Studies as a distinct senior level school subject and providing Indigenous perspectives and content throughout the entire curriculum. In this approach, the onus is on the State’s education department with regard to curriculum design and on tertiary institutions in terms of attracting more Indigenous teaching students as well as providing Indigenous perspectives to all teaching students. The “Dare to lead” program sits within this approach.\(^\text{117}\)

Indigenous education policy in Australia straddles the boundary between a comfortable cultural relativist equity-based approach and the pressure exerted by proponents of cultural relativist reform in that it seeks to work within an “access and equity” paradigm while also giving at least token recognition to community participation and consultation. The second prong of Indigenous education policy, teaching \textit{about} Indigenous people, is connected most strongly to the reform drive and the conviction that more knowledge will reduce the prevalence of prejudice and racism.\(^\text{118}\)


\(^\text{117}\) Australian Principals Associations Professional Development Council, \textit{Dare to lead}.

\(^\text{118}\) See the \textit{National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Policy} (NAEP), Australian Government Department of Education, Science and Training (available from https://www.dest.gov.au/archive/schools/indigenous/aep.htm); accessed 5 March 2008; The NAEP finds its equivalents in respective State-based policies, such as the NSW
Not convinced that the mainstream school system will be fully able to improve educational outcomes for Indigenous students, proponents of the radical approach advocate for separate schooling arrangements for Indigenous Australian children that reflect Indigenous culture as well as mainstream curriculum content. Stephen Harris’s two-way model of schooling is the most prominent example of this approach, however there are a number of successful independent Indigenous schools across Australia, such as Worawa Aboriginal College in Healesville that operate in similar ways.

Summarising the above, it becomes clear that despite their diversity, all of these traditions of Indigenous education aim to work towards addressing Indigenous educational disadvantage within a culturalist framework of incommensurability. While most focus on matters of curriculum, staffing and school structure, there are very few which focus explicitly on pedagogy, let alone transformative pedagogy. However, the field of transformative pedagogy is as crucial as the discourse of intellectual sovereignty to any attempt at re-conceptualising Indigenous pedagogies as strengths-based approaches founded on sovereign Indigenous philosophies and methodologies.

*Aboriginal Education Policy*. It is beyond the scope of this thesis to discuss all of these policies.


**Transformative Pedagogy**

The discussions about Aboriginal learning styles and Indigenous pedagogies over the past two decades have represented a welcome boost to educational debate since, in contrast to curriculum development, pedagogy has historically languished as the forgotten cousin of educational theory. In Australia, pedagogy is heavily under-theorised and when discussed at all, is usually talked about in regard to specific techniques or strategies of instructions, rather than in terms of underlying values and theories. This contrasts with curriculum development, which has often been at the forefront of educational debate and central to discussions about national identity and values in education.\(^{121}\) In Australian educational research, it appears that educational content – the *what* of teaching – seems to be valued not only above, but at the almost total expense of, educational process – the *how*. A result of this is the ‘incredible “continuity in practice”’ Gore refers to, which serves to maintain existing power and privilege within society.\(^{122}\)

When discussing current approaches to pedagogy, it is useful to remember that the etymological roots of the English words *pedagogy* and *pedagogue* go back to the Ancient Greeks. There, the *paidagogos* was the slave who escorted the sons of the upper classes to their various private teachers and

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\(^{121}\) See, for example, the recent discussions about a national curriculum, the literature used in English courses and the content of a national history syllabus, all covered extensively in the national media.

\(^{122}\) Gore, “Who has the authority to speak about practice”. 
generally supervised them.\textsuperscript{123} This is an interesting revelation of the openly racist, patriarchal and class-conscious foundations of Western education, a legacy which, despite the great changes that have occurred over the past forty years, endures with explicit foci on discipline and classroom management that are such a key feature of school education today.

Contemporary conceptions of pedagogy are expressed in most dictionaries rather simplistically as ‘the art of […] teaching’\textsuperscript{124} or ‘the science of teaching’.\textsuperscript{125} However, contrary to the implied equivalence, this duality is an important distinction, not a synonym. In Australia, the concept of pedagogy as the \textit{art}, as opposed to the \textit{science}, of teaching is intellectually neglected and heavily under-theorised, perhaps even un-theorised, especially, as mentioned before, when compared to discussions about curriculum, school structure or funding. Rather, we tend to restrict ourselves to responding to behaviourist, cognitivist and constructivist theories of learning based on research in the discipline of psychology, rather than education. In pursuing ideals in an instructional framework of procedures, tools and strategies, we miss the point that pedagogy is both the art \textit{and} the science of teaching. Therefore, while the science of teaching can be understood as particular strategies and methods, this thesis’ focus is explicitly on the \textit{art} of teaching – the philosophical


\textsuperscript{124} \textit{The Macquarie Concise Dictionary: Australia’s National Dictionary}, 4\textsuperscript{th} ed. (North Ryde, NSW: Macquarie Library, 2006), 893.

\textsuperscript{125} Bruce Moore, ed., \textit{The Australian Concise Oxford Dictionary}. 4\textsuperscript{th} ed. South (Melbourne: Oxford University Press, 2003), 1036.
paradigms, the underlying values and the theories about the process of teaching.

The underpinning principles of mainstream Western pedagogy today appear to be normalised and hidden, and have become visible only by critique. Henry Giroux points to the ‘atheoretical, ahistorical, and unproblematic view of pedagogy’ that currently prevails in curriculum development.\textsuperscript{126} The Marxist critique of education has revealed the school’s function within the modern nation-state as a key site for reproducing existing economic inequities, normalising oppression and assimilating all children into the dominant materialist value system.\textsuperscript{127} Establishing education as one of the important means by which those in power perpetuate the injustices of the status quo, Freire identified ‘the [dominant] “banking” concept of education as an instrument of oppression’,\textsuperscript{128} whereby students are made to conform through discipline, rote memorisation and repetitive tasks controlled by the teacher.\textsuperscript{129} Other metaphors, employed to describe mainstream pedagogy, are those of the classroom as a factory managed by behavioural psychology, standardisation and emphasis on content, and as an incarnation of Bentham’s panopticon, where constant surveillance results in self-disciplining behaviour.\textsuperscript{130}

\textsuperscript{128} Freire, \textit{Pedagogy of the Oppressed}, 7.
\textsuperscript{129} Ibid, 52-67.
Against this deterministic view, however, critical educators such as Giroux, Magnus O. Bassey and Joe Kincheloe point to the education system as both a site of oppression and resistance, thereby alluding to the transformative potential of pedagogy in challenging and overcoming unequal power relations. Freire, too, contrasts the oppressive models of schooling with a ‘problem-posing concept of education as an instrument of liberation’. Today, critical educators focus increasingly on the possibilities for resistance, counter-hegemony and cultural change that can arise from dialogical and dialectic pedagogical practice, both against and within Western culture.

Apart from critical pedagogy, there are of course numerous other transformative pedagogies that seek to challenge and overcome both dominant educational processes as well as the inequities of the wider social status quo. Transformative adult education, or androgogy, for example, is based on self-directed learning, reflected practice and a conscious, internally transformative process. The field of environmental pedagogy, on the other hand, attaches value to localised and traditional knowledge, immersion in nature and identification with place and

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131 Giroux, Pedagogy and the politics of hope; Magnus O. Bassey, Western education and political domination in Africa: a study in critical and dialogical pedagogy (Westport, CT: Bergin & Garvey, 1999); Joe L. Kincheloe, Critical pedagogy primer (New York: Peter Lang, c2005).
132 Freire, Pedagogy of the Oppressed, 7.
community. Transformative approaches to environmental pedagogy have been characterised as operating within a framework of relationality, reciprocity and integrated, purpose-driven projects that include methods such as peer mentoring, experiential and community-based education projects.

Within a human rights-based discourse, as with many others, the development of transformative pedagogy is concerned with the actualisation of the full human potential, rather than just an instrumentalist view of employability and the maintenance of hierarchical social norms. The notion of “consideracy” has been used along with literacy and numeracy to give the concept some axiological shape, while other approaches have focused their attention on ways to facilitate the practice of being human in the classroom as well as on student involvement in educational decision-making.

This brief but eclectic overview of various instances of transformative pedagogies serves to highlight the diversity of approaches as well as the underlying similarities in practice and theory. Predominantly, transformative pedagogy aspires to provide a richer and more nuanced education by actively involving students in conscientisation and decision-

135 McRae, Outdoor and environmental education; Smith and Williams, “Introduction” in Ecological Education in Action, eds. Smith and Williams, 1-18.
136 Sobel, Place-based education.
making in regard to their own learning as well as their position within the wider society.\textsuperscript{139} It is therefore usually aligned with a larger political, social or environmental cause. These examples and their context are important for discussions about Indigenous pedagogies, as the transformative dimension of any re-conceptualisation speaks to their potential benefit for all learners. This further entails a move away from a pedagogical deficit view of Indigenous learners based on a “target group” approach towards a sovereign and transformative conceptualisation of Indigenous pedagogies as having potential ‘remedial benefit for all learners’.\textsuperscript{140} Rather than characterising this benefit in terms of addressing perceived student failure, Woods understands it as repairing the damaging impact of mainstream Western pedagogy on communities, environments and student learning.\textsuperscript{141}

**Summary**

The preceding discussion has underlined the importance of re-thinking Indigenous pedagogies in light of their situatedness within the discourses of intellectual sovereignty, Indigenous education and transformative pedagogies. Several consequences flow from this discussion. Firstly, Indigenous pedagogies must be interrogated as to their respect for and relationship with Indigenous sovereignties which have never been ceded. Secondly, Indigenous pedagogies must articulate their position in regard to


\textsuperscript{140} Glenn Woods, personal communication, Lismore, NSW, 2003.

\textsuperscript{141} Ibid.
a discourse of Indigenous education that is dominated by a problem-, failure- and needs-based perception of Indigenous people and, by extension, Indigenous cultures. Thirdly, Indigenous pedagogies have to be re-considered in light of their transformative potential to challenge the reproduction of hegemonies, rather than functioning as an assimilationist tool to “improve outcomes”. Together, these three lenses provide a context for Indigenous pedagogies that is highly political, value-laden and concerned with fundamental arguments about justice, human rights and decolonisation.
Chapter 4  Discussion
Introduction

Situated at the nexus of the discourses of sovereignty, Indigenous education and transformative pedagogy, Indigenous pedagogies are located in a matrix of shifting values, priorities and directions. Rather than attempting to provide a complete and detailed description, examination and analysis of all previous articulations of Indigenous pedagogies, this chapter will sketch the development of various ideas, trends and directions in relation the topic by critiquing three key representative examples in regard to their underlying paradigmatic assumptions. In particular, it will focus on the entwining of anthropological theories regarding the existence of uniquely Aboriginal learning styles and political desires to improve outcomes for Indigenous learners by developing a culturally specific pedagogy tailored to better meet their educational needs.

Harris and Aboriginal Learning Styles

The development of Aboriginal learning styles theory and attempts to articulate an Aboriginal pedagogy operated in tandem during the 1980s to contribute to the culturally relativist challenge to the then dominant directions in Indigenous education – pastoral welfarism and assimilationism.142 The concept of distinctive Aboriginal learning styles has its genesis in the ethnographical fieldwork Stephen Harris undertook in the Yolngu community of Milingimbi in north-eastern Arnhem Land in the

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142 McConaghy, Re-thinking Indigenous Education. See discussion in previous chapter.
late 1970s. As a non-Indigenous educational anthropologist, Harris observed Yolngu life and wrote about what he identified as a set of unique Yolngu learning styles, such as learning through observation and imitation, personal trial-and-error, real-life performance, focus on context-specific skills and orientation towards the person. He then contrasted these with what he perceived to be Western traditions of learning. The resulting binary characterisation of Yolngu versus Western learning styles was subsequently taken to apply to all Indigenous peoples and was widely used to explain educational failure through cultural difference throughout Australia. Harris was motivated by a desire to describe Indigenous cultures as equal but different to Western culture and thus explain the education system’s failure in regard to Indigenous students in terms of its inability to cater to cultural difference, rather than Indigenous students’ inability to learn.

In his 1990 book, *Two Way Aboriginal Schooling*, Harris reflects on his previous anthropological research into Aboriginal learning styles and discusses the incapacity of current schooling arrangements to deliver outcomes for Indigenous students in terms of a culture clash. Although mostly referring to Yolngu, he widens his discussion to speak about a homogenous ‘remote Aboriginal culture’ in terms of its ‘irreconcilable incompatibility’ with Western culture. In order to illustrate this point, Harris sets up sets of binary opposites between Indigenous and European

144 Harris, *Culture and Learning*.
145 McConaghy, *Re-thinking Indigenous Education*.
146 Harris, *Two-way Aboriginal Schooling*, 43.
worldviews, such as ‘religious versus positivist thinking’, ‘relatedness versus compartmentalisation’, ‘cyclic versus linear concepts of time’, ‘being versus doing’ and ‘closed versus open society’. Having established such a binary divide, but conscious of the fact that many Indigenous people want access to what he calls a “Western” education, he proposes a “Two Way” schooling model for Indigenous children that rests on the pillar of ‘culture domain separation’, whereby the Aboriginal and the Western domain are clearly separated in terms of curriculum, language and pedagogy in order to ‘preserve Aboriginal identity because the Aboriginal child would not be learning Western culture by unconscious osmosis’. 

Harris’s work was subsequently taken up and expanded on by other anthropologists and educators to explain the continuous failure of Indigenous education to achieve better outcomes for Indigenous students. Michael Christie’s PhD thesis on “The Classroom World of the Aboriginal Child” marked the starting point to his exploration of the dissonance experienced by Indigenous children in mainstream education. Like Harris, Christie focused on the difference and incommensurability between Indigenous and Western worldviews. Merridy Malin, another anthropologist drawing on both Harris and Christie, applied their analyses to an urban Indigenous classroom to confirm the existence of distinct

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147 Harris, *Two-way Aboriginal Schooling*, 22, 24, 26, 28, 31, 34, 36, 38.
148 Harris, *Two-way Aboriginal Schooling*, 64.
Indigenous ways of learning and further highlight the clash of values, expectations and behaviours.\textsuperscript{150} Her work was subsequently extended by Sandra Hudspith who also focused on urban Aboriginality and the development of needs-based reactive pedagogies.\textsuperscript{151} Despite their different takes on the character of particular learning styles, the representativeness of Yolnu experiences in terms of other Indigenous peoples and the subsequent complexities in their interaction with the Australian school system, they all share the argument that there exist distinct Indigenous learning styles that are not successfully addressed in the mainstream school system.

Their argument and proposed solutions rested on the assumption that all Indigenous learners share these learning style characteristics. Thus, they presuppose homogeneity across diverse Indigenous populations, not only in a collective sense of culturally constructed shared meanings and values, but in individual learning personalities, and have been roundly criticised for this by scholars such as Anne-Katrin Eckerman in the so-called “learning styles debate” throughout the late 1980s and 1990s.\textsuperscript{152} In summarising the research of Harris and Christie at Milingimbi and Davidson at Bamyili, Helen Bell also warns against generalising results


across all Indigenous cultures and neglecting individual learning strategies.\textsuperscript{153} Christine Nicholls, Vicki Crowley and Ron Watt propose that these learning styles are neither exclusively Indigenous, nor should they be emphasised at the expense of socio-political struggles.\textsuperscript{154} In separate responses, authors such as Bronwyn Parkin and Partington caution against oversimplification of issues around Indigenous learning and achievement in theories of culture, critical education and material deprivation.\textsuperscript{155} Shane Williams is most adamant that while a ‘target group’ approach to social justice in Indigenous education is important to combat broader issues of entrenched poverty and historical disempowerment, it is severely limiting in its application to pedagogy. It is worth quoting him here at length:

\begin{quote}
Past responses by education authorities to address the educational needs of Indigenous people have focused upon developing separate target group strategies that frequently ignored the way the different dimensions of inequality are interrelated. This perpetuated an assumption that an individual’s capacity to learn is based on single dimensions of class, race, ethnicity, gender or disability. During this period, theories of distinct “Aboriginal learning styles” emerged, which conveniently focused school failure and school alienation on the Indigenous student rather than on the capacity of the teacher to teach to difference, valuing the diversity of students’ biographies and individual approaches to learning all children bring to the classroom.\textsuperscript{156}
\end{quote}

Undoubtedly, the work of Harris and other anthropologists was significant at the time in naming and alerting educators to the existence of diverse

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learning styles. By doing so, they challenged the entrenched cultural
deficit view of Indigenous people as lacking in comparison to white
Australians and replaced it with an articulation of distinct Indigenous
cultural differences that were not catered for by the education system.
However, apart from the criticisms mentioned above, there are several
other problematic assumptions inherent in their approach and some
awkward consequences that flow from it.

