EMBEDDING ABORIGINAL CULTURAL KNOWLEDGE IN CURRICULUM AT UNIVERSITY LEVEL THROUGH ABORIGINAL COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

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ABSTRACT

Purpose − *This chapter outlines the successful community engagement process used by the authors for the Kinship Online project in the context of Indigenous methodological, epistemological, and ethical considerations. It juxtaposes Indigenous and western ways of teaching and research, exploring in greater detail the differences between them. The following chapter builds on and extends Riley, Howard-Wagner, Mooney & Kutay (2013, in press) to delve deeply into the importance of embedding Aboriginal cultural knowledge in curriculum at the university level.*

Practical implications − *The chapter gives an account of an Office for Learning and Teaching (OLTC) grant to develop Indigenous Online*

Cultural Teaching and Sharing Resources (the Kinship Online Project). The project is built on an existing face-to-face interactive presentation based on Australian Aboriginal Kinship systems created by Lynette Riley, which is being re-developed as an online cultural education workshop.

Value − A key consideration of the researchers has been Aboriginal community engagement in relation to the design and development of the project. The chapter delves deeply into the importance of embedding Aboriginal cultural knowledge into curriculum at the university level. In doing so, the chapter sets out an Aboriginal community engagement model compared with a western research model which the authors hope will be useful to other researchers who wish to engage in research with Aboriginal people and/or communities.

Keywords: Higher education; Aboriginal; Indigenous; community engagement; social justice; cultural knowledge

This chapter describes the context and role of universities in social justice, particularly through Aboriginal education and research; then how the project addresses the issues pertaining to Aboriginal community engagement, methodology, and ethics giving the project not just validity within an academic context but to ensure that, first and foremost, it has validity among Aboriginal people. In doing this we preface our discussion of the research design in the context of Aboriginal engagement with a discussion of embedding Aboriginal cultural knowledge in education and how this relates to the project at hand. This background is critical in explaining how the narratives we collect from Aboriginal people will be used, giving added validity to Aboriginal knowledges. We then discuss the ethical considerations of Aboriginal engagement in the context of western research processes and provide a comparison between our adopted approach and western research processes. We do this to offer the reader a greater understanding of the differences between Aboriginal approaches and western approaches in research involving Aboriginal peoples, particularly when embedding Aboriginal knowledge into western teaching.

The Kinship Online Project is being undertaken through an Office for Learning and Teaching (OLTC) grant to develop Indigenous online cultural teaching and sharing. The Project is providing a pilot online cross-cultural education course based on an existing face-to-face presentation. The

process of constructing the material involves developing a pedagogical framework for cultural education in an online environment at the university level. The Project concerns the practical creation of multiplicities of knowledges and approaches. That is, taking Indigenous cultural practice and using the teaching of that practice, within a western system for non-Indigenous people working in social systems that impact on Aboriginal people. The intention of the project is to develop online learning tools to incorporate Aboriginal community, Elders, students, and staff narratives into a workshop and game environment for cross-cultural competency, focusing on the different responsibilities in Aboriginal societies and the impact this has on Aboriginal people.

The pedagogical framework takes into account Aboriginal epistemology both in methods and content, so that learning will be a process that builds on Indigenous cultures and identity National Aboriginal Education Committee (NAEC, 1985). To achieve this end, the project is a partnership between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal academics and an Aboriginal community to work together respectfully and productively to embed Aboriginal knowledges and cultural practices into university teaching. This is achieved by conducting research with Aboriginal people in a safe place for them to share their stories and cultural knowledge. It will also provide a place for educators and students to access Indigenous knowledges relevant to different University disciplines. The project has the dual purpose of using the narratives collected from Aboriginal people to embed in the online project that will yield mutual benefit to both decolonizing mainstream curriculum and being a site of empowerment in which Aboriginal people "are able to voice their thoughts and experiences in meaningful ways and participate in the process of knowledge production so that social transformations may be achieved" (Blodgett, Schinke, Smith, Peltier, & Pheasant, 2011, p. 523). It is being designed to bring Aboriginal knowledge sharing processes into the mainstream teaching of humanities and social science related subjects such as: sociology, law, education, and social work. To achieve this, the Kinship Online Project adopts what Blodgett et al. refer to as a "cultural praxis" in that the project design and delivery utilizes complementary Indigenous, social constructionist, and critical methodologies (Blodgett et al., 2011, p. 523).

The project is designed to enable educators to teach in a way that respects and allows Aboriginal voices to be highlighted in lectures and tutorials (Healy-Ingram, 2011, p. 70). The inclusion of Aboriginal peoples' first-hand accounts of Indigenous knowledges in mainstream curricula will also reinforce the de-centering of the non-Aboriginal academic as an

expert on "Aboriginality" via the incorporation of Aboriginal Standpoint Pedagogy (Nakata, 2007) into teaching. This will enable educators to provide non-Aboriginal students with a richer and deeper understanding of the issues that are presented to them in studying Aboriginal content.

The project is built on an existing face-to-face interactive presentation designed by Riley for teaching university, professionals, school students, and their teachers. The project comprises a film of the face-to-face Kinship presentation, interleaved with short exercises for students to gain some understanding of the different sections and levels of relationships involved in Aboriginal Kinship. To complement this online Kinship presentation, a second part of the online system is being developed to provide a repository of Aboriginal community narratives that will be incorporated into a set of interactive scenarios. This involves recording Aboriginal people's narratives and providing an opportunity for them to voice their issues, concerns, and perspectives about the impact of cross-cultural miscommunications, misunderstandings that can occur, and the effect it has on their lives.

