

PARTNERSHIPS IN EDUCATION: PLAN FOR A PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT DAY

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As part of her Graduate Diploma in Secondary Education course, Verushka Taylor was asked to imagine how issues the Social Contexts of Secondary Education class was reading about and discussing impact upon the work of teachers. To that end, students were asked to think deeply about one of the topics addressed in the semester, and to frame a professional development day for colleagues that teaches about the topic, attends to the pedagogy of the session, and creates opportunities for reflection and learning. What follows is Verushka Taylor's engagement with the topic of indigenous education.

AIMS

Drama is a powerful tool for social change. As Augusto Boal states:

Theatre is a form of knowledge; it should and can also be a means of transforming society. Theatre can help us build our future, instead of just waiting for it (2002, p.16).

This professional development day is designed for drama teachers at a public secondary school in rural Bathurst. It aims to inform teachers' awareness of Aboriginality and Indigenous issues and their involvement in these issues and to re-awaken teachers' understandings of the capabilities of Drama as a tool for social change. McConaghy argues that 'quality teaching is situated practice, situated in the sense that teachers must read into their activities the particular aspects of their place or location' (2002, p.7). This is particularly pertinent in reference to Indigenous education and teachers will be provided with the opportunity not only to build cross-cultural awareness and links to the Indigenous community, but also to develop skills in relationship building. In order to do so, teachers will be challenging colonial and deficit (Munns 1998) views of difference. The aim of this day is to stimulate teachers' cultural awareness but to allow that awareness to be locally situated and to develop the skills that allow teachers to further extend their understanding and compassion. Boal's Theatre of the Oppressed encourages one to know the world they live in, wherever that may be, and with that knowledge be better to change it (Boal 2002, p.16). Image theatre, a form of Boal's, is used to further examine or interrogate awareness and knowledge in an attempt to model making Indigenous issues central in the curriculum.

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TIMETABLE OF EVENTS

Time	Teaching/learning activity
9 – 10am	Acknowledgement of traditional owners of the land Ideological warm-up

Teaching/Learning experience

Adapted from a Theatre of the Oppressed activity (Boal 2002, pp.225-6), the first stage of the warm-up consists of the *reading aloud and discussion of newspaper articles*. These articles are on political and social events with specific relevance to indigenous issues, for example the recent move to reduce welfare of Indigenous parents whose children have a high rate of truancy. Participants are encouraged to demystify the “bourgeois” press and to recognise the knowledge they have that allows them to recognise information not presented in the newspapers. *The evocation of historic events* is the second stage of the ideological warm-up. The aim here is to draw parallels between historic events and the current national situation. Boal suggests a final stage of *lessons*: that ‘depending on the nature of the group and its awareness of historical events, lessons or explanations can be a useful stimulant’ (2002, p.226). This final stage is extended to include the following activity.

Time	Teaching/learning activity
10 – 10.50am	Guest speaker: Wiradjuri Elder talks of the history of the Wiradjuri language group and the contemporary challenges and celebrations situated locally.

Teaching/Learning experience

As this professional development day has a focus on making local Indigenous culture central to the school’s operation and drama course, the process for involving Indigenous guests is modelled here. For this reason, participants have been involved in the planning (guidelines prepared by the *Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Unit Department of education*, cited in NADIE 1995, pp.6-8). All participants have thus clarified the objectives of the guest’s involvement and are informed of (and contribute to) preliminary discussions involving the format of the session and how it fits into the overall program. In order to prepare the guest for the visit, significant questions have been identified and given to the Elder prior to their visit. Concepts s/he may be asked to speak about include (but are not limited by):

- experiences (or their parents’ experiences)
- his/her background (origin, family history etc)
- history of the area and their cultural heritage
- his/her lifestyle as a child and now
- what they consider has changed for Indigenous people in today’s society
- his/her identity
- major issues facing Indigenous people (and arts workers) today

Time	Teaching/learning activity
10.50 – 11am	Participants are given the opportunity for personal reflection and clarification of discoveries so far before breaking for morning tea. They are invited to share these, in visual or written format, by displaying in the room.

Time Morning tea
11 – 11.30am

Time	Teaching/learning activity
11.30am – 12pm	Mind map of ways in which teachers would like make the lives of their Indigenous students' more central to their practice.

Teaching/Learning experience

Teachers explore their involvement with the community and contact with parents. Issues may include: student attendance, home resources, helping students to realise their potential. From this mindmap, teachers will identify key points with which to structure their role plays: The theme, or what they want to learn about; the context, or the where and when, the particular circumstance that will be created by the role play/drama to explore the theme; the roles, or who will they be playing; and the frame, or why the role play is taking place and which viewpoint the roles will have (Bowell & Heap 2001, pp.128-129).

