University of Wollongong

Research Online

Faculty of Social Sciences - Papers (Archive)

Faculty of Arts, Social Sciences & Humanities

2019

Jindaola, an Aboriginal way for curriculum development

Jade E. Kennedy

University of Wollongong, jkennedy@uow.edu.au

Lisa K. Thomas

University of Wollongong, lkosta@uow.edu.au

Alisa J. Percy

University of Wollongong, alisa.percy@uts.edu.au

Julia I. Avena

University of Wollongong, javena@uow.edu.au

Bonnie Amelia Dean

University of Wollongong, bcord@uow.edu.au

See next page for additional authors

Follow this and additional works at: <https://ro.uow.edu.au/sspapers>

Part of the [Education Commons](#), and the [Social and Behavioral Sciences Commons](#)

Research Online is the open access institutional repository for the University of Wollongong. For further information contact the UOW Library: research-pubs@uow.edu.au

Jindaola, an Aboriginal way for curriculum development

Keywords

jindaola, aboriginal, development, way, curriculum

Disciplines

Education | Social and Behavioral Sciences

Publication Details

Kennedy, J., Thomas, L., Percy, A., Avena, J., Dean, B., Harden-Thew, K., Delahunty, J. & de Laat, M. (2019). Jindaola, an Aboriginal way for curriculum development. In M. A. Peters & R. Heraud (Eds.), *Encyclopedia of Educational Innovation* (pp. 1-9). Singapore: Springer.

Authors

Jade E. Kennedy, Lisa K. Thomas, Alisa J. Percy, Julia I. Avena, Bonnie Amelia Dean, Kathryn Harden-Thew, Janine Delahunty, and Maarten F. De Laat

Jindaola: An Aboriginal approach to embedding Indigenous knowledges and perspectives into the curriculum

Jade Kennedy, Lisa Thomas, Alisa Percy, Julia Avena, Bonnie Dean, Kathryn Harden-Thew, Janine Delahunty & Maarten de Laat.

University of Wollongong, New South Wales, Australia

javena@uow.edu.au

Introduction

At a political level, the fact that Indigenous Australia has not yet experienced any constitutional or treaty recognition makes it difficult to imagine how reconciliation between the cultural realities of its Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples may be achieved. And while it has been recognised that Australia's educational system plays a critical role in this process, attempts to reconcile the curriculum within academic institutions continue to pose complex challenges. From an Aboriginal perspective, the Australian higher education curriculum is steeped in British colonialism - dominated by Anglo-perspectives and Western academic values. This is despite the fact that the curriculum is located on Aboriginal Country and a continent with the longest surviving sustainable human history. Commonly, approaches to embedding Indigenous Knowledges and perspectives into curricula tend to be achieved through prescribed cultural competency frameworks or pre-defined modules of content embedded in subjects. The problem with these kinds of approaches, however, is that it represents Indigenous Knowledges and perspectives as disconnected from people and place. This paper describes how Academic Developers from the University of Wollongong, in New South Wales, Australia and local Aboriginal community members co-created an institution-wide educational grants program called *Jindaola*, which follows an Aboriginal way towards reconciling Indigenous and non-Indigenous Knowledges in the Australian higher education curriculum.

Terms within this text

Academic Developers: Staff whose role it is to undertake a variety of activities aimed at enhancing teaching, learning and scholarship in higher education.

Country: To Australian Aboriginal people, Country is all living things. It is people, plants and animals. It embraces the seasons, stories and spirituality. Country is both belongingness and a way of being.

Dharawal: The northern language group of the Yuin people.

Knowledge Holder: Recognised Aboriginal custodian of traditional knowledge.

The Dreaming: An embodiment of Aboriginal creation that gives meaning to everything.

Yarn: A modern Aboriginal term for talking together with relevancy.

Yarning circle: A collective of people sitting in a circle, speaking in turn and actively sharing knowledge and deep listening. A Yarning circle places no hierarchy on any one individual and requires protocol to direct the flow of knowledge.

Yuin: The Aboriginal Nation that runs along the south eastern coast of NSW between the Hawksbury River in the north, Mallacoota entrance in the south, the escarpments and Snowy Mountains in the west, and the Pacific Ocean in the east.