When the workshop is conducted in the online environment it will involve two stages. First students complete the online workshop, which provides information not only on Aboriginal Kinship but also how the system sets up a series of reciprocal relationships and responsibilities. Following this is a breakdown of the impact of the arrival of the British with their legal and social systems being forced on Aboriginal Nations. In the workshop questions will be posed about the various effects of European colonization, such as the teaching of "Pidgin" or English language and forced relocation of Aboriginal people outside their Nation and Clan boundaries. In the second stage, students will be placed in different scenarios and professional contexts in Aboriginal communities in an online environment. Students will have an opportunity to take on the role of a service provider, researcher, or policy developer, and negotiate the narratives of the community and various service and social issues as they arise or what we refer to as scenarios.

The different scenarios in the second stage will be based on three interconnected influences: (1) Kinship relations, (2) cultural conflict, and (3) professional systems and workers roles, which will give both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal students, the opportunity to select scenarios relating to a range of professional contexts such as: policy, research, and service provision in urban and rural Aboriginal communities. For example, the student who is learning about the protocols that the non-Indigenous researcher needs to follow in engaging with Aboriginal communities or organizations will be directed into a cultural conflict scenario. Whereas another student, involved in developing personal relationships within an Aboriginal

community, would be directed into a scenario based on Kinship levels or be offered a scenario based on a relevant professional system. This will ensure that students gain a better understanding of the different scenarios and contexts that exist in working across cultural groups.

The teaching framework is being developed through engagement with Aboriginal community members, University teaching staff, and Aboriginal students, collecting their stories for incorporation into the two different stages of the online teaching tool. Their stories will be password protected. While free, prior, and informed consent has been critical to the project, Aboriginal community engagement in the design, use and collection of narratives is critical. Importantly, the methodological and ethical considerations provide the forefront for the design of this project. A process which took nearly twelve months in the initial phases prior to the grant application being submitted, a further six months after the grant application was successful for ethics to be submitted and approved, and another six months before stories were collected from the Aboriginal community involved in the project.

THE ROLE OF UNIVERSITIES IN SOCIAL JUSTICE

Furlong and Cartmel (2009) are reflective of the role of universities as: (1) Being a semi-monastic community of scholars pursuing knowledge for knowledge's sake, hence focusing on creating world-class research capabilities; (2) preparing individuals for occupations requiring advanced skills and specialized knowledge and therefore satisfying public demands but at the same time creating elite roles in privileged positions; (3) preparing populations for economic change; and (4) being radical environments involved in civil society and holding societies and politicians to account. These diverse roles become problematic when universities are increasingly asked to: contribute to social agendas (e.g., social justice) and increase minority group enrolments and curriculum content. Often academia may wish to widen access and skills enhancement, and stimulate non-Indigenous student's interests, but more as a contribution to their own discipline and subject areas, and with the value being more on theory rather than practice; what this can lead to is an undervaluing or misinterpretation of the intrinsic value provided by Indigenous people's engagement, cultural knowledge transmitted, and provision of skills for the student's future profession.

For example, Skilbeck (2000) states there are obligations placed on higher education institutions and researchers to advance the equity cause:

> Higher education is challenged to continue advancing the equity cause, not just as an add on but as an integral element in its broader intellectual, cultural, social and economic purposes … Higher education has a key role in advancing the values of justice, democratic life and their wider dissemination in society. This is not a separate, free standing, theoretically disposable role, but a central or core value, part of the enduring concept of education as a universal enlightenment, civic development and personal fulfilment. (p. i)

Add to this the historical placement of Aboriginal people over the last two centuries where they were slated as being intellectually incapable of "higher forms of education" with anthropologists and scientist characterizing Aboriginal people as a "childlike race" (Fletcher, 1989; Manne, 2003; Miller, 1985; Parbury, 2005). For example, the Hon. D. H. Drummond, Minister for Education in 1937 drafted a memo with regard to the need for segregated schools and syllabus, "because children of marked aboriginal characteristics and parents of aboriginal blood belong to a child race, there exclusion from any school should be authorized" (Miller, 1985, p. 178) (see also Fletcher, 1989, p. 151); he followed this up in 1943 in a debate on Aboriginal Affairs in the NSW Parliament by arguing that, "persons who are of aboriginal blood and antecedents are regarded as belonging to a child race incapable of satisfactory handling their own affairs." (Parliamentary Debates, 1943, pp. 2850−2852) (also see Fletcher, 1989, pp. 153−155; Miller, 1985, p. 173). These prevailing views resulted in Aboriginal people being denied open access in education, reinforced by policies and practices − within societal structures − up to the late 1970s and mid-1980s, which embraced prior ethnocentric research (Moreton-Robinson, 2005; Sherwood, 2010; Sherwood, Keech, Keenan, & Kelly, 2011). When assessing the historical stances and policies which have affected Indigenous Australians over the last two centuries, we need to acknowledge the role education and educators have played in the colonizing process. It is hard to determine whether it was the ethnocentric views which lead the research or whether it was the ethnocentric research which lead the policies and practices which have governed Aboriginal people's lives, since colonialism.

