Special issue: Indigenous educational research

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Published online: 16 February 2017

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This particular issue of *Australian Educational Researcher* has been led by Tracey Bunda, a Ngugi/Wakka Wakka woman—a Goori woman from Queensland, who is Head of the College for Indigenous Studies, Education and Research at the University of Southern Queensland. Each article that appears in this issue has a lead Indigenous author and researcher. It was decided that given the focus on Indigenous research, it would be most appropriate for the development of this issue to utilise an approach to authorship and review that incorporates elements of Indigenous practices, accordingly Indigenous Elders were involved in the process of review, and the articles were collated and edited by Tracey Bunda together with Val Klenowski.

The first article ‘Conducting Indigenous research in Western knowledge spaces: aligning theory and methodology’, written by Myra Singh and Jae Major presents the issues of “[w]alking simultaneously in two worlds.” Myra is a Wiradyuri woman who has had to navigate Indigenous and Western epistemologies/methodologies. She explains the personal challenges for her and together the authors highlight how Indigenous methodologies have become an important element of qualitative research and have been taken up by both Indigenous and non-Indigenous researchers. Jae is non-Indigenous and has been supervising Myra’s doctoral research. The authors together analyse the experiences, the challenges and the tensions that emerged in the research design process which contextually was positioned within an overarching Western theoretical framework of poststructuralism while also using Indigenous methodologies. These authors suggest that Indigenous and Western epistemologies/methodologies can be used in a way that complements and supports each other. They describe how Indigenous methodologies seek to ensure that research is culturally safe and respectful through recognition

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of Indigenous worldviews, respect and accountability. Convincingly they argue that no longer is research *on* or *about* Indigenous people rather there is a shift towards research *for* and *with* Indigenous people.

Melitta Hogarth, a Kamiloroi woman, argues for the need to personalise methodological approaches to present the standpoint of the researcher and in so doing deepen the advocacy for addressing the research phenomenon. Too often, it is argued that attainment of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students is presented within a deficit view. Melitta exemplifies the use of Indigenous Critical Discourse Analysis and clearly illustrates the power of language to maintain the inequitable positioning of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples within Australian society. How the discourse of policy ignores the historical, political, cultural and social factors that influence the engagement and participation of Indigenous peoples in education today is analysed with reference to the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Action Plan 2010–2014. In ‘Speaking back to the deficit discourses: a theoretical and methodological approach’ presents the need to build on existing Indigenous research frameworks in the advocacy for the position of Indigenous research methodologies within the Western Institution.

Kevin Lowe, a Gubbi Gubbi man from southeast Queensland, presents the findings of a multisite ethnographic study involving Aboriginal community members, teachers and school principals. Kevin highlights how the relational dynamics between schools and Aboriginal people have been deeply affected by colonial histories of exclusion, systemic disadvantage and pervasive school discourses of marginalisation. His study highlights how the ignorance about holistic needs of Aboriginal students at schools can result in negative relational interactions between schools and Aboriginal families. The depth of the socio-cultural that disconnect between, Aboriginal students and their communities, and teachers, is emphasised as a significant issue. For too frequently, it is argued that teachers are appointed to schools with limited social, political and professional knowledge about the particular needs and aspirations of Aboriginal students which limit their capacity to establish authentic connections to students. In this research, when authentic engagement between Aboriginal people and schools occurred, the development in teachers’ professional knowledge facilitated interest in the particular communities to engage with their schools. These findings suggest that teachers need to honour, understand and actively reflect on community history; contexts and aspirations to develop the skills and knowledge to address the particular socio-cultural and educational needs of Aboriginal students.

‘Other ways of being: challenging dominant financial literacy discourses in Aboriginal context’, by Levon Ellen Blue and Laura Pinto is based on a study that makes use of critical discourse analysis (CDA) informed by Indigenous ways of knowing, being and doing. These researchers uncover an ‘uncomfortable space’ in the context of a Canadian Financial Literacy Education (FLE) program which focused on individual wealth accumulation. Such institutionalised attempts by charitable organisations to help Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples in poverty by promoting FLE as a ‘solution’ to collective problems is argued to be problematic. The program contradicted Indigenous ways of knowing, being and doing. The analysis revealed an overly simplistic, narrow and misleading vision of FLE

practices and demonstrated the power behind the dominant discourses which privilege Eurocentric practices and funds of knowledge over Indigenous epistemologies.

