Teaching Australian Indigenous Studies: Non-Indigenous academics negotiating structural impediments in a regional context

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This paper examines the experiences of two non-Indigenous academics in a regional Australian university who taught/coordinated a first-year course, Introduction to Indigenous Australia (SCS130). Drawing on our own experiences, we explore the implications and contentious nature of non-Indigenous academics teaching Indigenous Studies and align this discussion with structural critique. As non-Indigenous academics, some argue that it is culturally disrespectful and pedagogically problematic for us to deliver this course. We consider that the work of embedding Indigenous perspectives should not be relegated solely the responsibility of Indigenous academics, and that our teaching contributes to reconciliation and begins to fill a significant gap in awareness and understanding among Australian students in higher education. The course SCS130 aims to introduce students to Indigenous perspectives through narratives, film, documentaries, academic and non-academic texts, biography and art. The objective of the course is to engage students with the complexity of colonisation and its ramifications for constructions of individual and national identities. Student survey qualitative data is used to provide an analysis of the course and to illustrate the conflict between our pedagogic practice, student expectations and the structural impediments to our decolonising teaching aims.

Keywords: Australian Indigenous Studies; higher education; pedagogy; whiteness; student survey

Introduction

Gillborn (2005) asserted that "education policy itself can be seen as an act of white supremacy … the taken-for-granted routine privileging of white interests" (p. 485). In the Australian context, Vass (2012) notes that "it has been suggested that 'Indigenous education' has been constructed in ways that largely serve non-Indigenous purposes" (p. 92). Our aim in SCS130 is to challenge the "naturalising and normalising of whiteness and Eurocentrism within education" (Vass, 2012, p. 89). To this end, we discuss our own reticence and challenges in teaching this course, and in managing the content and the students. We seek to avoid what Moreton-Robinson (2000) calls middle-class white women's lack of conscious intention: "The white feminists positioned themselves as anti-racism women who were doing the right thing, unaware that their actions were not interpreted by Indigenous women in the same way" (p. xvii). Smith (2012) states that universities and Western education is embedded in the colonising process:

> The academy played a very significant role in upholding Western intellectual superiority: the disciplines of Western knowledge were used as a platform for dismissing or denying the existence of Indigenous knowledge, a view that still exists in some parts of the academy today. (p. 351)

Responding to this disciplinary and institutional racism, the education sector has introduced various strategies and directives towards change. As Nakata (2008) states, the "production and transmission of knowledge and understanding 'about' Indigenous peoples has sat in uneasy tension with higher education programs" (p. 1). There remains a gap between strategies as institutional policies and intentions and everyday practices embedded in the teaching and learning landscapes of Australian universities. The emphasis upon cultural competency within tertiary institutions is prescribed by the National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Policy Goal 4: "To provide all Australian students with an understanding of and respect for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander traditional and contemporary cultures" (Australian Human Rights Commission, 2008, p. 314). In a context whereby the majority of enrolled students have very little or no previous awareness or foundational education, as a first-year subject, SCS130 delivers an introduction into university studies and explores a combination of colonised histories and critical whiteness via reflective practice.

Drawing on the work of Nakata (2011), this course aims to develop intercultural understanding through student engagement with Indigenous content "to normalise the presence of Indigenous content" (p. 5). Our pedagogy is designed to "to acknowledge the deleterious effects of racialisation and racism … after years of institutional neglect" (Moreton-Robinson et al., 2012, p. 31). Clarke (2008) noted that the majority of students surveyed found Australian Indigenous Studies to be boring, repetitive, incoherent and superficial (p. 67). We grapple with the effects of this failure of schooling which contributes to a climate where "outright refusal to connect with this history [which] is somehow legitimated by the excessive repetition and poor coordination of Indigenous materials in schools" (Clarke, 2008, p. 69). One student Clarke interviewed stated that "invasion is a 'guilt trip' teachers pull on their students. Like we're meant to feel that our ancestors came and like killed a *billion* Aborigines" (2008, p. 70, emphasis in original). Clarke (2008) notes that this is an extreme example from her data, but this comment illustrates the mood and orientation many students have towards SCS130. This reluctance can be found among students that enrol in SCS130, many of whom do not want to be there, having had negative experiences about the topic before, or believe that they already know what they need to know and resent spending their time and educational debt on this course.

