

Using Podcasts in Higher Education: Examples of Strategies to Indigenise Higher Education Curricula and to Promote Indigenous Student Success. *A Practice Report*

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Abstract

This practice report explores the development and impact of two podcasts that we have developed and hosted. Drawing on our experiences as academics working closely together, one non-Indigenous (Barney) and the other Ngugi/Wakka Wakka (Bunda), we discuss the reasons for choosing the podcast medium, the development of the podcasts and their emerging impact. We also discuss how the podcasts are contributing to improving practices in two contexts: Indigenising university curricula and improving outreach programs for Indigenous students. To conclude, we consider how podcasting can be adapted and used in other university contexts to improve programs for student success.

Keywords: Indigenous student success; outreach programs; Indigenising curriculum; podcasts.

Introduction

Podcasting is a medium increasingly used in higher education contexts (Moore, 2022) and can be broadly defined as “a digital audio file of speech, music, broadcast material, etc., made available on the internet for downloading to a computer or portable media” (Oxford English Dictionary, 2023). As Rogers and Herbert (2020) note, podcasting has the potential to empower those whose voice may be marginalised from public debate and education. For example, podcasting is being used in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander¹ research contexts to centre and enable the voices of Indigenous communities to be heard (e.g., Kell & Gaguw, 2020).

Together we have developed two podcast series. One is based on research findings from an Australian Centre for Student Equity and Success (formerly NCSEHE)² Equity Fellowship and the other focuses on Indigenising the tertiary curriculum. Katelyn is a non-Indigenous woman living and working on Yuggera and Turrubul Country. She has worked within the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies Unit at The University of Queensland (UQ), Australia for the last 16 years and has collaborated with Indigenous colleagues on a number of research and teaching and learning projects. Tracey is a

¹ While acknowledging the diversity among and between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, in this practice report the term “Indigenous” is used to refer to both Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

² The National Centre for Student Equity in Higher Education (NCSEHE) was rebranded in 2024 as the Australian Centre for Student Equity and Success (ACES).



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Ngugi/Wakka Wakka woman, and during the course of her career, she has held senior Indigenous leadership roles in a number of universities. We have been working together for the last five years in undergraduate and postgraduate teaching, research (e.g., Bunda et al., in press; Fredericks et al., 2023) and resource development. We view our relationship as strong, respectful and centred on trust and mutual respect.

This practice report explores the aims, development and impacts of two podcasts that we have created and hosted together. We also examine how the podcasts are contributing to improving practices in two contexts: Indigenising university curriculum and outreach programs for Indigenous students. To conclude we reflect on the importance of podcasting as a platform to centre Indigenous voices and enable the diverse voices of Indigenous peoples to be heard and listened to. We also discuss the potential benefits of podcasting in other university contexts to improve and enhance programs to ensure student success.

Podcasts in Higher Education Contexts

Mooney (2019) notes that, “the world of podcasting, once considered a niche community of technology enthusiasts and audio nerds, has grown dramatically in popularity since the early 2000s” and podcasts are increasingly being used as a tool in higher education in a wide range of contexts (p. 2). Podcasting offers an accessible resource for learning and teaching purposes, and researchers have explored student-generated podcasts as a tool to improve student engagement. Mackay (2024) discusses the use of podcast interviews as a form of peer mentoring. She explores how podcast interviews with students who had successfully completed the first-year compulsory law subject allayed incoming students’ concerns about how difficult studying law might be. The podcasts also provided students with practical tips from their peers and generated excitement about the topics that would be covered in the course.

Elsewhere, Powell and Robson (2014) examine student-generated podcasts as an approach to assessment while Khechine et al. (2013) explore advantages and disadvantages of using podcasting in an online business education course. Lee et al. (2008) examines podcasting to prepare students to participate in a technology course while Gachago et al. (2016) discuss podcasting as a socially inclusive technology for vulnerable student populations (also see Bolden & Nahachewsky, 2015). However, podcasts have been criticised because, as Conroy and Kidd (2023) note, they “are not dialogical – learners cannot interact with the podcast speaker synchronously as they can on collaborative platforms” (p. 862).

As Moore (2022) points out, “the ability to gather and share information across time and space, coupled with emphases on dialogue, participation, and voice, also means that podcasts may hold emancipatory potential” (p. 2). In Indigenous higher education contexts, podcasts have also been used as a way of centring Indigenous voices. Kell and Gaguw (2020) developed a podcast series based on their archival research as “a way of making meaning from research that values Indigenous voices” (p. 38). They argue that podcasting provides a significant audio platform to prioritise Indigenous people’s expertise and knowledge.