With this in mind social justice would appear to be more an "add-on" rather than an integral component in universities (Skilbeck, 2000). Moreton-Robinson (2005) argues that a key to this approach is that universities as a "white institution" are largely about reinforcing their own epistemologies; in that they have traditionally represented themselves as being

the "knowers" of Aboriginal people. That is, in producing knowledge "about" Aboriginal people it is always within a lens of their own cultural and gender parameters. It is within this framework that this knowing/ knowledge takes on a definition of representation, giving power to the unquestioned traditional "knowledge holders" of Indigenous Australians within the university setting, while treating Aboriginal people as the "other" to be studied and taught about. In the process this "whitening of knowledge" has become part of the normalization of the system in accepted teaching − styles of teaching and curriculum content − and research "about" Aboriginal people (Moreton-Robinson, 2005). The challenge therefore for universities is to reverse this power play with an acceptance that the "dominant regime of knowledge is culturally and racially biased, socially situated and partial" (Moreton-Robinson, 2005, p. 88). In addition, it is important to ensure Australian Indigenous peoples are visible within universities, in their own contexts of representation, knowledge to be imparted, and research to be undertaken.

THE CONTEXT OF ABORIGINAL COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT IN RESEARCH

Research involving any Indigenous Australians must always have in-built ethical behaviors and practices National Health and Medical Research Council (NHMRC, 2003). Unfortunately research has often been blinded by a researcher's differing sets of values, perspectives, and non-recognition of Indigenous peoples' cultural knowledges and protocols. It is this non-recognition which can create harm in both subtle and obvious ways which leaves Indigenous people feeling they have been dismissed and undervalued (NHMRC, 2003). Researchers need to consider asking: How will the research impact to assist in making changes in Aboriginal lives either personally or indirectly through changes in service provision for their families and communities? How will the research empower the community? Indigenous peoples do not value research that simply advances the credentials of the researcher (Minniecon, Franks, & Heffernan, 2007); to them this is a one-way flow. The question they want answered is: How does the research or our involvement in the research benefit individuals and communities? (NHMRC, 2005).

The colonizing approach in research concerning Indigenous people has often been about objectifying (Sherwood et al., 2011), and treating them as

subjects on whom the research will be imposed. As subjects they are observed, assessed, and quantified through the cultural and often gender lens of the researcher. Despite prolific writing now available to non-Indigenous researchers about Indigenous methodologies and Indigenous principles for engaging in research with Indigenous communities, objectifying and colonizing mentalities in research still prevail (Minniecon et al., 2007; Sherwood et al., 2011). As an example, two of the authors recently encountered an academics proposed project involving short visits into traditional communities, sending Higher Degree Research Aboriginal students out to gather information − including photos of secret/sacred sites − for this researcher to interpret. When asked which Aboriginal communities were contacted, and where the Aboriginal engagement was, the academic's response was that it was not required. This is an example of an ongoing colonial approach in research − indicating that the control of the research rests with the "knower" and that Aboriginal people and their culture are seen as "objects" that have no say in the research; and the role of Indigenous people as facilitators in assisting the academic to gain the knowledge they want to get from Aboriginal people. This also strengthens the ideology that the Aboriginal community is not a valid "Knowledge Holder" in an academic sense. As such, this type of research in effect seeks to omit, exclude, and misrepresent Indigenous people's knowledge, cultures, and issues (Fredericks, 2007; Nakata, 2007; Stewart, 2007). From an Aboriginal standpoint, this adds insult in demeaning Aboriginal people as: being incapable of directing what research is valuable and needs to be undertaken; being seen as incapable of undertaking or directing their own research; not having "rights" to control the research about them; and being seen as incapable of interpreting their own culture and representing various aspects of their culture.

Fredericks (2007) sees the above as a failure to interrogate a system; that refuses to speak to Indigenous peoples, who speak "about" and not with Indigenous peoples. This omission Fredericks asserts, leaves Aboriginal people voiceless, remaining on the periphery as "objects" while reinforcing the "legitimacy" and "authority" of the non-Indigenous researchers as "Cultural Overseers" and the "Privileged Interpreters" of Aboriginal people (p. 17). Rather than, what should be taking place is the creation of research that emancipates and liberates Indigenous people. Through challenging colonialist research and attitudes, we can build openness and in the process de-colonize both the research and information held "about" Aboriginal people (McLaughlin & Whatman, 2007; Moreton-Robinson, 2005; Sherwood et al., 2011).

Fortunately, research "about" Indigenous people as opposed to "with" Indigenous people is slowly being weeded out as researchers become more culturally competent. The core principles for research involving Aboriginal people are that it "respects our shared values; is relevant to our priorities, needs, and aspirations; and, develops long term ethical relationships with researchers, institutions and sponsors" (NHMRC, 2005, p. 1). Importantly, "regardless of who comes up with the research idea or who does the research, it is important to think about whether or not the research is right (ethical and appropriate) for our communities/organisations" (NHMRC, 2005, p. 15).

At this point, it is worth revisiting what equity in the research field entails (Nakata, 2008; NHMRC, 2003, 2005). While approaches to research will vary, Table 1 summarizes the precepts now underpinning equitable approaches in undertaking research "with" Aboriginal people.

Recently, the Australian Institute for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies (AIATSIS) revised its Guidelines for Ethical Research in Indigenous Studies. The Guidelines are now organized around 14 principles. Michael Davis (2010, p. 11), who was charged with the role of reviewing the former guidelines as an independent consultant, notes that, "In considering the operation of the AIATSIS Guidelines for Ethical Research in Indigenous Studies (AIATSIS, 2011), one question that is raised is the relationship between these Guidelines, the framework of national laws and policies, other organizational and institutional ethics and research guidelines and protocols, and, importantly, local and regional community Indigenous protocols and guidelines." Davis argues that "what should be at the heart of good ethical research are behaviours and practices in an engaged participatory process" (2010, p. 12). Thus, in reflecting on his role in the review of the Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies Guidelines for Ethical Research in Indigenous Studies, Davis (2010, p. 10) argues that "research needs to be thought about more as a type of behaviour and practice between engaged participants, and less as an institutionalized, document-focused and prescriptive approach."