Time	Teaching/learning activity
12 – 12.30 pm	Videotaped role play.

Teaching/Learning experience

In order to develop and establish protocols and guidelines for working with the local Indigenous community teachers need to make contact with that community. The videotaping and critiquing of role plays is an in-service education activity suggested by the Board of Teacher Registration, Queensland, to prepare teachers with interviews with parents, extended here to include students' communities. Teachers will take on roles as identified in the mind map and enact the role plays following the thematic/contextual and framed structure.

Time	Teaching/learning activity
12.30 – 1.15pm	Critique of role play

Teaching/Learning experience

With the assistance of the school's Aboriginal Education Officer, participants will watch and then critique their role plays.

Time Break for lunch
1.15 – 2pm

Time	Teaching/learning activity
2 – 3pm	Image theatre

Teaching/Learning experience

Image theatre is a key ingredient to Boal's *Theatre of the Oppressed* and is not only a component of the Years 7-10 Syllabus dramatic contexts, but a form by which to study the compulsory dramatic context of playbuilding. The following stages of Image theatre are followed in this experience (adapted from Boal 2002, pp.176-181):

1. Participants identify a theme relating to Indigenous education
2. Volunteers are asked to express the chosen theme in visual form (in groups of 3 or

- more). Participants work without looking at what the others are doing in order not to be influenced by them, but one after the other come into the middle of the playing space and use only their bodies to express the theme. These images are static and the exercise is done without talking. Once all volunteers have joined the space to show their images, the audience is asked if they can suggest a different image, which they then create.
3. *Once everyone has been in the playing space, the facilitator then moves on to the 'dynamisation' of these images, done in three stages.*
 4. First dynamisation: The participant groups go back into the playing space and present exactly the same images as before, but this time all together and not in succession.
 5. Second dynamisation: The participants attempt to interrelate with the other participants in the playing space: they need to link their images to those of others. They can use, for example, levels or distance, but their image must relate in some other way to others' poses.
 6. Third dynamisation: When the chosen theme is related to oppression, Boal states that it is common for participants to show the 'victims of the same repressive system' (2002, p.179). When this is the case, participants are then asked to transform all the 'victims' (or objects) into 'oppressors' (or subjects).
 7. Participants conclude by completing the image they showed at the start. Discussion can then add depth to the first image shown.

Time	Teaching/learning activity
3–3.30pm	'Place Matters' (McConaghy 2002): Writing of 'Statement of Best Practice' in conjunction with Education policy

Teaching/Learning experience

Teachers independently review the current *Aboriginal Education Policy (2005)* and write a personal 'Statement of Best Practice' on how they would like to work to achieve some of the outcomes stated. This is a personal statement and includes ways in which they would like to involve the local Indigenous community.

Time	Conclusion
3.30–3.45pm	Participants are invited to share their 'best practice' statements with the group. The day is finalised by raising any remaining questions or queries in view of efforts to be made in the future, and ways of realising them.

RATIONALE

Ideological warm-up

Boal's 'Theatre of the Oppressed' contains a diverse range of exercises or activities but all have a 'didactic intent' (Boal 2002, p.48). If theatre is an 'ideological representation of images of society at large' (Boal 2002, p.225), then this activity serves to encourage drama teachers to not become alienated from society, no matter how intricate or demanding their day-to-day lives at school may be.

This activity is designed to allow teachers a framework by which to enter into substantive conversation with peers and begin to uncover the domination of white-supremacist thought (McIntosh 1989; Hooks 2003), as represented in mainstream media. It is important that teachers analyse the impact of white supremacy on school society and society at large and how this influences their practice. McIntosh states that

white privilege, or supremacy, is 'an invisible package of unearned assets which I can count on cashing in each day, but about which I was 'meant' to remain oblivious' (1989, p.10). The media is a powerful force in maintaining that oblivion, and through analysing the dominant voices and forms of communication in today's society, teachers may begin to realise how non-Indigenous students will be assured of given 'curricular materials that testify to the existence of their race' and how the views of Indigenous students and their challenges are constructed to be seen in terms of their deficit (Munns 1998).

The participants' mission in this exercise is progressive in nature, and pedagogical and combative in character (Boal 2002, p.225). The analysis of information not presented in the press is an attempt to encourage teachers to recognise factors contributing to the hidden curriculum pervasive in Indigenous issues in schools (Symes & Preston 1997, p.278) and the evocation of historic events is recognising a need to view education and the education system as representative of the dominant societal ideologies. As Symes and Preston note, 'it is impossible to isolate schooling from its context, from its contact with other institutions in the complex fabric of modern society' (1997, p.273). In order to better understand the current situation, participants are encouraged to explore the history of oppression suffered by Indigenous Australians, how education plays a powerful role in oppression, and what forces are operating in contemporary society to maintain this position.