Importantly, for the aims of this article, Clarke (2008) notes that:

> Indigenous history is hard to teach well … who can tell this story, and how? Some teachers feel reluctant to touch on aspects of Indigenous history because they're not comfortable speaking about someone else's experience … but not to teach it altogether would be even riskier … Teachers end up offering what they know, what is safe. (p. 80)

The considerations of risk, safety and *who* will teach Australian Indigenous Studies has long been contentious and "lie at the heart of the Indigenous dilemma in Western education" (Nakata, 2006, p. 267). This was illustrated in 2019 through a controversy in which Griffith University acknowledged that a professor, Regina Ganter, stood down from teaching a foundation course named First Peoples at its Gold Coast and Brisbane campuses. Ganter's move responded to claims of racism and cultural insensitivity from students in relation to Ganter's teaching methods and course content.

This article explores the authors' experiences of teaching an Introduction to Indigenous Australia course at a small regional Australian university. We grapple with the challenges and ethics of our teaching, and the resilience required for us to teach the course Introduction to Indigenous Australia at first-year level. Resilience is required because, as non-Indigenous academics, we are scrutinised and criticised for teaching into this content area. As early career academics, we are tested by the lack of institutional support in delivering decolonising content and managing significant student backlash.

Indigenous Studies in Australian universities

Nakata (2006) states:

> Indigenous Studies in the academy is not the study of Indigenous societies, histories, cultures, or contemporary issues alone but necessarily, given historical circumstances, *the study of how we have been studied, circumscribed, represented* and how this knowledge of us is limited in its ability to understand us. (p. 272, emphasis in original)

Universities Australia's (UA) *Indigenous Strategy First Annual Report* outlines the Universities Australia Indigenous Strategy 2017–20, which is the framework through which "our 39 member universities committed to make further gains in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander participation, retention and success in universities" (2017, p. 5). One of the key recommendations from this nation-wide strategy is to "have processes that ensure all students will encounter and engage with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultural content as integral parts of their course of study, by 2020" (UA, 2017, p. 8).

SCS130 is a critical element to the whole-of-university approach to reconciliation and equity for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. The course sits directly within the institutional framework "for embedding Aboriginal knowledges and perspectives and Torres Strait Islander knowledges and perspectives in curriculum at the University of the Sunshine Coast" (University of the Sunshine Coast, 2016) in response to the Universities Australia Indigenous Strategy. This is in line with the National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Higher Education Consortium 2018 report which stated that:

> To date, most of the effort in advancing these areas has been contributed by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and centres. A shared approach that encompasses the broad resources and expertise of universities is vital in achieving the significant change and advancement needed to achieve parity. (n.p.)

Central to the aims of SCS130 is anti-racism and reflective practice in relation to whiteness and privilege, which we suggest aligns strongly with UA's aims in this area: "cultural competence is important to ensure a safe working environment for staff and students—free from racism and discrimination" (UA, 2017, p. 41).

The course also strongly responds to the Behrendt Review, which stated:

> The Panel considers it imperative that graduates across a range of faculties are exposed to and build their understanding of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander contemporary issues and perspectives. Such knowledge will help to equip them as professionals to better meet the needs of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and organisations with whom they will be doing business and to whom they will be providing services. (Behrendt et al., 2012, pp. 94–95)

The Behrendt Review, Universities Australia's Indigenous Strategy and the National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Higher Education Consortium all confirm the aims and intentions for Australian higher education to embed broad cultural understanding of colonisation and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples' histories and culture. The Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership concurs, requiring teachers to "understand and respect Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people to promote reconciliation between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians" [Focus Area 2.4] (2018, p. 3). The delivery and design of SCS130 – Introduction to Indigenous Australia seeks to introduce and build on student understandings and to contest myths and mis-informed understandings of Australia's colonised histories and the ongoing impacts of colonisation on culture and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.

University structures: Decolonising the academy (who and how?)

We suggest that considerations about how universities and faculties allocate teaching workloads in relation to courses such as SCS130 – Introduction to Indigenous Australia needs to be addressed. Within neo-liberal universities few academics are able to decide what they will teach; sessional or contract staff and newly arrived or early career academics often have a very limited capacity to choose the subjects they teach. We argue it is a mistake to underscore the individual academic, who may present as the "problem" when they are teaching Australian Indigenous content, rather than consider the broader institutional and structural contexts of universities' demands, workload and funding. Gillborn (2005) notes that the academy often "seeks school-based solutions to school-based problems and totally ignores existing structural and historic relations of domination" (p. 487). In the regional teaching context explored within this paper, courses must be taught across three campuses, meaning that logistical and economic imperatives tend to overshadow the ethics and ethos associated with decolonisation and other critical concerns.