The underlying principles of community engagement in the context of ethical research in Indigenous Studies are set out in principles 6, 7, 8, and 9 in the guidelines, which are as follows:

Principle 6: Consultation, negotiation and free, prior and informed consent are the foundations for research with or about Indigenous peoples.

Principle 7: Responsibility for consultation and negotiation is ongoing.

Principle 8: Consultation and negotiation should achieve mutual understanding about the proposed research.

Table 1.   Equitable Approaches and Principles for Engaging with
Aboriginal People.

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1. *Recognizing the limitations of western research*
   i. Taking the "primitive" concepts of Indigenous people's knowledge out of its ethnocentric base − that is, no longer suppressing or ignoring Indigenous cultural knowledge.
   ii. Understanding that Indigenous knowledges are not obstacles to "modern civilization."
   iii. Indigenous culture needs to be interpreted by Indigenous peoples; not re-interpreted by "others."
   iv. Fully understanding what Indigenous engagement in research means.
   v. Understanding the differences between different Indigenous groups protocols and ethical approaches as opposed to the western research model.
   vi. Where the research data is kept, what access do Indigenous peoples have to the research undertaken about them, and where and how is the research disseminated.

2. *Valuing Indigenous knowledges and inter-cultural differences*
   i. The value Indigenous knowledges can add to all other cultures and social systems, globally and locally.
   ii. Loss of Indigenous knowledges in relation to human and environmental interaction, if not accepted and retained as the intellectual property of those people.
   iii. Understanding the innate cultural differences between Indigenous knowledge systems.
   iv. Adhering to local Indigenous protocols and ethics.
   v. Incorporation of Indigenous rights to intellectual and cultural knowledges.

3. *Incorporating the diversity of stakeholders in Indigenous research*
   i. All people involved in the research as either researcher or participants have a stake in the research.
   ii. Indigenous people must have control over the research to be undertaken about them. That is, determining what research is required, how the research will be carried out, who will be involved in the research, and how the research will be interpreted.

4. *Recognize and value strengths of Indigenous researchers*
   i. Validation of Indigenous researchers.
   ii. Incorporation of "local" knowledge and researchers into the research.
   iii. Build groups of people for support and collaborative research.

Summarized by Riley from writings on approaches required in research with Indigenous people based on work by NHMRC (2003, 2005) and Nakata (2008).

> Principle 9: Negotiation should result in a formal agreement for the conduct of a research project.
>
> Principle 10 of the guidelines sets out that "Indigenous people have the right to full participation appropriate to their skills and experiences in research projects and processes." (AIATSIS, 2011)

In developing this set of principles, the revised guidelines recognize that community engagement varies according to context − that is, one size does

not fit all. The process relating to community engagement in the context of undertaking research in a remote community in the Northern Territory, a regional township in western New South Wales, and a regional city in New South Wales can differ considerably. What remains the same are the principles underpinning engagement with Aboriginal people.

CURRICULUM CONTENT − EMBEDDING ABORIGINAL CULTURAL KNOWLEDGE

So far we have discussed Indigenous methodologies and epistemologies in the context of this project and western methodologies and epistemologies, but what is also needed to give our project validity is a justification of the process that we undertook to incorporate Aboriginal voices, particularly in regard to Aboriginal community engagement and the ethics of Aboriginal community engagement.

The NSW Department of Education and Communities (NSWDEC) have assessed ways to incorporate Indigenous knowledges, such as, through the "Quality Teaching Framework" (NSW Department of Education and Training [NSWDET], 2003a, 2003b, 2004). One such project − designed through the Sydney Region's Aboriginal and Curriculum Consultant Teams, Bemel-Gardoo − provides a model for embedding Aboriginal Cultural Knowledge in curriculum content (Riley & Genner, 2011). The questions asked in this project were as follows. How do you embed Aboriginal Australian cross-curriculum content into units of work? How can you best engage school systems and Aboriginal community in the process? How can you facilitate team-teaching relationships, which strengthen Aboriginal cultural knowledge content? (p. 119). These objectives are easily translated for the Higher Education sector; particularly as key areas of concern in using the "Quality Teaching Framework" in Aboriginal education was in the "Significance Dimension" with the elements of: Cultural Knowledge, Knowledge Integration, Inclusivity, Connectedness, and Narrative. The issue being how educators create processes and links to ensure these elements are incorporated, while maintaining a clear focus on key concepts central to the element of Deep Knowledge in the Intellectual Quality Dimension. The challenge seemed to revolve around the tacit acceptance of Eurocentric content of curriculum and understandings of "perspectives" as bolt-on rather than built-in. The purpose in the Bemel-Gardoo project was to support staff to look at curriculum content from Aboriginal rather than

Eurocentric perspectives and *to* recognize the value of Aboriginal cultural knowledge to the curriculum.

The aim therefore was to change the focus of educators in their perceptions of what and whose content were they actually teaching; that is, get them to critically reflect, on their own processes, by using the four scenarios set out in Genner's (2012) model (see Fig. 1) to encourage educators to examine: (S1) Ethnocentric perspectives of Eurocentric content; (S2) Ethnocentric perspectives on Aboriginal content; (S3) Aboriginal perspectives on Ethnocentric content; and (S4) Aboriginal perspectives on Aboriginal content.

In the context of embedding these different knowledges, educators need to be aware of what "cultural content" they are teaching, to fully appreciate the inclusion and embedding of Aboriginal cultural content. This becomes problematic for educators as they have to develop a level of critical reflection they may find extremely challenging. The process can be assisted by working alongside Aboriginal cultural knowledge holders and educators to ensure Aboriginal perspectives on Aboriginal content are central to curriculum delivery.