Indigenous Success: Doing it, Thinking it, Being it

In 2020 Katelyn undertook an Equity Fellowship with the Australian Centre for Student Equity and Success (formerly NCSEHE) exploring building the evidence to enhance and improve outreach programs for Indigenous school students (Barney, 2022). In Australia, the majority of universities offer outreach programs for Indigenous (mostly high school) students. The theoretical case for these initiatives is strong as much data exists about the barriers Indigenous students face in entering university (e.g., see Behrendt et al., 2012). However, before this Fellowship occurred, the research and evidence base for these equity programs remained largely underdeveloped and limited. Working closely with an Indigenous advisory group and Indigenous research assistant Hayley Williams, the Fellowship involved mapping outreach programs for Indigenous students, evaluating selected outreach initiatives and developing strategies for strengthening and improving outreach camps for Indigenous students.

During 2020, amongst COVID-19 outbreaks and lockdowns across Australia and globally, Katelyn also started listening to a number of podcasts including ABC’s *Coronacast* (Taylor & Swann, 2020-2023) and university focused podcasts such as *Higher Ed Heros* (Kaempf & Stark, 2020-present) the *Academic Writing Amplified* (Mazak, 2019-present) podcast. She found it was an accessible way to listen to information during the busyness of life. In addition, during interviews with outreach staff, participants noted the need for more practical resources to assist them to evaluate their programs. As one staff member noted “we’re the boots-on-the-ground” running the programs rather than having experience with collecting and analysing data to evaluate their programs (Barney, 2022, p. 37). She then had the idea of developing a podcast based on the findings from the

Fellowship as a non-traditional research output (NTRO). Katelyn invited Tracey, who was one of the advisory group members, to co-host the podcast. Anthony Frangi, Manager of ABC Radio Brisbane, was engaged to record and edit the podcast.

We called the podcast *Indigenous Success: Doing it, Thinking it, Being it* because of the multiple understandings of “success” in this context. Staff and student comments in interviews demonstrate that what “student success” means and what “counts” as success in relation to outreach programs is complex. Sponsors often view success as students transitioning to a degree in the specific disciplinary focus of the camp, while university leadership can be looking for students to transition to that specific university. Harrison and Wallis (2017) highlight there can be a “confusion of successes” and a tension where “outreach is conflated with recruitment and universities seek easy wins ... this is an added challenge to practitioners: is it success against institutional or national targets that matters?” (p. 81). Also, how might cultural matters influence the type of success that we want students to be able to have? Important work focused on what success means in relation to Indigenous students has been undertaken by Indigenous scholars (e.g., Andersen et al., 2008; DiGregorio et al., 2000; Martin et al., 2017). In Canada, Pidgeon (2008) argues it is important to broaden notions of success and that, for many Aboriginal nations in Canada, success is “connected to empowerment of self and community, decolonisation and self-determination” and certainly such concepts have relevance within Indigenous Australian contexts too (p. 340).

Launched in 2021, the aims of the podcast were to:

- Share the findings of the Fellowship in an accessible format
- Provide examples of good practice in outreach programs for Indigenous students
- Assist outreach staff to improve their programs for Indigenous students.

Our method for each podcast interview was to identify and invite interviewees to participate in a conversation on a particular theme linked to findings in the Fellowship. Prior to the recorded interview, in discussion with the interviewee, we agreed on a focus and potential interview questions. Next, we recorded the interview either in-person or via online, depending on the guests’ locations, and then post-production editing was undertaken by Anthony Frangi. The episode was then shared and checked with the participant and, once approved, was published online via the podcast website (which distributes the recording to the various podcast platforms).

The podcast forms part of a suite of resources developed as part of Katelyn’s Fellowship which also includes a suite of video resources (and accompanying booklet) on evaluation and a webinar with two Indigenous experts, Maria Raciti and Gawaian Bodkin-Andrews, who provided practical tips and advice to outreach practitioners on how to evaluate their programs. Topics and guests included in the podcast, based on findings from the Fellowship have been:

- Why evaluation of outreach programs is so important: Maria Raciti (University of Sunshine Coast)
- Cultural aspects in outreach programs for Indigenous students: Chris Miller (Western Sydney University)
- The role of student ambassadors on outreach programs for Indigenous students: Olivia Williams (The University of Melbourne)
- Including Indigenous perspectives in the curriculum of outreach programs: Hope Perkins (The University of Melbourne)
- How the shift to online outreach activities during COVID has worked in practice: Lydia Bissett (Swinburne University of Technology)
- Building self-confidence and a strong sense of self through participating in an outreach program: Alyssa Armstrong (University of Wollongong)
- Outreach practitioners and researchers working together: Gawaian Bodkin-Andrews (Western Sydney University)
- The benefits of attending multiple outreach programs: Mitchell Odegaard (The University of Adelaide)
- Improving post-engagement with Indigenous students who attended outreach programs: Raqual Nutley and Robyn Donnelly (The University of Queensland)

For accessibility we had each interview transcribed and share the transcript via the podcast website. It is hoped that the podcast is of interest to anyone with an interest in student success in higher education more generally.