Harrison (2008) states that teachers should work closely with Indigenous education workers for insights and resources and to ensure cultural sensitivity; we think this is critically important for non-Indigenous academics working in this area. Harrison's (2008) point illustrates a significant tension in the intent and institutional structure within Australian universities. This is illustrated in the capacity of academics to invite and embed local Indigenous knowledges and community members into our learning spaces as Harrison (2008) advocates. We argue that this collaborative approach is only possible with the support of "institutional enablers". The framework for embedding Aboriginal knowledges and perspectives and Torres Strait Islander knowledges and perspectives in curriculum at the University of the Sunshine Coast includes the direction: "Resources will need to be allocated to support the work. Such resources will include appropriately qualified and experienced staff to work with colleagues at a school/discipline level and to liaise with Indigenous and non-Indigenous mentors" (2016, p. 3). Despite the institutional policy direction, there is no mechanism, time allocated or institution-led collaborations with local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities to build on and/or draw on. For example, it is ethically problematic to invite guest lectures or contributions from Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people without appropriate payment for these services. This discordance between the articulated framework and practical action at the level of course delivery highlights a structural issue.

Australian universities have embedded Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander centres and places of cultural learning that tend to align strongly, if not exclusively, with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students in response to ongoing and long-term educational disadvantage and disparities for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. This is as it should be. We argue that the scope and funding of centres

for Indigenous student success should be expanded to provide cultural and content expertise across the University of the Sunshine Coast. A broader remit would facilitate collaboration, build teaching and content capacity, and provide an audit process to ensure cultural and decolonising teaching is embedded and continually improved upon by all academic staff across the institution.

We agree that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander academics should not be the only spokespersons for institutional responses to reconciliation and equity. Reconciliation in Australia is a contested idea, an often misunderstood and stalled process towards meaningful change through building respectful relationships. Reconciliation Australia states that a reconciled nation will be just and equitable, where "Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children will have the same life chances and choices as non-Indigenous children, and the length and quality of a person's life will not be determined by their racial background" (n.d., n.p.). The Australian process of reconciliation must begin with education, knowledge and awareness of colonisation for all Australians.

We argue that by coordinating SCS130 – Introduction to Indigenous Australia we are making a contribution towards the national aim of reconciliation. Yet we are advised by some Indigenous scholars and students that as non-Indigenous academics we should not be teaching Australian Indigenous Studies. Nakata (2007) would regard this tension and dilemma as illustrating the "cultural interface", wherein Indigenous and non-Indigenous knowledges, cultures, values and beliefs intersect. Our teaching into SCS130 – Introduction to Indigenous Australia is work within the cultural interface which recognises "all the disruptions, discontinuities, continuities and convergences of knowledge in this space and appreciation of the complexities that exist there" (Nakata, 2011, p. 5). The cultural interface within our SCS130 tutorial rooms is often uncomfortable for us and our students and, therefore, we think it is an important issue to explore. Nakata's cultural interface is an important concept to engage with in relation to the course SCS130 because it "assumes complexities as a condition of the space but does not see the solution to be the endless separation of Indigenous from non-Indigenous" (2011, p. 5).

Despite the challenges and uncomfortableness of the cultural interface for non-Indigenous academics and students through engaging with SCS130 – Introduction to Indigenous Australia, we suggest that all Australian university students should engage with a course such as this. This is critical anti-racist foundational work of higher education.

Universities Australia's data shows that in 2017 1,387,409 students studied at Australia's 39 comprehensive universities. A total of 1,014,503 were domestic students, with over 250,000 commencing students each year (UA, 2019, p. 20). These student numbers demonstrate the massive task of engaging all Australian university students in Australian Indigenous Studies.

Conversely, UA's *Indigenous Strategy First Annual Report* states:

> The total number of Indigenous staff has increased by 72.6% since 2005, from 771 staff to 1,331 staff in 2017. Of these, around one-third are academic staff. The number of Indigenous academic staff has increased by 55% over the sample period, from 282 in 2005 to 437 in 2017 … Indigenous academic staff only increased marginally from 0.73% in 2005 to 0.79% in 2017 … In 2017, only 1.09% of Australian university staff—both academic and non-academic— were from an Indigenous background, significantly below the working-age population parity of 3.1%. (2017, p. 52-53).

Even if we accept that Indigenous Australian Studies in Australian universities should be taught only by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander academics, the gap between university student numbers and

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander academics to deliver these courses confirms that this is clearly impossible.

What we do? SCS130 – Introduction to Indigenous Australia

SCS130 – Introduction to Indigenous Australia is a core first-year course offered at a regional university with the majority of students enrolled in a Bachelor of Social Work or Bachelor of Community Services/Development. This course was designed in the late 1990s by non-Indigenous academics. The teaching team for the period referred to in this article was coordinated by a non-Indigenous early career academic, who began teaching this course two weeks after beginning work at the University of the Sunshine Coast, and a sessional academic who is non-Indigenous. With Nicoll (2004), we both acknowledge our privilege "as a middle-class white Australian woman with the institutionalised power" (p. 3). Following the work of DiAngelo (2011), we acknowledge the "white fragility" of our teaching work; an "insulated environment of racial privilege builds white expectations for racial comfort while at the same time lowering the ability to tolerate racial stress" (p. 55).