Nakata (2007) notes that:

> Indigenous knowledge systems and Western scientific ones are considered so disparate as to be "incommensurable" or "irreconcilable" on cosmology, epistemology and ontological grounds … Differences at this level mean that in the academic it is not possible to bring in Indigenous knowledge and plonk it in the curriculum unproblematically as if it is another data set for Western knowledge to discipline and test. Indigenous knowledge systems and Western knowledge systems work off different theories of knowledge that frame who can be a knower, what can be known, what constitutes knowledge, what constitutes truth, how truth is to be verified, how evidence becomes truth,
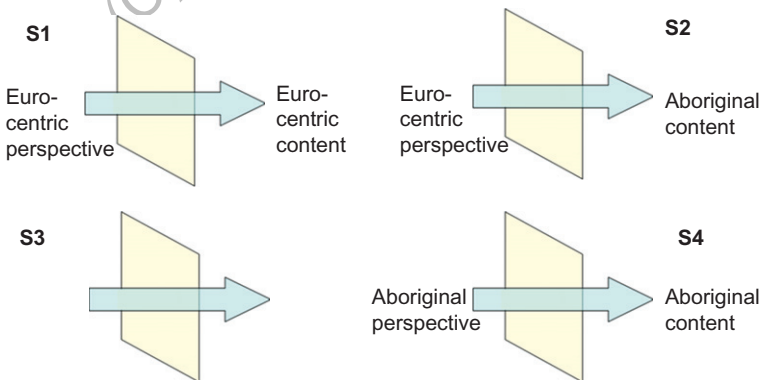

Fig. 1. Embedding Aboriginal Cultural Knowledge into Curriculum Content. *Source*: Michael Genner (2012, slide 7).

how valid inferences are to be drawn, the role of belief in evidence, and related issues. … we cannot just "do" Indigenous knowledge in the curriculum. (p. 8)

Nakata (2007), goes on to say that what has occurred in academia is that through non-Indigenous discourse there has developed an approach of knowing "about" Aboriginal knowledge, cultures, and issues; rather than incorporation of Indigenous voices and grounding of Indigenous knowledges, cultures, and issues in their own disciplines. We are working toward research that has equality for Indigenous peoples, which is often a challenge to the Western classifications developed to suit Western hierarchies, linearity, abstraction, and objectification of Indigenous knowledges, cultures, and issues (Nakata, 2007, p. 9; see also Williamson & Dalal, 2007).

Arguably, this can be achieved via pedagogical teaching and curriculum content that:

 (i) Embeds cultural knowledge, as provided by appropriate cultural knowledge holders;
 (ii) Recognizes and understands the complexities within "Cultural Interface" (Nakata, 2007) – the connection and differences between Indigenous and non-Indigenous worlds and knowledge economies;
(iii) Prioritizes Indigenous voices and epistemologies (Minniecon et al., 2007) with recognition of the diversity of cultural knowledges;
(iv) Builds in Indigenous intellectual and cultural knowledge rights of the cultural knowledge holders; and
 (v) Increases critical reflection capabilities of academics in teaching programs.

A primary process for provision of these goals is through engagement with Aboriginal educators, researchers, and local communities. To convey Aboriginal knowledge to non-Aboriginal students would be invalid without the contributions of Aboriginal people through their "translation" of their experiences into the new context (Ramsay & Walker, 2010). In particular, we need to reverse the present "systemic undervaluing of local knowledge and Aboriginal culture, a deeply ingrained unwillingness to "see" more sophisticated Aboriginal knowledge and processes" (Yunkaporta, 2009, p. 105). Battiste (2002) argues that integrating the voices and experiences of Aboriginal people into mainstream education creates a balanced center from which to analyze European culture and learning.

The embedding of Aboriginal understandings, through their narratives will assist non-Aboriginal academics teaching Indigenous content as part of mainstream curriculum to incorporate both "Aboriginal Standpoint Pedagogy" (Nakata, 2007) and Aboriginal voices into their teaching (Phillips & Whatman, 2007). This has the dual purpose of decolonizing

mainstream curriculum and allowing sharing of Aboriginal perspectives and embeds Indigenous knowledges in the curriculum of mainstream disciplines, contributing to decolonizing Indigenous knowledges and learning in western higher education institutions.

Social Constructivism in Indigenous Education

Freire (2007) argued that learning requires the learner to be active, and knowledge arises out of a shared process of inquiry, interpretation, and creation in which the educator is very involved. In particular the sharing of Aboriginal knowledge with non-Aboriginal people in Australia is very much a process of conscientization, which must involve Aboriginal communities as educators. This work is in the area of social constructivist education, a term which Vygotsky (1978) developed to emphasize the critical importance of culture and social context for cognitive development. In this project we are using the knowledge of community members and Aboriginal educators to provide material for teaching cross-cultural awareness at the University level. This knowledge is from people's local experience, but is gathered across NSW to develop a broader base and provide a range of experiences that are brought together into a learning environment.

The assumption that acknowledging and utilizing traditional knowledge processes occurs as a local phenomenon will always be partly true as "local" people construct and use diverse processes of knowing in order to develop and sustain themselves and their community (Maila & Loubser, 2003). In fact in all societies, people are historically and culturally bound to the particular knowledge system that they developed not only to enable them to survive, but also to become a civilized community (Ntuli, 1999; Vilakazi, 1999). Knowledge is generally viewed, within educational institutions, as a universal heritage and resource, particularly the acquirement of Indigenous knowledge on environment and land care. Yet knowledge-sharing processes are also culturally determined and although knowledge may be created and utilized locally, it has the potential to be used universally (Maila & Loubser, 2003), with the appropriate engagement with and direction from Indigenous peoples. While Indigenous knowledges enhance local development and sustain the community as a people, they can also be globally appreciated (Vilakazi, 1999).