Indigenising Curriculum in Practice

The importance of Indigenising the curriculum at our institution was identified as an objective in the UQ Reconciliation Action Plan (2018-2022). The process of Indigenising curriculum is complex as institutional support is required and there can be many challenges including resistance from students particularly from mandatory curriculum. At UQ, Tracey has been leading this process since 2019 in collaboration with an Indigenising Curriculum Working Party who advises and makes recommendation on:

- The adoption, configuration, and integration of best practices for embedding Indigenous perspectives in UQ curriculum.
- Emerging educational developments and practices in relation to the Indigenisation of curriculum, including related technological developments and digital platforms.
- Support, training, communication and professional learning requirements related to embedding Indigenous perspectives in curriculum, including the establishment of a Community of Practice on Indigenising the curriculum.

As Ryan and Ivelja (2023) note, Indigenising the curriculum “cannot be achieved without allyship, culturally responsive pedagogical frameworks, a reciprocal relationship with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities” (p. 312). We have found from discussion within the UQ Indigenising Curriculum Community of Practice that non-Indigenous staff can be unsure about how to build relationships with Indigenous community members, where to find resources, and/or worried about getting it wrong (also see Raciti et al., 2018).

After our experiences undertaking the *Indigenous Success* podcast and the potential for international reach of podcasts, we decided to undertake a second podcast but focus on this important process of Indigenising the curriculum. We wanted to explore how Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander and non-Indigenous academics are Indigenising the curriculum at UQ and provide academics with practical suggestions and advice on how to begin the process of Indigenising the curriculum through exploring case studies across the disciplines. The framing of the podcast discussions aligned to a set of Indigenising curriculum design principles Tracey had developed: relationships, cultural capability, benefits, Country, truth, respect, and reciprocity (Bunda, 2022). Launched in 2023, the aims of the [Indigenising Curriculum in Practice](#) podcast are to:

- Creatively and innovatively explore the Indigenising curriculum design principles and learning
- Share new perspectives and tips about the ways non-Indigenous staff can engage with and embed Indigenous perspectives in their teaching
- Model how Indigenous and non-Indigenous people can work respectfully together.

We followed a similar method to the first podcast series and so far we have recorded two series of the podcast with one interview released each month.

Series one episodes include:

- Relationships: Francis Nona and Preetha Thomas, School of Public Health
- Cultural capability: James Blackwell, Kath Gelber and Morgan Brigg, School of Political Science and International Studies
- Benefits: Ren Perkins and Kate McLay, School of Education
- Country: Carroll Go-Sam and Kelly Greenop, School of Architecture
- Truth: Geoff Ginn, School of Historical and Philosophical Inquiry
- Respect: Jim Walker, School of the Environment
- Reciprocity: Keane Wheeler and Murray Phillips, School of Human Movement and Nutritional Sciences

Series two is in the process of being released in 2024 and so far includes:

- Benefits: Anna Lago and Caitlin Murphy, UQ Library
- Country: Coen Hird and Steven Salisbury, School of the Environment
- Relationships: Des Crump and Samantha Disbray, School of Languages and Cultures
- Cultural capability: Karina Maxwell and Kate Thomson, School of Nursing, Midwifery and Social Work
- Reciprocity: Sharlene Leroy-Dyer, Samantha Cooms and Gemma Irving, Business School

The Impact of the Podcasts

The impact of our first podcast *Indigenous Success* is evident in the downloads and global reach of the podcasts. The *Indigenous Success* podcast has been downloaded over 1400 times with listeners in Australia, New Zealand, Canada and the US. The most downloaded episode is on improving post-engagement with Indigenous students who attended outreach programs. The Fellowship findings, and by extension the podcast, has had significant impact on practitioners who facilitate outreach activities for Indigenous high school students. UQ now runs an annual InspireU Alumni event to bring students who had previously attended outreach activities together and provide networking and support beyond undertaking the camp, through the whole-of-student-life-cycle. A number of other universities, including The University of Melbourne and Curtin University are also facilitating events to bring together students after completing outreach program to continue the relationship with students.

The second most downloaded episode is on the inclusion of cultural aspects of outreach programs and three of the universities involved in the project are now further implementing cultural aspects incorporating Indigenous perspectives to strongly embed in the “hands-on” activities in outreach camps. This podcast episode also discussed how outreach might shift into earlier years of primary and early high school. As a result, UQ, Curtin University and University of Melbourne are also piloting outreach activities for Indigenous students in primary school and early years of high school. This is significant because there is growing recognition that the current major investment in outreach activities in the later secondary years may begin too late. The importance of evaluation of outreach programs is also a focus of an episode, and further evaluation strategies have now been embedded in a number of outreach programs who were involved in the Fellowship. The findings discussed in the podcasts are also being used by colleagues at the University of Melbourne with students from underrepresented schools in Melbourne demonstrating impact beyond programs for Indigenous students.

