

Exploring Authenticity and Integrity in the Sharing of Indigenous Knowledge: Is Process More Important than Content?

by Glenn Woods*

Until very recently Indigenous Australian people and cultures have been the subjects of study and content in non-Indigenous Australian education settings rather than the teachers of knowledge systems. Like all knowledge systems Indigenous knowledge systems are philosophically inspired, value driven and delivered via particular process.

How do we create opportunities for the holders of Indigenous knowledges to share their knowledge in ways that are authentic and meaningful to all participants? If particular people and places are intrinsic to the authenticity and integrity of Indigenous knowledge sharing how well is this understood and valued by non-Indigenous policy makers and educators that are in a position to support and make space for this? What are the consequences if the authenticity and integrity of the Indigenous knowledge sharing process is overlooked or ignored in the quest to include 'it' as content within a non-Indigenous teaching and learning space?

This paper draws directly on the voices of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander knowledge holders to provide some parameters around what makes a knowledge sharing experience authentic and meaningful. Further to this, it explores what the consequences may be when Indigenous process is overlooked or ignored in the quest to include Indigenous 'content'.

Introduction

In contemporary discussions regarding the status and role of Indigenous Australian peoples within education contexts and settings the point has been clearly made that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples have been extensively studied and discussed as objects/subjects yet, until very recently, have been ignored even prohibited regarding ownership of their own knowledges and dismissed as the decision maker regarding how those knowledges are shared (see Morgan 2003; Nakata 2002; West 2000) Morgan makes the point that:

Despite growing support for the principles of equal opportunity and multiculturalism, and the growing appreciation and apparent accommodation of Indigenous knowledges in Western institutions, higher education is still dominated by a western worldview that appropriates the views of other cultures (Morgan 2003: 2).

Post the anti-discrimination legislations of the 1970's Australian education administrators and practitioners have moved away from the overt segregation and exclusion of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples from formally organised and delivered education and qualification opportunities. Over the following decades the focus has tended to be on the inclusion of Aboriginal

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and Torres Strait Islander peoples in 'mainstream' education systems and environments. This is evidenced by the numerous state and federal policy initiatives that began most visibly during the 1980's. There has tended to be two common and consistent themes and initiatives running through these policies. The first is inclusion and participation of Indigenous peoples. The second is the inclusion of 'Indigenous content'. For example, the four main aims of the National Aboriginal Education Policy in 1989 were:

- Involvement of Aboriginal people in educational decision making;
- Equality of access to educational services
- Equity of educational participation
- Equitable and appropriate education outcomes (ACSA 2015)

In 2015 the "initial set of actions for focus" of the National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education strategy are:

- Attendance and Engagement
- Transition Points (including pathways to post-school options)
- Early Childhood Transitions
- Workforce
- Australian Curriculum (DET 2015)

It appears to have been generally accepted and assumed within mainstream education design, administration and practice circles that inclusion of Indigenous people and content is a positive move in terms of social justice and equity within formal education for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. The various preambles, introductions and endorsements of policy point to an optimistic outlook on the end results. For example, the 1989 Aboriginal Education Policy Overview states:

The AEP's overarching objective is to bring about equity in education and training outcomes for Indigenous Australians (ACARA 2015).

Despite the optimistic rhetoric it is clear from the longitudinal evidence that outcomes are consistently not being achieved in many areas of policy and that the purposeful disparities, socially engineered via education and other social policies pre the anti-discrimination legislation era remain. (AHRC 2014)

The term 'mainstream' is often used as a shorthand expression to describe systems and processes that are designed, administrated and populated by the majority of the Australian population via the most dominant and available means. Within this discussion it is important to briefly unpack and contextualise what this means in relationship to Indigenous Australians and the systems and processes that are Indigenous in theory and practice. Further to this, what does the relationship mean in regards to socially just and equitable practice in Australian education?

Given that the vast majority of the Australian population, particularly the governing and administrating population are of Anglo Australian or Anglo/Celtic ethnicity it is reasonable to conclude that anything termed mainstream has been inspired, informed and dominated by Anglo Australian

world views and values. Based on the current Australian demographic picture it is also likely that Anglo Australian worldviews and values will continue to dominate education and other policy well into the future unless there are very conscious decisions made by groups and individuals within the mainstream cultures to question and challenge what it is they believe and value.