Jindaola

Jindaola is an institution-wide educational development grants program that brings together participants (university teachers from interdisciplinary, faculty-based teams), academic developers and Aboriginal communities on a collaborative journey, situated in Country, for the purposes of learning, knowledge exchange and knowledge co-creation. *Jindaola* adopts an Aboriginal approach to conducting business to bring authenticity to the process of embedding Aboriginal Knowledges and perspectives into the Australian higher education curricula. This is achieved, not by providing the participants with pre-defined packages of ‘Indigenous Knowledge’, but through an experiential journey which begins the process of establishing knowledge-based relationships between their disciplinary knowledges and the relevant Aboriginal Knowledges that are grounded in Country. Participating in *Jindaola* is a process of decolonising one’s thinking in relation to knowledge, as the participants begin to experience what it means to ‘know’ in an Aboriginal way, and to bring that ‘knowing’ into an authentic and respectful approach to embedding Aboriginal Knowledges and perspectives into their curriculum. In this way, *Jindaola* adheres to Aboriginal methods for conducting business and maintaining knowledge integrity that are alive and still practised within Australian Aboriginal communities in varying ways.

The name *Jindaola* [*Jinda-ole-la*] was carefully chosen for this program because it comes from the *Dharawal* word for goanna:

“A protector of many Knowledges, Jindaola walks from place to place helping people know ‘proper way’. He speaks of protocol, the sacred and the special, and the appropriate practices we must perform to maintain the continuation of these” (Kennedy, et al., 2017).

Jindaola is placed within several significant Dreaming stories across Yuin. The name was agreed upon through dialogue and consultation with Yuin Elders and Knowledge Holders. *Jindaola* has since been positioned as a reconciling gift and promise for Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal peoples to walk together on this journey as it is based on the principles of respect, responsibility and reciprocity. Figure 1 provides a symbolic representation of the path of *Jindaola* between local Aboriginal communities of knowledge and the University’s communities of knowledge, and as a philosophy of practice.

Figure 1: The Path of Jindaola

As *Jindaola* carries knowledge from place to place, informing the authentic embedding of Aboriginal Knowledges and perspectives into curriculum, the symbolic diagram becomes a roadmap... a walking track... a guide... that is to be broken down and understood symbol by symbol to present an overall structural interpretation of an interconnected Aboriginal approach in this university context. Each symbol within this diagram therefore informs us of the appropriate relationships and protocols we are required to undertake in following the ways of *Jindaola*. Table 1 explains each symbol in terms of its Yuin meaning, as well as how it features in the educational development grants program.

Table 1: The Symbols of *Jindaola*

Symbol	Yuin representation	University context representation
<p>Tracks of <i>Jindaola</i> (goanna). Spots: his footprints, Lines: marks his tail leaves on the earth as he travels.</p> <p>For Yuin people, <i>Jindaola</i> represents the carrying of knowledge from one place to another, with the markings he leaves behind representing knowledge tracks connecting groups and places.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Knowledge-based relationships being established between the University and Aboriginal communities, - Knowledge-based relationships being established between University staff across the various disciplines. - Relationship protocols.
	<i>Bora</i> or significant gathering places.	Two <i>Big Bora</i> :