Guest Speaker: Wiradjuri Elder

By involving a member of the local community, participants will develop in sensitivity toward the people of their community, rather than view cross-cultural relationships as something removed from their immediate presence. McConaghy states that the 'school-community dynamic is ... central to the attainment of intellectual quality in rural classrooms' (2002, p.10). The inclusion of this experience is aimed to increase the 'perception of communities as integral to schooling and learning, as integral to classroom activities and to the culture, structure and decision-making of schools' (2002, p.10), a perception that McConaghy identifies as crucial to the rural schooling context.

The need for a school-community dynamic in rural classrooms has driven the structure of the activity. Non-Indigenous teachers may approach what they view as the "other" or Indigenous community with trepidation and thus resist making steps toward building that dynamic. Modelled in this process has thus been a way to involve, approach and include community members in the classroom with the aim of decreasing trepidation through awareness.

In this activity, however, there is a danger of creating what McConaghy describes as a new racism (2000, p.253). This is founded upon a 'notion of the supposed incompatibility of cultural traditions' and a 'two race' binary rather than notions of superiority and inferiority (McConaghy 2000, p.253). The problematic concern of essentialism (McConaghy 2000, p.260) in Aboriginality is also raised. Essentialism can be seen as upholding colonial discourse and it is thus important for participants to examine what sort of 'knowledge' or understandings they are constructing, and whom this knowledge serves. The creation of a school-community dynamic is an ongoing process and within this process, one must be aware of creating what could be operating as an "us and them" mentality.

Mind map

This activity is to facilitate and develop teachers' consciousness of the context of a specific community. Understanding this context could be, for example, recognition of 'family values...knowing that there are aunts and that involved in the immediate family' (*Indigenous Education – Everybody's business* 2004, p.10). The opportunity to "sit and think" is included in this activity, allowing teachers to examine what it is they know and would like to know about their students' community, and to develop these ideas as a group. Ways in which student/teacher relationships can be built through community are explored and as Beresford (2003) stresses, such relationships carry great importance. He notes that 'attendance and achievement are heightened' when Indigenous students feel they are being valued and heard (2003, p.269). It is not enough, though, to make an effort to value and listen to students, teachers must have an understanding of what they are valuing and to what they are listening. The possibility of this is increased when meaningful relationships are formed with students.

Videotaped role play and critique

Teachers are presented with the opportunity for informed reflection and learning in this activity. The Board of Teacher Registration, Queensland, stresses the importance of teachers' ability to establish and maintain relationships when establishing partnerships and protocols for working with the Indigenous community (*Indigenous Education – Everybody's business* 2004, pp.9-10). This activity is to allow participants to continue to develop their skill in relationship building and it is suggested that there is a need for particular 'sensitivity by non-Indigenous teachers when establishing relationships with Indigenous people' (*Indigenous Education – Everybody's business* 2004, p.10). The development of these skills can be seen as a two-fold process: the development of interpersonal skills for teachers; and the 'building of community capacity at the broader than interpersonal level' (*Indigenous Education – Everybody's business* 2004, p.10). As supported by McConaghy's 'Situated Pedagogies' (2002), *Indigenous Education – Everybody's business* (2004) stresses that 'some skills necessary for relationship-building can only be developed within the context of the specific community'. It is thus of utmost importance that this activity is seen as a role play and not as a replacement for work within the specific community. Thus, with the assistance of the school's Aboriginal Education Officer, participants will watch their role plays and be involved in informed critique; informed in the sense that it will be viewed as continuing on from 'role play' into 'real life'.

Beresford identifies issues faced by Aboriginal Education Officers and parents in schools (2003, pp.265-7). The role of Aboriginal Education officers can be seen as limited: they are often under-resourced and can be seen as someone to 'sort out fights' (Beresford 2003, p.265). The real influence of Aboriginal Education Officers needs to be recognised and valued, as this impacts on the Indigenous students: 'The kids know that the officers have got no authority and they resent it'. The introduction of the Aboriginal Student Support and Parent Awareness Committee in the early 1990s aided the involvement of Aboriginal parents in schools, aiming to, amongst other things, encourage schools to 'create a more supportive and welcoming environment for Aboriginal students and their parents' (Beresford 2003, p.266). Local decision-making needs to be suited to the particular needs of a community, but Beresford states that there

is a long way to go before both parties can fully and comfortably work together (2003, p.266).

Image theatre

In order to de-marginalise Indigenous issues in the curriculum, teachers need to challenge the deficit views of difference. To make these issues central in the curriculum, one needs to remove Indigenous students, their culture, their rights and their community from the periphery.