Firstly, there is the anthropological construction of an “other”, which can
then be described and spoken for. Scholars such as Martin Nakata,
Michael Dodson and Sonja Kurtzer have provided a potent critique of this
colonial discipline and its claim to representation, which is founded on a
totalising worldview that seeks to disguise its own particularity by
mistaking its values for universal ones, denying the subjective nature and
political motivation of its work, and emphasising its ability to comprehend
a people’s life in its entirety.\footnote{Nakata, \textit{Disciplining the Savages: Savaging the Disciplines}. See also Martin Nakata,
Dodson, “The end in the beginning: re(de)fining Aboriginality,” in \textit{Blacklines –
Contemporary Critical Writing by Indigenous Australians}, ed. Michele Grossman
(Carlton: Melbourne University Press, 2003), 25-42; Sonja Kurtzer, “Wandering Girl:
who defines ‘authenticity’ in Aboriginal literature,” in \textit{Blacklines – Contemporary
Critical Writing by Indigenous Australians}, ed. Michele Grossman (Carlton: Melbourne
University Press, 2003), 181-188.}

Secondly, their work entrenched a
dominant cultural difference view that relied on emphasising reductive
inter-group difference and intra-group homogeneity to the exclusion of
considering continuities, discontinuities and convergences within and
between cultures. Thirdly, it constructed and applied exclusive notions of
Aboriginality based on the ideal of unchanging remote “traditional”
communities, with urban Aboriginality “contaminated” by Western influence a second best. Not only does this remote/urban binary deny Indigenous agency and cultural fluidity in interacting with other cultures, but it sets up and re-affirms a hierarchy of authenticity in which Indigenous claims for sovereign legitimacy are benchmarked against colonial fantasies of the noble savage. Finally, although the findings were supposed to have debunked the colonial cultural deficit-view of Indigenous peoples as inherently incapable of achieving at Western schools, their generalisation appears to have unconsciously strengthened this view by assigning differences in learning styles solely on the basis of a fixed homogenous ethnicity.

**Hughes and Aboriginal Pedagogy**

Along with Harris, the connection between theories of Aboriginal learning styles and the development of an Aboriginal pedagogy is exemplified by Paul Hughes. Hughes is an Indigenous academic, teacher and educational activist who in the early 1980s was inspired by Harris’s work on learning styles and in turn promoted it beyond the local context Harris had initially focused on. Pointing out that Harris had originally never intended for his work to apply outside of Milingimbi, Hughes states that he ‘take[s] full responsibility for broadening the concept across Australia for purely political motives’.158 This statement and the fact that Hughes later wrote the foreword for Harris’s book, *Two Way Aboriginal Schooling*, which had

come about as an initiative instigated by Hughes and some of his colleagues, highlights the interconnections between the two concepts.\textsuperscript{159}

As the president of the National Aboriginal Education Committee (NAEC), Hughes challenged the Committee in 1983 to develop a framework for an Aboriginal pedagogy in order to provide an alternative to ‘[t]he theories and methodologies used in education [which] are designed by and for middle class Australians of Anglo-Saxon extraction’.\textsuperscript{160} In his presidential address, Hughes also explicitly criticised the cultural deficit view inherent in Indigenous education and its assumptions of ‘indigenous [sic] peoples’ lack rather than their difference and strength’.\textsuperscript{161} Consequently, the NAEC resolved at its 1985 Conference that schools and teachers must

\begin{quote}
…and develop an education theory and pedagogy that takes into account Aboriginal epistemology. Only when this occurs will education for our people be a process that builds Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures and identity […] To be effective […] skills and learning must be acquired in harmony with our own cultural values, identity and choice of lifestyle, whether we reside in an urban, traditional community or homeland centre.\textsuperscript{162}
\end{quote}

Hughes’s initiative gathered momentum and in 1986, the then Curriculum Development Centre (CDC) of DEET launched the “Aboriginal Pedagogy Project” to further investigate and catalogue Aboriginal learning styles,

\begin{footnotes}
\footnote{See Paul Hughes and Bob Teasdale, “Foreword” in Stephen Harris, \textit{Two Way Aboriginal Schooling: Education and cultural survival} (Canberra: Aboriginal Studies Press, 1990), ix-xi.}
\footnote{Hughes, “A Call for an Aboriginal Pedagogy,” in \textit{Aboriginal Ways of Learning}, eds Paul Hughes, Arthur J. More and Mark Williams (Adelaide: Paul Hughes, 2004), 200.}
\footnote{Ibid, 201.}
\end{footnotes}
develop and test pedagogical models that corresponded to these styles and make the findings available as a resource for teachers of Aboriginal students.\textsuperscript{163} Unfortunately, in 1988, the CDC was dissolved and replaced by a new body which abandoned the project uncompleted.\textsuperscript{164}

However, a paper commissioned by the project and written by Andrews and Hughes provided an interim summary of its findings, chief among which was the conclusion that ‘[t]here is not sufficient evidence to draw an absolute conclusion that an Aboriginal learning style exists’.\textsuperscript{165} Nevertheless, Andrews and Hughes argued that Indigenous students do ‘differ significantly from other students as a result of culturally-derived characteristics, including learning styles’ and proposed further investigation of a range of teaching methodologies and ways of imparting knowledge that built on ‘traditional approaches to education’ and were thought to be principally benefiting Indigenous students.\textsuperscript{166} Among others, these included ‘providing for learning by observation and imitation’, ‘providing for learning by repetition’, ‘developing strong teacher-pupil relationships’ and ‘emphasising cooperation and group processes’.\textsuperscript{167} While these strategies were suggested in order to ‘respond to the particular learning style characteristics of Aboriginal students’,\textsuperscript{168} the authors finished their paper by cautioning that despite common roots in ‘traditional

\textsuperscript{163} Hughes, More and Williams, eds., \textit{Aboriginal Ways of Learning}, 9.
\textsuperscript{164} During a rearrangement of State-Federal education relations at the time, a new body, the Curriculum Corporation, was created under the auspices of the Ministerial Council of Education, Employment, Training and Youth Affairs (MCEETYA).
\textsuperscript{165} Andrews and Hughes, “Toward a theoretical framework,” in \textit{Aboriginal Ways of Learning}, eds. Hughes, More and Williams, 229.
\textsuperscript{166} Ibid, 247-248.
\textsuperscript{167} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{168} Ibid, 248.
culture’, the variations between different regions and sectors of the Indigenous community preclude one homogenous model, and called for further research.\(^{169}\)

After the original project was abandoned, Hughes continued to ‘search for best practice in teaching Aboriginal students’ and in the mid-1990s began collaborating with Canadian academic Arthur More in the ARC-funded “Aboriginal Ways of Learning (AbWoL) project”.\(^{170}\) Their findings mirrored the results of Hughes’ earlier work in that they could not conclusively establish the existence of a single Aboriginal learning style, but did find a range of recurrent learning styles likely to be common among Indigenous students. Becoming aware of the culturalist assumptions underlying their work and the danger that these could be used to once again stereotype Indigenous learners, their statements increasingly reflected a more qualified assessment. For example, they argue that,

\[\ldots\text{while there is not evidence for a single Aboriginal learning style, there are some recurrent learning styles which are more likely among Aboriginal students. Similarly there are also recurrent learning styles which appear to be more likely among Non-Aboriginal students. However there are wide variations amongst individuals in any cultural group and these must be taken into account.}\(^{171}\]

In their final assessment, they conclude that not only Indigenous children, but all students obviously ‘benefited from being exposed to a range of learning options’.\(^{172}\) While still clinging to the importance of relationships

\(^{169}\) Ibid, 249.
\(^{170}\) Hughes, More and Williams, eds., Aboriginal Ways of Learning, 15.
\(^{171}\) Hughes and More, “‘Aboriginal ways of learning’ - Learning styles and needs of Aboriginal students”.
between ‘cultures, learning patterns and appropriate pedagogies’. Hughes ultimately recognised that what he was revealing through his research, rather than a distinct Aboriginal learning style was the existence of a variety of learning styles within all learners. He concludes that paying attention to this diversity of learning styles and developing strategies to address them will benefit students in terms of deepening their engagement, playing to their strengths and helping them improve on their weaknesses.

While not downplaying the importance of these insights and the positive results they may carry for many students, Hughes was ultimately unsuccessful in making the case for one or several Indigenous pedagogies as he approached the issue from a needs-based instead of a strengths-based pedagogical framework. He sought to pinpoint Indigenous students’ needs and then develop pedagogies that addressed them, instead of looking at the strengths of sovereign Indigenous philosophies and teaching methodologies, and considering how they might be able to offer pedagogical alternatives to the dominant mainstream system for all learners. However, Hughes’s lasting impact comes down to two things: firstly, he emphasised the importance of educational process, when most of the dominant discourse was and still is focused on content in the form of curriculum. Secondly and perhaps contrary to his original intentions, he promoted the existence and recognition of a diverse range of learning

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173 Ibid, 281.
174 Hughes, More and Williams, eds., Aboriginal Ways of Learning, 18.
styles within as well as between different cultural groups and thus helped to dissolve the reductive anthropological binary of homogenous group identity that has held back understanding of the complexity of contemporary Indigenous and non-Indigenous lives at ‘the cultural interface’.  

**D-BATE and Aboriginal Pedagogy**

The third and final example I will analyse is an early attempt to develop Indigenous pedagogies through the Deakin-Batchelor Aboriginal Teacher Education Program (D-BATE). This collaborative venture between Deakin University and Batchelor College in the Northern Territory was designed to promote Aboriginal Education Assistants’ access to tertiary education.

In the late 1980s, the D-BATE program enlisted the help of researchers from Deakin University and provided students in the program with the opportunity to engage in action research projects that examined the connection of their teaching practice to ideas about Indigenous pedagogies. These projects were concerned with remote communities in the Top End of the Northern Territory and their aim was to support Aboriginal teachers who were working to create distinctive forms of pedagogy which were not merely acceptable to Aboriginal people, but which made an explicit effort to test pedagogies which realised Aboriginal people’s aims for self-determination.  

To promote the work and contribute to contemporary discussions about Aboriginal pedagogy, some examples of these action research projects on  

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176 Nakata, “The cultural Interface”.  
Indigenous pedagogies were published in 1991 in the book *Aboriginal Pedagogy – Aboriginal teachers speak out*.\(^{178}\)

Inspired by a dialectic Freirean view of education as an instrument of liberation,\(^{179}\) many of the students set out to develop community-controlled education programs that focused on, for example, ‘teach[ing] the Tiwi people Tiwi knowledge in a Tiwi learning style’ with outdoor activities centred around Tiwi concerns and involving everyone as both teacher and learner.\(^{180}\) In a similar vein, Dayngawa Ngurruwutthun examined how Ganma philosophy could be used to indigenise a mainstream school curriculum and pedagogy in order to arrive at a ‘Yolngu curriculum … [and] for Yolngu children to learn Yolngu knowledge’.\(^{181}\) Also focusing on Ganma research and educational philosophy and its “both ways” metaphor of the meeting of saltwater and freshwater, Bakamana Yunupingu stated that ‘[t]his is where our children live, this is where we must look for relevance; the Ganma curriculum

\(^{178}\) *Aboriginal Pedagogy – Aboriginal teachers speak out* (Geelong: Deakin University Press, 1991).


emphasises the interface of children’s situation in moving from one world to the other’.  

While all action researchers identified the necessity for Indigenous pedagogies and curricula to move away from Eurocentric thinking, only some actually incorporated locally developed Indigenous teaching methods.  

And whereas most writers focused on developing Indigenous methodologies and knowledges for the benefit of Indigenous children, Mary Nalari Liddy contended that non-Indigenous children would also gain from being exposed to other ways of teaching in order to improve their understanding of Indigenous cultures.

Despite not totally being held hostage by theories of Aboriginal learning styles and making some important observations that speak to sovereign Indigenous philosophies and methodologies, the authors are constrained by their focus on a binary cultural divide between Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples. The “two way” schooling model inspired by Harris appears to form the conceptual backbone of most approaches. The student researchers also take a fairly lateral approach to the topic, with the majority of the research and discussion actually dealing with issues such as

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182 Bakamana Yunupingu, “A plan for Garray Research,” in Aboriginal Pedagogy – Aboriginal teachers speak out (Geelong: Deakin University Press, 1991), 101. The “both ways” concept is an extension of Harris’s “two way” concept that focuses not just on domain separation, but also on establishing some sort of common ground for mutual learning.


school structure, staffing and curriculum design rather than articulations of pedagogies as the art of teaching. While probably not as high a priority for the researchers, this is unfortunate as some of their approaches, rooted in local philosophies and experience, could actually provide valuable reference points for developing explicitly Indigenous pedagogies at the local level that move beyond a culturalist assumption of innate difference.

Beyond the three key examples discussed here, Indigenous pedagogies have also been characterised in similar ways by other authors. For example, Rhonda Craven as well as Christine Halse and Mavis Robinson debate and develop teacher education programs that reaffirm notions of Indigenous learning needs and suggest appropriately targeted pedagogies. Deirdre Heitmeyer discusses Indigenous disadvantage in terms of learning environments, while Michael Donovan applies needs-based Indigenous pedagogical ideas to Information Communication Technologies (ICT). Raymond Nichol, finally, claims to be ‘cognizant of the dangers of over-generalisation, binarism, reductionism, dichotomous thinking, and “tips for teachers”’, before proceeding to apply just such over-generalisation, binarism, reductionism, dichotomous thinking and

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“tips for teachers” to his anthropological case study of an Indigenous community.\textsuperscript{187}

In all of the approaches mentioned above, Indigenous pedagogies have ultimately been defined as reactive pedagogies \emph{for} (or \emph{directed at}) Indigenous people and thus not much concerned with pedagogical approaches to education \emph{based on} Indigenous philosophies and methodologies. While the analyses of the problems are certainly correct in many cases, the proposed solutions are rooted in needs- or problem-based initiatives focused on remedial help for Indigenous children as opposed to transformative approaches. Mona El-Ayoubi is the only scholar who provides an analysis of Indigenous pedagogy which problematises the constructed notions of difference.\textsuperscript{188}

While pursued with good intentions and offering occasional glimpses of sovereign concepts, these approaches have transformed a pre-existing cultural deficit-view of Indigenous people into a pedagogical one. The ongoing focus on what Indigenous learners (and, by implication, Indigenous cultures) \emph{need} instead of what they \emph{offer} has subsequently become even more entrenched in the Australian education system. However, despite – or, as one might contend, because of – this, educational statistics have not improved. I certainly share the various


\textsuperscript{188} Mona El-Ayoubi, “Knowledge, Discourse and Indigenous Pedagogy in Higher Education: A case study of the Bachelor of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Program at the Northern Territory University,” (Masters Thesis, Charles Darwin University, 2004).
authors’ analyses of one of the key problems in the Australian education system – namely, that there exists a great diversity of learning styles among all students which is not presently catered for in the dominant education system, thus resulting in disconnection and alienation for many students, especially those already socioeconomically marginalised in society. However, I differ in my approach to developing solutions to this problem, especially in light of its relationship to other relevant and important discourses, such as those concerning sovereignty and transformative pedagogies.
Chapter 5  Resonance
Introduction

Having established the rootedness of previous approaches to developing Indigenous pedagogies in a colonial anthropological paradigm of culturalism and pedagogical reactivity, this chapter will propose how the positive aspects of previous approaches might be harnessed by considering a strength-based Indigenous pedagogical framework. This framework moves away from a racialised or culturalised view of difference and instead bases itself on the sovereign recognition of Indigenous philosophies as the key to developing good teaching methodologies. In discussing this paradigm shift, I will draw both on selected sovereign articulations of Indigenous philosophies in Australia as well as on examples from other indigenous peoples in North America and the Pacific. Finally, I will offer my perspective as to how such a ‘new old ways’ pedagogical framework could help break down racialised views of Indigenous learners as passive, lacking and needy, benefit all learners through offering alternative pedagogical practices, further the recognition and engagement of sovereign Indigenous knowledges and philosophies, and thus assist the decolonisation process in Australia.  

While I am doubtful of Harris’s learning styles model and his “Two Way” schooling approach because of its anthropological roots and emphasis on cultural difference, even incommensurability, there are several positive aspects in the work of Hughes and some of the D-BATE action researchers that warrant further contemplation. Andrews and Hughes’s suggestion to

189 For ‘new old ways’ see Arbon, “Thirnda ngurkarnda ityrnda”, 264.
build on ‘traditional approaches to education’, as well as NAEC’s call to ‘develop an education theory and pedagogy that takes into account Aboriginal epistemology’, if divorced from their attachment to needs-based ideas about learning styles, are valuable starting points from which to consider a strengths-based Indigenous education framework. Furthermore, many of the Indigenous beliefs about, and strategies for, teaching and learning Hughes talks about originate from within sovereign Indigenous philosophies and could more comfortably align themselves with strengths-based notions of Indigenous pedagogies. Finally, the D-BATE program’s focus on Indigenous self-determination and strength along with the observation of some researchers that non-Indigenous people and the wider community would also benefit from this kind of education underlines the need for a re-conceptualisation of Indigenous education.

This need to re-conceptualise Indigenous education within a strengths-based framework impels me to argue, along with others, for quite a different kind of Indigenous pedagogies. To me, more appropriate alternatives could be based on the translations of sovereign Indigenous philosophies and educational processes into a discourse of transformative pedagogy. In other words: if pedagogy is indeed the art or science of teaching, then Indigenous pedagogies can best be understood as education through (or based on) Indigenous philosophies, processes and knowledges.