In developing teaching methodologies that both cater for variations in learning styles between people of all cultures, and to enable the teaching of

diverse knowledges, it is fruitful to learn knowledge-sharing processes from different cultures and analyze how these may be reproduced in present day systems, structures, and engage with new approaches in teaching in particular taking advantage of internet communication. Hence, we are using narratives as a traditional form of learning and providing these in an online learning environment. We are working with community members and educators to develop the knowledge they will be sharing and the environment in which it will be shared. Hence, the project has run focus groups (Stewart, 2007) in the community prior to collecting narratives, where those who may contribute stories discuss their desires. This allows people to evaluate their community's goals and beliefs. This involves considering the themes that need to be covered for learning about the present context, which links to the learning goals. The group interprets and interacts with the context of the Kinship Online workshop and this develops the cohesion of the narrative, what will be presented for the social and creative linkage of information.

KINSHIP ONLINE PROJECT − ABORIGINAL COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT PROCESS UNDERTAKEN

As previously mentioned Aboriginal community engagement is a critical aspect of the Kinship Online Project, as is the act of engaging Aboriginal community in terms of the validation of the Project. What follows is a discussion of how these principles guided the research, as well as how our engagement with key principles can be interpreted in terms of providing a comparative model for how the process of engaging in research with Aboriginal communities differs from the process of engaging in western research. First, we discuss the role that Aboriginal Kinship connections and Country played in determining which Aboriginal community we engaged with, and how this added to the credibility and validity of the research. We then discuss the protocols which need to be followed for the Aboriginal researcher coming into an Off-Country community and any non-Aboriginal researchers. We go on to present a four-stage Aboriginal community engagement model, which has been developed by Riley to assist other researchers engaging in research with Aboriginal peoples and communities.

In determining the location of which Aboriginal community should be approached to be invited into the project, the Team assessed: which Aboriginal communities did people in the team have a history with; and which Aboriginal communities might view the associated research and engagement as a positive for their community.

The New South Wales country town of Dubbo was selected as the primary site for the project, due to the fact that, one of the project team Riley has an extensive history, community connections, and cultural validity in the Dubbo area are: (1) Aboriginal Kinship Connections − as an Aboriginal person; (2) Educational credentials and work experience in the area; (3) Credibility, where trust has been established through being known with work standards valued; and (4) Prior research in Indigenous communities being known and recognized.

This validity is also required for any Aboriginal person coming into an Off-Country community and any non-Aboriginal people (Minniecon et al., 2007) have to be vouched for, in relation to the points listed above.

This was undertaken by Riley as the Aboriginal person from that Country and as author of the Kinship Presentation. This was done firstly, informally in discussing the project within the Dubbo community, to introduce the proposed project concept and research people, such as − who would be involved, why they should be involved, what work they have done in the Aboriginal field of work prior to this, and how long they have worked in Aboriginal education. In introducing other Aboriginal people involved in the research, Riley introduced them by their Kinship connections to other Aboriginal communities. This was done to verify Aboriginality, to the local Aboriginal community and establish in the minds of the local people connections they could relate to. That is, local community participants get to establish their own Kinship connections − they might do this by stating they know people in the research project or know people from the newly introduced person's Country, etc. These prior introductions were done so that when the local Aboriginal community got to physically meet the "outside" or "Off-Country" people involved in the research, they did not come as strangers as the community already knows who they are. In doing this we allow the local Aboriginal community time to develop a perceived relationship. We are creating a history of these "unknown" people for the local community. We are in this way able to follow local Aboriginal community protocols in introducing "Off-Country" people into the community. These "relationship connections" were followed up through more western processes and protocols, such as: phone calls, emails, and letters of introduction − as per the ethics approval process for the research; and then formal personal introductions by the "known" person, to Aboriginal community members.

Kinship Online Project − Aboriginal Community Engagement Model

In determining the application for the "Kinship Online Project" and the extent of the community engagement, a number of stages were required to make sure this was an effective process. The following Aboriginal Community Engagement Model developed by Riley is a breakdown of the engagement processes followed in the "Kinship Online Project" − the flow chart provides an indicative timeframe for each stages commencement − and how this aligns with the western research process, as used in the ethics application and approval processes. In practice both approaches must be in tandem for the research to be effective. As Fredericks (2007) and Minniecon et al. (2007) espouse Indigenous research must be competent in western research methodologies and Indigenous scholarship and protocols, otherwise we may in effect be assisting in perpetuating colonization, untruths, bias, ethnocentric views, and racism (Fig. 2).
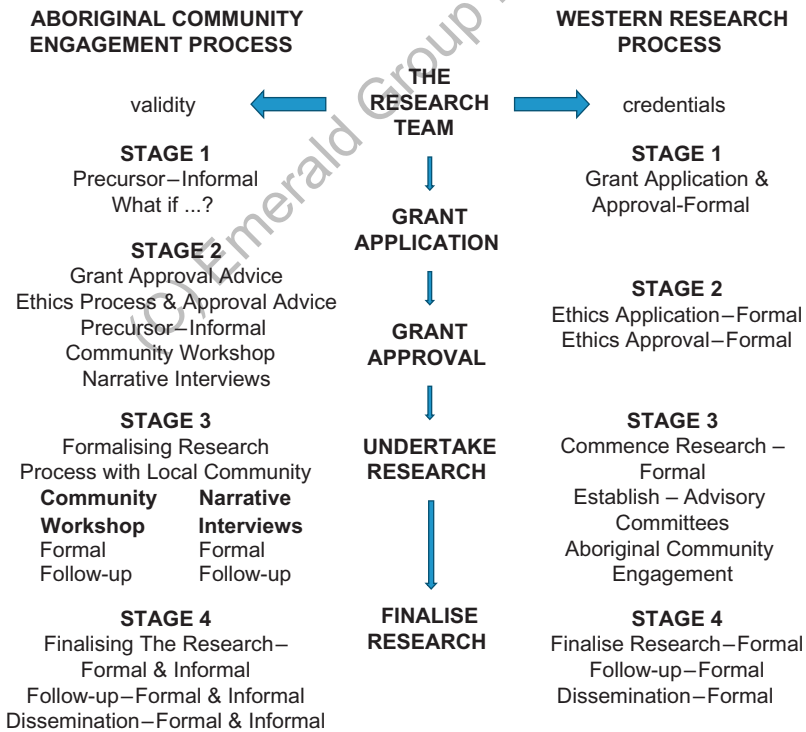