<p>Entail strict protocols to retain the integrity of '<i>proper way</i>'. Elders and Knowledge Holders will gather at a <i>Bora</i> to collectively make decisions in the best interest of community.</p> <p><i>Big Bora</i>: big gathering where important decisions are negotiated, impacting the whole community.</p> <p><i>Little Bora</i>: smaller gathering, where the outcomes of negotiations will have an impact on a smaller proportion of the community.</p>	<p>One: Aboriginal communities of knowledge; Two: University communities of knowledge.</p> <p>Each of these are collectives of Knowledge Holders in their own right and in their own contexts.</p> <p><i>Little Bora</i>: 'Formal Gatherings. Places and spaces where cross-faculty teams come together to share knowledge collectively.</p>
<p><i>Goonie</i> prints (the print left by your bottom when sitting on the earth). These represent people sitting, but also indicate that there are strong protocols related to <i>respect</i>, <i>responsibility</i> and <i>reciprocity</i>. These principles and values are demonstrated through acts of deep listening and soft speaking, with no aggression or shouting.</p>	<p>The semi-circles require participants in the program to uphold and engage in strong protocol on all occasions, and are coached and mentored in Aboriginal practices that articulate <i>respect</i>, <i>responsibility</i> and <i>reciprocity</i>. These values are shared through i.e. 'yarning circles', 'on Country' experiences with community and engaging in acts of '<i>ngapartji ngapartji</i>' ('give and take' or reciprocity).</p>
<p>Campfires around which people gather.</p> <p>Here, protocol is not as strict, as it is around the campfire we sit and yarn, build new knowledge, grow, and develop ideas.</p>	<p>Informal Gatherings. These campfires represent each of the faculty teams who are walking with <i>Jindaola</i> and are the places where knowledge creation, development and protocol will emerge.</p>
<p>The straight lines between <i>little Bora</i> are the notion of travelling (learning), or coming together for learning.</p>	<p>Represent the learning and development of participants as they travel between Formal and Informal Gatherings, on-campus and on-Country...</p>

In practical terms, *Jindaola* is an 18 month-long educational development grants program. Annually, a call for expressions of interest is advertised across the University, with interdisciplinary faculty groups applying to participate in the following year. Successful teams are selected based on their perceived readiness to engage in the *Jindaola* protocols of respect, responsibility, reciprocity, as well as obligations of regularity, routine and relevance. There is also a careful consideration of the relational dynamics that each team will bring to complement the others. Walking with *Jindaola* requires teams to engage in a series of Formal and Informal Gatherings, including off-campus and on-Country experiences. Teams also receive consistent coaching and mentoring facilitated and directed by the Academic Development and Recognition Unit, the Lecturer of Indigenous Knowledges (a traditional Knowledge Holder with esteem in the local Aboriginal community, and first-named author), and with the support of key Aboriginal community Elders and Knowledge Holders.

The Formal and Informal Gatherings uphold particular obligations, understood in Aboriginal terms as ‘business’. These include the principles of *regularity* (of communication), *routine* (of meeting) and *relevance* (to the participants and the environment). Within these Gatherings, the protocols of *respect*, *responsibility* and *reciprocity* are valued:

- Respect for the various communities (Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal) with which participants work amongst
- Responsibility, as a commitment to the program, to the group, to share with each other, learn from each other and teach each other (to form a new, responsible community)
- Reciprocity, the act of giving and taking, in this instance giving back to each other and the broader communities (Kennedy, et al., 2017).

The Formal

Formal Gatherings refer to Aboriginal cultural practices for upholding the meaningfulness of the multilayered relationships that bound people with their ecological environment. Before the colonisation of Australia, Formal Gatherings and ceremonies took place around natural environmental cycles such as a change in season or the migration of birds and fish, for example. Post-contact, these kinds of Formal Gathering continue, although their form and shape have changed through the impacts of modern society. The practice of Formal Gathering and ceremony maintains its significance because of its intimate link with cultural identity, cultural responsibility and cultural obligation, still alive and thriving within Aboriginal communities today.

For *Jindaola*, Formal Gatherings are all mandatory program days, requiring participants to attend a whole-day session at an off-campus, on-Country location, identified as significant for the journey with *Jindaola*.

“Walking this journey together in an ‘*Aboriginal way*’ means many things, however, in this Formal space, it means stopping at significant times... at significant landmarks... and sitting together... sharing together... learning together... this is doing ‘*business*’ within *Jindaola*” (Kennedy, 2017).

These Gatherings are a collective of all participating faculties, disciplines and schools coming together to share their experiences of the weeks between Formal Gatherings. Importantly, Formal Gatherings are intended as a shared space: for reflection and sharing, for collaboration and learning; a space to practice, not only respect, responsibility and reciprocity, but also regularity, routine and relevance.

Circles or cycles constitute a recurring theme throughout stages and procedures of *Jindaola*. As such, every Formal Gathering follows the same routine, starting with a morning yarning circle, following the protocol of “What’s your name? Where you from?”. Participant autonomy is encouraged as groups move onto an activity to share their ‘homework’ since the last Formal Gathering. In the afternoon, engagement is facilitated by ‘jig-sawing’ the teams into multi-disciplinary groups for the relevant activities that will prepare them for the next phase of the journey. Formal Gatherings commence at the same time on the same day of the week and flow the same way. This familiarity allows for a deep variety of knowledges to be explored and for the participants to be more creative.