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190 Andrews and Hughes, “Toward a theoretical framework,” in Aboriginal Ways of Learning, eds. Hughes, More and Williams, 247-248.
191 National Aboriginal Education Committee, cited in Paul Hughes and Arthur J. More, “‘Aboriginal ways of learning’ - Learning styles and needs of Aboriginal students”.
This re-conceptualisation demands recognition of the validity, value and relevance of Indigenous philosophies, respect for Indigenous people as teachers as well as learners, and a focus on the strengths of Indigenous peoples, rather than just on needs. Conversely, acceptance of this view also entails the realisation that these kinds of Indigenous pedagogies are not targeted at an exclusive racial or ethnic identity.

On the contrary, this view places more emphasis on the foundation of pedagogies in Indigenous values and philosophies that can be shared with others to transform the school system for all learners. This is not to deny or detract from the urgency in addressing the manifest crisis in providing a quality education to Indigenous people, as outlined earlier in this thesis. It merely underlines the fact that such a perceptual transformation has the potential to both contribute to addressing that crisis and have wider benefits for all learners, not to mention positive flow-on effects on the decolonisation process. This is an idea whose underlying principles, within Australia, have only appeared as fragments within other debates. However, while it is only just emerging in Australia, it resonates deeply with similar ideas taking hold in North America and the Pacific in recent years, which will be introduced later on. Overall, it is a radical view but one that deserves much closer consideration in an Australian context.

This new approach to Indigenous education and pedagogies has to heed the warnings of prominent Indigenous scholars such as Nakata or Watson who argue against a homogenising and appropriative pedagogical
direction. As Watson has noted, the take-up of Indigenous concepts by non-Indigenous people can easily lead into just another form of appropriation, colonisation and victimisation of Indigenous intellectual and cultural property.\textsuperscript{193} Nakata has pointed out that misconceived and mal-applied notions of Indigenous pedagogy in particular are prone to racialised and culturalised views that stereotype learners and fail to deliver on their promise of panacea-like solutions to very complex historical problems.\textsuperscript{194}

Any articulations of Indigenous pedagogies must therefore be rooted in a transformative discourse that recognises sovereignty, respects human rights and shares power, rather than in an anthropological paradigm of observation, consultation and “speaking on behalf of”. This entails the understanding that any negotiation of meanings and processes cannot be divorced from respecting Indigenous sovereignty, universal human rights and a social justice framework of reparation for past wrongs. It also means that white privilege can no longer excuse itself from the conversation, but has to be confronted and interrogated in order to move towards what Watson calls ‘a meditation on discomfort’.\textsuperscript{195} It is not a negotiation unless all sides enter into it with the understanding that while they will potentially

gain something valuable, they will also have to relinquish particular privileges.

Another fundamental challenge in discussing Indigenous pedagogies is recognising the diversity that exists between and within Indigenous peoples and avoiding the creation of new hegemonies. This means a realisation that the sovereign primacy of local autonomy in thinking and decision-making may produce very different, indeed contradictory, results in different places. Such thinking mitigates against arriving at convenient but essentialist pan-Indigenous solutions that can quickly turn from liberationist into oppressive regimes of truth.\(^{196}\) While useful as a strategic or contingent political tool in the struggle against colonial oppression, Morrissey warns that pan-Indigenous identities also have the potential to reproduce colonial notions of authenticity, homogeneity and exclusiveness:

Identity politics as a policing operation of course can be a sensible recognition of vulnerability. An embattled community may well have a strategic interest in clearly defining the limits of its membership. The problem with the policing and maintenance of acceptable cultural and political positions is that those positions become reified and the critical debate necessary for a community of modernity is stifled.\(^{197}\)

Finally, this thesis must confront the “common but different” challenge inherent in any postcolonial grouping of peoples and weigh up the relationships of diversity and commonality between Indigenous nations. First of all, in reflecting the reality of Indigenous peoples, philosophies

\(^{196}\) Foucault, *Power-Knowledge*.

and epistemologies, Indigenous pedagogies must be multitudinous and localised, and should therefore be understood as the plural reality, pedagogies, rather than the singular construct, pedagogy. Being cognisant of the plural is important here, since the great diversity of Indigenous peoples in Australia demands acknowledgment of the variety of valid teaching theories, strategies and methods that will necessarily be generated and employed. I believe that developing a multiplicity of locally negotiated pedagogies will best serve the expression of both intellectual sovereignty and transformative potential. This factor of local negotiation also corresponds with El-Ayoubi’s focus on plurality, hybridity and exchange.\textsuperscript{198}

However, in order to complement, amplify and empower that process, it is important to exchange ideas, build critical mass and provide the intellectual firepower that comes from traversing similar roads and discovering common ground. Rather than attempting to distil from various practices some timeless essence and produce a unified meta-concept of Indigenous pedagogy that underpins a range of local pedagogies, as Jeannie Herbert appears to suggest,\textsuperscript{199} I am more interested in engaging diversity and complexity through the concept of resonance, as outlined in a previous chapter.\textsuperscript{200}

\textsuperscript{198}El-Ayoubi, “Knowledge, Discourse and Indigenous Pedagogy in Higher Education”.
\textsuperscript{199}Jeannie Herbert, cited in Donovan, “Can Information Communication Technological tools be used to suit Aboriginal learning pedagogies?” in Information Technology and Indigenous People, eds. Dyson, Hendriks and Grant, 96.
\textsuperscript{200}See Chapter 2 Ethical Encounters.
An analogy exists here with articulations of Indigenist research methodologies, where more and more Indigenous scholars articulate their own ontological and epistemological positions, but develop them in resonance with other scholars.\textsuperscript{201} Characterising her Indigenist approach to research, Martin expresses the need for researchers and their stories to start ‘coming amongst’ and then ‘coming alongside’ their research participants, resulting in expansions of relatedness, rather than replacements of others’ identities.\textsuperscript{202} While this thesis does not offer its own story about a particular localised example of an Indigenous pedagogy, it embodies my perceptions of some of the resonances of important sovereign Indigenous philosophies and pedagogies.

By making my own journey of listening for resonance explicit to others, this thesis may support localised articulations and negotiations of Indigenous pedagogies by providing a reservoir of ideas, some of which may in turn resonate with other sovereign local philosophies, processes and knowledges and lend support to their translations and articulations as transformative pedagogies. I therefore offer the following characterisation not as an authoritative list but, as indicated earlier, as a tentative beginning and an opening of discursive space that allows for the sharing of a multiplicity of perspectives. It is up to the reader to decide whether the concepts and ideas identified also resonate for and with her or him. As

\textsuperscript{201} See for example Shawn Wilson, “Research as Ceremony”; Karen Martin, “Please knock before you enter”; Veronica Arbon, “Thirnda ngurkarnda ityrnda”.
\textsuperscript{202} Martin, “Please knock before you enter”, 200.
Muecke says, ‘[i]n the end it will be up to the readers to make their own assemblages, just as I have, for here there can be no final word’.  

**Rethinking Indigenous Pedagogies**

What could Indigenous pedagogies – that is, pedagogies *through* (or *based on*) sovereign Indigenous philosophies, methodologies and knowledges – be shaped by and what could they look like? Since this idea has not been discussed in any substantial depth in Australia, there are only small fragments within various conversations that this section aims to bring together. As discussed above, it is a tentative first step to opening up further discursive space on the possibility of establishing Indigenous pedagogies based on sovereign Indigenous philosophies. While any attempt of articulation will always be part of an ongoing process of negotiation, the following resonants have emerged for me in my engagement with the topic.

In regard to underlying sovereign Indigenous philosophies, a key resonant is what Martin calls the ‘ontological premise of relatedness’ in Quandamoopah philosophy that is elementary to any understanding of reality.  

She states that ‘[w]ith relatedness as the premise and impetus, there is no such thing as Outsider, or Other, but of Another’. Noting the similarities with Martin and other Indigenous scholars, Arbon also stresses the importance in Arabana Ularaka philosophy of ‘see[ing] the world from

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204 Martin, “Please knock before you enter”, 99.  
205 Ibid, 209.
a position of relatedness’. Moreton-Robinson agrees that ‘one experiences the self as part of others and that others are part of the self; this is learnt through reciprocity, obligation, shared experience, coexistence, cooperation and social memory’. This corresponds with the overarching epistemological importance of relationships noted by Wilson, which he explains thus: ‘relationships don’t shape reality, they are reality’. Both Moreton-Robinson’s and Wilson’s comments are echoed by David Mowaljarlai’s epistemological concept of ‘pattern thinking’. And it is Martin who suggests rethinking current teaching approaches by applying such ontological and epistemological concepts through a methodology of relatedness pedagogy, firmly rooted in ‘an Aboriginal knowledge framework and using Aboriginal terms of reference’.

Concerning Indigenous pedagogies, Mudrooroo speaks about experiential and first-hand teaching methodologies which are ‘personal, not generalised, with information transmitted by experience’, while Arbon discusses how ‘Indigenous societies are very clearly founded within and on the symbolic, performative and interpretational, where dialogue, mentoring and responsibility are critical to doing’. In order to facilitate these collaborative experiences and first-hand accounts, two distinct

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206 Arbon, “Thirnda ngurkarnda ityrnda”, 54.  
207 Moreton-Robinson, Talkin’ up to the white women, 16.  
208 Wilson, “Progressing Toward an Indigenous Research Paradigm”.  
209 Wilson, personal communication, Lismore.  
210 David Mowaljarlai, cited in Muecke, Ancient and modern, 172.  
211 Martin, “Please knock before you enter”, 208.  
relational and methodological qualities must be nurtured and upheld. The important communal component of Indigenous pedagogies is facilitated by the concept of ‘dadirri – listening to one another’. But one expression of an idea that is found across many Indigenous nations, it is ‘a special quality, a unique gift of the Aboriginal people. It is inner deep listening and quiet, still awareness – something like what you call contemplation’.\textsuperscript{214} The other central plank of communal learning is Mary Ann Bin-Sallik’s concept of ‘cultural safety’ which affords each individual member of the learning community the respect and feeling of integrity they require for higher learning to take place.\textsuperscript{215}

In a previous exploration of pedagogical practice at Gnibi College, Marcelle Townsend-Cross and I identified the methodological imperatives of ‘identity, relatedness, inclusiveness, reciprocity, nurturance [and] respect’ as key shaping forces.\textsuperscript{216} Finally, Glenn Woods makes the crucial point that Indigenous education and pedagogies are not necessarily restricted to Indigenous students. On the contrary, he hints at their capability to reconnect all students to a deeper learning experience when he stresses the ‘remedial potential for all learners’ they imbue.\textsuperscript{217}

After having assembled some of what I perceive to be key resonant elements in existing conversations about Indigenous pedagogies, it is perhaps useful to turn our ear to the east and listen to other discussions.

\textsuperscript{214} Ungunnerr, cited in Atkinson, \textit{Trauma Trails}, 16.
\textsuperscript{216} Biermann and Townsend-Cross, “Indigenous Pedagogy as a Force for Change”.
\textsuperscript{217} Woods, personal communication.
about sovereign indigenous educational philosophies. Over the past decade, indigenous scholars from the Pacific and North America have discussed the idea of indigenous pedagogies in great depth and developed teaching theories and programs based on strength-based indigenous pedagogical frameworks.

**The Pacific and North America**

A strong school of thought on the idea of Indigenous pedagogies which emanate from Indigenous philosophies exists among indigenous scholars in the Pacific and North America. Their work can lend further resonants and points of reference for developing localised Indigenous pedagogies in Australia, as the discussion is often more entrenched in discourses of sovereignty and transformative pedagogy than is the case in Australia. Due to the limited scope of this thesis, a brief overview to provide a glimpse of the pace and depth of conversation on the topic will have to suffice here.

In the Pacific, scholars such as Michael Mel, Noelani Iokepa-Guerrero, Manu Aluli Meyer, Graham Hingangaroa Smith and Konai Helu Thaman argue that it is the philosophies behind the teaching that make Indigenous pedagogies unique, relevant and applicable in a variety of

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contexts. Writing about diverse local indigenous contexts, these Pacific
scholars stress the decolonising imperative of pedagogies in order to
reclaim sovereign knowledges, processes and traditions. Discussing
teaching projects in Papua-New Guinea, Mel asserts the primacy of
collaborative activities and ‘learning as a process of engagement and
dialogue’, while Iokepa-Guerrero, Meyer and Smith stress the
connection between epistemology, pedagogy and language in Hawai‘i and
Aotearoa respectively. Thaman, a tertiary educator in Tonga, also talks
about the reclamation of language and educational processes by
‘developing philosophies and teaching and learning strategies that are
rooted in [Pacific Islander] cultural values and practices’.  

In North America, Angayuqaq Oscar Kawagley and Ray Barnhardt, Marie
Battiste, Michelle Rae McKay, Fyre Jean Graveline and Leonore
Stiffarm also discuss the sovereign philosophical foundations and actual
methods and strategies employed by indigenous pedagogies. At a

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221 Thaman, “Towards a New Pedagogy,” in Local Knowledge and Wisdom in Higher Education, eds. Teasdale and Ma Rhea, 49.


223 For further discussions of Indigenous pedagogies in these contexts see Lambe, “Indigenous education, mainstream education, and Native Studies”; Michael D. McNally, “Indigenous pedagogy in the classroom: A service learning model for discussion,“
foundational level, some resonating ontological principles have been identified by Kawagley and Barnhardt as ‘long-term perspective, interconnectedness of all things, adaptation to change [as well as] commitment to the commons’.\footnote{Kawagley and Barnhardt, “Education Indigenous to place” in \textit{Ecological Education in Action}, eds. Smith and Williams, 134.} These reflect McKay’s insistence on congruence between pedagogical methods and Indigenous beliefs about the land, community and belonging.\footnote{McKay, \textit{Indigenous pedagogy}.} Furthermore, Michael McNally’s observation of Indigenous pedagogies’ focus on the experiential and the first-hand, instead of the abstract corresponds with similar propositions by Mudrooroo discussed above.\footnote{McNally, “Indigenous pedagogy in the classroom”\footnote{Graveline, \textit{Circle Works}.}} Graveline introduces particular teaching methods such as the Medicine Wheel and anchors them within their philosophical context to give them meaning and direction.\footnote{Graveline introduces particular teaching methods such as the Medicine Wheel and anchors them within their philosophical context to give them meaning and direction.\footnote{Marie Battiste, \textit{Indigenous Knowledge and Pedagogy in First Nations Education}, 18.}}

The most thorough treatment of the subject, though, is given by Battiste. In her interesting summary of Canadian research findings, she considers and rejects the same Aboriginal learning styles arguments of the 1970s and 1980s which were asserted in Australia.\footnote{228} Instead she refers to Indigenous philosophical understandings of every child as unique in her or his access to knowledge, or the ‘resourceful capacity of being that creates the context and texture of life’.\footnote{229} Cautioning against fossilising or mystifying Indigenous philosophies and processes ‘by stressing their normative content or “sacredness”’, Battiste instead portrays the fluidity and

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adaptability of Indigenous knowledge systems to changing empirical circumstances and social values in a continuing educational quest for wholeness.\textsuperscript{230} Going further, Battiste discusses the foundation of good pedagogy as being steeped in Indigenous philosophies and provides a detailed overview of resonant elements in the literature:

In Eurocentric thought, epistemology is defined as the theory of knowledge and pedagogy involving the processes by which children come to learn or know. The Aboriginal people of Canada have their own epistemology and pedagogy. 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, modeling, meditation, prayer, ceremonies, or story telling as ways of knowing and learning ... [as well as] learning by observation and doing, learning through authentic experiences and individualized instruction, and learning through enjoyment.\textsuperscript{231}

While by no means providing a direct template for developments in Australia, the Pacific and North American cases are nevertheless instructive as they exemplify conversations about Indigenous pedagogies outside of any anthropological paradigm and instead steeped in discourses of sovereignty and transformative pedagogy. Furthermore, they may offer further points of resonance with Australian Indigenous philosophies to assist in developing localised Indigenous pedagogies.

**Benefits**

The benefits of re-conceptualising Indigenous education as education through, or based on, Indigenous philosophies and methodologies are manifold and will be discussed here in more detail. Firstly, the re-think offers a break from a dominant discourse in Indigenous education that

\textsuperscript{230} Ibid, 18-19.
\textsuperscript{231} Ibid, 18.
constructs Indigenous students as passive, different and needy. Secondly, it opens up opportunities for articulating and providing alternative teaching methodologies based on sovereign Indigenous philosophies for the benefits of all learners. Thirdly, it provides an opening for the recognition and acknowledgment of the true calibre of Indigenous philosophies, processes and knowledges. Finally, it promotes engagement with these philosophies and methodologies and thus advances the decolonisation process in Australia.

