

First Nations learning summary

Introduction

Purpose

In order to combine First Nations and Western educational approaches, it is important to understand First Nations perspectives on learning and the traditional Western approach of Constructivism, which means knowledge is built through experience and reflection.

Constructivism at CDU

At university, learning often happens with others. It's important to have chances to work with your classmates and lecturer, who guides your learning. Working with others helps you talk about ideas, plan tasks, and understand your coursework better. Sometimes, you will work in groups for assignments.

Your learning spaces are set up to support collaboration. For example, tables may be arranged for group work, and the usual divide between where the lecturer stands and where students sit can be less strict. The same occurs in online settings using discussion boards, video calls and shared platforms like Office 365.

Both-Ways learning

Both-Ways Learning is an educational approach that combines First Nations knowledge with Western academic knowledge. It supports a respectful exchange of ideas from both sides, encouraging learning that strengthens First Nations identity and cultural awareness in the university community.

Both-Ways and Two-Ways often mean the same thing, though some experts point out differences. In 1990, Stephen Harris introduced "Two-Way schooling" to describe learning that draws on two areas of knowledge. Since then, the terms have been used to show how Western and First Nations knowledge systems can come together. A common metaphor is the Garma, where saltwater and freshwater meet in a lagoon.

Key principles

Respect for Knowledge Systems: Both-Ways Learning values First Nations and Western knowledge systems. First Nations knowledge, rooted in storytelling and community, is equally respected alongside Western science and academics.

A Shared Learning Journey: Learning is a group effort. In Both-Ways learning, students, staff, and the community learn together, sharing ideas and growing together.

Student-Centred Learning: This approach puts students' cultures and experiences at the centre. First Nations students can use their knowledge to reach their academic and career goals, connecting their heritage with Western learning

Why it is important

In today's world, universities are places where diverse cultures meet. Both-Ways Learning strengthens First Nations identity and helps all students learn to respect and work with other cultures. Both-Ways Learning builds confidence and a sense of belonging for First Nations students. It makes sure education supports their cultural identity rather than replacing it.

For all students, it is a chance to engage with First Nations knowledge, learn cultural competence, and expand their worldviews. Both-Ways Learning reminds us that knowledge comes in many forms, and respecting all ways of knowing makes education more inclusive.

8 Ways Learning

The 8 Ways of Learning framework, created by Dr Tyson Yunkaporta, uses First Nations knowledge systems. It offers teaching strategies that work well for First Nations learners and can help many students. This framework highlights the diversity of learning, using methods connected to culture and community.

The 8 Ways of Learning are:

1. Story Sharing: Learning through stories helps people connect and explain complex ideas.
2. Learning Maps: Using diagrams or symbols to show understanding and see how different ideas fit together.
3. Non-verbal Learning: Learning through observation, imitation, and visual cues.
4. Symbols and Images: Using visual aids to explain ideas simply and clearly.
5. Land Links: Connecting knowledge to the land and environment is important to First Nations perspectives.
6. Non-linear Thinking: Learning in a circular way, revisiting ideas to deepen understanding.
7. Deconstruct/Reconstruct: Breaking down ideas to understand them better, then building a broader understanding.
8. Community Links: Engaging with the community as part of learning.

Yarning

Yarning is a First Nations learning and communication method involving storytelling and conversation in a relaxed, informal setting. Participants engage in deep listening, share firsthand experiences, and build understanding through talking. Yarning is not just about exchanging information; it is about creating relationships and trust.

At university, Yarning can create a culturally safe space for students to share their perspectives and learn from each other. This process encourages reflective thinking and fosters an inclusive environment, making it especially valuable in settings where diverse worldviews are present.

First Nations learning at CDU

At CDU, academic staff are expected to prioritise students' needs and recognise First Nations knowledge in their teaching. They are expected to include First Nations content in their courses and continue professional development to improve cultural awareness. Reflection and review of teaching practices are also important to keep improving their approach.

Embedding First Nations Content: Students can expect to see First Nations content and pedagogy integrated into teaching practices, with a curriculum that reflects the knowledge and perspectives of First Nations peoples.

Acknowledgment of Country: It is common for lecturers to include an Acknowledgment of Country in unit information guides and other materials to honour the land's traditional custodians.

Collaboration with First Nations People: Students may find that learning materials have been prepared or peer reviewed by First Nations individuals. This approach often includes real-world practice scenarios and storytelling that aim to represent First Nations communities without stereotypes.

Inclusion of First Nations Voices: Lecturers may include readings by First Nations authors and invite guest lecturers from First Nations communities to share their perspectives and experiences.

Culturally Safe Practices: Course content is designed to be culturally safe, with teaching methods that recognise and respect the cultural identities of all students.

Feedback and Adaptation: Lecturers may be open to receiving feedback from students and willing to adapt their teaching practices better to meet the needs and expectations of First Nations students.

Co-Teaching Opportunities: In some cases, students might experience co-teaching by a First Nations educator, providing diverse perspectives and enriching the learning experience.