The emerging impact of our second podcast *Indigenising Curriculum in Practice* has been even stronger with over 1700 downloads of episodes since it was launched in June 2023 with a global reach with listeners in Australia, Italy, Japan, the US, UK and Canada. The tip sheet on incorporating Indigenous scholarship in the episode on cultural competence with James Blackwell, Kath Gelber and Morgan Brigg is now being used/adapted by other Schools within the university. We have also received positive feedback from other colleagues at other institutions including UNSW and the University of Melbourne on how useful they are finding the episodes. The podcast has created new connections and collaborations across the university and to other universities and has led to invitations to present on Indigenising the curriculum in different Schools and Faculties. A further impact of the podcasts is that it enables us to embody reconciliation in practice as hosts with Indigenous and non-Indigenous guests, sharing our expertise in the teaching and learning space. Podcasting is a tool that allows us to model close and respectful working relationships, which is particularly important given Tracey’s leadership role at UQ which is committed to reconciliation. We have also been invited to provide advice to other colleagues on starting podcasts in Indigenous higher education contexts. In Indigenous higher education, a space that has always had to be innovative, the uptake of technologies to centre Indigenous voices and give acknowledgement to Indigenous practices is critical to transforming the sector and making it safer for “doing Indigenous business”.

Higher education staff could also use podcasting to achieve similar impact. It allows for connection to diverse listeners as it is an accessible medium. School teachers, librarians, university professional staff, university students, and those outside of higher education contexts have told us they are listening to our podcasts which demonstrates the potential reach of podcasting beyond an initial target audience. Podcasting creates a space to communicate knowledge and expertise and can build stronger networks. For example, we have found that reaching out to colleagues and then interviewing them has strengthened our networks across the university and nationally. The reach of podcasts can have immediate and international impact as sharing platforms allow listeners across the world to access to recordings. In the business of universities, podcasting is also a time-efficient form of communication. However, learning to use new technologies can be anxiety producing and we have found that working with someone with sound editing, recording and producing expertise as an important addition to ensure the development of quality resources.

Conclusion

Podcasting is increasing being used in higher education settings for learning and teaching purposes (e.g., Bolden & Nahachewsky, 2015; Moore, 2022) and has the potential to empower voices that may have been marginalised (Rogers & Herbert, 2020). It provides an accessible medium for sharing information and research findings that can be used to inform and guide others. The *Indigenous Success* podcast is part of a suite of resources to promote research findings from Katelyn’s Equity Fellowship nationally and globally in a different and more creative way than a traditional research report. The *Indigenising*

Curriculum in Practice has created an (audio) space for a dialogue with colleagues to share epistemological and pedagogical expertise in the Indigenising curriculum space and discuss ways that different approaches can be embedded in other disciplines.

We have found that the podcast audio format is valuable to centre Indigenous voices and perspectives in relation to Indigenous success in outreach programs and also in the process of Indigenising the university curriculum across the disciplines. Wherever possible we have focused on Indigenous voices and if interviewing a non-Indigenous guest, we have wherever possible interviewed them alongside an Indigenous collaborator to emphasise the importance of Indigenous voices in topics relating to Indigenous matters and the importance of working in collaboration. Indigenous colleagues speaking in dialogue with non-Indigenous colleagues creates a comfortable environment in which the Indigenous contributor does not have to be the absolute authority of all that is “Indigenous” in the topic all the time. The epistemological and pedagogical load is shared and thus affirms the collaboration undertaken by Indigenous and non-Indigenous colleagues in teaching and learning spaces. The growing number of downloads of the podcasts with national and increasingly international listeners demonstrates the impact of podcasting as a medium to share information and as a product to disseminate research.

Overall, podcasting provides an engaging and creative way to bring awareness of a topic and build stakeholder relationships and we encourage others in higher education contexts to experiment with podcasting in their own contexts to enhance student success. Importantly, both podcasts are centred on our relationship – we are modelling how Indigenous and non-Indigenous people can work closely, collaboratively and respectfully together. The ability to produce non-traditional and creative resources is a project of joy. Our shared work in our university always looks to opportunities to make projects of joy and creating the podcasts with our colleagues, laughing at our mistakes, and listening to the finished products strengthens the camaraderie in our working relationship, builds trust in our engagement and honours the often unseen work we do in the academy. Overall, the two podcasts have been a useful and practical approach to share and generate new knowledge, and most importantly, empower the voices of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

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Image: *Indigenising Curriculum in Practice* Podcast
(Left-Right) Associate Professor Katelyn Barney, Dr Kate McLay, Ren Perkins and Professor Tracey Bunda. Photo by Anthony Frangi

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