Following other Australian scholars grappling with the ethics of university pedagogy at the cultural interface, we note the observations by Hendrick & Young (2018) that social work students "have been able to experience collective humanness, form relationships and challenge common preconceptions of Aboriginal life" (p. 315). Our stamina to sustain teaching into a first-year Introduction to Indigenous Australia is problematic as the task has been individualised, left to two academics, rather than facilitated by and embedded within institutional frameworks, funding and cultural responsiveness. The fragility of this work for non-Indigenous teaching staff is evidenced by the high level of staff turnover, including a reliance on sessional academic staff resulting in limited content and pedagogic development within the course.

We counter our own fragility by shaping course content with challenging, un-seen narratives from Indigenous peoples. We deflect and push back against student anger, hostility and refusal to engage or rethink Australia's colonised legacies. We embed reflective writing assessment tasks to purposefully question student resistance and unlearning. We invite Indigenous guest lecturers to share stories of damage and hope, ensuring that students cannot look away from distressing narratives and their own lack of awareness. This creates "a powerful interruption of common (and oppressive) discursive patterns around race" (DiAngelo, 2011, p. 67). While acknowledging our personal positioning within this ethical dilemma (white fragility included), we contend that structural considerations are instrumental in the dynamics of the issue. We argue that this ethical concern could be largely resolved should course delivery be supported by Indigenous academic leaders who were resourced to undertake that labour (Page et al., 2019). This would illustrate a commitment to the embedding framework that extends into institutional structures and beyond the realm of "lip service" (McGloin, 2016, p. 15).

The institutional limitations and pressures within which we deliver SCS130 are shaped by the multi-regional campus delivery, a newly established university with low enrolment numbers of less than 20,000 students and high student attrition rates at 22.3% (University of the Sunshine Coast, 2019, p. 9). These factors result in student survey data being closely monitored and significantly informing university policy and teaching and learning practice. Our analysis, therefore, draws closely on student survey data. Student survey data is also critical to the course, as SCS130 – Introduction to Indigenous Australia is a core subject and often a compulsory subject required for degree completion. As Thorpe and Burgess (2016) argue, "as a mandatory subject, it brings with it additional tensions and possibilities due to this

imposed status" (p. 121). Student survey data is also compounded by the confronting content embedded in the course that very often challenges student understandings of themselves and Australia's colonised histories more broadly.

Many students come to our course with a "naïve, prejudiced, hostile and/or an antipathetic outlook to the field" (Thorpe & Burgess, 2016, p. 119). The course aims to challenge and shift some of these assumptions. Many students move through significant phases of "un-learning", which is challenging for them and for us as academics shaping the process. These teaching challenges are common in anti-racist education, as "efforts aimed towards educating whites on our socialisation into systems of racism and white supremacy are often impeded by the well-documented white investment in and resistance to challenging racism" (DiAngelo & Sensoy, 2014, p. 193).

University structures are critical in decolonising academic learning and institutional practices. The course SCS130 is listed in the University of the Sunshine Coast's *Indigenous Education Statement 2015* as supporting the institution's aims to deliver these frameworks. The University of the Sunshine Coast *Indigenous Education Statement 2015* is directed at all students and aims to "deliver high-quality teaching, learning and graduate outcomes". It includes embedding Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander perspectives and knowledges in curriculum "to provide all Australian students with an understanding of and respect for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander traditional and contemporary cultures" (University of the Sunshine Coast, 2015). Following Ahmed's (2007) examination of "doing diversity", we suggest that university "statements" of intent are ends in and of themselves and can conceal the institutional realities or failures of actual change. Hiding behind the document and consultation, organisational mission statements are expressions of commitment and may hide the gaps between the words and the deeds, limiting action and change. Staff turnover, funding restrictions and a lack of will result in a lack of planning, mentoring and pathways for Indigenous academics to take up the operation and coordination of key subjects in their field.

We have designed the course around critical inquiry-based pedagogy which enables asynchronous learning as students work through the extensive readings and film/documentary resources supported by us through weekly lectures and tutorials. Inquiry-based learning is based on Dewey's (1933) "learning by doing" and is effective in the un-learning often required for students beginning to explore Australia's colonised past and present, as it aims to "achieve learning outcomes that include critical thinking, the ability for independent inquiry, responsibility for own learning, and intellectual growth and maturity" (Lee et al., 2004). We understand this critical inquiry pedagogy supports diverse learning styles and the curated series of film/documentary resources begins conversations and disrupts myths and prior (mis)learnings for students. The combination of these resources with critical inquiry pedagogy connects students with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples' stories and culture through the accessible medium of film and documentary, often for the first time.