The authors recommend moving towards a praxis approach to FLE that recognises that cultural and personal values such as being generous and/or being kind to others are important aspects to consciously consider when making financial decisions with which an individual can live comfortably.

Undergraduate programs in Australia are implementing curriculum that aims to better prepare graduates to work in culturally diverse settings but Jonathan Bullen, Lynne Roberts and Julie Hoffman identify the uncertainty surrounding current student attitudes towards Indigenous Australians. In ‘What predicts health students’ self-reported preparedness to work in Indigenous health settings?’ the researchers explore first-year undergraduate health students’ attitudes towards Indigenous Australian culture and people, and their interactions with people of diverse cultural backgrounds to establish if these are predictors of student self-perceptions of preparedness to work with, and engage in, Indigenous health settings. Baseline data on student attitudes upon entry to tertiary education were collected using an anonymous in-class paper questionnaire. On average, students reported positive attitudes towards Indigenous Australians, with female students reporting more positive attitudes than male, and domestic students more positive than international. The researchers conclude that given what we know about student attitudes upon entry to health science courses more research is required to establish how to change attitudes and prepare students for working in Indigenous health settings.

Karen Martin in the article entitled “It’s special, it’s specific: Understanding the early childhood education experiences and expectations of young Indigenous Australian children and their parents” argues for a greater valuing of early childhood education for young Indigenous Australian students. In this article, she aims to challenge and change current understandings of early childhood education with reference to large-scale qualitative and quantitative research from the Longitudinal Study of Indigenous Children (LSIC). She presents an understanding of the experiences of Indigenous Australian children to explore what they believe to be special about their early childhood education. Further some specific choices, perceptions and expectations that parents of young Indigenous Australian children make, and have, regarding their early childhood education are discussed. The article concludes with the role of research in strengthening areas for development within Indigenous Australian early childhood education in Australia and identifying areas where it is valued to the same level as compulsory schooling.

The final article of this issue of *Australian Educational Researcher* is written from the Aboriginal Australian perspectives and experiences of Aunty Judi Wickes and Marnee Shay. A cross-generational, critical race analysis of Aboriginal identities is adopted to exemplify how the identified issues are implicated in the schooling experiences of Aboriginal young people. These authors use autoethnography to discuss their educational experiences in Australian education systems from primary schooling to university settings. These narratives highlight dominant discourses that continue to subjugate and subordinate Aboriginal Australians and Aboriginal Australian identities in education contexts. The narratives of these two

Aboriginal women demonstrate how on-going colonial and racialised constructions of Aboriginal identity continue to impact upon the educational experiences of Aboriginal peoples and the engagement of Aboriginal young people in school settings. The process of critical self reflection by these authors is used to re-imagine educational approaches to reconstruct their own experiences and to consider what changes might improve the outcomes of Indigenous young people for future generations.

At the Australian Association for Research in Education conference held in Melbourne in (2016), keynote speaker Dr Peter Anderson spoke of ‘New challenges and opportunities for Indigenous education in the post imperial world.’ In this important keynote address, he made reference to the work of Professor Jeannie Herbert and in particular quoted the following:

From an Indigenous perspective, the critical issue would appear to be the degree to which one is given a voice. (Herbert, 2012: 1, cited by Anderson 2016).

In instigating this initiative of an Indigenous research focused special issue of *Australian Educational Researcher*, we wanted to increase the degree to which Indigenous authors and researchers are given a voice, for we agree that without such an amplification of Indigenous voices, understanding of the multiple identities and Indigenous perspectives remain silenced.

Reference

- Anderson, P. (2016, 27 November–1 December). ‘*New challenges and opportunities for Indigenous education in the post imperial world*’. Keynote presentation, Australian Association for Research in Education Conference, Melbourne.