First Nations Education: Teaching Philosophy & Culturally Responsive HPE Lesson Design

Bryce Howell | Portfolio edition | 2026

Portfolio note: Adapted from university assessment work. The formal submission cover, marking rubric and appendices have been removed for public portfolio presentation. The substantive teaching philosophy, analysis, culturally responsive design and reference base are retained.

First Nations Teaching Philosophy

My teaching philosophy for First Nations students is centred on culturally responsive pedagogy, relational intention, and a commitment to reconciliation through education (Hradsky, 2022). This ethical and professional responsibility (Fogarty et al., 2018) extends beyond curriculum delivery to foster a culturally inclusive, safe and empowering learning environment for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students. This aligns with the Australian Professional Standards for Teachers (APST 1.4 and 2.4), which require teachers to demonstrate understanding and respect toward First Nations cultures, histories and languages through meaningfully embedded perspectives within teaching practice (Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership [AITSL], 2022). My philosophy recognises that teaching and learning are intrinsically linked to the cultural, linguistic and relational contexts of learners within their own communities. Yunkaporta (2009) notes that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students often engage more effectively with pedagogies that are collaborative, experiential, grounded in storytelling and community knowledge systems. Conversely, Western models of education often prioritise individualism, abstract knowledge and written text (Bodkin-Andrews & Carlson, 2016; Rudolph & Thomas, 2023). In response to these differences, I aim to design learning experiences that draw on strength-based approaches that recognise First Nations students' cultural knowledge as an asset (Lowe & Yunkaporta, 2013).

As a novice educator, I have come to value equity, respect and truth-telling (Auld et al., 2025) – I believe that education plays a critical role in challenging historical omissions and deficit narratives that have often shaped schooling experiences for First Nations people (Burgess & Lockyer, 2021; Hogarth, 2018). Critical reflection has been a key outcome of my learning throughout this course. My initial understanding of inclusion as simply representation in curriculum content has expanded to incorporate culturally responsive teaching requiring ongoing personal reflection, particularly as a non-Indigenous educator. Nakata (2007) notes the importance for educators to challenge assumptions and biases to avoid reinforcing inequities, guiding me to prioritise community voices (Vass, 2018) and engage in respectful consultation with First Nations peoples (Thorpe, 2022). The advancement of reconciliation requires a move beyond 'tokenistic inclusion' toward embedding of First Nations perspectives across all learning areas (Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority [ACARA], 2022a). For example, within Health and Physical Education (HPE) I would incorporate traditional Indigenous games to promote holistic wellbeing and acknowledge cultural practices (Edwards, 2008), recognising the importance of physical activity in supporting connection to community and Country (Kingsley et al., 2013). Within English,

I would prioritise texts authored by First Nations authors (Bacalja & Bliss, 2019), contributing to cultural affirmation for First Nations students and deeper intercultural understanding among all learners.

I have identified three professional development resources that contribute to building my knowledge and understanding of First Nations perspectives:

Firstly, use of a personal reflective journal will establish ongoing critical self-reflection, which Proud and Morgan (2021) note as being essential for developing culturally responsive practices in evaluating teaching practices, identifying biases and adapting strategies to support First Nations learners. Use of structured reflection can work to ensure that my teaching practice remains ethical, responsive and informed by both experience and theory (Bennett et al., 2016). Secondly, the Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies (AIATSIS) provides a rigorous framework with the AIATSIS Guide to Evaluating and Selecting Education Resources to help assess the appropriateness and cultural authenticity of teaching materials (AIATSIS, 2022). The importance of avoiding materials that perpetuate deficit perspectives, misinformation and stereotypes is highlighted by Fogarty et al. (2018). Through applying AIATSIS guidelines, I can ensure that resources support a culturally safe and respectful learning environment respectful of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and perspectives (AIATSIS, 2022; Burgess et al., 2019). Thirdly, Narragunnawali [Narra-gunna-wally] provides a practice-orientated and comprehensive approach through professional learning, curriculum resources and guidance for developing a Reconciliation Action Plan (RAP) (Reconciliation Australia, 2023). Conceptualisation reconciliation as an ongoing and active process, rather than a one-time initiative (Mellor et al., 2007), strongly aligns with my philosophy that culturally responsive teaching strategies require sustained reflection, action and commitment. Engagement with Narragunnawali resources enables me to embed reconciliation into everyday classroom practice (Reconciliation Australia, 2023) to promote cultural understanding and strengthen relationships with First Nations communities (Vass, 2018).