Recognising that all students learn differently and that pedagogical target group approaches cannot assume racial or ethnic homogeneity in learning styles, this strengths-based approach to Indigenous education inverts the relationship between Indigenous peoples and the dominant system. Rather than being about the dominant system’s search for appropriate solutions to the problem of Indigenous cultural difference, Indigenous education suddenly becomes about Indigenous solutions to the dominant system’s diversity deficit and its entrenched inability to teach successfully to difference. Not only can Indigenous students escape from their twentieth century prison of cultural determinism, but the approach moves the primary focus onto the necessity to tackle educational failure through teaching to difference and constructing a wider response framework that tackles entrenched socio-economic inequalities and is based on social justice and human rights.

Muecke made the comment that “‘Culture’ thus seems to me to be the prison of twentieth century Aborigines”. See Stephen Muecke, “Lonely Representations: Aboriginality and Cultural Studies,” in Power, Knowledge and Aborigines, eds. Bain Attwood and John Arnold (Bundoora: La Trobe University Press, 1992), 40.
Importantly, removing the culturalist stigma and racialised target group approach from Indigenous education and conceiving of it instead as a strengths-based pedagogical framework also allows other learners to access an alternative pedagogical approach that perhaps corresponds more closely with their learning styles and/or worldview. As outlined in the introduction, there are many learners who come from a variety of backgrounds that place them at odds with the normative white middle-class Anglo-Saxon pedagogical model criticised by Hughes. Echoing Hughes’s findings as discussed earlier, David McRae et al. state that personal engagement to counter ‘the perceived alien quality of school experience’ is important for all young adolescents, adding that experiences of alienation ‘appear in standard form across the whole cohort of students, Indigenous and non-Indigenous alike’. Furthermore,

[there was some belief that problems with conventional schooling for adolescent Indigenous students are so intractable that the solution must include providing an alternative setting. […] Again, this is a strategy which is applied to non-Indigenous as well as Indigenous students.]

The extensive report by McRae et al. also concluded that recognition, support and integration of Indigenous knowledges in mainstream education was not only important for Indigenous students, ‘but for the general quality of Australian preschools, schools and training

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234 David McRae et al., What has worked (and will again), 12.
235 Ibid.
institutions’.

This correlates with the aims of the National Federation of Aboriginal Education Consultative Groups, which are

… to change education systems to give Aboriginal students a fair go, and at the same time to improve mainstream education by incorporating the principles of Aboriginal pedagogy.

Brady similarly insists that

the relationship between Indigenous knowledge and Western concepts of knowledge and knowing needs to be placed in a framework of mutual interaction so that not only do Indigenous people benefit, but so do non-Indigenous educators and students.

Furthermore, individual sovereign articulations of Indigenous pedagogies will necessarily contribute to more flexible and localised educational arrangements, thereby fulfilling at least two of the key factors for educational success identified by McRae et al. The contribution of Indigenous pedagogies is thus not just about additional or different content-knowledge within a European canon, but also about different process-knowledge. As McNally notes, this is important in terms of engagement:

What makes Indigenous theories of culture distinctive is in part that they are less a matter of theory than of process, and thus we cannot just enumerate the content of the theories more effectively; we must engage their dynamism in creative ways.

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236 Ibid, 2.
239 McRae et al, *What has worked (and will again)*, 7-8.
While being able to provide different perspectives and conceptual starting points, Indigenous philosophies do not receive the same recognition and appreciation of other knowledge systems, including other non-Western ones such as Buddhism. On the one hand, this problem is rooted in colonial attitudes of superiority and scientific racism which classified Indigenous peoples as inferior human beings and their knowledges as superstitious and irrelevant to the modern world. In recent years, however, the problem has been compounded by non-Indigenous and Indigenous people emphasising the value of Indigenous cultures at the expense of other ways of conceiving of Indigenous systems of knowledge. This has also been true in academia, where, as long as researchers speak of cultures, ways of learning or worldviews, there is an inherent unspoken assumption that these concepts are less rigorous, complex or accessible than Western ones. Battiste put it succinctly,

> [p]ostmodernist scholars have noted that culture is often viewed as what the inferior “other” has. While some peoples have civilizations, philosophies, romance languages, or cultured societies; other peoples have cultures, dialects, worldviews, and tribal knowledge. Peoples with “civilizations” are regarded as inherently superior to peoples with “cultures”.

Reflecting on comparative approaches to philosophy, West found that the intellectual dimension of Indigenous reality lacked an overt facet and was thus practically unrecognised by the Indigenous and non-Indigenous public alike. In another forum, West noted in a similar vein that,

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242 Errol West, “The Japanangka Teaching and Research Paradigm: An Aboriginal Pedagogical Framework,” (paper presented at the *Indigenous Research and Postgraduate Forum*, Underdale, Aboriginal Research Institute at the University of South Australia, 18th-20th September 2000), 8. The intellectual dimension is one of the eight sub-paradigms comprising West’s Japanangka Teaching and Research paradigm. The
Western epistemology differs from Indigenous epistemology in that we Koori peoples already know the origin, nature, methods and limits of our knowledge systems, what we unlike westerners seem to lack is the capacity to flaunt that knowledge as a badge of our intellect and cultural integrity, in a very public sense.\footnote{Errol West, “Speaking Towards an Aboriginal Philosophy,” (paper presented at the First Conference on Indigenous Philosophy, “Linga Longa” Philosophy Farm, NSW, 1998).}

The articulation and theorisation of Indigenous pedagogy, however, is more than just an exercise in \textit{flaunting a badge}: it is the naming and claiming of a transformative process with significant ‘remedial potential’ for re-connecting all learners with their environment, community and educational journey.\footnote{Woods, personal communication.} In North America, it has been argued that the current educational climate, with the introduction of alternative “Western” concepts like ‘peer mentoring, apprenticeships, experiential learning and holistic development’, prepares the ground for Indigenous pedagogies to be widely introduced into the school system.\footnote{McKay, \textit{Indigenous pedagogy}.} McNally holds that engaging Indigenous pedagogies means unlearning racism, going outside of the academy and transforming white middle-class intellectual curiosity and spiritual hunger into ‘a politicized fire in the belly’.\footnote{McNally, “Indigenous pedagogy in the classroom”: 610.} It is therefore part of a wider analysis of Indigenous contributions to reshaping ecological and educational understanding.\footnote{Kawagley and Barnhardt, “Education Indigenous to place,” in \textit{Ecological Education in Action}, eds. Smith and Williams, 117-140.}
In Australia, too, there are voices such as Ungunnmerr’s that speak of the knowledge and resources Indigenous peoples hold which are vital for the wellbeing and healing of the whole country.\(^{248}\) And it was Nakata who said that,

\[\ldots\] to defend Indigenous peoples, Indigenous students require understanding of the concepts and methodologies of both systems of knowledge. That is, one can’t do battle with Western systems of thought without understanding it, likewise, its inconsistencies cannot be turned around and an Indigenous perspective substituted without rigorous understanding of Indigenous concepts.\(^{249}\)

Is this not equally true for non-Indigenous students? By engaging both the oppressed and the oppressor through a transformative pedagogical process, decolonisation and a paradigm shift in thinking and values can become a reality in this country. Gus Worby, Lester-Irabinna Rigney and Simone Ulalka Tur remind us that ‘the challenge is to negotiate the tensions between Indigenous and non-Indigenous discourses of communication by giving them equitable recognition’.\(^{250}\) Finally, Nakata argues there is a need to

\[\text{not just preserve or restore or develop Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander knowledge and practice but also to build new productive knowledge that will change relationships, practices, understandings, attitudes and beliefs on both sides of the divide.}\(^ {251}\)

**Decolonisation**

The recognition of the need to create shared communities, philosophies and processes that enable more equal, just and sustainable ways of living

\(^{248}\) Ungunnmerr, cited in Atkinson, *Trauma Trails*, 5.

\(^{249}\) Nakata, *Indigenous Australian Studies and Higher Education*.


\(^{251}\) Nakata, *Indigenous Australian Studies and Higher Education*. 
together is what drives the process of decolonisation. After various powerful independence movements in former African and Asian colonies and their calls for equality, independence and human rights changed world opinion, a wave of decolonisation swept their colonial masters from power during the 1960s and 1970s. However, the decolonisation process has multiple ongoing dimensions even in places that have achieved political independence from foreign powers, as a mere change of government, while liberating, does not in itself undo the damages colonialism has inflicted on social networks, economic relations, natural environments, intellectual traditions and self-identity. Muecke states that ‘[d]ecolonisation […] cannot be about the removal of one kind of state power; it is about the creation of a new assemblage.’

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In Australia, as in other so-called “settler states”, decolonisation is concerned with continuing assertions of Indigenous sovereignty, the reclamation of Indigenous knowledges as well as the exposition and dismantling of hidden structures, ongoing processes and unquestioned traditions of colonial governance within the formally decolonised nation-state. This is because colonialism is not simply a historical period, the sum of its administrative, political and cultural markers, to be overcome or purged by the dominant society at some time in its development as it no longer wishes to be that way. Rather, colonialism is an ideology, a way of thinking, which is diametrically opposed to what we may call a human rights-informed world view. It cannot coexist with the notion of free and

252 Muecke, Ancient and modern, 48.
equal individuals living together peacefully, dignity intact. Apart from its material effects in terms of power relations, we must understand colonialism as the persistent psychological determination to control others’ lives in order to impose one’s own set of beliefs. Because of this contradistinction, the decolonisation process and the accompanying realisation of human rights in education have to entail addressing colonial practices as much as theories and institutions.  

Going much deeper than the concept of reconciliation in contemporary Australia, decolonisation implies more than just “making up”, but a serious re-consideration of the totality of our relationships to other people and the land we live with. As Rose suggests, being perhaps the first generation of settler/invader descendants to appreciate the magnitude of devastation caused by the onslaught of colonialism, the question for many non-Indigenous people must surely also be: how do whitefellas decolonise? While I agree with Ungunmerr Baumann (and Paulo Freire) ‘that it is the oppressed who will liberate the oppressed (and the oppressor as well),’ I also believe that the oppressor needs to become aware of and question his/her own modus operandi, locate his/her own privilege and become critical of all colonising practices.


What, then, can those understanding the damage of colonialism and not wanting to perpetuate colonial relations do to deconstruct and reconstruct themselves? The answer to this question and the capacity to consider what it means to be human in our relations to one another and the land we live with, is inextricably tied up with access to, and willingness to honestly consider, other philosophical traditions. Being exposed to, respecting and engaging Indigenous philosophies is thus a crucial element to not only recognise and reaffirm the sovereignty of Indigenous peoples but to generate the decolonising conditions for the creation of shared knowledges, processes and relationships. Importantly, this cannot occur in an unreflective way that disregards Watson’s questions about the cannibalisation of Indigenous peoples ‘by a white, settled Australia that is to become embodied in our black Aboriginal being’. Any conversation and negotiation about Indigenous pedagogies as instruments of decolonisation thus needs to be steeped in discourses of sovereignty, transformative pedagogy and human rights.

Having analysed previous approaches to Indigenous pedagogies and critiqued their rootedness in anthropological paradigms of needs-based pedagogical reactivity, this chapter has outlined a re-conceptualisation of Indigenous pedagogies as education through, or based on, Indigenous philosophies and methodologies. After drawing together resonant elements of various conversations within Australia, the chapter then contrasted this tentative first step with other discussions and articulations in North

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America and the Pacific. By providing examples of such directions in other countries and suggesting a range of potential benefits inherent in pursuing locally negotiated Indigenous pedagogies, this chapter has established a convincing case for considering the possibilities locally negotiated Indigenous pedagogies based on sovereign Indigenous philosophies and methodologies might create in Australia.
Chapter 6  Connections
This thesis has woven together separate ideas about sovereignty, Indigenous education and transformative pedagogy into a new strand that considers Indigenous pedagogies not as a reactive Western-made solution to Indigenous problems, but as expressions of sovereign Indigenous philosophies that reconnect learners with themselves, others and the land they live with. Thus, this thesis points to a way of establishing resonance and connections between and across cultures, just as it expresses my desire to ethically intervene in what I perceive to be a limiting one-way perception of education. Current mainstream thinking is stuck in the constant refinement of an instrumentalist view of education that is based on a human capital rationale at the expense of almost everything else. At the same time, alternative philosophical positions such as Indigenous ones are denied their existence, credibility and standpoint, leaving everyone intellectually impoverished. To rethink our understanding of Indigenous pedagogies means to consider the vast transformative potential of education and the advantages alternative educational processes have to offer all learners.

There are four important consequences that flow from this thesis. Firstly, it disrupts the discourse of needs-based, target group Indigenous education. Secondly, it opens the opportunities of transformative pedagogies for all learners. Thirdly, it allows opportunities for non-appropriative recognition and engagement with Indigenous philosophies. And finally, it contributes to decolonisation and new relationships between people and with the land.
In many ways, this thesis is a reflection and suspension of my own ongoing learning journey at this moment in time. As a newcomer to these shores, I wanted to ‘come into country in a respectful way, […] honour land, first peoples and their laws’. To me, this meant respecting Indigenous sovereignty, whilst also having to fit in with the colonisers’ society and laws – which is surely a contradiction in terms. In attempting to navigate through this unusual place as a traveller, my ambiguous relationship to the dominant society became more and more apparent. By physical appearance I was assumed to be a coloniser; by my cultural expressions (mostly my language) I became a foreigner. Positioned somewhere in between, I tried to strike an ethical path of doing the right thing by the law of the land, but also doing the right thing by the lore of the land. This thesis attempts to do something similar, as it swerves between intellectual traditions and loyalties, and tries to find a moral way of being in this place.

Coming into contact with Indigenous pedagogies has enriched my own understanding of relatedness and place. But rather than that contact being an eye-opening, life-altering catalyst for change, it resonated with knowledge and beliefs I myself had held and known to be true, and deepened these by adding further layers of complexity. That has been the key lesson out of this encounter for me: listening for resonance and making connections. What was most surprising was that for all my understanding of relatedness and connectivity, I have found that rather

than learning about others, I have had to think more deeply about myself. My background, my roots, my identity, my implicatedness in colonialism and inequality, and my ability to develop a moral presence in this postcolonial present. Beginning with a naïve attitude of wanting to “do good”, I soon came to realise that the moral righteousness of perfect intentionalism limits the ability to ask for one’s own complicity in maintaining colonialisn relations. On the other hand, I have come to appreciate the importance of proper process, which is deeply imbedded in notions of sovereign legitimacy and the recognition of another’s humanity. Recognising, respecting and engaging Indigenous processes is, to me, one of the answers to the question of how we can develop more respectful, less appropriative relations. It goes beyond good intentions and asks how these can be channelled into a productive and politically aware outcome. Rather than attempting to understand, analyse and codify Indigenous processes, the underlying notion of recognising sovereignty speaks to the willingness to move oneself, and be moved, onto unfamiliar territory. In other words: realising that what is already an embodied reality of unfamiliarity and displacement is also intellectual unease. Without being able to recognise, let alone meaningfully engage with, Indigenous philosophies, non-Indigenous people are left intellectually impoverished and perhaps permanently unable to fully comprehend and properly articulate their presence in this country.

The mutual fecundity and enrichment that comes from sharing intellectual traditions and stories is at the core of my story. Through engaging
Indigenous knowledges via Indigenous processes, through respectful listening to sovereign stories, I have enriched my own previous understanding with layers of complexity and interrelatedness, while neither denying my own cultural roots and identity, nor wanting to replace or appropriate sovereign Indigenous understandings. This has been made possible by listening for and thinking through resonances, making connections and considering what these might mean for my own learning, shared understandings and the need for alliances to protect them. It is this personal experience of respect and enrichment that has led me to consider the importance of intellectually vital Indigenous pedagogies for all learners, the effects this might have on the attitude towards and relationship with Indigenous peoples and what this understanding might mean for our collective ability for counter-hegemonic action in order to decolonise. It goes to the weakness at the heart of our modern education system which, according to Orr’s above-stated critique, currently produces mobile, rootless and place-autistic students incapable of relating.

However, in order for this mutuality and enriching exchange to occur, we need to move away from a needs-based deficit view of Indigenous people and into a place where we turn our attention to the hegemony of dominant Western thought and power. Only when this hegemony is exposed as a direct function of Indigenous disadvantage in the equation of colonialism, can we begin to talk about redress, balance and equality outside of a paradigm of value-free progress. Human rights and the recognition of
never-ceded sovereignty must be the staring points for the long conversation about national identity, legality and direction.