The Image theatre activity is structured to interrogate varying viewpoints and ideals. The purpose of the first dynamisation is to give a multiple vision of the subject, an overview or an 'objective vision' (Boal 2002, p.177). The aim is to see what everybody thinks, rather than the individual: where the individual presentation of images (stage 2) gives a 'psychological representation', the first dynamisation gives a 'social vision' (Boal 2002, p.178). The importance of this is to see how the particular theme might influence or affect this particular community (Boal 2002, p.178). In the second dynamisation we see not only a social vision, but an 'organised, organic, social vision'; rather than multiple points of view, we see an 'all-embracing' vision (Boal 2002, p.179).

Explored in this experience is simply a small part of issues relating to Indigenous education, but from a non-Indigenous dominated perspective. Heitmeyer asserts that 'the school curriculum should include the views of Aboriginal people. It does not mean slotting in a little extra content to a course or lesson' (2004, p.242). In order not to further marginalise Indigenous Australians and perspectives through the curriculum and classroom activity, one needs to realise that:

Aboriginal perspectives are not in themselves units of work but rather the way in which curriculum are developed. It is not an additional item to be dealt with separately but should be an integral part of what the school is already doing. It is the Aboriginal view taken toward a particular matter that is of concern to Aboriginal people, their society and culture (Lardner 1999, p.55, cited in Heitmeyer 2004, p.243).

What are some aspects of 'Aboriginal perspectives' and how would the incorporation or inclusion (terms that are in themselves problematic for they suggest a binary relationship) of these in drama and curriculum allow for improved attendance, achievement and esteem of Indigenous students? How can drama be used as a tool for social change? In the Drama Years 7-10 Syllabus, 'Aboriginal and Indigenous' is mentioned only in cross-curriculum content and suggests the study of plays and texts which 'deal with Indigenous issues and portray a range of Aboriginal characters' (NSW Board of Studies 2003, p.15). The argument here is that Aboriginality and Indigenous issues/perspectives should be core-curriculum content, rather than a peripheral study of Aboriginal characters, writers and performers. What, then, 'values and attitudes' are students 'valuing and appreciating' when looking at the 'contribution of drama and theatre to enriching and sustaining cultures and societies' (NSW Board of Studies 2003, p.10)? Curriculum may confirm that when considering their Indigenous students, 'schools and teachers should consider the possibility that classroom opposition may be rational cultural responses and not represent individual problems' (Munns 1998, p.182).

Statement of Best Practice

The opportunity for reflection and learning is given to participants here as they sit, think and write about their practice. Teachers will be familiar with the drama syllabi, but are encouraged to examine ways in which the outcomes stated in the *Aboriginal Education Policy* (2005) can be embedded into the drama curriculum. As McConaghy states, 'whose knowledge is valued in this curriculum and whose knowledge is excluded from this curriculum have been important questions for several decades' (2002, p.28). The involvement of the Wiradjuri community is paramount to this statement if teachers are to consider how 'place matters' (McConaghy 2002). Drawing on the experiences of the day, teachers will be considering McConaghy's model of situated pedagogies: Quality professional learning communities; quality teaching and learning; quality school/community dynamics; and quality leadership (2002, p.29).

INTENDED OUTCOMES

There is ample literature about teaching strategies for Indigenous students, but the challenge in this development day is not to relay those strategies and methods of working, but to allow teachers to question why those strategies might be in place and whose needs they are serving. Strategies must be applied in context, and the primary intended outcome for this day is a development of that context. Boal believes that 'theatre is an art and a weapon' (2002, p.225), but like any weapon it must be used wisely. Indigenous Australians have been oppressed for too long. This staff development day does not proclaim to be able to heal the country, but I firmly believe that education is a catalyst for change and that change must be dealt with in "mainstream" classrooms, not only "specialist" classrooms for Indigenous students.

This staff development day intends to stimulate the notion of 'cultural production', in which curriculum is seen as a 'dynamic relationship between teachers and pupils which reflects the social context in which the curriculum is constructed' (Grundy 1994, pp.27-39, cited in Munns 1998, p.177). It is intended, however, that drama be used not only to reflect, but also to question and reconceptualise the social context.

Deficit logic needs to be unhinged to create an understanding, equitable and just schooling society. Munns explores the reality for many teachers of Indigenous students characterised by consistent 'struggles' centred on behaviour, attendance, engagement and academic achievement in which its explanations for 'student disaffection and lack of classroom success' turn to deficit logic (1998, p.90). The limitations of deficit are that explanations fail to address connections between the individual or group with the wider social context, as they simply work to attribute blame (Munns 1998, p.90). It is intended that the questioning, deconstruction and challenging of the wider social context of Aboriginality will reduce the ignorant need to fall back on debilitating deficit notions of difference.

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