Over the course of the 18-month program, there are five Formal gatherings, each with its specific focus:

Gathering	Name	Timeline
1	Joining the Journey	Beginning of program
2	Sharing your Landscape	3 months
3	Sharing your Way	6 months
4	Sharing your Walk	12 months
5	Sharing your Story	18 months

In the first Formal Gathering ‘*Joining the Journey*’ participants are introduced to the program, and commitment in terms of time, values, principles and expectations. The importance of the grounding principles is also stressed - respect, responsibility, reciprocity - regularity, routine and relevance. The afternoon begins the process of ‘Mapping your Landscape’. At this early stage, mapping one’s landscape sits around the first, most basic level of the multiple existing landscapes. It is predominantly tailored around the descriptive aspects of ‘what can you see back where you came from or where you exist regarding Aboriginality?’ Here, the definition of landscape embraces all tangible and intangible evidence and displays of Aboriginality within one’s faculty or discipline; including content within the curriculum, paintings on walls, people attached to the faculty, the faculty building and even the discipline as a whole.

The second Formal Gathering is themed around ‘Sharing your landscape’ where each team begins to share their descriptions of their landscape based on the homework from the previous Formal Gathering. During the process of sharing their ways of understanding the landscape, self-reflection is carefully facilitated to help participants identify the kinds of assumptions they bring to the process, and in this way, begin to see the influence of their own ontological and epistemological perspectives and the impact this has on their perceived landscape. The mapping and sharing of landscapes occurs throughout the duration of the 18-month program.

The third Formal Gathering, ‘Sharing your Way’, requires the groups to share their methods or approaches to embedding Aboriginal Knowledges and perspectives into the curriculum thus far. The objective is that through sharing their experimentation of building knowledge-based relationships, the teams are able to identify collectively, frameworks and methodologies that support the embedding of Indigenous knowledges within their particular landscapes.

The fourth Formal Gathering ‘Sharing your Walk’ centres on sharing the tested approaches, methods, and curriculum changes that have occurred. It is designed to deeply reflect on progress and provide feedback on the cohort’s growth. It is a time to address holistically, the knowledge-based relationships and how they are being scaffolded sustainably across curricula. Time is also used to allow participants to take the first steps in preparing the ‘Final Gathering’, which signifies the formal end of their direct participation in the project.

The Final Gathering is an opportunity to share the journey with the wider university and Aboriginal community audience. It is a celebration of what teams have achieved over the course of the program and involves aspects of local Aboriginal ceremony. The Final Gathering is a commitment to the University’s *Jindaola* community, as the graduating cohort are considered to have experiences and competencies that can contribute to subsequent teams undertaking the program.

The Formal Gatherings are a shared space for decolonising, challenging and establishing relationships between the held ontologies and epistemologies of the participants and those of the local Aboriginal

communities. This happens slowly and carefully to establish a strengths-based approach to minimising the institutional impositions of the dominant society. Formal Gatherings are highly emotional, personal and at times confronting as these are entirely focused on building knowledge-based relationships from the work and activities undertaken by participants in a series of Informal Gatherings.

The Informal

In the time between Formal Gatherings, participants also engage in Informal Gatherings as part of the journey. In contrast to the strict principles of Formal Gatherings, Informal Gatherings can be spontaneous or they can be planned. They can have no agenda and simply be a yarn, or they can have an objective, an agenda and a set of outcomes. Their informal nature comes from sitting outside the *Bora* and the seasonal calendar for major significant gatherings.