On a more immediate level, we need to consider the kind of ‘pedagogical pioneering in local contexts’ that would allow ‘time for consultation and negotiation […] and] for achieving outcomes’, utilise available resources and arguments in a local circumstance, and press for a flexibly negotiated solution, all the while asserting Indigenous sovereignty and arguing from a strengths-based, as opposed to a needs-based position. This approach could be further strengthened by building alliances with other marginalised groups such as migrant communities, which according to Birch would represent ‘not only […] an act of moral and political solidarity, but […] recognition of the sovereign responsibility’ Indigenous people hold. In addition, beginning conversations with other alternative educational philosophies and methodologies would provide further opportunities to listen for resonances, extend relatedness and achieve the critical intellectual mass needed for bigger changes. Such a model would share Partington’s assessment of positive change in contemporary Indigenous education as developing most likely ‘from the bottom up, rather than from the top down’. In other words,

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261 For example, environmental education and Indigenous pedagogies share some interesting resonants. See Biermann, “Indigenous pedagogies and environmental education”.
[i]f Australia is to become a genuinely post-colonial nation, we must first adopt a proactive stance of anti-colonialism, achieved through ideas, alliances and social and political action.\(^{263}\)

There are already some tentative beginnings in other areas and individual negotiations such as those described by Heath Greville are an important first step in bringing about larger agreements that could cover all educational aspects of an Indigenous nation’s or community’s life.\(^{264}\) As Townsend-Cross and I have suggested elsewhere, an instrument like the Indigenous Land Use Agreements (ILUAs), for example, could be modified to provide the basis for a local education treaty between an Indigenous community and all three levels of government (“the State”), covering areas such as jurisdiction, resourcing and cooperation with other entities.\(^{265}\) If this sounds far fetched, it is perhaps instructive, notwithstanding the substantially different legal and political circumstances, to refer to a Canadian example as a possible way forward. The recently completed *Mi’kmaw Kina’matnewey Agreement* in Nova Scotia provides for Indigenous peoples to assume jurisdiction for their education, and to research and implement new structures, models and methodologies.\(^{266}\) The *Alaskan Native Knowledge Network* in the US, which developed the ‘Alaskan standards for culturally responsive schools’, is another example of a negotiated way forward.\(^{267}\) And while Jeff Lambe discusses the challenges of incorporating Indigenous pedagogy into Native


\(^{265}\) Biermann and Townsend-Cross, “Indigenous Pedagogy as a Force for Change”.


\(^{267}\) Ibid, 23.
Study courses in a university setting, McNally provides one solution by going outside of the classroom when integrating Ojibwe pedagogy into a Western college. Finally, Battiste may warn that ‘[n]one of the provincial initiatives taken so far have integrated the expertise of the Aboriginal peoples in ways that are truly transformational’, but she nevertheless identifies this integrative negotiation as the pedagogical challenge facing Canada.

Against the backdrop of similar struggles to come to terms with the powerful legacies of colonialism and its ongoing destructive consequences, the challenge of today is how to decolonise as a community and enter into relationships to each other and the land we live with that are equal, just and sustainable. If we can agree that there is substance to the concept of Indigenous pedagogies and that there is a need for their further articulation and consideration, then how do we proceed and utilise the concept to make a difference for Indigenous and other children? I believe that the challenge of negotiating localised Indigenous pedagogies that reflect Indigenous philosophies not in an abstract, exoticised sense, but as the foundational basis of a way of life, is crucial to decolonisation. We should be practising, theorising and living together within an ethics of and a focus on ‘reconciliation, earth-keeping and peace-making’ that provides avenues for creative expressions of our diversity as well as for

268 Lambe, “Indigenous Education, Mainstream Education, and Native Studies”.
269 McNally, “Indigenous Pedagogy in the Classroom”.
corroboration of our common humanity. Keeping an eye on what has already been achieved elsewhere, but being aware of our own particular circumstances, we can thus begin to have conversations about Indigenous pedagogies in Australia and create resonances in localised methodologies, integrative principles and potential applications in a variety of settings. In all of this, however, we should never lose sight of the fact that such pedagogies are more than a theoretical abstraction: they have powerful sovereign qualities and a transformative potential to change teaching and learning for all.

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Appendices
Appendix I


Introduction

Human rights are important, not just as the ultimate normative reference point in the arena of international politics or domestic law, but rather, as informing a conscious practice of being human in everyday life. As Offord (2006) has previously observed, in order to acknowledge and reinforce their crucial importance for a just and compassionate society, human rights cannot remain tied solely to legal interpretations but must be reclaimed and reinserted into discourses on philosophy, art, science and education. Especially education. We know that, apart from students’ socio-economic background, good teachers have the greatest impact on quantifiable student achievement at school (Hayes, Mills, Christie & Lingard 2004). However, it is often simultaneously assumed and overlooked that teachers also carry much of the significant responsibility for teaching the practice of humanity, of being human, to those becoming conversant with the wider world. This is particularly true for the social aspects of personal development, which are neither easy to define nor measure. How, then, do human rights fit into the picture of school education in Australia today?

When talking about the activation of human rights in education, we can distinguish between at least three different conceptual starting points from which to engage this challenge, all of which are of course interconnected and interdependent: a rights-based discourse about educational opportunity, a didactic approach rooted in a human rights curriculum, and a focus on process, on human right pedagogy. I am interested in this third dimension, that human rights in education can be activated and engaged through a focus on a type of pedagogy that imbues its principles in practice. Pedagogy is an area in which teachers can positively build on their expertise, autonomy and agency in order to make a difference. Furthermore, it provides avenues for learning about human rights that all teachers can walk down, even though the content of their subject may not, at first sight, be directly related to human rights. It is therefore firstly, about embedding human rights in education, not only as further curriculum content, but also as a practice and process applicable in diverse educational contexts. How can we learn about human rights, if we do not practice them? Secondly, this approach allows existing human rights concerns in regard to educational participation and engagement to be thought through in an open and inclusive manner. Again, how can we expect human rights concerns to disappear, if we do not address them through practice?
So this chapter is very much a call for praxis, a descriptor used by Freire (1996) for the inseparable nexus between practice and inductive theorisation, as a key component of the successful activation of human rights in education. While this full activation requires action on all of the above fronts, I would like to focus on pedagogy in particular and pose the following questions: What would an emerging framework of human rights pedagogy begin to look like? How can we conceptualise pedagogy as embodying an appreciation of the diverse and unique manifestations of our common humanity? What are the characteristics of such a pedagogy which is reactive to present inequalities as well as proactive and positive in its teaching for human rights?

I argue that the concept of Indigenous education – or education through (or based on) Indigenous philosophies, methodologies and processes – can provide a starting point from which to articulate a kind of human rights education that is rooted in practice and process: in pedagogy. This chapter, therefore, brings together a discussion of two crucial concerns: a re-interpretation of Indigenous education that moves away from a deficit-view or needs-driven model, and the relationship of this re-interpreted concept to the emergent formation of human rights pedagogy.

**Diversity in the classroom**

The contemporary discourse on Indigenous education in Australia is symptomatic of a dominant view within the education system that tends to perceive diversity as synonymous with “challenge”, “problem” or even “threat”. In other words: our education system appears to have a fundamental problem in coping with diversity (Hickling-Hudson & Ahlquist 2003), with Indigenous learners the most prominent, but by far not the only example. As discussed by Allard & Santoro (2006), students who are “different” from the dominant mainstream in terms of their ethnicity, language, (dis)ability, sexuality or socio-economic background are less likely to do well at school. The marginalisation, blaming and othering of those kids that don’t “fit in” to our school system are testament to the manifest failure to substantially engage, appreciate and celebrate this difference. According to Woods et al (2003), an increasing “blame the victim” mentality has led to a myriad of “special” (i.e. “not-normal”) programs and initiative targeted at “low achievers”. Ultimately, in the words of Father Chris Riley (2007), ‘our schools are set up to exit kids that don’t fit the system’.

At the heart of this lies a rationalising mono-cultural worldview which, if not flatly denying or rejecting the obvious consequences that flow from the reality of diverse classrooms, nevertheless views and objectifies diversity as something that requires strategies to be dealt or coped with – a bit like a famine or a natural disaster. Many schools have a hard time even acknowledging, beyond tokenistic gestures, the diversity that exists within their student (and staff) population as a matter of fact, let alone celebrate and embrace it as part of any kind of positive school-wide pedagogy. There is a clear need to broaden teaching methodologies by systematically
changing pre- and in-service teacher training towards a sharper focus on
diversity education. Yet, according to Mills (2007), the current approach to
diversity education for pre-service teachers at Australian universities is
taking place in an add-on or piecemeal fashion, often with little or no
success. While teacher education, school funding, the syllabus, and
administrative and other structural impediments certainly leave a lot to be
desired for in this respect, the pedagogy at the coalface of the individual
classroom is a significant factor in the alienation or inclusion experienced
by students day in and day out. This is, in many ways, a manifest and
profound human rights concern.

Let’s be honest, here. Diversity in our schools is a fact of life that is not
going away. If anything, diversity is only going to increase in a
progressively mobile world. Allard & Santoro (2006) tell us that
‘[w]orking with diverse student populations productively depends on
teachers and teacher educators recognizing [sic] and valuing
difference’ [my emphasis]. To view diversity as a problem to be dealt with is not very
empowering: it can leave us feeling pressured, besieged and overwhelmed,
even threatened. If, however, we adopt a different view of diversity as a
resource, as a positive opportunity for growth and transformation, then we
can change our focus from one of being drained by diversity towards one
of being replenished by it. Pannikar stresses the need to create
intermediary space to engage in critical cross-cultural processes that lead
209). By valuing the diversity that we live, learn and teach in as a potential
source for creating new, transformative knowledge and processes, we free
ourselves up to become collaborative learners in a mutually enriching
dialectical dialogue on the nature of teaching and learning. We do need to
move our thinking away from an objectifying, needs-driven view of
difference and diversity, however, and instead invest time and effort into
engaging diversity as a resource for our own benefit as much as for those
who currently fall between the educational cracks. It is about being
enriched by diversity instead of threatened or besieged.

The discourse on Indigenous education

As Foucault (1980) reminds us, knowledge and power are inextricably
linked through discourses, which actively delineate and shape the reality of
individuals’ identity within society. The prevailing orthodoxy in
educational thinking dictates that Indigenous education is perceived and
discussed primarily as education for Indigenous children, with the
corollary of teaching all children something about Indigenous Australia.
This type of education is somehow different from “normal”, mainstream
education and requires “special” policies, programs and practices to
address the present and continuing “underachievement”. The NSW
Aboriginal Education Policy (1996, p. 1) states its unequivocal goals as:

To promote the educational achievements of Aboriginal students.
To educate all students about Aboriginal Australia.
Nowhere is this powerful ascribing of roles more apparent than in previous attempts to develop an Aboriginal pedagogy (Andrews & Hughes 1988; *Aboriginal Pedagogy – Aboriginal Teachers Speak Out* 1991; Hughes, More & Williams 2004). Aboriginal pedagogy was defined as a reactive pedagogy for (or directed at) Indigenous people, i.e. catering to their perceived specific “cultural” needs and learning styles. While this brings up matters of ontological hierarchies and competing views of Indigenous people as subjects or objects, there also appears to be a fundamental misunderstanding of the meaning of the term pedagogy as the ‘art of teaching’ or ‘the science of teaching’ (Delbridge & Bernard 1998, p. 848; Moore 2003, p. 1036) [my emphases]. While undoubtedly pursued by people with good intentions, it ultimately perpetuated a deficit-view of Indigenous people that focuses on needs instead of resources. The “Aboriginal learning styles” debate of the late eighties and early nineties reflects this misconceived view.

The concept of particular Aboriginal ways of learning was originally based on Harris’ (1984) anthropological research with the Yolngu people in Arnhem Land and was widely discussed and critiqued in the ensuing anthropological and educational “Aboriginal learning styles” debate (see for example Christie 1985; Eckermann 1988; Nicholls, Crowley & Watt 1996; Partington 1997). While useful at the time in naming and alerting educators to the existence of diverse learning styles, it ultimately entrenched difference, othering, generalisation and exclusive notions of Aboriginality. Ironically, although the anthropological findings were supposed to have debunked the colonial cultural deficit-view of Indigenous peoples as inherently incapable of achieving at Western schools, their generalisation appears to have unconsciously strengthened this view by assigning differences in learning styles solely on the basis of a fixed homogenous ethnicity.

The subsequent development and continued existence of “special” Indigenous programs to address “special” Indigenous learning needs, particularly in an age of economic rationalism, has fed the view that difference is a burden, that it costs money. A pedagogical problem thus also becomes an economic one. Furthermore, through this targeted response, the education system locates difference and diversity outside of the classroom, which in itself is not required to fundamentally change or be questioned as to its implication in the continuation of the status quo. Add to that the fact that the significant gap in learning outcomes between Indigenous and non-Indigenous schoolchildren has continued to persist despite decades of targeted policies, programs and practices, and you reach the point where many people will throw up their hands and say: What’s the point? Why don’t things change? What else can we do?

**Indigenous pedagogy**

The above-mentioned need to re-conceptualise impels me to argue for quite a different kind of Indigenous education: one based on the translation of enduring Indigenous educational processes and philosophies
into methodologies of transformative education. In other words: if pedagogy is indeed the art or science of teaching, then Indigenous pedagogies must be understood as education through (or based on) Indigenous philosophies, processes and theories of knowledge.

This re-conceptualisation demands recognition of Indigenous people as subjects not objects, as resourceful not needy, as teachers not learners. In short: a paradigm shift in relations between Indigenous and non-Indigenous people in this country. Conversely, acceptance of this view also entails the realisation that this kind of Indigenous pedagogy is not applicable on the basis of an exclusive racial or ethnic identity, but open to all learners. This is not to deny or detract from the urgency in addressing the manifest crisis in providing a quality education to Indigenous people who, according to the Productivity Commission (Steering Committee for the Review of Government Service Provision 2003, 6.1), ‘continue to be the most educationally disadvantaged group in Australia’. It is merely about underlining the fact that such a perceptual transformation has the potential to both contribute to addressing that crisis and have wider benefits for all learners.

What would Indigenous pedagogy – that is, pedagogy through (or based on) Indigenous values, philosophies and methodologies – be shaped by and what would it look like? In this sense, it is a fairly new idea that is only just being considered in Australian academia, although it resonates with similar discussions in North America that have taken place over the past decade (McKay 1996; Kawagley & Barnhardt 1999; Battiste 2002; Lambe 2003; McNally 2004). While any definition at this stage is slippery and incomplete, there appear to be some emerging key principles that might give shape to the notion of Indigenous pedagogy.

First of all, in reflecting the reality and nature of Indigenous philosophies and epistemologies, Indigenous pedagogy is multitudinous and localised, and should therefore be correctly understood as pedagogies rather than pedagogy. The plural is important here, since the great diversity of Indigenous peoples in Australia demands acknowledgment of the variety of valid teaching methods and strategies that will necessarily be employed. These Indigenous pedagogies reflect the overarching epistemological importance of relationships noted by Wilson (2003), which he explains thus: ‘relationships don’t shape reality, they are reality’ (Wilson 2005). Other characteristics concern the actual teaching methodology, with an emphasis on the personal instead of the generalised – or ‘information transmitted by experience’ rather than textbooks (Muñoz 1995, p. 25) – as well as on the experiential and the first-hand, instead of the abstract (McNally 2004). In order to facilitate these collaborative experiences and first-hand accounts, two distinct relational and methodological qualities must be nurtured and upheld: a respectful, culturally safe learning environment (Bin-Sallik 2003) as well as an emphasis on inner deep listening and quiet, still awareness or ‘dadirri’ (Ungunmerr, cited in Atkinson 2002). Kawagley & Barnhardt (1999, p. 134) name the guiding ontological principles of Indigenous education as ‘long-term perspective,
interconnectedness of all things, adaptation to change [as well as] commitment to the commons’, while Biermann & Townsend-Cross (2007) identify the methodological imperatives of ‘identity, relatedness, inclusiveness, reciprocity, nurturance [and] respect’ as key shaping forces. Finally, Indigenous pedagogies have to be congruent with Indigenous beliefs about the land, community and belonging (McKay 1996). However, as flagged before, this does not imply exclusiveness or restrictedness to Indigenous learners only. Woods (2003) in particular is adamant about the broader educational benefit – what he calls the ‘remedial potential for all learners’ – that arises from a wider engagement with Indigenous pedagogies.

The contribution of Indigenous knowledge is not just about additional or different content-knowledge, but also about different process-knowledge. As McNally (2004) notes, this is important in terms of engagement:

> What makes Indigenous theories of culture distinctive is in part that they are less a matter of theory than of process, and thus we cannot just enumerate the content of the theories more effectively; we must engage their dynamism in creative ways.

Consequently, Indigenous pedagogies appear to be the most advantageous ground for cross-cultural engagement with the aim of activating human rights in education. It also attests to the wider social importance of pedagogy as not just imparting knowledge onto others, but helping to shape learners’ attitudes to themselves, others and learning in general.

**Developing a human rights pedagogy**

A framework for teaching through the practice of being human in our interactions in the classroom requires us to re-think our traditional ideas in regard to teaching, schooling and the function of our education system. Perhaps even to collectively re-examine what it means to be human, beyond platitudes, in the context of our classroom. To begin with, therefore, the engagement of diversity in an open, negotiated and participatory framework must be a key competency for any pedagogy that aspires to teach through the practice of human rights. This most certainly means substantive and ongoing student involvement.

The issue of student involvement, or student voice, in education is problematic, however, and has been exposed as such by Lodge (2007). According to her research, the concept has in the past been predominantly concerned with student experiences of issues such as bullying or dress codes. Lodge claims that it is only recently that an emergent view has arisen of the importance of hearing the learner’s voice in discussions about learning itself. Discussing student involvement or participation *per se*, then, is not sufficient if one wants to capture the intent of the practice in its precise manner, as it may span the whole spectrum from being used for compliance and control to building a dialogic relationship of negotiated learning. Substantive student involvement, as opposed to tokenistic, thus
has to focus on negotiation about teaching and learning, the primary characteristics of education.