We suggest that the utility of the course SCS130 is expounded by its foundations in sociology whereby students are introduced to Mills's (1959) *The Sociological Imagination* and the critique of social structures and the socio-historical foundations of colonisation and embedded racism. This focus on social structures enables the course to challenge deficit-based assumptions that are commonly held by the student cohort. SCS130 has a strong focus on reflective professional practice with critical awareness and early explorations of the ethics of practice forming central themes throughout the course.

This subject is designed to explore, expand and challenge student understandings of colonisation. We aim to "create culturally responsive learning environments [that] provide opportunities for students to

actively engage in dialogue, challenge and be challenged" (Thorpe & Burgess, 2016, p. 121). As Gilbert and Tillman (2017) note, "teaching is a challenging business and walking the fine line of putting forward Aboriginal knowledges as valuable and questioning long held beliefs … only compounds the challenge" (p. 180). Our experience of pedagogy within this "fine line" outside an institutionally supported cultural space compounds the isolation and challenges in managing the cultural interface within SCS130.

We also manage the accumulated impacts of teaching SCS130, the "emotional labour" (Hochschild, 2003) required and invested each week throughout our 13-week teaching semester. This course is taught across three different campuses, with the course coordinator travelling a four-hour return trip each week to deliver the course to a regional campus. The emotional work demanded in a course such as SCS130 is based on the challenge of "engaging students in respectful, risk-taking dialogue without public scorn, and yet safe for those who might take offense" (Thorpe & Burgess, 2016, p. 123). Students are often angry, distressed and upset by the content of this subject, as we are in delivering the content, and this creates difficult conditions to manage the delivery of SCS130. The dimensions of "critical allyship" and emotional labour within this context cannot be understood without considering our own positioning as white academics, and the interplay between anti-racism ethics, white fragility and the structural issues associated with the neoliberal university (McGloin, 2016).

We critically discuss the dilemma of us, as non-Indigenous academics, teaching the course SCS130 – Introduction to Indigenous Australia, with each other and with our students. This discussion about cultural ethics and logistics is a useful mechanism to open up discussion, as Nicoll (2004) notes:

> My refusal to embody moral virtue and perform an exemplary role as the "good" lecturer dedicated to the fight against racism and racists made it easier for other white students to honestly explore the ambivalence that accompanies the recognition of their race privilege. (p. 4)

In this discussion of our positioning as academic teachers, we model the uncomfortableness of being in this space as non-Indigenous people, getting it wrong and reflecting on ways to deliver the course differently. To facilitate our attempt to balance the risk of problematic (racist) openness and creating culturally safe learning spaces, we employ an early focus on critical whiteness. As Moreton-Robinson observes, "so rather than focusing on identity per se I had to keep bringing the focus to bear on the processes through which individuals identify with and invest in patriarchal white sovereignty" (cited in Nicoll, 2004, p. 3). Nicoll (2004) explores the utility of critical whiteness in university teaching, stating that, "ultimately the aim of critical whiteness theory should be to unsettle white subjectivity rather than create opportunities for individual confession, catharsis and redemption" (p. 5).

The course SCS130 has two main texts, Kaye Price's edited collection *Knowledge of Life* (2015) and Ruth Hegarty's *Is that you Ruthie?* (2003). Hegarty's book is a powerful personal text, an excellent example of life writing wonderfully illustrating the relational power of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples' kin and community as the "various creative strategies developed and deployed for survival and resistance" (Moreton-Robinson, 2000, p. 3). Hegarty's personal narrative is an accessible and deeply moving text for students in SCS130. "Indigenous women's life writings make visible dimensions of the hidden history and colonial legacy of this country through their gaze as subjects" (Moreton-Robinson, 2000, p. 3). Following the work on anti-racism pedagogy, Hegarty's stories of growing up in an Australian mission are read as vignettes:

> [They are] stories to which students can relate but that are not as politically charged as explicit discussions of racism can be because they put the student in the protagonist position, unsettle expectations, and evoke curiosity. As such, they have enabled our students to see structural oppression and privilege. (DiAngelo & Sensoy, 2014, p. 198)

Price's (2015) text was introduced to the course in 2018 as a vital text written by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander scholars on topics that are directly covered in the course. The text introduces students to "Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander storytelling at its finest … [sharing] aspects of their own lived experiences" (Price, 2015, p. v). Price notes the collection is essential and, while it may feel confronting to some students, it is an effective text to support students who are challenged by the brutal realities of colonisation for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.