While participants are encouraged to arrange Informal Gatherings within and beyond faculty groups, the Academic Development team engage the teams in regular, routine and relevant Informal Gatherings between Formal Gatherings. In general, these gatherings follow the pattern of a discipline-exclusive fortnightly gathering at a chosen place. Yarning circles aid the process of communal reflection on previous or upcoming Formal Gatherings, as well as an opportunity to raise any concerns relating to the process. The yarning is driven by the participants, while the Lecturer of Indigenous Knowledges' role is to ground and validate participants' ideas, encourage reflection, share anecdotes and refer participants to relevant stories. If participants identify the need for a topic-specific workshop or an event which requires the facilitator's knowledge, the Lecturer of Indigenous Knowledges fills the requested role or gives advice on how to fill the 'knowledge-gap' and pushes participants to find other 'gaps' concerning curriculum and landscapes. Essentially, Informal Gatherings embody the safe space participants need, to explore feelings and questions. This is important because the journey with *Jindaola* ineluctably becomes a personal one as deeply held beliefs are challenged and transformed. It is through these continual gatherings that participants are able to build stronger professional relationships, established through the practised Aboriginal concept of constantly moving towards bringing together the personal and the professional. Overall, Informal Gatherings allow participants time and space to:

- consolidate their understanding of Knowledges,
- reflect on relevant ideas that have been workshopped at Formal Gatherings,
- formulate and test ideas within the faculty, based around the foundation of *Jindaola*,
- seek guidance and feedback on attempts to identify Aboriginal Knowledges relevant to their discipline and build knowledge-based relationships.

Outcomes

Jindaola, as a program, is unique to the specific Aboriginal Country on which it lies. The significance of this approach being grounded in Aboriginal methodologies, while being relevant within the University of Wollongong, means that the nature of any directly related outcomes will be novel and emergent within this context. Outcomes will be particular and related to the knowledge-based relationships created through the Formal and Informal gatherings between staff, students, Elders, Knowledge Holders and the Aboriginal community. The program however does aspire to achieve the following three overarching outcomes:

1. to build genuine knowledge-based relationships between Aboriginal, Western and discipline knowledges that can be presented within the appropriate UOW curricula.
2. to develop genuine two-way relationships with Aboriginal Elders, Knowledge Holders and community
3. to create culturally safe curricula that privileges Country and establishes a stronger sense of belonging for students, staff and university community.

Transferability

Where it is ‘common practice’ within the academy to apply ‘good practice’ from elsewhere to respond to a similar area of need, in the case of *Jindaola* such transferability is not as easy nor direct. *Jindaola* is a program intimately embedded and grounded in Yuin Country, privileging place and people and their relationship with the particular Knowledges of Yuin Country and its people. The program insists on the acknowledgement and practice of respect, responsibility and reciprocity and therefore application or appropriation ‘off-Country’ would be considered highly disrespectful to the Yuin and the relationship built between their communities and the University of Wollongong.

Nevertheless, it is acknowledged that across Australia and even beyond, academic developers urgently seek successful methods for decolonising curriculum and reconciling knowledges from different cultures. Although *Jindaola* cannot be copied as a pre-packaged, ‘plug-and-play’ program, there are some principles and approaches that may be considered in facilitating a path towards curriculum reconciliation in other contexts. These considerations could include:

- shifting one’s philosophical approach to differing Knowledges from a deficit to a strengths-based model
- working towards and facilitating genuine ongoing two-way relationships around cultural Knowledges and perspectives with the appropriate Knowledge Holders to create shared principles for practice.
- making space for and privileging non-dominant cultural epistemologies, ontologies and pedagogies within a tailored learning environment.

The process of Knowledge reconciliation must be embedded within Country. This relationship extends beyond place to include the people and culture of that place, and hence the individuality and particularity of each case and significance of this when respectfully building knowledge-based relationships. The objective is knowledge integrity, and in achieving this, it is the responsibility of universities, academics developers and local community to not perpetuate colonising approaches that prescribe and position non-dominant cultural knowledges within the curriculum as ‘other’. Establishing foundational knowledge-based relationships however will foster change and sustainability that offers a more holistic understanding of disciplinary knowledges and how they relate across cultures and within a multifaceted and multilayered society.

References

- Kennedy, J., Thomas, L., Percy, A., Delahunty, J., Harden-Thew, K., Martin, B., de Laat, M., and Dean, B., (2017). *Jindaola – An Aboriginal Way of Embedding Knowledges and perspectives*. 3rd

Ed. [ebook] Wollongong: University of Wollongong, p14. Available at:
<https://www.uow.edu.au/dvca/lte/teachdev/jindaola/index.html>