Although some curriculum areas lend themselves to human right pedagogy more easily than others, the subject in question is really of secondary importance. What matters is the process of teaching which has to fulfil several quality criteria, some of which may be to:

- involve students in cooperative decision-making about learning;
- provide a respectful, culturally safe space for all learners to participate;
- provide acknowledgment of and voice to all the identities present as important contributors to the learning process;
- acknowledge and be conscious of the responsibility each individual holds for the wellbeing of the group;
- focus on a real-life issue and not shy away from dealing with complexity
- be oriented towards a defined, emancipated learning goal; and
- be underpinned by a very clear and explicit understanding of the common values, shared by and applicable to all, that enable it to be sustained.

These characteristics are a starting point, but they are more than just a fancy wish-list grasped out of thin air: they reflect basic human rights ideals about equality, dignity and the struggle for peace and cooperation. They also strongly relate to the characteristics observed by Watkins, Carnell & Lodge (cited by Lodge 2007), who examined the nature of effective learning and found that it is ‘active, collaborative, learner-driven, engaged in authentic activities and metacognitive’.

**Colonial legacies**

As this is an endeavour in cross-cultural meaning-making, engaging Indigenous pedagogies within a human rights education context means engaging Indigenous people as well as Indigenous philosophies and theories. The meeting of different peoples in a mono-cultural institution such as our education system is never easy, specifically so when that institution has been a central tool of colonialism and has shaped the power relations as well as the attitudes of both coloniser and colonised. Colonialism is not simply a historical period, the sum of its administrative, political and cultural markers, to be overcome or purged by the dominant society at some time in its development as it no longer wishes to be that way. Rather, colonialism is an ideology, a way of thinking, which is diametrically opposed to what we may call a human rights-informed world view. It cannot coexist with the notion of free and equal individuals living together peacefully, dignity intact.

Human rights education cannot, therefore, unproblematically claim to be postcolonial, attempting to immediately and seamlessly move on as one.
Apart from its material effects in terms of power relations, we must understand colonialism as the persistent psychological determination to control others’ lives in order to impose one’s own set of beliefs. Because of this contradistinction, human rights education has to address colonial practices as much as theories. It has to be anti-colonial, explicitly challenging colonial practice and actively teaching against its sentiments to ensure human rights are central to any ethical considerations. At the same time as being anti-colonial, it also has to be de-colonial: practising, theorising and living together within an ethics of and a focus on ‘reconciliation, earth-keeping and peace-making’ (Oates 2007) that provides avenues for creative expressions of our diversity as well as for corroborations and reaffirmations of our common humanity. To achieve that, we have to answer Tuhiwai Smith’s (1999) call to start ‘decolonizing [sic] methodologies’ and forge new, decolonised understandings in dialogue between peoples, nations and cultures.

Conclusion
Where do we start with this far-reaching endeavour? How can we together create education and indeed, pedagogy, which is at once anti-colonial and immersed in humanity? The answer is both complex and incredibly simple: we start right here, right now. There is no panacea: the plurality and diversity of Indigenous nations and cultures means that solutions, albeit supported by wider academic and intellectual discourses, must be found at the local level. This requires a respectful engagement with local communities with the positive expectation of mutual enrichment and enhancement, the awareness of the legacies of colonial history and the explicit purpose of developing an effective local human rights pedagogy that is inclusive of all learners. In other words: a long-term exchange built on talking about teaching and learning, and preparedness to see Indigenous pedagogies as highly relevant, resourceful and remedial contributions to the process. On top of that, the very act of entering into this exchange is a manifestation of human rights in action.

Unquestionably, there are some risks involved in this approach to developing transformative human rights education. As Watson (2007) has noted, the take-up of Indigenous concepts by non-Indigenous people can easily lead into just another form of appropriation, colonisation and victimisation of Indigenous intellectual and cultural property. Nakata (2004) has pointed out that misconceived and mal-applied notions of Indigenous pedagogy in particular are prone to racialised and culturalised views that stereotype learners and fail to deliver on their promise of panacea-like solutions to very complex historical problems. Finally, the approach relies fundamentally on the goodwill of Indigenous peoples which, to say the least, has been continually eroded for the past 220 years.

Despite these warnings, however, Indigenous pedagogies are favourably disposed to be the starting point from which to develop and facilitate human rights education through practice. Put simply, they encapsulates content in process, perceiving and treating people as unique individuals
with inalienable rights to live in dignity and moral responsibilities towards ailing the suffering of the human community they are part of. When engaged as a dynamic and rigorous philosophy, the influence of the theories, processes and practices of Indigenous pedagogies can not only transform the way we teach, but enrich us as human beings in the process.

On a final note, this is something every teacher can do: right here, right now. Changes at the school, departmental and political level are important too, but pedagogy is the one area that every teacher can think about and act on straight away. If we take human rights in education seriously, we must simultaneously act on multiple levels. And who knows where one little pedagogical change in one classroom might lead? Who can say how it might affect the life paths of your students, other teachers, the school, the education system and, importantly, yourself?
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Appendix II


Introduction

The Australian education system does not handle diversity very well. According to Hickling-Hudson & Ahlquist (2003) and Woods et al (2003), it does not positively incorporate and address student diversity and instead perpetuates a pedagogical monoculture that has shifted the blame for failing at school onto the victims. These have become stigmatised as ‘low achievers’ that require ‘special’ programs and attention.

While teaching diverse groups of people in diverse settings and locations, the Australian education system nonetheless clings to an imagined norm of how education is done. This imagined norm favours an individual, abstract and teacher-centred interpretation of education over one that emphasises collective, concrete and student-centred learning. While it might appear to be well-suited to a globalised world, it is increasingly being challenged by those concerned about its debilitating effects on both local communities and students’ overall skills and capacities (McRae 1990; Orr 1999; Sobel 2004).

In this paper, I want to unpack some of these critiques and contrast them with two approaches to education that are different to the imagined norm. Indigenous pedagogies and environmental education both emphasise a more localised approach to learning that rests on collectiveness, experientialism and student-centredness. My argument is that such localised models of education, cognisant of the fecund diversity inherent in people and place, can actually turn a perceived obstacle into a pedagogical tool.

To this end, the paper begins by examining the imagined norm as well as some of the crucial ethical and methodological dimensions of this type of theoretical inquiry. Secondly, the paper considers Indigenous pedagogies and the need to re-conceptualise the dominant notion that it represents a type of pedagogy which is for Indigenous people. Thirdly, this will be followed by an exploration of the pedagogical facets of environmental education. After having thus explored the two approaches separately, we can finally consider the inherent potentialities of a dialogue between them. Indigenous pedagogies and environmental education are both sound, intelligible systems at the margins of the Australian education system. What could happen if they were brought into a pedagogical conversation with one another?
The Imagined Norm

Mainstream education as practised in the majority of schools in Australia and other Western nations has been well critiqued over recent decades from a variety of perspectives. As some of those perspectives have concerned themselves with the importance of *place*, it is worth unpacking a few of these a little further. Orr’s criticism (cited in Sobel, 2004, p. ii) that we are “educating young people to be mobile, rootless and autistic towards their places” is at the heart of this charge. If autism is understood as “the inability to relate affectionately” (Delbridge and Bernard 1998, p.65), then he points to a serious lack of relationship-building and connection to the local environment, both physical and social. In the same vein, McRae (1990, p. 4) states that “many people have become passive participants, spectators, recipients of second-hand knowledge, attitudes and values, increasingly removed from real first-hand experiences”. This physical, emotional and intellectual disconnection and abstraction can be felt in curricula and pedagogy as well as in more subtle contexts such as the schools’ architecture and design (Orr 1999).

While everyone is diminished by a disconnection from the richness of complex relationships with their environment, children from marginalised backgrounds in particular appear to suffer stigmatisation and low achievement as a result of this disconnection. Of course, nowhere is this clearer in Australia than in education statistics concerning Indigenous learners. In no uncertain terms, the Productivity Commission states that “Indigenous students continue to be the most educationally disadvantaged student group in Australia” (Steering Committee for the Review of Government Service Provision 2003, 6.1). Year after year, official statistics tell the seemingly unchanging story of educational segregation, which continues despite recent decades of targeted policies, programs and reports on Indigenous education on a territory, state and federal level.

Historically, however, Indigenous peoples in Australia have been denied educational opportunities afforded to other people on the basis of racist attitudes held by the white majority. Moreover, the education system played a central part in the colonisation of Indigenous peoples, by devaluing and apprehending the transmission of their cultures, knowledges and languages. This has led to a deep suspicion, shared by many Indigenous people, towards the ultimate goals and effects of mainstream schooling. More recently, since about the 1970s, the quantity and quality of education for Indigenous children has been the driving concern and focus of several initiatives by Federal, State and Territory governments (see Beresford and Partington 2003 for a comprehensive historical and contemporary analysis). At this point in time, improving educational outcomes for Indigenous children can safely be considered as one of the most urgent issues in Australian education.
Ethics
There are some extremely important ethical issues that form an intrinsic part of my inquiry. As noted by Baden Offord (2007), “ethical questions are germane to research”. Especially if we operate at the “cultural interface” (Nakata 1997) of different world views, we have to ask how do we know, how do we act and why do we act? My ethical questions thus encompass three branches of philosophy: epistemology, methodology and axiology.

Engaging Indigenous pedagogies and philosophies as a non-Indigenous immigrant researcher is no simple task. Putting aside the complexities inherent in any encounter between cultures with different values, languages and belief systems, the Australian legacy of over two hundred years of colonialism, of scientific racism and of the academy’s complicity in the continued subjugation of Indigenous peoples, cultures and knowledges is stark. It has left many Indigenous people deeply suspicious of researchers and their agenda. And it has led many academics to either dismiss Indigenous philosophies or shy away from engagement with a great potential resource for fear of perpetuating colonial relationships.

To me, however, engagement with Indigenous pedagogies through environmental education is to follow Tuhiwai Smith’s (1999) call to start ‘decolonizing [sic] methodologies’. Furthermore, it is a means to a decolonising approach to living together. How do we live and learn together in a diverse, just and sustainable society? And what is my part in it? Leila Watson’s famous quote comes to mind:

If you have come to help me, you are wasting your time. But if you have come because your liberation is bound up with mine then let us work together.
(Watson, cited in Brady 1988, p. 6)

Approach
The approach of this inquiry is characterised by its trans-disciplinary nature, as it draws on the fields of Indigenous Studies, Education and Cultural Studies. Methodologically, it is informed by Critical Theory and Indigenist Research. Critical social research, on the one hand,

… assumes that the world is changed by reflective practical activity and it is thus not content to simply identify the nature of oppressive structures but to point to ways in which they can be combated through praxis. (Harvey 1990, p. 32)

Indigenist research, on the other hand, as expressed by Rigney (1997), Martin (2000), Atkinson (2001), Weber-Pillax (2001) and Wilson (2004), is a research methodology based on the philosophies, processes and protocols of Indigenous peoples. It views research as the building of respectful relationships based on reciprocity, accountability and responsibility, and lays down the ground rules for engaging Indigenous communities on their terms. The centrality of relationships to Indigenous philosophical understandings cannot be underestimated here. As Wilson
(2005) says so concisely, “relationships don’t shape reality, they are reality”.

**Indigenous pedagogies**

Pedagogy has been defined as “the art” or “the science” of teaching (Delbridge and Bernard 1998, p. 848; Moore 2003, p. 1036). Contrary to the implied equivalence, this is an important distinction, not a synonym. This paper’s focus is explicitly on the art of teaching – the philosophical basis, the underlying values, the theories about the process of teaching. So before we go on to discuss the nature of Indigenous pedagogies, we need to clarify what they are not. This is important since, in Australia, both the terms Indigenous education and Indigenous pedagogies have been predominantly conceptualised as education for Indigenous people, with the corollary of teaching all students something about Indigenous peoples (see for example the Aboriginal Education Policy 1996).

The search for an Aboriginal pedagogy and the ensuing Aboriginal learning styles debate that raged in the nation’s university education and anthropology departments in the late eighties and early nineties are a prime example of this misconception of pedagogy as determined by the object instead of the subject (see Harris 1984; Christie 1985; Eckermann 1988; Harris 1990; Harris and Malin 1994; Nicholls, Crowley and Watt 1996; Malin 1997). After two centuries of considering Indigenous people to be largely incapable of learning “Western” knowledge, anthropologists and educators started to consider what they thought were more culturally appropriate learning processes. The developing discourse defined Aboriginal pedagogy as a reactive pedagogy directed at Indigenous people, i.e. catering to their perceived specific needs (Andrews and Hughes 1988; Aboriginal Pedagogy: Aboriginal teachers speak out 1991; Hughes, More and Williams 2004). While undoubtedly pursued with good intentions, it transformed a pre-existing cultural deficit-view of Indigenous people into a pedagogical one. The ongoing focus on what Indigenous learners (and, by implication, Indigenous cultures) need instead of what they have to offer has subsequently become even more entrenched in our education system. But despite – or, as one might contend, because of – this, the statistics have not improved.

Consequently, I argue, along with others, for a different conceptualisation of Indigenous pedagogies. A more appropriate alternative could be based on the translation of enduring Indigenous educational processes and philosophies into the discourse of transformative education. In other words, understanding Indigenous pedagogies as education through (or based on) Indigenous processes, philosophies and knowledges. This approach heeds the warnings of prominent Indigenous scholars like Nakata (2004) or Watson (2007) who argue against a homogenising and appropriative pedagogical direction. Due to the multidimensional and localised nature of Indigenous nations and their philosophies, it is important to be cognisant of the plural reality, pedagogies, rather than the singular construct, pedagogy. However, as part of this rich diversity there
appear to be some common threads in educational processes that can be discussed as a whole to provide some indication of shared values and methods. This is an idea whose underlying principles in Australia have only appeared as fragments within other debates. While it is only just emerging in Australia, it resonates deeply with similar discourses taking place in North America in recent years (see McKay 1996; Battiste 2002; Lambe 2003; McNally 2004).

There are several emerging key principles that have been suggested by Indigenous thinkers as critical to understanding Indigenous pedagogies in this sense. Mudrooroo (1995, p. 25) describes Indigenous education as “personal, not generalised, with information transmitted by experience” or first-hand rather than through textbooks (McNally 2004). This concurs with the “preference for experiential learning” Battiste (2002, p. 15) found in her summary of Canadian research findings.

The important communal component of Indigenous pedagogies is facilitated by the concept of “dadirri – listening to one another” (Ungunmerr, cited in Atkinson 2002). But one expression of an idea that is found across many Indigenous nations, it is “a special quality, a unique gift of the Aboriginal people. It is inner deep listening and quiet, still awareness – something like what you call contemplation” (Ungunmerr, cited in Atkinson, p. 16). The other central plank of communal learning is Bin-Sallik’s (2003) concept of “cultural safety” which affords each individual member of the learning community the respect and feeling of integrity they require for higher learning to take place.

Some guiding ontological principles have been identified by Kawagley and Barnhardt (1999, p. 134) as ‘long-term perspective, interconnectedness of all things, adaptation to change [as well as] commitment to the commons’. These reflect McKay’s (1996) insistence on congruence between pedagogical methods and Indigenous beliefs about the land, community and belonging.

In an Australian context, several imperatives that contribute to shaping Indigenous pedagogies have been suggested, such as identity, relatedness, inclusiveness, reciprocity, nurturance and respect (Author and Townsend-Cross under review). Finally, Woods makes the crucial point that Indigenous education and pedagogies are not necessarily restricted to Indigenous students. On the contrary, he hints at their capability to reconnect all students to a deeper learning experience when he stresses the “remedial potential for all learners” (Woods 2003) they imbue.

**Environmental Education**

Environmental education is a fairly well-established and -delineated field of education that has been explored extensively over the past two decades. It is a term used to house a diversity of practices and purposes like outdoor education, adventure education, socially critical education, place-based education and ecology, among others.
Building on Murdoch (1993, p. 3), who defines environmental education as “learning in the environment, about the environment and for the environment”, and Sobel (2004, p. 9), who speaks about the use of “the environment as an integrating context”, we can arrive at a useful working definition. When we define environmental education as education in, about, through and for the environment, it allows us to appreciate the multiple dimensions of location, content, process and purpose. As the about and perhaps also the in aspects are fairly well-known, let us now focus on the through and for dimensions which shine a different light on traditional assumptions about environmental education.

A key axiological consideration, the purpose of environmental education is linked to the two related themes of “ecological literacy” (Schwartz 1999, p. 103) and sustainability. In this context, the former does not only concern knowledge about the local environment “but, in the light of that knowledge, how we come to live our lives” (Schwartz 1999, p. 103). Sustainability, on the other hand, is “at its heart […] about the relationship between human beings and the world; it is about morality” (Smith and Williams 1999, p. 1).

While not losing sight of the location, content and purpose, it is the process, the through dimension, of environmental education that I would like to focus on in more depth. By concentrating on what might be described as environmental pedagogy, environmental education’s relevance is extended beyond narrow minimalist conceptions towards a broader discussion and application in other contexts and subject areas. In other words, let’s move environmental pedagogy out of its naturalist pigeonhole and think about it in terms of broader pedagogical categories, primarily as a widely applicable educational process tied to key principles.