We have designed SCS130 – Introduction to Indigenous Australia to explore Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples' stories and to make visible the ongoing and devastating impacts of colonisation and to support and encourage students to grapple with their own privilege. McIntosh's "invisible knapsack" is a critical text to facilitate student exploration of their own privileges and understandings of Australia's colonial legacy. In this text, McIntosh (2003) asks:

> What it is like to have white privilege? I have come to see white privilege as an invisible package of unearned assets which I can count on cashing in each day, but about which I was "meant" to remain oblivious. White privilege is like an invisible weightless knapsack of special provisions, maps, passports, codebooks, visas, clothes, tools and blank checks. Describing white privilege makes one newly accountable. (n.p.)

We spend one tutorial exploring the McIntosh reading, drawing on small group work to review the reading and for students to explore and nominate which of McIntosh's privileges they feel could apply to them, or in general. This reading has strong impacts on the student cohort and links very well to how sociology can be effective in shaping student awareness of the structural frameworks of race and disadvantage. The tutorial discussions and personal examples that students share demonstrate the effectiveness of this reading for reflection by non-Indigenous students. Following the work of Fredericks and Bargallie (2020), McIntosh's framework became a useful mechanism to "offer opportunities for participants to reflect on their own cultural identity, and white privilege, attitudes, prejudices and propensity to stereotype, challenge racism and promote anti-racism practices" (p. 298). More than half of the students choose to include this reading in their final assessment, a reflective essay, also illustrating the power of McIntosh's words to prompt personal reflection. This purposeful focus on the invisible knapsack in this first-year course follows the work of Moreton-Robinson (2000), as it illustrates to students not only the way whiteness and privilege work in the everyday but that "white race privilege is inextricably connected to the systemic racism they criticise but do not experience" (p. xx).

This activity is linked with critical whiteness theory in exploring the everyday and uncomfortableness of the benefits of colonisation for non-Indigenous Australians. Moreton-Robinson et al. (2012) note that "subjects on offer are designed to transfer knowledge and awareness of Indigenous history and culture absolving the role that race plays in structuring disadvantage and privilege" (p. 34). Following Leonardo (2004), our work in SCS130 aims to examine key elements of whiteness and colonisation in Australia. There is a clear and weekly focus on racism in Australia, both historical and contemporary examples, both at the individual and structural level. In week 4 of the course the tutorial activity is based on Ahmed's (2010) concept of the killjoy to share ways that students resist racism and ways that they are able to speak against racism in different social contexts.

The weekly course materials and the assessment tasks demand that students confront colonisation and the racist legacy in Australia. These goals are enabled in SCS130 because it is a Sociology subject, drawing heavily on the work of Mills (1959) and sociological imagination theory to consider the nexus of personal troubles and social ills. This focus on whiteness through the lens of sociological imagination aims to challenge students' understanding of the colonised legacy, their sense of Australian-ness and even their sense of themselves. We suggest that our pedagogic approach in SCS130 destabilises white privilege for many students, disrupting what Gillborn (2005) refers to as "performative constitution of particular identities and roles that lends whiteness its deep-rooted, almost invisible status" (p. 490). This is often distressing and painful for students as they progress through weekly readings, narratives, films and data that centre Indigenous voices and form the bedrock of this course. For the majority of students who enrol in this first-year course, the brutal stories of Australia's colonisation and the intergenerational trauma that continue to impact many Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and communities in Australia is new information. The design of this course enables a complex understanding of racism for many students. Following Lentin (2018), the course refuses to leave racism in Australia assigned to history, nor limit racism to only individual failures of morality.

This is reflected in the following student comments:

> Not knowing anything about the history of Indigenous Australians, this course gave me an insight that was not previously known and has peaked [sic] my interest in learning more (Semester 1 2018 Student survey data – SCS130).

> This course has changed my life for the better. I have acquired knowledge I never knew I was lacking (Semester 1 2019 Student survey data – SCS130).

> Hmm this subject for me was very confronting and the content was hard to take on board as I have never been exposed to the Indigenous people or what had happened to them in the past (Semester 1 2019 Student survey data – SCS130).

