Daruganora: a model for inclusive inter-cultural education

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This paper is an introduction to a new model for inclusive practice in education. It sprang from a 2010 Learning and Teaching Fellowship which called for strategies to address the under representation of Indigenous and other low Socio Economic Status groups in higher education in Australia. We have since realised that it can be adapted and developed in a wide range of other contexts and could be relevant in many other countries.

We had piloted an innovative, research led learning and teaching programme for high school students in years 8-10 in 2009 and it was clear to us then that problems of under representation of particular socio economic groups at higher education level must begin much earlier than university entry stage. We decided to design a programme, again as a pilot, initially for Indigenous school students in years 8-10 from schools designated 'low SES' by the NSW government in the western suburbs of Sydney. We also conducted an associated research project to learn more about Indigenous school students' aspirations to attend university, what they, their non-Indigenous peers, and their teachers knew about getting to university, and what value they place on a university education. We are currently in the process of publishing the results of the research.

Daruganora is an Aboriginal term that means Darug Land. It was chosen as a name for the programme because Macquarie University is situated on Darug Land and we wanted to acknowledge Darug Land and Darug people as the literal and philosophical foundation of the project. The project is founded on a philosophy which values and respects diverse cultures and which recognises that current classrooms can be enhanced to create inter-cultural spaces of mutual respect and recognition. The pilot proceeded from a starting point of respect for Indigenous knowledge and has developed from a theoretical framework that allows for Indigenous and non-Indigenous knowledge to be equally acknowledged, respected and shared between students from diverse cultural backgrounds.

Drawing from primary research conducted by Everett over many years with Aboriginal people in the western suburbs of Sydney in collaboration with Ambler using the latest in innovative, student-centred learning and teaching strategies, the Daruganora programme was developed. Our own experience as teachers taught us that students cannot be successful and will not continue their studies if they cannot identify with the institution and the community it produces. Students need to see positive representations of their culture and of themselves, and these must also be recognised by others in their classrooms (including their peers and teachers) to be successful.

Fifteen years of experience as a supporter and researcher in Aboriginal communities in the far western suburbs of Sydney informs Everett's knowledge of some urban Aboriginal people's attitudes towards learning and teaching. Her research shows that of primary importance and interest to Aboriginal peoples is their culture (Everett, 2006, 2008, 2009a, 2009b). A poignant example was one young man who had very little formal education and who spent long periods of his life in gaol who indicated that 'without my culture I am nothing' (field notes 2003). Elders in the community constantly ask Everett if she is 'teaching culture' as a vital part of the Indigenous Studies programme at Macquarie. As Everett's research shows, although it may conflict with anthropological conceptualisations of culture, the meaning of 'culture' with the people she works with is: singing, dancing, ceremonies, art, storytelling, language, bush tucker and bush medicine. Macquarie's Indigenous art collection and Indigenous Studies, which focuses on Aboriginal art has demonstrated the power to engage both Indigenous and non-Indigenous students. IHEAC (2008) have pointed to a national failure to value and recognise Indigenous knowledge systems and the

expertise of Indigenous custodians and knowledge holders. This programme redresses this failure by making our commitment to Indigenous culture and attainment highly visible and integral to our educational experience at Macquarie.

The theoretical frameworks which underpin our practice are drawn from theorists working in the areas of identity formation and transformation, cultural change, ethnicity and 'intercultural' representation. We recognise, following authors such as Cowlishaw and Morris (1997) that, borrowing the title of their book, 'Race Matters'. Conceptualisations of 'race', ethnicity and cultural diversity can and do translate to inequality, marginalisation and discrimination. Barth's (1969) seminal work, 'Ethnic Groups and Boundaries' has never been surpassed as an account of processes involved in the emergence and development of groups of people who, for many political and cultural reasons, want to make and maintain their difference from other groups. Barth demonstrates that in high modernity people, far from the common 1960s metaphor of becoming a cultural melting pot, are making more and more of often miniscule cultural differences to maintain, as Hill (1996:1) argues, 'simultaneously cultural and political struggles to create enduring identities in general contexts of radical change and discontinuity'. It would be naive, in short, to ignore or under-estimate the value and importance and the positives and negatives connected with the assertion and representation of cultural difference.

It would be equally naive, we would argue, not to recognise that cultural difference, even if it is grounded on strategies to hierarchically elevate the status of a group of people who have been historically marginalised by a dominant society, remains situated on a level which is unequal to the dominant society. Put simply, some group identities have greater access to resources and status than others, even if there is some upward movement in their social position as a result of their own cultural and political action. No matter how positively it is represented by different cultural groups themselves and by those who seek to aid and support them, cultural difference is often constructed systemically within western cultures as the binary opposite of 'us' (Foucault 1980, Derrida 1982). This results in alienation at every level of society.

It must be recognised that significant global, national and local forces[1] have and continue to work to somewhat alleviate conditions of poverty, bad health and lack of access to human rights and social justice for Indigenous and other marginalised peoples. However, there remains huge disparity of life opportunities for those living 'inside' dominant social groups and those living outside or on the edges because they are constructed and represented as 'them' and not 'us'(Deleuze and Guattari 1986; Bhaba 1998, 1994; Bennett 1998).