Fig. 2. Aboriginal Community Engagement Model. *Source*: Lynette Riley.

As this model demonstrates research in the Indigenous field must be more critical and reflective (Sherwood et al., 2011) and allow longer time-frames to ensure full engagement with Aboriginal people. To ensure appropriate research is undertaken with the consent of Aboriginal community and for benefit of the community involved.

Kinship Online Project − Aboriginal Community Engagement Process

The following articulates various stages and actions undertaken in the model above.

Stage 1 − Precursor − Informal
  The informal process needs:

- To commence at least 6−12 months prior to any grant application.
- To be undertaken with local organizers and participants.
- To be undertaken with potential research assistants.
- Venues to be assessed for future meetings and workshops.
- Aboriginal community validation of researchers.

Aboriginal community engagement from an Aboriginal standpoint means as Parsons (2008) states "We are all stakeholders now." Engaging Aboriginal stakeholders in the development and design of the project can be a lengthy process and it should start about 6−12 months prior to the grant application. For example, the first step in considering the possibility of developing the face-to-face workshop into an online teaching tool was to consider which Aboriginal stakeholders needed to be consulted. Additionally validation of the researchers through local Aboriginal community protocols is imperative.

Stage 1 − What If?
  Research ideas as questions need to be presented to members of the local Aboriginal community people and organizations and their feedback needs to be incorporated in the grant application:

"What if we were to submit a proposal for a grant to do ……?"
"Would you think this is a good idea?"
"Would you be supportive of the research?"

"In what way could you be supportive?"

"Where could we hold workshops?"

"Who do you think could/should be involved in organizing events/ components for this research in ……?"

"Who should be invited to participate in the workshops for the research?"

"If we apply for the grant, and if and when the ethics process is cleared does anyone want to be contacted further about the research?"

In undertaking Stage 1, the "Precursor" and "What if?" phase of this project, Riley informally spoke to: Aboriginal people working in the New South Wales Department of Education and Communities, including Schools, Aboriginal Consultants and Liaison Officers, and the Regional Director from the Dubbo region; Aboriginal people working in the Western Institute of Technology – TAFE College, Aboriginal Development Manager, Aboriginal Liaison Officer, and Regional Director; Members of the Dubbo Aboriginal community, including the Language and Cultural Teacher, Elders Groups, Aboriginal organizations, such as pre-schools and staff in Lands Council; and other members of the local Aboriginal community and wider region working in what is referred to as the Aboriginal Public Service Sector – who had attended the Kinship Presentation in previous workshops in Dubbo and across the Western Region, which included Aboriginal people working in health, legal professions, and housing sectors.

State-wide consultation was also needed as our proposal related to Aboriginal education. Several consultative meetings were held with the President of the NSW Aboriginal Education Community Consultative Group (NSWAECG) to present the rationale for the project. We were then given a timeslot on the agenda at a State Meeting of the NSWAECG to gain advice from and support of the members.

Stage 2 – Informal and Formal Notification

Local Aboriginal Community Organizers must be seen as valid and be seen as:

- Neutral within the Aboriginal community.
- Be able to speak across a wide cross-section of the community.
- Have access to resources to assist in the research project.

Stage 2 occurred after formal notification of the grant approval and ethics approval and prior to entering the field to conduct the research. This involved building research relationships and formalizing the involvement of the community in the research. As a precursor to conducting the workshops and interviews we talked with community members about who should be interviewed and negotiated with public sector managers to gain approval for the involvement of their Aboriginal staff as organizers and participants in the project. Once approval was granted for staff to be formally engaged in the research as workshop organizers and interviewers and prior to conducting the workshop and collecting narratives, a research training session for organizers/interviewers was held. The training covered: what the research ethics process is; why the research is being run the way it is; importance of a wide group of participants and why; and their role in the process. We then formalized plans for the community workshop: the venue; how the workshop would work; role of organizers and role of participants; the workshop program and timing; and who would present what sections of the program; as well as catering. Throughout this process we were mindful of building the local communities capacities in undertaking formal research and provided additional time for discussions so that they felt comfortable in understanding research and ethics processes involved.

Stage 3 − Formalizing the Process with the Local Community

Stage 3 involved formalizing the process through arranged meetings with Dubbo Aboriginal Community Organizers:

1. Community Workshop

Formal − Research Ethics Process
Before organizing the Community Workshop, provision of information sheets as per the research ethics process; talk with individuals and organizations on their involvement with the research project and walk them through the research process and ascertain their expectations and objectives of the research.