Together, these professional development resources support a sustained and grounded approach to improving my teaching practice; the reflective journal fosters critical self-reflection (Proud & Morgan, 2021), the AIATSIS Guide to Evaluating and Selecting Education Resources ensures integrity of teaching resources (AIATSIS, 2022), and Narragunnawali provides a practical framework for ongoing reconciliation within education (Reconciliation Australia, 2023). I aim to build respectful relationships with students, families and communities (Gower et al., 2021), and recognise that education grounded in mutual respect and trust is most effective (Thackrah et al., 2022). Ultimately, I aspire to actively contribute to reconciliation by creating culturally safe and inclusive classrooms that support the wellbeing, identity and empowerment of First Nations learners (Bishop & Vass, 2021), while promoting their academic success.

Lesson Plan Analysis

Analysis of ‘Teaching AFL Skills – A Physical Education Mini-Unit of 5 Lessons’ (baymy003, 2015) reveals a technically oriented and pedagogically limited approach to HPE that is culturally unresponsive. While the lesson reflects a sequence of skill-based activities including handballing, kicking and small-group gameplay, unrealistic pacing – covering multiple complex skills and

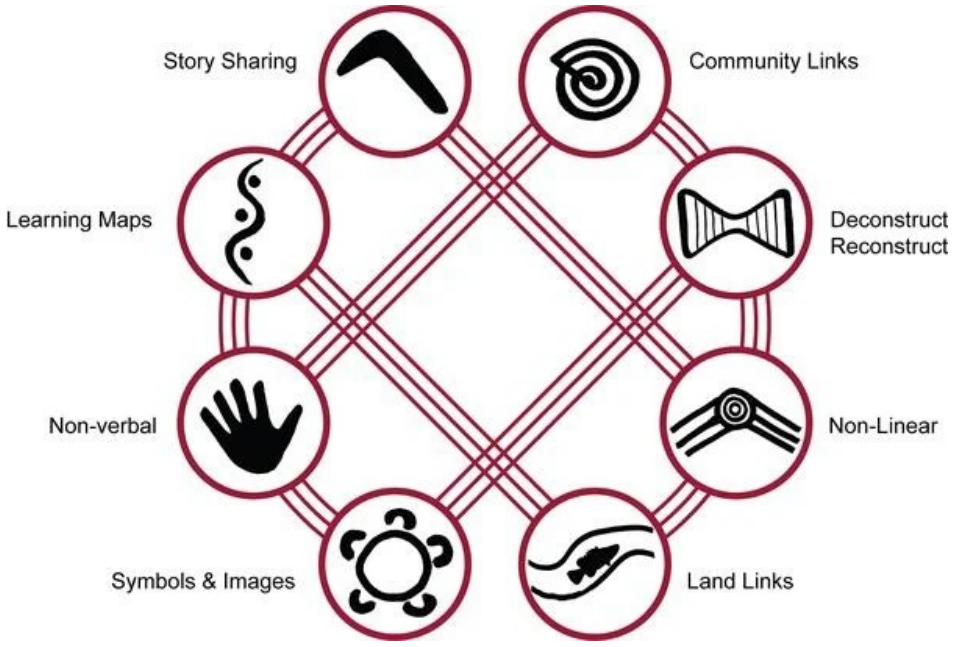
gameplay application within a single lesson – provides limited opportunity for modelling, observation, feedback and consolidation, which Zhou et al. (2021) identify as critical for effective learning. From a First Nations perspective, the rushed lesson design undermines culturally responsive practice, limiting opportunities for relationship building, observation and gradual skill acquisition emphasised within Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander pedagogies (Yunkaporta, 2009).

Critically, the lesson lacks alignment with APST 2.4 (AITSL, 2022) through a significant absence of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander perspectives and lack of alignment with First Nations histories, cultures and contributions (ACARA, 2022a). Despite deep connections with First Nations communities and prominence of Indigenous athletes within the sport, Australian Rules Football (AFL) is presented as a culturally neutral activity, reinforcing what Lowe & Yunkaporta (2013) identify as the marginalisation and invisibility of First Nations students within the Australian Curriculum. A failure to position AFL as a site of cultural expression, community belonging and identity, in preference of decontextualised technical skills, reflects a traditional Western model of education that prioritises individual achievement and performance (Merriam & Kim, 2011). While tokenistic references to First Nations content are avoided (Hogarth, 2022), students are equally denied the opportunity to engage with culturally relevant knowledge and experiences (ACARA, 2022a).

Pedagogically, the lesson adopts a narrow, skills-based approach that does not account for the diverse learning preferences of First Nations students. Emphasis on competitive drills and rapid skill progression restrict opportunities for observation, relational trust, and supported participation, potentially impacting student confidence and engagement (Wadsworth et al., 2013; Zhou et al., 2021). The absence of dialogical approaches such as storytelling, or ‘yarning’ (Yunkaporta, 2012) restricts student voice and meaningful engagement, with Cumming-Potvin et al. (2022) noting the importance of these approaches to facilitate effective teaching and learning for First Nations students. The lack of connection to community and Country, widely recognised as a fundamental component of culturally responsive education for First Nations students (Burgess et al., 2019; Thackrah et al., 2022), suggests a superficial understanding of the ways culture, identity and context influence learning processes and outcomes.

Together, these limitations indicate that the lesson does not meet the culturally responsive pedagogical standards necessary to meaningfully support First Nations learners (Bishop & Vass, 2021). Its design prioritises efficiency, technical skill acquisition and performance at the expense of inclusive engagement, cultural responsiveness and relational learning, which Burgess et al. (2019) identify as central to the effective teaching of First Nations students. This misalignment highlights the need for pedagogical alignment that embeds cultural perspectives, strengthens connections to community and Country, and positions Indigenous ways of knowing central to the learning process (Yunkaporta, 2009).

Alternate Pedagogical Approach



Yunkaporta's 8 Ways of Learning model (as referenced in the original assessment).

The use of an alternative First Nations pedagogical approach, such as Yunkaporta's 8 Ways of Learning (Yunkaporta, 2012;), can provide a more appropriate lesson framework through integration of Story sharing, Community links and Land Links. Guided primarily by this framework, the lesson draws on students' existing knowledge and experiences, with elements of culturally responsive pedagogy (Bishop & Vass, 2021) and strength-based approaches (Burgess & Lockyer, 2021) to support First Nations belonging and identity. This approach supports the integration of key concepts, including Story Sharing, Community Links, Deconstruct/Reconstruct, Non-Linear, Land-Links, Symbols and Images, Non-Verbal and Learning Maps (Yunkaporta, 2012), to effectively reposition learning as contextually embedded and relational. The redesigned lesson draws on students' existing knowledge and lived experiences (Burgess et al., 2019), while incorporating elements of strength-based approaches (Fogarty et al., 2018) and culturally responsive pedagogy (Vass, 2018) to support First Nations belonging, engagement and identity.

Central to this approach is Story Sharing (Yunkaporta, 2012), functioning as an entry point for learning by First Nations students (Barton & Barton, 2017) through exploration of Indigenous epistemologies, or ways of knowing, central to many First Nations cultures (Nakata, 2007). This enables students to connect personal, family and community experiences with new knowledge (Thackrah et al., 2022). In contrast to the original lesson, this approach presents AFL within a broader historical, social and cultural context rather than a neutral or decontextualised activity (ACARA, 2022a). Yarning pedagogies, which emphasise shared meaning, dialogue and trust, can also foster an inclusive and culturally safe learning environment (Cumming-Potvin et al., 2022).

Incorporation of Learning Maps provides a visual and conceptual scaffold for First Nations students (Yunkaporta, 2012), further strengthening the lesson through shared understanding. The original lesson may result in fragmented learning experiences due to a lack of clear sequencing and coherence; the use of learning maps works to address this through explicit relationships

established between lesson content (AFL skills), personal identity, teamwork and community to create a ‘concrete, holistic image of tasks to be performed’ (Hughes & More, 1997). Yunkaporta (2009) notes that alignment with Indigenous ways of knowing is achieved through a focus on visual, spatial and interconnected representation of knowledge. Furthermore, learning maps can support students to consider connections between individuals, places and knowledge systems (Thorpe, 2022). Students are provided with an opportunity to see the ‘big picture’ of teaching and learning, rather than simple engagement with isolated skill development.

The use of Non-Verbal and Experiential learning (Yunkaporta, 2012) are also key components of this pedagogical approach, emphasising modelling, observation and embodied practice (Loughran & Berry, 2005). While incorporating physical activity, the original lesson relied heavily on direct instruction (baymy003, 2015) and did not effectively utilise reflective observation. To align with Indigenous pedagogical practices such as non-verbal learning, learning through observation and experiential learning (Yunkaporta, 2012), this redesign utilises an ‘observation before participation’ approach (Morris, 2020) supporting reflective awareness (Cavilla, 2017) and First Nations concepts such as deep listening, or dadirri (Ungunmerr, 2017). Students are provided with opportunities to silently watch demonstrations, interpret movement and build confidence prior to engagement. Prioritising shared success, participation and connection over competition helps establish Community Links under the 8 Ways of Learning model (Yunkaporta, 2012), effectively reinforcing a strength-based and culturally responsive learning environment.

Importantly, the holistic integration of Story Sharing, Learning Maps, Non-Verbal and Experiential Learning ensures the lesson is not only culturally responsive, but also pedagogically coherent, purposeful and inclusive (Yunkaporta, 2012). Through this approach, AFL is repositioned as a culturally meaningful practice that strengthens First Nations identity, community and connection to Country, rather than being reduced to a set of technical skills. This approach aligns with APST 1.4, 2.4, and 4.1 by demonstrating an understanding of the impact of culture and identity on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students’ learning, embedding respectful and authentic engagement with First Nations histories and cultures, and implementing inclusive, relational strategies that support active student participation and engagement (AITSL, 2022). The following teaching and learning sequence demonstrates how this pedagogical framework is operationalised in practice, with each phase of the lesson explicitly embedding First Nations ways of knowing, being, and doing (Yunkaporta, 2009).

Teaching and Learning Sequence

This structured activity sequence provides an alternate, like-for-like resource to the critiqued lesson plan (baymy003, 2015) effectively incorporating Yunkaporta’s 8 Ways of Aboriginal Learning framework (Yunkaporta, 2012). Alignment is drawn to the Explicit Instruction model through Checking for Understanding, Guided Practice and Application (Hughes et al., 2017) to identify opportunities and strategies that support culturally responsive student participation and engagement (Burgess et al., 2019).

Checking for Understanding and Providing New Input

1. The teacher begins the lesson with an Acknowledgement of Country, linking learning to local land and relevant custodians (Land Links).
2. The teacher introduces inquiry question to the class to support students to explore meaning and context rather than engaging with AFL as a technical-only skill activity (O'Connor et al., 2016) (Deconstruct/Reconstruct)

   > "How is Australian Rules Football, or AFL, connected to people, identity and community?"

3. Students engage in a yarning circle, sharing prior experiences and knowledge of AFL (Story Sharing) to best support relational learning and culturally safe dialogue (Cumming-Potvin et al., 2022)
4. Responses are recorded visually by the teacher, creating a co-constructed Learning Map (Learning Maps).
5. Teacher prompts further discussion to explore links to local community and activate lived experience (Thackrah et al., 2022): (Community Links)

   > "Who plays AFL in your community?"
   >
   > "What does sport, or footy, mean to people and your mob?"

6. Students can respond both verbally, and/or through gesture, supporting multiple modes of communication (CAST, 2018) (Non-Verbal Learning).

Guided Practice: Experiential and Non-Verbal Learning

7. Silent teacher demonstration of handball technique, encouraging students to first observe and interpret movement (Non-verbal Learning).
8. Students then observe peer modelling, identifying key elements through use of guided questioning in an 'observation before participation' model (Morris, 2020).
9. Teacher introduces diagrams/visual cues demonstrating hand position and movement (Learning Maps; Symbols & Images).
10. Students then practice handballing in pairs in a cooperative, low-pressure setting, prioritising inclusion and encouragement over competition. This works to support inclusive participation in physical education through differentiated and accessible learning design (Van Munster et al., 2019).

    > AC9HP8M01: Analyse, refine and transfer movement skills in a variety of movement situations (ACARA, 2022b).

11. Roles including performer, observer and feedback-giver are rotated between students to construct shared knowledge (Joranson, 2008) (Non-linear Learning).
12. Scaffolded feedback is provided as the teacher circulates between students, both modelling technique and building personal relationships through affirming student progress (Zhou et al., 2021).

Applying Knowledge in Context

13. Students participate in a modified group activity, focusing on passing and teamwork with an emphasis on inclusion and communication (Community Links).

AC9HP8M02: Design and demonstrate how movement strategies can be manipulated to improve movement outcomes.

AC9HP8M09: Practise and apply leadership, collaboration and group decision-making processes when participating in a range of physical activities (ACARA, 2022b).

Deepening Understanding

14. Students create a visual representation (diagram/mind map) linking: (Symbols & Images; Learning Maps)

    AFL Skills > Teamwork > Belonging > Identity

Reflection and Consolidation

15. Students return to a whole-class yarning circle to reflect: (Story Sharing)

    “What did you learn about AFL beyond skills?”

    “How does sport connect to identity and belonging?”

    AC9HP8P01: Analyse and reflect on the influence of values and beliefs on the development of identities (ACARA, 2022b).

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