Understood in this light, environmental education involves not simply learning about the geographical or biological elements of the local area, but the education environment more generally, or its in and through dimensions. At its most basic, it moves beyond rigid structures and abstract classroom concepts to focus on the interplay of cognition, affect and skills, instead of just one domain (Williams and Taylor 1999). This obviously has the potential to apply to any subject or key learning area.

Common ground

Before proceeding with the analysis of some common elements shared by Indigenous pedagogies and environmental education, a word of caution is appropriate. Indigenous people and the environment movement have an equally ambiguous historical relationship as Indigenous people and academia, especially centring around constructions of Aboriginality and what has been called “the dispossessing doctrine of wilderness” (Bayet-Charlton 2003, p. 177) or “environmental racism” (Langton 2007). These challenges relate to what is seen by many Indigenous people as the conservation movement’s push to declare and preserve certain areas of land as ‘wilderness’ and thus erase or deny the Indigenous inhabitants’
property rights and even their existence within these environments. Because of this history, Bayet-Charlton (2003, p. 176) notes, “Aboriginal people remain ambivalent about green issues since in their purest form green values deny black rights”.

Having said that, there also are (and have been) substantial alliances between large parts of the environment movement and Indigenous peoples’ campaigns for land and justice, such as direct action – “reconciliation through conservation” (Evans 1997, p. 10) – or joint national park management. Historically, the essential task of re-evaluating the relationship between Western society and its environment has been driven by the environment movement. At a very fundamental level, changing existing attitudes on environmental issues is a task that we all must share for the future benefit of the nation and the planet.

Looking at common pedagogical factors, a few principles stand out that show the proximity of underlying values guiding both approaches. To render this discussion of pedagogy meaningful, let us consider three shared key characteristics of Indigenous pedagogies and environmental education: the experiential, group-dynamic and student-centred nature of learning

**Experiential learning** means guiding and challenging students creatively, physically and emotionally through inquiry-based research, multisensory ‘hands-on’ experience and reflective discussions. This includes, for example, challenging the individual or group through “positive stress”: questioning and re-assessing one’s own identity by participating in a perceived risky or dangerous experience (Hayllar 1990, p. 61). The maxim, to “confront without defeating the individual” (Ibid.), allows for a taxing, yet culturally safe experience that pushes boundaries and facilitates personalised, meaningful learning outcomes.

**Group-dynamic learning**, realises learning objectives by relying on the formation of a “cooperative classroom” (Murdoch 1993, p. 138). Facilitating the development of both individual and social competencies, group-dynamic learning builds on the potential of each individual’s contribution to the whole and the resulting synthesis of ideas. While not a new concept, its centrality to both Indigenous pedagogy and environmental pedagogy means that the multidimensional nature of learning is respected, with learning taking place from direct experience, observation of peers as well as dialogical and dialectic processes.

**Student-centred learning**, finally, translates into an emphasis on partnership, participation and allowing for individual solutions to collective learning challenges. The teacher needs to be aware of the pedagogical opportunities inherent in collaborative and negotiated approaches to learning and involve students as much as possible in planning, problem solving, decision-making and determining change management. The role of students as substantive rather than tokenistic partners in negotiations contributes greatly to what Watkins, Carnell and
Lodge (2007) identify as criteria for effective learning, such as agency and meta-cognitive approaches.

In practice, these key characteristics could be translated into more integrated, project-based and goal-oriented work. By identifying real-life social or environmental challenges in the local community and devising solutions, students begin to appreciate the extent and limits of their own skills and knowledge, the contribution of other group members and their collective stake in determining outcomes. All of this doesn’t just happen by itself, of course, but requires careful planning, facilitation and accompaniment by the teacher. It also relies on a flexible school structure that allows space and time for projects to work across a number of subjects and key learning areas. Sobel (2004) discusses a range of such types of projects in a North American context.

**Synergies**

In the context of decolonisation and reconciliation in Australia today, environmental education has the potential to function as a conceptual bridge for many non-Indigenous people to engage and relate to Indigenous pedagogies and therefore, to larger Indigenous value and belief systems. This is a necessary step in the evolution of the environment movement itself, but also reflects its unique predisposition to help build those much-needed bridges for non-Indigenous people. This process is by definition not a pre-determined course of action, but rather a continuous negotiation, which must take place in a spirit that is de-mystifying, empowering and contributing to Indigenous self-determination. In other words, we can’t lose sight of the fact that engaging Indigenous methodologies is inseparable from fighting for social justice for Indigenous peoples, including improved outcomes for Indigenous children and improved control of educational processes by Indigenous communities.

Through this process, a decolonising approach to living together can be explored which is about moving mainstream environmental and educational practice towards Indigenous philosophical and ecological understandings with concern for justice and sustainability (Kawagley and Barnhardt 1999). It also answers Campbell and Marshall’s (2003, p. 2373) call to “expand programs of Indigenous studies beyond the purely cultural” and provide other avenues of meaningful engagement and mutual fecundity.

Furthermore, this approach supports the view of the wider social importance of pedagogy, not just in imparting knowledge in children but in shaping people’s attitudes to self, to others and to life-long learning. In order to effect educational and other larger changes, different process-knowledge not more of the same content-knowledge, is the key. As McNally (2004, p. 604) puts it,

> What makes Indigenous theories of culture distinctive is in part that they are less a matter of theory than of process, and thus we cannot just enumerate the content
of the theories more effectively; we must engage their dynamism in creative ways.

**Conclusion**

It becomes apparent that further care and nurturing of this common ground represents an important contribution to our education system. Such an alternative view speaks to a variety of learning styles and holds potential remedial benefits for all learners in that it allows for different ways of reconnecting with personal learning journeys. Indigenous children are not the only ones struggling to grapple with a monocultural education system. In my judgement, the interaction of Indigenous pedagogies and environmental education has the potential to be a fruitful one. It is important to bring together and negotiate complementary alternative educational designs to build support, recognition and intellectual capacity, but it is even more important to positively influence and build bridges to the mainstream. This is about developing innovative, transformative education practices based on convincing, sound theoretical concepts and rooted in enduring values and philosophies.

However, altering educational process alone will only be a starting point towards wider changes. A sustained effort is required that brings about interaction with curriculum planning, funding arrangements, governance and school culture. Further, for this effort to have any chance of contributing to liberation rather than oppression, it needs to be based on partnerships rather than colonial relationships with local Indigenous communities. Some tentative beginnings are being made, such as ethno-ecological education in the Canadian Arctic (Doucette, Ransom and Kowalewski 2006) and environmental outreach and exchange programs between schools such as Melbourne Grammar and Worawa Indigenous College (McCoppin 2003).

Regardless, there remain enormous practical and ethical challenges, concerned with questions of intellectual property, the nature of the relationships being established, intellectual frameworks for negotiation as well as the potential dangers of exploitation or misappropriation, where Indigenous knowledge – in this case, of educational practices – is taken without permission and without a clear reciprocal benefit to Indigenous people. Finally, the approach relies to a great extent on the goodwill of Indigenous people to once again share their knowledge and practices after centuries of dispossession, misappropriation and exploitation. Which brings us back to where we started – with ethics and the difficulty of how to proceed. A good starting point for any further exploration might be to simply be open and explicit about our intention, start to build trust, follow Indigenous protocols, including relationships with community, in our research methodologies and act with constant self-reflection and –query. This is because it is obvious from past experience that good intentions are not enough!
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Appendix III


Introduction

Over the past decade, there has been a lack of engagement with Indigenous pedagogical concepts on behalf of Indigenous academics. While Indigenist research methodologies and Indigenous epistemologies have featured heavily as topics of Indigenous students’ postgraduate writing over the past two decades, there has not been, with the exception of Hughes’ (2004) work, a similar focus and emphasis on Indigenous pedagogies or teaching methodologies. It seems that an important part of the circle of knowledge – teaching – has not been part of the reclaiming of Indigenous philosophies. Why? What is it about the transmission of knowledge that earns it a lesser status than the nature of knowledge and how to gain it? Pedagogy plays a crucial role in the entire education process of lifelong learning: from early childhood to primary to high school to tertiary and adult education.

This article is therefore an initial, tentative exploration of an important yet under-theorised concept that. It is only the first step, albeit an important one, in bringing together the discourses of transformative pedagogy and Indigenous education at the ‘cultural interface’ (Nakata, 1997) of tertiary education. The exploration starts off comparatively small, relying on the authors’ reflected experiences and selected student responses. We are by no means suggesting that Indigenous pedagogy has the same effects on everybody: more in-depth, evidence-based studies are needed to understand the impact of this kind of pedagogy on student learning. Nor are we seeking to define a universal model of an Indigenous pedagogy: localised articulations are needed to provide the basis for understanding the nature and complexities of such pedagogies. Instead, what this paper contributes is a challenge, to be taken up by others, an opening up of discursive space and an impetus to articulate this important area of Indigenous philosophy and methodology.

It is our contention that Indigenous pedagogy, properly analysed, explored and theorised on the basis of Indigenous values, philosophies and methodologies, has great potential to effect positive educational change for all learners. We want to turn a prevailing deficit-view of Indigenous education into a resource-based view that names and values Indigenous philosophies for what they are: complex and sophisticated systems of thought. This paper is reflected praxis and a call for action: it builds on experience, weaves it with theory and highlights the need and means for change. Its setting is a tertiary one but its implications permeate the whole education sector from early childhood to primary and high school to tertiary, adult and community education.
Our discussion of Indigenous pedagogy is motivated by a three-fold desire to effect change: change in the classroom, in the education system, in society. First of all, that change concerns addressing existing inequalities that prevent Indigenous children from reaching their full potential. Secondly, it goes beyond a racialised view of Indigenous education as education for Indigenous children and instead focuses on the ‘remedial potential’ for all learners (Woods, 2003) of a pedagogy based on Indigenous values, philosophies and methodologies. Thirdly, it re-injects Indigenous values into the education system that run counter to the trend of producing students that are becoming increasingly, in David Orr’s words (cited in Sobel, 2004, p. ii) ‘mobile, rootless and autistic towards their places’.

Consequently, this paper sets out to,

- Challenge deficit-based view of Indigenous Education as education for Indigenous children;
- Promote Indigenous methodologies as valid and valuable for the educational process of all children;
- Contribute to addressing the ongoing crisis in the provision of quality education for Indigenous children;

To reflect the multiple perspectives with which Indigenous pedagogy resonates, this paper is shaped by an educational dialogue between student and teacher, between scholars and between learners. It is testament to both the importance of the acknowledgment of the learner’s subjectivity and the inherent quality of a reciprocal learning process guided by a common vision. We want to contextualise, relate and extrapolate to provide an overview of what one localised instance of Indigenous pedagogy in Australia might look like. After laying out the historical, political and intellectual context of our conversation, we reflect on our practice as teachers and learners, and what this experience means for theorising Indigenous pedagogy. We will explore the methods as well as the underlying methodology of teaching practice and bring this reflected practice into a theoretical relationship with international indigenous experiences and other ideas about transformative education. In conclusion, we will look deeper at the potential benefits and challenges of trying to articulate a theoretical underpinning for the practice of such a transformative Indigenous pedagogy.

Context

Before we begin our exploration of reflected practice, we need to delineate the context in which it takes place. The three dimensions within which this discussion is placed are: Temporally, it is situated in the recent past, although it also draws on the life histories of the authors. Spatially, it is located within an Indigenous Australian college, within a regional
university, and within the tertiary education sector in Australia. Thematically, it lies at the intersection of two discourses: that of transformative pedagogy and that of Indigenous education.

**Timeframe**
The authors’ reflections on Indigenous pedagogy at Gnibi encapsulate a period of approximately nine years and five years respectively, while the supporting student responses were chosen from this current year’s cohort. However, the Indigenous values and philosophies that underpin and are interwoven with Indigenous pedagogy cannot be defined in such narrow Western understandings of time.

**Location**
Southern Cross University is a regional university situated in the heart of Bundjalung Country on the far north coast of NSW. Gnibi, College of Indigenous Australian Peoples, was created as a new structure within Southern Cross University in January 1997. The College had evolved from the functions of a successful and longstanding Indigenous student support program established in 1989. Gnibi is committed to delivering culturally safe, dynamic and innovative Indigenous studies courses for all people, with the aim of facilitating and supporting students to experience a teaching and learning process that is founded on Indigenous knowledges, experiences and process under principles of social justice, cultural integrity, and inclusion. As well as preparatory foundation studies and postgraduate degrees by research, Gnibi offers three courses:

- Master of Indigenous Studies (Wellbeing)
- Bachelor of Indigenous Studies (Trauma and Healing)
- Bachelor of Indigenous Studies

The course in focus of this study, the Bachelor of Indigenous Studies, explores the interface of Indigenous knowledges and the academy. The Course investigates ‘the complexity of knowledge intersections’ (Nakata, 2004); challenging the continuing history of the circumscription of Indigenous knowledges by the non-Indigenous disciplines across the academy. The Course focus (Gnibi College of Indigenous Australian Peoples, 2004) is for students to develop:

- an appreciation of the diversity of Indigenous Australian peoples philosophies, values, histories, experiences, viewpoints, literature and politics;
- an accurate understanding of Australian colonial history from the perspective of and in relation to Indigenous Australians;
- an awareness of the complex and ongoing manifestation of racism in Australian society, particularly in relation to pedagogic paradigms and practices;
- an awareness of current Indigenous issues related to social justice and human rights including Intellectual and Cultural Property Rights;
- an appreciation of the development of Indigenous cultural, economic and educational policies and practices.
Discourses

Pedagogy

When considering a discourse on transformative pedagogy, it is useful to remember that the etymological roots of the English words *pedagogy* and *pedagogue* go back to the Ancient Greeks. There, the *paidagogos* was the slave who escorted the sons of the upper classes to their various private teachers and generally supervised them (Onions, 1966; Partridge, c1966). Our contemporary conception of pedagogy, on the other hand, is expressed in most dictionaries as ‘the art of teaching’ (Delbridge & Bernard, 1998, p. 848) or ‘the science of teaching’ (Moore, 2003, p. 1036), reflecting a significant shift in understanding.

The underpinning principles of mainstream pedagogy appear to be normalised and hidden, and have become visible only by critique. Establishing education as one of the important means by which those in power perpetuate the injustices of the status quo, Freire (1996, p. 7) identified ‘the [dominant] “banking” concept of education as an instrument of oppression’, whereby students are made to conform through discipline, rote memorisation and repetitive tasks controlled by the teacher (see Freire, 1996, pp. 52-67). Other metaphors, employed to describe mainstream pedagogy, are those of the classroom as a factory managed by behavioural psychology, standardisation and emphasis on content, and as an incarnation of Bentham’s panopticum, where constant surveillance results in self-disciplining behaviour (Lambe, 2003).

While alternative pedagogies have been developed in Western countries since at least the turn of the 19th century, there has been a strong growth of transformative pedagogical approaches in competition with and opposition to mainstream education since the 1960s. Some of these, like critical or anti-colonial pedagogy, are based on the Freirean model of understanding a ‘problem-posing concept of education as an instrument of liberation’ (Freire, 1996, p. 7) (see Bassey, 1999; Giroux, 1997; Kincheloe, c2005; Luke & Gore, 1992; Shor & Freire, 1987). In a similar vein, transformative adult education, or androgogy, is based on self-directed learning, reflected practice and a conscious, internally transformative process (Elias & Merriam, 2005; Usher et al, 1996). The field of environmental pedagogy, on the other hand, attaches value to localised and traditional knowledge, immersion in nature and identification with place and community (McRae, 1990; Smith and Williams, 1999). It has been characterised as operating within a framework of relationality, reciprocity and integrated, purpose-driven projects that include methods such as peer mentoring, experiential and community-based education projects (Sobel, 2004).

In Australia, we find that the concept of pedagogy as the *art*, as opposed to the *science*, of teaching is intellectually neglected and heavily under-theorised, perhaps even un-theorised, especially when compared to discussions about curriculum, school structure or funding. Rather, we tend to restrict ourselves to responding to behaviourist, cognitivist and constructivist theories of learning based on research in the discipline of psychology, rather than education. In pursuing ideals in an instructional
framework of procedures, tools and strategies, we miss the point that pedagogy is both the art and the science of teaching.

**Indigenous Education**
The discourse on *Indigenous education* in Australian has been framed almost exclusively in terms of mainstream education for Indigenous students, with the corollary of teaching all students something about Indigenous cultures. Despite good intent, this is ultimately an objectifying deficit-view that sees Indigenous students as an educational problem or issue that requires remedying or addressing.