2. Interviewing Process − Narrative Collection

Formal − Research Ethics process

Before organizing the Narrative Interviews, we ran focus groups to discuss the narrative collection process with local community interviewers and covered issues such as: ethics implications; identification of potential participants and information needed to be collected from participants; type of information sought and types of questions to ask participants in the narrative collection process.

Stage 4 − Formalizing the Process with the Local Community

At the point in time of writing this chapter Stage 4 components are yet to be finalized, they will include:

1. Finalizing the Research − Formal and Informal

This does and will involve open communication in the form of: continuous phone and email contact regarding interview progress − being careful to not be seen to harass interviewers, but rather to be seen as keeping the process on track and maintaining contact. Have a follow-up visit from the team for feed-back on the interview process and completion. This will be followed by an evaluation and provision of a report in suitable language.

2. Follow-up − Formal and Informal

The research will be followed by an evaluation survey of the interviewers on the narrative collection process.

3. Dissemination − Formal and Informal

The final stage of the process will include a visit to the community for a debriefing to gather information on how they thought the project went and ideas for improving future projects.

Provision of verbal report followed by the formal written report − may need to be in plain English for the community. A final component of the project will be to hold a Community Workshop to demonstrate the Kinship Project web-site and gather any final comments which may be used to re-fine the web-site material. Additionally provision of details on how people can collect and submit future narratives or get assistance to record their stories will be distributed.

WESTERN RESEARCH − ABORIGINAL ENGAGEMENT

There is a very logical reason for the formal approaches undertaken in the western research model, which has a "one size" fits all approach, to cater for diverse faculty approaches in research. This incorporates: grant application and ethics approval processes with a built-in Aboriginal community engagement process. A key concern with the Western model is that the researchers must have appropriate credentials to carry out research. For example, a Masters or Doctorate degree; this often does not equate with experience in working with Aboriginal communities and does not incorporate the Aboriginal validity process of researchers required by Aboriginal communities. This can create problems for Aboriginal people, as a researcher who may have the academic credentials, may not be culturally competent (i.e., have the skills or knowledge in working with Aboriginal communities), which could and sometimes creates serious communication and cultural conflict. If this approach is not challenged it could mean that Aboriginal communities have a "bad" experience or be "harmed in some way" and not wish to be engaged in future research projects, thus creating difficulties into the future.

Additionally while there is often a requirement − within the ethics process − for the researcher to demonstrate that they have made contact with representatives of an Aboriginal organization "gatekeeper" and that these representatives provide, in principle support for the research, the extent to which requirements are imposed on the researcher or the participants is limited. Avoidance of coercion in organizations and individuals so that participants retain choice of whether or not they participate in the research; to ensure that the researcher remains at "arms-length" from the research participants; and is neutral with the people they are researching; has been built into research ethics programs over time to protect those people being researched. The idea that the participants would be involved in the research

questionnaire is also at odds with pre-empting responses and allowing themes and theories to emerge freely from the research participants.

Although ethics committees have been established to ensure that participants involved in research are protected, this one-size-fits-all approach provides no flexibility within the process of engaging with different Aboriginal communities, Nations or Clan groups and the respective protocols for each or for different types of research. For example, the requirement of many Australian ethics committees to have a representative from an Aboriginal organization or one Aboriginal organization overseeing the research can be highly problematic and can result in conflict within a community and hinder the research process. It can inevitably lead the inexperienced researchers becoming embroiled in community politics that can possibly lead to doomed research because they are shut out from a community or produce research which is not truly representative of the locality involved in the study.

Knowledgeable and experienced Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal researchers can navigate their way around such limitations in the context of the locality and Aboriginal peoples and organizations due to their understanding and engagement with Aboriginal protocols. Yet, in doing so, they can become embroiled in lengthy ethics clearance processes going back and forward with written responses to ethics committee's with little or no experience with Aboriginal people or Indigenous research. This process can also stall the research, and create tensions when Aboriginal community protocols have been followed and the Aboriginal community is left asking "why isn't the research taking place." Both protocols systems can create havoc for the inexperienced Aboriginal community and researchers.

CONCLUSION

The objective of this chapter has been to discuss the role universities play in social justice in light of colonial practices and attitudes to the role of Aboriginal people in research and as informants, as opposed to rightful transmitters of their own cultural and epistemologies. To successfully change the power balance requires Aboriginal control of knowledge sought, gathered, and produced. The Kinship Online Project has sought to undertake this role through community engagement in ensuring Indigenous methodological, epistemological, and ethical considerations by juxtaposing Indigenous and Western ways of teaching and research and exploring in greater detail the differences between them.

The chapter discusses the importance of embedding Aboriginal knowledges into the curriculum. It shows that the Kinship Online Project is piloting an online program which uses a current cross-cultural education program. It describes the research process of how Aboriginal community peoples narratives are being collected and embedded into an online program as a way to provide additional learning and teaching for university students so that students gain information first hand from Aboriginal peoples narratives. The chapter discusses the ethical considerations of Aboriginal engagement in the context of western research processes and provided a model with a comparison between our Aboriginal community approach and western research processes. It then explores the validation of this project from an Aboriginal standpoint, of Aboriginal engagement.

This chapter clearly extends our thinking on the interaction between cultural groups to ensure all stakeholders in the research feel valued and in control of their engagement with the research. It is not an easy process, but with respect validity within Aboriginal communities and cultural competence by researchers the process adds enormous value not only to the research, but also to delivery of appropriate outcomes for Aboriginal communities.

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