Initially filmmakers and film theorists provided us with some tools for thinking about ways in which more than one culture can be equally and respectfully represented in the same production. Filmmakers including Trihn Mihn-Ha, Penny McDonald , Jennifer Deger and David McDougall to name a few, demonstrate how a filmmaker , using what is often considered the quintessentially western medium of film, can represent different cultural groups whilst problematising notions of difference. Film theorist, Laura Marks (2000) calls this 'intercultural cinema'. Developing this 'intercultural' theory and practise to analyse various media including painting, literature and music has led to the development of the Daruganora programme.

'Intercultural' representation depends on multiple cultures participating in a single representation, therefore Indigenous students' non-Indigenous classmates and teachers are an important inclusion in the programme by facilitating and supporting inter-cultural competencies and respect for Indigenous cultures ─ they are key participants. Their engagement and educational development in the area of Indigenous Studies is crucial. This potentially allows them to better engage with their Indigenous peers and students by making them more aware of Indigenous culture and representations which are all around them. This can potentially enrich all participants' lives. The programme does not give Indigenous students 'special' treatment so much as to draw on their strengths thus demonstrating to their peers and teachers the enrichment that inter-cultural exchange of knowledge can foster. This is done through a holistic approach to student engagement (Coates, 2005) which honours Indigenous cultures and their representations on the Macquarie University campus.

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[1] Including the UN, WHO, some governments, charities and churches for exemple.

Experience, relationships and formative assessment in the learning situation

The Daruganora programme provides a finely calibrated learning experience which draws on the Macquarie University campus, students, resources and staff to honour Indigenous peoples and culture ─ the Macquarie University Indigenous art collection represents the rich diversity of Indigenous peoples and culture. It is also designed to encourage students' aspirations to attend a tertiary education facility and to support teachers in being able to source accurate and timely information regarding access to universities.

The view that experience, relationships and formative assessment are a valuable and necessary part of student learning is supported by learning theories found within the broad area of Social Constructivism. People are considered to be active participants in the creation of experiences, and the learning process requires that people search for meaning in their experiences (Boghossian, 2006; Bruner, 1990; Kooy, 2006b; Vygotsky, 1992). In the tradition of Kolb (1984) Daruganora manifests the belief that "learning is the process whereby knowledge is created through the transformation of experience" (1984, p. 38). Thus the experiences students' bring to the learning context need to be drawn upon and acknowledged if further learning is to occur, and engaging students in a range of events and activities as part of the learning process paves the way for creating new experiences from which future learning might evolve. Boud et al. (1993, p. 9) argue that learning starts to occur when individuals engage to "recapture, notice and re-evaluate their experience" of an activity or event and "work with their experience to turn it into learning." Dyke (2006, p. 116) supports this argument and states, "Unless learners engage with and transform their experience, learning may not occur." Opportunities to study one's experiences mean that it is possible to develop an understanding of those experiences, and this can then transform subsequent thoughts, actions and practice (Dewey, 1938). Nussbaum (1989) emphasises that to actively construct and make meaning from experiences people need to connect together. Daruganora actively encourages inclusion by promoting student and teacher interaction and it is at that "interface" (Nakata, 2008) that the socio-political, cultural-historical aspects of experience are structured and re-structured; these essential features help to create an inter-cultural learning environment. Students and teachers bring to the learning and teaching context 'who' and 'what' they are and this inevitably includes aspects of their cultural heritage. Formative assessment activities enacted in the teaching situation in the form of both open and reflective questions,

discussions, modelling, and guided group work allow
the teacher to observe what students bring to the learning context and then draw upon those experiences to respectfully nurture, guide and construct continued learning opportunities for all. This becomes both an inclusive and inter-cultural learning construction.

The programme was initially adapted from Macquarie's Indigenous Studies curriculum and aligned with the New South Wales Aboriginal Studies Stages 4 and 5 syllabuses[2]. It is designed to support the learning of high school students in years 8, 9 and 10 in Indigenous art and identity in Australia. Indigenous art and Indigenous Studies have proven to be subject areas which can provide an educational advantage to Indigenous students which is not usual in their educational experience and allows them to 'shine' in front of their non-Indigenous peers and teachers. Indigenous Studies, with a strong emphasis on key generic learning areas including literacy, research and writing skills provides an excellent model for how similar programmes could be developed in different contexts. This is achieved within a framework that acknowledges Macquarie University as Aboriginal Country and Darug as its traditional owners thus allowing for a politics which privileges Indigenous knowledge, people and representations. It allows non-Indigenous students to experience a positive, supported learning experience in a cultural context other than their own. This can be both challenging and exciting for them. Evaluations of the programme demonstrate that it is an overwhelmingly positive experience for both Indigenous and non-Indigenous school students and their teachers.

The 3-hour programme begins with a 30 minute interactive multi-media presentation in a tiered lecture theatre. This enables students to experience a 'real' university lecture and serves to introduce key issues in Indigenous Studies. The lecture incorporates diagnostic learning and teaching strategies which allow the Daruganora facilitators to evaluate students' prior knowledge.

