

Indigenous ‘Places’ as Learning ‘Spaces’: Using the Yindyamaldhuray Yalbilinya framework to foster cultural competence in pre-service teachers

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Universities are being called to provide the next generation of professionals with knowledge and understandings of Indigenous cultures, histories and contemporary contexts and equip graduates with culturally appropriate skills and strategies to prepare them for working effectively with Indigenous clients and/or communities (CSU Strategic Plan, 2011-2015). Using places of cultural significance to the local Wiradjuri people, the Yindyamaldhuray Yalbilinya framework was initially designed to engage Indigenous primary school children in classroom learning. As an extension of the project, a school/university partnership was established between a regional primary school and the local University. Pre-service teachers enrolled in the Bachelor of Education (Health & PE) participated in the Yindyamaldhuray Yalbilinya experience which aimed to foster their cultural competence. The Yindyamaldhuray Yalbilinya framework draws on five local places and symbols of cultural significance to the Wiradjuri people and uses these places to create spaces for engaging learners in Indigenous histories and culture. The aim of this research is to evaluate the efficacy of using these culturally-significant places as spaces for learning. As a prescribed assessment task, the pre-service teachers were required to design an integrated learning unit for Years 5 and 6 students at the primary school, using the Yindyamaldhuray Yalbilinya framework. The pre-service teachers visited the places of significance and participated in learning opportunities facilitated by the primary school staff and Indigenous elders that introduced them to the background and application of the learning framework. Pre-service teacher work samples (integrated learning units) formed the data source and were analysed using the three elements of cultural competence: i) knowledge and awareness, ii) values and attitudes, and iii) skills (Weaver, 1997). The findings indicated that the partnership had positively and significantly supported the pre-service teachers in understanding Australian Indigenous culture, increased their awareness of cultural practices that were outside their own belief system, refined their curriculum design skills in an authentic trans-cultural context; and assisted them in modelling respectful partnerships between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians.