

Contents lists available at [ScienceDirect](https://www.sciencedirect.com)

Journal of Hospitality, Leisure, Sport & Tourism Education

journal homepage: www.elsevier.com/locate/jhlste

Critical perspectives

Educating managers for equity and social justice: Integrating Indigenous knowledges and perspectives in Australian sport, recreation and event management curricula

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ARTICLE INFO

Keywords:

Leisure studies
Education
Curricula
Indigenisation
Sport

ABSTRACT

The past two decades have witnessed a shift from stand-alone and critically reflexive leisure studies programs into an assortment of sport, tourism, hospitality, events, and (outdoor) active recreation management-focused programs. This shift, driven by student and University led demand for more vocational and employability oriented degrees, has reduced the criticality of leisure studies and, consequently, its capacity to evaluate the particular relationships between Indigenous peoples and leisure, sport and recreation in Australia. In this article, we introduce the concept of 'Indigenisation' and demonstrate the demand for leisure and sport studies curricula that embed Indigenous-related content, knowledges and perspectives. We provide a case study of efforts to Indigenise the Sport, Recreation and Event Management program at Edith Cowan University in Western Australia. This case study provides the context for a critical reflection from a leisure studies educator, and a set of recommendations for how criticality and reflexive teaching and learning practice can be more effectively integrated into twenty-first century leisure and sport studies education.

1. Introduction

A critical perspective on leisure studies education and, by extension, sport studies (including sport, active recreation and event management education) is limited. Spracklen (2014) has recently called for educators to return vibrancy and critical sociology to the current branches of leisure studies subject fields by challenging students to think more critically about the world around them. The concept of Indigenisation provides a critical lens in this endeavour, with its emphasis on the incorporation of Indigenous-related content, perspectives and knowledges into tertiary curricula. By engaging with Indigenisation in the context of a sport, recreation and event management program at an Australian university, we offer ways for leisure studies educators to move away from the delivery of narrowly focused managerial and professional programs to develop curricula underpinned by notions of equity, social justice and change. We also discuss ways for leisure studies educators to be critically reflexive through the questioning of basic assumptions, discourses and practices that inform and dominate contemporary, tertiary management education (Cunliffe, 2004). We argue in this paper that the critically reflexive leisure studies educator can do much at the course level to "enhance the goals of empowerment, distributive justice and social inclusion" (Rojek, 2005: 14) by incorporating non-Western knowledges into the curriculum through Indigenisation.

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<http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.jhlste.2017.08.005>

Received 23 August 2016; Received in revised form 2 August 2017; Accepted 14 August 2017

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The study of leisure emerged within the humanities, as a multidisciplinary subject field based in the critical social sciences. A focus on “increasing knowledge about the function of leisure and sport in everyday lives, while helping policy-makers to make leisure central to their planning” (Spracklen, 2014: 21) was the basis for the growth of undergraduate leisure studies programs. Critical sociology was core to leisure studies and, subsequently, the leisure studies curriculum (Spracklen, 2014). Major themes debated in leisure-related social and cultural theory included inequality, globalisation, authenticity, and leisure on the margins (Rowe & Lawrence, 1998). In such a disciplinary context, there is great potential for innovative teaching and learning which addresses systemic and substantive inequalities, including those experienced by Indigenous people and communities.

In recent years, however, the field of leisure studies “has been in a state of flux, as institutions and, more specifically, the programs and the academics that run them have been forced to meet the market-driven demands of student course preferences” (Sibson, 2010: 380). Global trends of neoliberal higher education are evident in the shift towards a management-focused leisure studies with the creation of a range of new undergraduate programs in countries such as the United Kingdom, the United States, Canada, Australia and New Zealand over the last 20 years (Sibson, 2010; Spracklen, 2014). Further, leisure studies at an undergraduate level no longer remains as a degree in, and of, itself (as it did in the 1980s). Instead, the field of leisure studies is now consumed by an assortment of sport, tourism, hospitality, events and (outdoor) active recreation management programs and courses, focused on vocational and employability outcomes (Spracklen, 2014). This positioning of leisure studies education as leisure management (and, by extension, the management of sport, tourism, hospitality, events and recreation) potentially undermines the very essence of leisure theory and its historic examination of the power relations inherent in leisure choice and patterns of power (Rojek, 2005). Yet, whilst the decline of the field of leisure studies has received quite some attention (see, for example, Rojek, 2010; Rowe, 2002; Spracklen, 2009, 2014; Veal, 2002), the current state of broader leisure studies curricula has received insufficient attention.