In terms of achieving social justice and equity for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples the influence and impact of current Anglo Australian worldviews and values represent a significant challenge. This is because, based on the nature of even the most contemporary and current 'equity based' education policies and practices, Anglo Australian worldviews and values appear to remain orientated around the assimilation or integration of 'others' into systems, structures and practices that privilege Anglo Australians and maintain a colonially established and enduring socio-economic status quo. It is a fact, evidenced by multiple indicators and reference points that Indigenous Australians occupy the most disadvantaged and least equitable status within the spectrum of this status quo. This situation continues despite the policy and political rhetoric. This status, established via invasion and occupation, remains unchanged and uninterrupted despite significant legislative and policy shifts since the days of overtly racist and oppressive laws and policies. This apparent paradox may be explained by considering that the same worldviews and values that inspired the oppressive colonising practices of last century remain relatively uninterrupted and highly influential, largely through lack of critical interrogation at the education and political coal face in combination with a lack of exposure to alternative worldviews and value systems across Australian mainstream social and cultural life (Tascon 2008). Nevertheless, many Australians seem to dismiss or play-down the existence of a hegemonic mainstream and regard the availability of various ethnically diverse culinary experiences and the physical presence of ethnically diverse people as clear evidence of an equitable, multicultural society (Poynting and Mason 2008).

Quandomooka woman and respected scholar Dr Karen Martin defines culture as "ways of knowing, being and doing" (Martin 2008). This definition is supported and echoed by Biripi woman and scholar Marcelle Townsend-Cross with the addition of 'ways of valuing' being included Townsend-Cross (Biermann and Townsend-Cross 2008). Given these reference points a multicultural society should be recognisable by the multiple ways its population know, be, do and value. This is the opposite to a culturally homogenous, culturally hegemonic mainstream. Multicultural is perhaps an accurate way to describe what was in place prior to the British invasion and colonisation of the Australian continent and surrounding islands. Indeed, Indigenous multiculturalism remains in place, literally, despite the establishment of a hegemonic mainstream and the relentless, consistent attempts to render the keepers and practitioners of the diversity invisible or at least inaccessible to the mainstream population.

The expressed desire by the leaders and administrators within the mainstream to 'include' Indigenous people in mainstream education and other mainstream institutions is not new and it does not represent socially just and equitable practice. Assimilationist and culturally bias integrationist visions and initiatives date back to the early 1800's via such projects as the Parramatta Native Institution in Sydney whereby it was seen as appropriate and civilised

to offer the 'natives', via capture and force, an opportunity to have a British cultural education, amongst the children of the colonisers and to thereby assimilate into colonial society (My Place 2015). Young Aboriginal people did engage successfully with the education offered at the Parramatta Native Institute. Indeed, in the annual school examinations in 1818 it was an Aboriginal girl, Maria Lock that out-performed all her peers, including 20 Aboriginal students from the Native Institute and 100 non-Aboriginal children. Maria's success was soon considered a failure by the authorities as she rejected the opportunity to assimilate into colonial society and returned to her people and traditional way of life (Fletcher 1989). The institute was abandoned in 1823, considered as a failed experiment by the schools' administrators and practitioners primarily due to the fact that a majority of the schools' residents and 'graduates' chose to re-integrate into their own Aboriginal groups and societies as soon as they were free to do so (Fletcher 1989).

Whilst many things have changed since 1814 it seems that the assimilationist agenda, with outcomes of imagined benefit for Indigenous participants being determined and controlled by Anglo Australians have not. This includes the disappointment and sense of failure when Indigenous students choose not to embrace the Anglo Australian mainstream. This situation is clearly not being motivated and driven by the same overt racism and culturally genocidal policies of the 20th century. It could be separated from the hostile assimilation policies of the past by giving it the term 'benevolent assimilation'. Nevertheless, those in positions of privilege, power and political domination continue to overlook, ignore or play-down the significance of the uninterrupted status quo. In effect it has become an inter-generational closed-loop that is proving incredibly hard to disrupt. We cannot expect to address social justice and equity disparities without disrupting and changing the worldviews and values that are currently relied on by designers, practitioners and administrators. We cannot keep trying to counter for or 'fix' the disparities and inequities that are the inevitable outcomes of colonising, dominating cultural practices. To this end we are hugely advantaged in Australia to have present, across all socio-cultural and physical landscapes, people who hold worldviews, values and knowledges that represent successful, sustainable and resilient alternatives to those that reproduce the mainstream status quo. Further to this it has been made clear since the earliest days of British colonisation that the custodians and keepers of these successful cultural alternatives are willing to share and to mentor-in cultural shifts and collaborative processes, despite the outcomes of sustained and hostile colonising practices. There are stories from the earliest days (McGrath 1990) and recent reminders of this via the published narratives of Elders and knowledge holders such as renowned Elder and teacher Big Bill Neidjie (Neidjie and Lang 2015)

Where I'm heading in the exploration of authenticity and integrity as it applies to sharing Indigenous knowledges

I feel the introduction to this discussion is important in locating where I'm coming from in my own analysis of the backdrop to this discussion. In this part of the discussion I am choosing to take a more narrative, story-telling

approach rather than a more typical third-person academic writing approach. This is certainly not a deviation from valid and credible academic practice. Narrative approaches and yarning have been introduced into the academic enquiry and knowledge review spaces by Indigenous and non-Indigenous academics across the world with major and significant contributions being introduced and championed by Australian academics (Bessarab and Ng'andu 2010; Dean 2010).