Film pedagogy is used extensively in this course as an effective way to engage students and to provide flexible learning but, importantly, these films provide self-presentations of Indigenous stories shared with us. Giroux (2001) notes, "film produces images, ideas, and ideologies that shape both individual and national identities … a visual technology that functions as a powerful teaching machine that intentionally tries to influence the production of meaning, subject positions, identities, and experience" (p. 587). Moreton-Robinson (2000) notes the power of self-presentation "to distinguish between how one represents oneself through interpretation as opposed to how one is represented by another" (p. xxii). Students in this course are required to watch *September* (Carstairs, 2008), *Samson and Delilah* (Thornton, 2009), *Kanyini* (Hogan, 2006) and *Who Killed Malcolm Smith* (Frankland, 1992) as powerful examples of self-presentation, film as political acts, which make students uncomfortable and encourage them to think and feel differently. The scope of these films and course texts aims to contest "unproblematically fixed Indigeneity" (Carey & Prince, 2015, p. 275). Our course design seeks to facilitate student un-learning and to challenge simplistic and often racist notions of Indigeneity as the first steps towards engaging with equity and diversity, a task that aligns with the introductory nature of this course. The depth and scope of Indigenous representation and the strongly reflective nature of this course limits the risks that it fails to "challenge the way participants see themselves, their actions or their complicity in maintaining racial inequities" (Fredericks & Bargallie, 2020, p. 297).

Student feedback: University of Sunshine Coast SC130, Introduction to Indigenous Australia

Our analysis of our experiences is informed by the student survey data that is automatically generated at the conclusion of each teaching semester. This student data is strictly anonymous and is collected to drive teaching and learning improvements; our shared reflections here extend the usefulness of the data. In recognition of the limitations of student surveys as a marker of success within Indigenous Studies, Bullen and Flavell (2017) highlight that "transformational learning does not necessarily result in satisfied students; the cultural interface requires tolerance for ambiguity and feeling unsettled" (p. 591). By extension, survey results reflecting that most students are satisfied does not necessarily equate to successful embedding of Indigenous perspectives throughout university operations. We have collectively taught and coordinated this first-year subject over four semesters in 2018 and 2019. The following data tables provide an overview of the qualitative comments submitted, which are de-identified.

Table 1: Overview of qualitative comments

Semester and year	Student survey comments total	Survey response rate	Strongly negative comments total	Negative comments total	Neutral comments total	Positive comments total	Strongly positive comments total
Semester 1 2018	51	45.3%	5	6	1	9	30
Semester 2 2018	42	41.1%	2	2	0	8	30
Semester 1 2019	50	49.7%	4	9	2	15	20
Semester 2 2019	32	34.6%	2	7	2	7	14
Total	175		13	24	5	39	94

Table 2: Overview of comments Semester 1 2018

Student survey comment type	Comment number	Example of comment
Strongly positive	30	I absolutely loved this course and thoroughly enjoyed it. Whilst confronting and a huge eye opener I learnt more during the course than I had ever learned at school or had even known about.
Positive	9	I got a lot out of this course. It was informative.
Neutral	1	I have no idea [sic] to say about this course.
Negative	6	I found this course to be completely unhelpful, and, at times, felt as though I was being "bullied" into a particular way of thinking.

Strongly negative	5	The lecturer spent most lectures reading from her slides making the content uninteresting as I could read from the slides faster and with more enthusiasm.

Table 3: Overview of comments Semester 2 2018

Student survey comment type	Comment number	Example of comment
Strongly positive	30	I found it fascinating, interesting and worthwhile. I feel it should be a core unit for everyone.
Positive	8	It was a good class.
Neutral	0	n/a
Negative	2	This course needs a review.
Strongly negative	2	I found it a waste of time as this subject was a requirement of my course.

Table 4: Overview of comments Semester 1 2019

Student survey comment type	Comment number	Example of comment
Strongly positive	20	This was an excellent course, well delivered, engaging and inspiring. Genine Hook is one of the best teachers the university has.
Positive	15	It was a very interesting class and very eye opening.
Neutral	2	Everything is good.
Negative	9	This course is helpful towards gaining a larger understanding of the Indigenous community but the way the course is designed is not helpful.
Strongly negative	4	This content was ridiculous. I was unable to speak without offending an Indigenous Australian.

Table 5: Overview of comments Semester 2 2019

Student survey comment type	Comment number	Example of comment
Strongly positive	14	Cannot praise both lecturers and tutors enough for their passions, dedication, support and understanding to all students, including Indigenous students.
Positive	7	This course was my favorited [sic], I have learned so much and create a great insight. I really appreciate this course.

Neutral	2	Content of this course should be compulsory for all students as it is very relevant in all industries.
Negative	7	While I strongly believe that this course could contain vital and relevant information for all students the teaching quality was VERY poor.
Strongly negative	2	This course reminded me of what it's like to have an insecure girlfriend, constantly reassuring them they are relevant … honestly, I think course needs a total overhaul because it teaches nothing and it was a complete and total waste of time and money.