Whilst critiques of tourism curricula as being overly vocational are increasingly commonplace (Caton, 2014; Young & Maguire, 2017), this criticality remains limited in the other areas of leisure studies identified here. As university teachers, we are interested in how we can educate our students to be critical thinkers who are ethically mature and committed to social justice and equity in relation to race and ethnicity. We argue that one of the ways to achieve this is by decolonising the curriculum through Indigenisation (Young & Maguire, 2016). In doing so, we can generate knowledge, confidence and conversations about relevant issues affecting the sport, recreation and events sectors and society more generally. Further, our graduates can take this knowledge and understanding into the wider community to develop sport and active recreation programs which have the potential to deliver development and social outcomes for Indigenous communities in Australia (Rossi, 2015).

In the next section, we theorise the concept of Indigenisation in terms of curricular design. We proceed to an historical overview of the study of sport and leisure in Australia, with particular focus on how a critical sociological perspective has explored the relationship between Indigenous peoples and Australian sport and leisure. We then introduce the case study of Edith Cowan University in Western Australia, and examine the means by which it has attempted to incorporate Indigenous-related content and perspectives into the Bachelor of Sport, Recreation and Event Management degree. This following section reflects on the extent to which this specific program has been ‘Indigenised’ and what more it may require. Finally, we make recommendations for future progress in the Indigenisation of sport and leisure studies education.

2. Indigenising curricula

Indigenous education and the Indigenisation of curriculum are vital national priorities in higher education in Australia (Behrendt, Larkin, Griew, & Kelly, 2012: 22). The Indigenisation of curricula requires the sensitive and appropriate incorporation of Indigenous-related content and perspectives in university courses and programs (Maguire & Young, 2016: 97). Indigenised pedagogy requires the integration of Indigenous perspectives at the core of material taught in courses across all disciplines, rather than the addition of Indigenous perspectives as options in a few selected courses. This goal was expressed in the Federal Government’s *Review of Australian Higher Education*:

Higher Education providers should ensure that the institutional culture, the cultural competence of staff and the nature of the curriculum recognises and supports the participation of Indigenous students... Indigenous knowledge should be embedded into the curriculum to ensure that all students have an understanding of Indigenous culture. It is critical that Indigenous knowledge is recognised as an important, unique element of higher education, contributing economic productivity by equipping graduates with the capacity to work across Australian society and in particular with Indigenous communities. (Bradley, Noonan, Nugent, & Scales, 2008: 33)

This imperative is supported by professional organisations that are increasingly requiring Indigenous content within professional higher education programs. Many universities now make reference to the inclusion of Indigenous perspectives in their statements of graduate attributes. Furthermore, inclusive and equitable quality education for Indigenous peoples is an international priority cited in the United Nations 2030 Sustainable Development Goals (United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs, 2015).

The implementation of Indigenised curricula can increase the knowledge of all students and educators on Indigenous histories, cultures and knowledges. Such curricula can shape skills and attitudes that enable all students to contribute to a multi-cultural society, particularly in an Indigenous context, both professionally and personally. According to Nakata (2007), effective Indigenisation acknowledges the complexities and anxieties at cross-cultural interfaces and the need for negotiation between Indigenous knowledges, standpoints or perspectives, and Western disciplinary knowledge systems. In the following section we step back to provide a brief historical overview of sport and leisure studies in Australia and consider how Indigenous peoples’ relationships to sport, more particularly, have been examined.

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