Indigenous Societies and the Course Concepts Diagram

By Kate Thompson Aurora College

Indigenous Australian societies are a potent example of how the Society and Culture course diagram explains interactions between the major course concepts. Interactions occur between every element and can be further examined with a significant level of detail, supported by direct interaction with particular Aboriginal communities. Such interactions should always look to respectfully gain permission with either Elders, Traditional owners or even the local Aboriginal corporation. This interaction with the Aboriginal community may also be supported by documentary evidence, statistics, government policy, investigations, and media reports. There are distinct advantages to developing a study which links to a particular Aboriginal nation or language group, in contrast to a generalised study of 'all Aboriginal peoples'.

Interactions between persons and society

Aboriginal Elders are respected people within Indigenous societies. They can be male or female, but both are greatly respected for the knowledge they hold and are able to impart. Elder status is not just recognition of age. They are key decision-makers within Aboriginal communities and therefore hold a significant degree of authority over the direction the community may choose to take. Their role is integral in the functioning of Aboriginal societies. It is common for Elders to be referred to as Uncle or Aunty as an honorific acknowledgment of their status. The role of the individual is distinctive in Aboriginal society as the bonds to land, family and clan are traditionally most significant. Societal structures are distinctly different from Western hierarchical models and Aboriginal society does not follow this structure. Traditionally, there are no 'chiefs' as the social structure is a 'flat' structure, whereby various Elders have authority over different areas of the lore. This is why the concept of a democratically elected leader for an Aboriginal community, as in the ATSIC model of leadership can be seen as being in conflict with traditional values.
Interaction between culture and environment

Different Aboriginal groups have widely diverse culture and practices. Lifestyles and resources are largely dependant on local resources as well as items traded from other regions. Those located in and around more tropical areas in the north of Australia and the Great Barrier Reef were more blessed with an abundance of food supplies and therefore led a more sedentary lifestyle than those clans in arid areas. Totems and skin names are examples of cultural practices that ensure individuals are the guardians and protectors of elements of the natural environment. An Aboriginal worldview on the environment could be typified by the statement: "the Land owns us" in contrast to a western perspective that an individual can have title or ownership over a piece of land.

Interaction between culture and time

The Dreaming is a very different perspective to the traditional Western construct of time. The Dreaming is not just a reference to the past, as can sometimes be interpreted through the use of the term 'Dreamtime'. The Dreaming not only embraces the past, but also engages the present and the future. The knowledge for teaching aspects of the Dreaming is the domain of the Elders and the Old People. Listen carefully, only then consider asking. Knowledge may only be offered to those ready to learn.
Further Research and clips to show during the lesson:

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=C1h9NKm17w\n
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sEWFKE59JFw

Activity suggestions:

Students can conduct a study of the transition through life stages in a cultural group different from the student’s own. When conducting this research students must ensure ethical research practices are implemented and they should follow the steps of the research process to:

− develop and administer a questionnaire that contains both open and closed questions and that is suitable for people from different generations
− compile, analyse and synthesise the results obtained
− present the findings and conclusions about these findings in an appropriate format.

Extended response:

With reference to a cultural group different to your own, assess the impact of technologies, including communication technologies, on individuals, groups and institutions.

Further reading on remote Internet access for Aboriginal communities.

http://www.creativespirits.info/aboriginalculture/economy/internet-access-in-aboriginal-communities#axzz408F5N5Hy