We suggest that the student feedback for SCS130 is shaped by the course being a core course. Moreton-Robinson et al. (2012) note the importance of this distinction: "Is it better to have a student who energetically seeks out an elective or one who indignantly endures Indigenous content in a core subject?" (p. 31). Our teaching experience of SCS130 reflects that the course is a core subject rather than an elective for most of the students we teach. Students often resent being forced to enrol in this course and this compounds the challenges many students experience in relation to the course content. This is illustrated in the following student comments:

> [The lecturer] engaged me in a course I initially had no interest in undertaking. (Semester 2 2018 Student survey data – SCS130)

> I found it a waste of time as this subject was a requirement of my course, I would have rather spent my time and money on a subject related to my course. (Semester 2 2018 Student survey data – SCS130)

Negative student survey feedback was received regarding non-Indigenous people delivering courses:

> Ok, being a 57-year-old proud Aboriginal woman who also has studied and graduated with a Masters, I disagree that a non-Indigenous person is teaching Indigenous Studies. Perusing this lady's profile, she may have a doctorate but nothing in her previous studies reflects any Indigenous Studies nor does she have social ties with Australia's first people. This is a disgrace that this is allowed to happen at this level of education. Someone who has "walked the talk" should be informing students of my heritage and history. (Semester 1 2018 Student survey data – SCS130)

This theme was repeated in student survey feedback in Semester 2 2019:

> This class is extremely offensive and hard to sit in. A non-Indigenous Australian is the course coordinator that provides no help or justification as to why. A First Nations Australian should see how this class is taught at least to review it because most class members found it racist.

This student survey data reflects the complexity of teaching into Australian Indigenous Studies. The majority of students' comments, 133 out of the 175, are very positive or positive about their experiences of the course. Many students report that they had very little or no previous education or knowledge about colonisation and its impacts on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples in Australia. The survey data demonstrates the pedagogic fine line in exploring issues of race, privilege, discourse and colonisation. An example of the contested nature of the course is the comment, "This content was ridiculous. I was unable to speak without offending an Indigenous Australian and not only that got

abused for what I had learnt ????" (Semester 1 2019). Following Nakata (2007), these student comments illustrate the cultural interface, the uncomfortableness and the cultural collision that disrupts student understandings of themselves and Australia's colonising nation-building. The cultural interface created within this course is effective because it demands that non-Indigenous students engage with Indigenous peoples' stories, directly and personally. Students must grapple with the uncomfortable tension that these stories stir; they must reflect on this, and on themselves.

Each semester includes student comments critical of non-Indigenous academics leading this course. Each semester we are told, directly and indirectly, by Indigenous academics that is it problematic for us to deliver this course. These comments prompt a sense of retreat or reticence in us and increases the difficulty of teaching into this space. This tension is compounded when we consider our ethical obligation as educators to be allies in progressing decolonising pedagogies (Hook, 2012). We also argue the unreasonableness of making Indigenous colleagues wholly responsible for the delivery of Indigenous Studies at the introductory level. These difficulties must be examined at school and institution level, as institutions fail to provide pathways and opportunities for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander scholars to take up the coordination and teaching of this course. We hope that this paper contributes to a broader discussion relating to the pedagogy and ethics of teaching Indigenous Studies at Australian universities.

In closing

Nakata (2011) highlights the gap between policy, intentions and practice, noting that "nice inclusionary statements are there and then nothing" (p. 7). SCS130, an introductory level course mandatory across a variety of degree programs, is going some way to bridging the gap between intentions and pedagogy by reaching a wide number of diverse students and introducing them to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples' stories. SCS130 purposefully sits within the cultural interface, designing contested and uncomfortable spaces, whereby many students experience their first encounter with critical perspectives of colonised narratives of Australian histories. Many students experience discomfort as the incorporation of critical whiteness generates reflection and growing awareness, precipitating the unsettling of previously unquestioned assumptions about Australian histories, identities and prevailing social structures. We recognise the limitations of our work as non-Indigenous academics teaching into the course SCS130; however, we also understand the course as a critical element of a suite of learnings that university students should engage with, always and already mediated by the "ontology of Western knowledge systems" (Nakata, 2006, p. 271). Working within this context, SCS130 contributes towards a cross-cultural learning space—our students learn what they don't know, they un-learn some of the things they think they know, and they learn to "explore less invasive ways of being towards those in whose sovereignty we stand" (Nicoll, 2004, p. 6). Education has a critical role in reconciling Australia's colonised past with an equitable and culturally rich future. Reconciliation hinges on knowledge, which we argue requires all university graduates to complete an introductory course such as SCS130—a task requiring solidarity in a shared educational responsibility.

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