In the past thirty years, however, there have also been some attempts at articulating an Aboriginal pedagogy, most notably by the Deakin-Bachelor Teacher Education (D-BATE) Program (*Aboriginal pedagogy: Aboriginal teachers speak out*, 1991), by the Curriculum Development Centre of the Department of Education, Employment and Training (Hughes et al., 2004, pp. 9-10), and by Indigenous academic Paul Hughes (Hughes et al., 2004). These attempts, however, were based on the premise of responding to perceived particular Indigenous learning styles (see Harris, 1984; Christie, 1985; Harris & Malin, 1994; Harrison, 2004) and thus, as such, not much concerned with pedagogical approaches to education based on Indigenous philosophies and methodologies. As opposed to transformative approaches, they were rooted in needs- or problem-based initiatives focused on Indigenous children.

It thus appears that the intersection in Australia today of a set of discourses, on transformative pedagogy and on Indigenous education, has the potential to start a conversation about transformative Indigenous pedagogy. Yet where does one start in bringing the two together? We take our clue from Paulo Freire and Hannah Arendt and undertake the following tentative exploration in the form of a dialogue on reflected practice. These scholars discussed, as did many others, that reflections of our practice, while important in themselves, take on a different dimension when brought into a theoretical relation with other ideas. We want to embrace Arendt’s call to ‘think what we are doing’ (Arendt, 1998, p. 1) and bring about the *conscientisation* Freire insisted was necessary for change (Shor & Freire, 1987). In this spirit, we wish to commence our conversation by building a relationship with each other, the reader and the topic through relating our background and motivation that led us to where we are.

**Reflections**

**Backgrounds**

**Lecturer**
My heritage is Biripi, Worimi and Irish. I am an Indigenous Australian woman, who was, like many other Indigenous Australian people, raised in a non-Indigenous family. Being fair-skinned I was raised as a non-Indigenous (or ‘normal’) person without acknowledgement of my
Indigenous identity. When I was 17 I found my way home to my Koori family and began my cultural learning journey. Soon after, I engaged an academic learning journey in Indigenous Studies at University. Whilst both these learning journeys will not conclude till the day I die, I’ve been lecturing at Gnibi since 1999 and am currently Course Coordinator of the Bachelor of Indigenous Studies.

**Student**
I am a saltwater person from northern Germany and grew up in an “alternative” Western culture, where I learnt to relate to and respect the land I lived on. I worked in environmental education before emigrating to Australia in 2001, when I was 20. A few years prior, I had experienced a culture shock as a high school exchange student in Australia, where my interest in getting to know Indigenous people and learning through interaction collided with the realities of segregated life and social injustice in a deeply racist country town.

Being a recent immigrant to this country, I feel a desire and obligation to learn more about the peoples whose lands I had moved onto. I come with a sincere interest in learning from Indigenous peoples, cultures and philosophies. Because of my background, this might perhaps be a bit easier than for invader descendants, many of whom carry a guilt that paralyses them.

**Motivations**

**Lecturer**
Reflecting on what has informed and influenced my pedagogy it became important to me to articulate why I engage in the academy, what drives me to negotiate the ‘interface’ (Nakata, 1997) of Indigenous and dominant knowledges.

Initially my drive was fuelled by my outrage at the historical and currently maintained depth of racism, ignorance and power imbalance in Australia. I was truly shocked when I first came to understand the full and unabridged history of the colonial project in Australia and gained insights into the mammoth effort that has historically gone into maintaining this ignorance, and therefore colonial dominance, in the general population. I harboured for a long time deep anger and bitter resentment bathed in a blanket of grief and perceived cultural loss. Learning about my mother’s, grandmother’s and great grandmother’s lives broke my heart. I watched the trans-generational effects of their experiences on my family and community every day; alcohol and drug abuse and dependency; social and emotional difficulties: what some people call “mental illness”; what I like to call ‘perfectly normal responses to traumatic experiences’ (Atkinson, 2003). My drive was that addressing ignorance and dominance in Australia was vital to Indigenous community interests and in the interests of the Australian national community.
To some extent this ‘beast of outrage’ is still with me, though is tempered by Indigenous philosophies, values and process in education as I have come to understand, interpret and engage them. This tempering has ‘lifted the blanket’ (Atkinson, 2003) of perceived identity and cultural loss to be replaced by a buoyant carpet of acknowledgment and celebration of identity and perceived cultural potential. I strongly believe that engaging the interface to which Nakata refers in proactive and positive ways in mainstream education is critical in the fight against racism and dominance, the fight for social justice (a very broad term that includes self-determination), and critical to Indigenous Australian well-being and community interests.

**Student**

Before I begin to reflect on my pedagogical experience at Gnibi, I would like to say what I consider to be “good pedagogy”. This understanding is shaped by my experience as a student in various formal (Steiner school, mainstream primary school, integrated high school in Germany, state high school and university in Australia) and informal settings, as well as my experience working as an environmental pedagogue in a German national park. Good pedagogy is not just about relating content, but about values and purpose in an engaging, egalitarian and liberating process. To me, it is much more about the art, than the science of teaching: the science has to constantly change to keep up with the circumstances of the learning experience and offer diverse strategies for diverse contexts; but the art of teaching, the values and purposes that the pedagogy seeks to convey, need to be embodied – they are solid, they are “business”.

**Methods – The Science of Teaching**

**Lecturer**

Engaging a pedagogical practice embedded in Indigenous philosophy within the confines of the university structure is, whilst challenging, achievable. Self analysis and reflection in classroom activity, discussion and assessment encourages students acknowledgement of their own identity and world-views and awareness of their relatedness. Overall, the pedagogical space is important – a space that is ‘culturally safe’ (Bin-Sallik, 2003), respectful and conducive to shared learning. Being outside the classroom and using the concept of a talking circle to physically emphasise non-hierarchical structures and holding every participant to account to both speak and listen is indicative of this approach.

Quite a few of the units and courses are held in blocks of time, allowing for deeper, more meaningful and longer interaction between all learners. Field trips allow for interaction with community on the land. Many of the assessments are group-based, either in their preparation or in their presentation. On the other hand, there is a clear understanding of the personal responsibility a learner must take for their work. Many assessments emphasise reflectiveness: personal journals, artwork or active participation in class discussions are used to reflect on the whole learning experience of content, process and purpose.
Student
If learning is self-directed and the teacher not the repository of all knowledge, what, then, is the role of the teacher? In the pedagogical context I experienced at Gnibi, it is the twofold role of ice-breaker/confronter and guide/mentor. Because of the enculturation in Western systems of education, a class needs to be brought back to a common starting point, so the first part of any subject usually consists of active unlearning, of collapsing the barriers that have been erected in the way of true, liberating education. Presenting previously marginalised historical accounts, legal insights and social commentary, the teacher creates the space needed for productive learning to take place. Once this is achieved, students’ desire to know usually takes them wherever they want to go and the teacher takes a position of providing stimuli and facilitating pointed reflection, liberating conversation and individual conceptualisation.

Methodology – The Art of Teaching
Lecturer
My personal life circumstances, (being raised and educated as a “normal” Australian and then coming back to my heritage and identity through cultural education), have provided me the opportunity to critically reflect and comparatively analyse the pedagogy of state enforced education against the pedagogy of my cultural education. My pedagogical practices are most powerfully influenced by the formal and informal cultural learning that I have experienced through family/community cultural mentors, including Indigenous academics, that has informed my appreciation of Indigenous philosophies and values. This pedagogy could be described as being founded on the broad principals of identity and relatedness, couched in the contextual values of reciprocity, inclusiveness, nurturance and respect:

- Identity – learning about oneself as primary to the life-long learning process;
- Relatedness – belonging - an enlarging of identity through relatedness to people, place, space, flora, fauna, creation, time (history, present and future) – emotional/passionate;
- Inclusiveness – acknowledgement, attention and consideration of unique identities, experiences and perspectives;
- Reciprocity – as a process of relatedness - rights and responsibilities; equal exchange; balance in relatedness;
- Nurturance –caring, generosity (sharing experience and knowing), patience, forgiveness;
- Respect (acceptance, acknowledgment)

Student
Overall, I found the pedagogy explicitly Indigenous, that is based on and proclaimed in relation to Indigenous values, processes and philosophies.
Non-hierarchical structures based on relationships are an important factor in the pedagogy at work at Gnibi. The creation of communities of learners is a reality that takes peer mentoring and group efforts seriously, encouraging individual responsibility and collective success reminiscent of my own practice of environmental pedagogy.

Reflected practice seems to be the most appropriate term to explain Indigenous pedagogy as I perceive it working at Gnibi. This is not a naturalised assumption of a practice inherent in all Indigenous people, but a cultural artefact that is amplified, thought about and implemented by engagement with Indigenous philosophies, values and theoretical and socio-political contexts. It is perhaps an overstatement to say that a form of Indigenous pedagogy is consciously practised at Gnibi but nevertheless, the Freirean nexus between conscientisation and educational practice for social change is certainly present and pertinent (Shor & Freire, 1987). The impetus in Gnibi’s teaching methodologies is expressed through a commitment to both liberating education for all, in the sense that it presents a normally hidden account of Australian history and cultural, social and political presence, and the accompanying need to work for change to address these injustices. In other words, the axiological component of teaching and learning at Gnibi focuses on the responsibility that comes with acquiring that knowledge and education.

The teaching methodology itself is based on reflected and applied Indigenous theories and values that emphasise relatedness, reciprocal responsibility and caring for the land and sea. Importantly, this is not restricted to the content of teaching, but infused in the process of it. An appreciation of and concern for the whole person, not just the academic mind, is an active component of a teaching process that sits within the confines of academia while at the same time subverting it. Gnibi’s pedagogical approach recognises the importance of learning about the self before learning about others, all in the context of a web of relations. This signifies an approach rooted in reflection, individual judgment and personal interest – not everybody is interested in all knowledge but pursues what s/he feels connected to.

Responses
Student feedback suggests that this pedagogy is not only effective but a new and welcome change to the pedagogy previously experienced by both non-Indigenous and Indigenous students. The following quotes are responses to the first year, first semester Bachelor of Indigenous Studies core unit, Indigenous World Views.

Non-Indigenous Student

The unit has open my eyes and given me a whole new understanding of indigenous cultures and has challenged me to think outside the stereotype image of Aboriginal people …I have learnt so much about myself … This subject has … transformed my thinking. My learning through this unit has been based in deeper knowledges, of not just Indigenous cultures, but of my self and my culture also. By acknowledging
Indigenous groups as diverse, culturally legitimate peoples with complete and complex education, knowledge and learning systems, I became aware of myself. This was interesting because I became visible as a subject and not invisible as the naturalised dominant white Australian. … I think that being visible to myself as a citizen of one way of being in the world, opened up my appreciation and the potential for gauging multiple world views … It is important for me to express that I have changed; I can feel that I have changed. Thank you for opening up my eyes, heart and mind to this potential. Never in my life have I been introduced to the seeds of deeper, higher learning that is practical, spiritual and political all at once. (Little, 2007)

Indigenous Student

As I reflect on what has been an absorbing unit, I cannot help but acknowledge the important role this unit has played in establishing a personal sense of cultural safety, affirming my identity and thus through the proliferation and promotion of my personal perspectives I have been able to greatly articulate my own worldview and subsequent identity. For most of my life leading into this unit, there has been a definite difficulty on behalf of the dominant Australian social paradigm… in accepting my multidimensional Indigenous life and the range of Indigenous lifestyles across a modern spectrum and subsequently, I have found it complicated to truly articulate my place within this contemporary climate. But now, as result of this unit’s work, specifically as it relates to the way in which knowledge is constructed in relation to Indigenous Australians, I feel I am equipped to enter into such contemporary discourse. Hence, I believe this coursework has enabled me the ability to appreciate the construction of knowledge, as a relational concept, in order to mark my space, within Australia’s discursive practice. But surprisingly, in accepting the principles of cultural safety as they pertain to my sense of identity and wellbeing, I have invariably begun to understand the importance of sharing ones worldview as a valid remedial experience. (Creighton, 2007)

Conclusion

What becomes apparent from the reflections and responses, then, is an emerging methodological concept of Indigenous pedagogy with some key underpinning values and an array of tools to translate them into practice. While we use the singular, it is but one instance in a culturally diverse continent of distinct Indigenous nations and communities.

The idea of Indigenous pedagogy as one based on Indigenous values, philosophies and methodologies, even if not widely discussed in Australia, is certainly not new. In North America, for example, it has to various degrees been articulated, discussed and consciously implemented (see for example Hickling-Hudson and Ahlquist, 2003; Lambe, 2003; McKay, 1996; McNally, 2004). While Lambe (2003) discusses the challenges of incorporating Indigenous pedagogy into Native Study courses in a university setting, McNally (2004) provides one solution by going outside of the classroom when integrating Ojibwe pedagogy into a western college. And Battiste (2002, p.21) may warn that ‘[n]one of the provincial initiatives taken so far have integrated the expertise of the Aboriginal peoples in ways that are truly transformational’, but she nevertheless identifies this integrative negotiation as the pedagogical challenge facing Canada.
Is an articulation of Indigenous pedagogy equally important in the Australian context? Yes, for two reasons: (re)claiming Indigenous knowledges and decolonising the teaching process. Regarding the former, we believe that as long as Indigenous researchers speak of *cultures, ways of learning* or *worldviews*, there is an inherent unspoken assumption by academia that these concepts are less rigorous, complex or accessible than Western ones. Battiste (2002, p. 16) put it succinctly,

> Postmodernist scholars have noted that culture is often viewed as what the inferior “other” has. While some peoples have civilizations, philosophies, romance languages, or cultured societies; other peoples have cultures, dialects, worldviews, and tribal knowledge. Peoples with “civilizations” are regarded as inherently superior to peoples with “cultures”.

Reflecting on comparative approaches to philosophy, West (1998) noted in a similar vein that,

> Western epistemology differs from Indigenous epistemology in that we Koori peoples already know the origin, nature, methods and limits of our knowledge systems, what we unlike westerners seem to lack is the capacity to flaunt that knowledge as a badge of our intellect and cultural integrity, in a very public sense.

The articulation and theorization of Indigenous pedagogy, however, is more than just an exercise in *flaunting a badge*; it is the naming and claiming of a transformative process with significant ‘remedial potential’ for all learners (Woods, 2003). In North America, it has been argued (McKay, 1996) that the current educational climate, with the introduction of alternative “Western” concepts like ‘peer mentoring, apprenticeships, experiential learning and holistic development’, prepares the ground for Indigenous pedagogy to be widely introduced into the school system. McNally (2004) holds that engaging Indigenous pedagogy means unlearning racism, going outside of the academy and transforming white middle-class intellectual curiosity and spiritual hunger into ‘a politicized fire in the belly’. It is therefore part of a wider analysis of Indigenous contributions to ecological and educational understanding (Kawagley & Barnhardt, 1999).

In Australia, too, there are voices such as Ungunmerr’s (cited in Atkinson, 2002, p. 5) that speak of the knowledge and resources Indigenous peoples hold which are vital for the wellbeing and healing of the whole country. And it was Nakata (2004), after all, who said that,

> … to defend Indigenous peoples, Indigenous students require understanding of the concepts and methodologies of both systems of knowledge. That is, one can’t do battle with Western systems of thought without understanding it, likewise, its inconsistencies cannot be turned around and an Indigenous perspective substituted without rigorous understanding of Indigenous concepts.

Is this not equally true for non-Indigenous students? By engaging both the oppressed and the oppressor through a transformative pedagogical process, decolonisation and a paradigm shift in thinking and values can become a reality in this country.
If we can agree that there is substance to the concept of Indigenous pedagogy and that there is a need for its further articulation and consideration, then how do we proceed and utilise the concept to make a difference for Indigenous and other marginalised children?

First of all, what we discussed is but one instance of practice. There are probably dozens or hundreds of these around Australia, and not just at universities. We can begin a conversation about our pedagogical practice, its particular characteristics and its relationship to Indigenous philosophies, and discuss the theoretical considerations and implications of such practice. Having the comparative privilege of resources and freedom makes the university the best place to begin, however it is our responsibility to look beyond the tertiary sector, initiate meaningful changes and negotiate partnerships in the wider educational context.

Individual negotiations like those described by Greville (2000) are an important first step in bringing about larger agreements that could cover all educational aspects of an Indigenous nation’s or community’s life. For example, an instrument like the Indigenous Land Use Agreements (ILUAs) could be modified to provide the basis for a local education treaty between an Indigenous community and all three levels of government (‘the State’), covering areas such as jurisdiction, resourcing and cooperation with other entities.

If this sounds far fetched, it is perhaps instructive, notwithstanding the substantially different legal and political circumstances, to refer to a Canadian example as a possible way forward. The recently completed Mi’kmaw Kina’matnewey Agreement in Nova Scotia provides for Indigenous peoples to assume jurisdiction for their education, and to research and implement new structures, models and methodologies (Battiste, 2002, p. 23). The Alaskan Native Knowledge Network in the US, which developed the “Alaskan standards for culturally responsive schools”, is another example of a negotiated way forward (Battiste, 2002, p. 23).

Keeping an eye on what has already been achieved elsewhere, but being aware of our own particular circumstances, we can thus begin to have a discussion on Indigenous pedagogy in Australia, its localised methodologies, its integrative principles and its potential applications in a variety of settings. In all of this, however, we should never lose sight of the fact that it is more than a theoretical abstraction: it has a powerful transformative potential to change teaching and learning for all.
List of References