The next phase involves an authentic research task where students are divided into smaller groups and armed with two key research questions. They are then taken on a tour of identified spaces on campus to view examples of Aboriginal art. Students

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[2] The programme is currently being developed to align with the New South Wales preliminary Higher School Certificate history curriculum so that it can be more readily developed into various cultural contexts and relevant to a wider group of students and teachers.

engage with representations of Aboriginal identity while simultaneously experiencing the campus.

The third phase involves a 'World Café where students engage in a group activity to reflect upon, self-assess, and disseminate their research findings (Boud, 1995; Biggs, 2007) which are focused on issues concerning Aboriginal art and identity. Macquarie University Indigenous Studies students act as scribes, discussion facilitators and mentors in each group and provide the opportunity for the school students to meet and talk to a diverse array of Macquarie students.

The programme is designed to be beneficial for both Indigenous and non-Indigenous students, and aims to facilitate a welcoming and inclusive environment as well as one that privileges Australian Indigenous cultures. Students from diverse backgrounds bring different understandings and views to this programme and our experience has shown that Indigenous students generally demonstrate highly developed visual literacy skills providing conceptual advantages to their non-Indigenous peers. This is often a reversal of their usual educational experience and serves to support their self-confidence and command the respect and recognition of their abilities from peers and teachers.

Teachers are provided with learning and teaching materials to support the programme in the school context and school student participants are provided with a 'showbag' of promotional, marketing and educational materials. Evaluation surveys conducted after the event indicate that over 70% of respondents would like to find out more about the university and are interested in returning to the campus for Open Day.

Feedback from Head Teachers and school Principals has shown that teachers are benefiting from the programme as much as students and there is now a call from schools to develop the programme for teacher education. Teachers can use the Daruganora model to develop their own learning and teaching and research skills, and adapt it to other contexts. Importantly, the programme allows teachers to see aspects of their own students' learning processes that may not have been previously exhibited in a school classroom environment. This may be particularly noticeable in the case of Indigenous students.

The programme has also proven to be highly beneficial to undergraduate Macquarie students who participate as mentors. Macquarie students are given the opportunity to

reflect on their own learning in Indigenous Studies and to learn through sharing the experience of learning with the High School students.

The programme was run in 2010 with 5 schools, which were selected from the NSW government's list of 'Priority Schools' which are schools which, for various reasons, have been designated 'low Socio Economic Status'. Schools on this list from Sydney's western suburbs were invited to participate stemming from the belief that these schools might not already be in contact with many (if any) universities, and that these schools potentially had higher populations of Indigenous students than schools which are not on the list. Each school provided between 15 and 30 students for the programme. Some schools undertook the programme jointly with other schools. The students were from years 8, 9 and 10, with each school deciding the most appropriate students to invite. Some students who attended were already enrolled in an Aboriginal Studies class. Those from other classes (such as history) were considering choosing Aboriginal Studies as an elective.

This experience has been enormously successful not only in establishing relationships with a number of schools in Sydney's western suburbs, but, through media attention and other marketing, in attracting the attention of untargeted Sydney schools. Some of these schools, including elite private schools with bursary programmes for Indigenous students, have contacted us asking for the programme to be run for them. Through our discussions with these schools we realise the benefit of extending our boundaries to include all schools in Sydney. Schools other than those in the outer suburbs of Sydney and other than those in areas labelled 'low SES', 'disadvantaged' or 'priority', have Indigenous populations. This includes some private schools which have specific scholarships or bursaries for Indigenous students. In order for the programme to develop, we need to take into account that Indigenous, 'low SES', 'disadvantaged' and discriminated against people live in all societies, geographical locations and socio-economic groups across Sydney, Australia and the world.

Daruganora has not only excited and invigorated the lives of the 9 staff that made up the team in 2010, but has also elicited interest from many staff at Macquarie University, other universities in Australia and internationally as well as schools across Sydney.

We hope that in the years to come Daruganora will be offered as part of the Macquarie university curriculum disseminated in different forms and within different contexts across Australia and the world. We envisage a flexible programme that can be

extended to include different versions for different year levels, an on-line programme for remote schools, a teacher education programme, and a suite of support programmes such as incursions, video-conferencing, workshops and conferences to be developed. It is proposed that, should the programme continue to be funded at Macquarie, a longitudinal research project will be established to track the progress of students who participate in the programme.

Daruganora has the potential to enact positive and lasting change throughout the education sector. It is no exaggeration to say that Daruganora could greatly influence positive cultural change in education in relation to the place of Indigenous peoples, migrant groups and other marginalised social groups and representations in schools and universities. It may, indeed, prove to be a model in developing a new approach to learning and teaching in inter-cultural classrooms, which will have a global impact.

The values that are aligned between Daruganora, Macquarie University and Government imperatives relate to the need to address social justice, a sustainable social world and support the participation of students and staff in important network building as a community. It also aligns with values related to ethical practice, equity, valuing strengths in diversity, quality enhancement and personal, cultural and social development of students, teachers and the University community through local engagement.

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