I feel privileged and confident in this discussion space as many of the people whose work I am referring to and referencing are people I have had opportunities to yarn with and share ideas, experiences and understandings about regarding Indigenous ways and aspirations, including Indigenous pedagogies. Some of these people are Elders, friends and colleagues whom I consider 'extended family'. On the other hand, not all my teachers, mentors and peers within this discussion are academics nor have they 'published' anything per say. These people, who are often referred to as 'community people', and/or family are no less expert nor vital to the quality and content of my learning and understanding than those who have chosen to have a voice and presence in the academy or other institutional spaces. At this point in my discussion however I will not be naming those people outside the academy who have not had the opportunity to give their consent and permission to be named. This is because this discussion is an introduction to a broader process of enquiry I am currently undertaking via a PhD to explore what defines and brings integrity to an Indigenous teaching and learning experience. There are a lot of yarns to be had and those yarns will lead to how people wish to be represented and identified.

My choice of this approach is indeed a form of evidence that Indigenous cultural practices have found their way into what was until very recently an almost exclusively Western cultural space, that of research and writing within the academy. It's a microcosm of the status quo. This is not to say that it is an ethnically exclusive space as we can clearly see a diverse range of people from various ethnicities engaged in research. However ethnic diversity does not automatically and simply mean cultural diversity, diversity of worldview or diversity of what is focussed on and valued. It may well be that any number of non-Anglo Australian researchers could draw on personal heritages and knowledges of philosophy and enquiry other than Western, however this does not appear to be evident in the questions, approaches and end results that researchers within the academy are engaging with (Eijkman 2009: 240).

I'm using the example of the research space to make a point about possibility however I want to bring it back to what this discussion is focussed on: the difference between having 'Indigenous content' within a mainstream education curriculum in contrast to the experience of engaging with an Indigenous teaching and learning process. My key point is that these are two completely different things both conceptually and in outcome. Within the confines of this discussion I feel I have made my point within the introduction about the outcomes of incorporating or including 'Indigenous content', via benevolent assimilation, into mainstream education curriculums and institutions.

In making this point I have named the ethnically and culturally hierarchical structure of the Australian socio-economic status quo, the

mainstream as the critical, reference point. Without wanting to discount or ignore the obvious and critical discussions about how Indigenous content was sourced and authenticated in the first place (Moreton-Robinson: 75) it is clear that, despite whatever else might be going on in the lives of individual education participants, this approach is not challenging nor re-configuring the status quo into anything that looks like social justice and equity for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. It may be that there are some important and valuable things happening for individuals in this space, as a result of their encounters with content. Indeed as a teacher and education facilitator within a university that incorporates significant Indigenous content into subjects and courses of study I know this to be the case however after twenty years of being involved in the introduction of Indigenous 'content' and 'perspectives' I am convinced more than ever that the value and potential of the practice, let alone the integrity, is incredibly limited in contributing to social justice and equity for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples within the education space.

I am certainly not the first person within the academy to make this point or consider the socio-cultural dynamics at play in terms of integrity and outcomes. One of my earliest teachers and mentors within the academy the late Dr Errol West, Palawa Elder, has considered the colonisation of Indigenous thought and practice within education systems within the Japananka Paradigm (West 2000). Dr West makes the point that universities are "pathologically dominated by Western thought" (West 2000: 1). Further to this Dr Martin Nakata has covered this issue extensively from a Torres Strait Islander perspective in his book "Disciplining the Savages Savaging The Disciplines" (Nakata 2007) as has Dr Lester Rigney (Rigney 2010). Internationally Canadian Aboriginal academic Mary Battiste has considered this from an Indigenous Canadian perspective (Battiste 2011) and in New Zealand Linda Smith has provided a Maori perspective via her groundbreaking book "Decolonizing Methodologies" (Smith 1999).

I intend to yarn with a lot of people in my broader enquiry about the potential and possibility of sharing Indigenous knowledges. There appears to be some common ground in regards to the inspiration to generate and utilise knowledge along with some profoundly different outcomes and cultural practices in regards to how knowledge is generated, implemented and interpreted. In all cases however what we collectively call culture is produced, maintained, re-produced, shifted and changed through the process of making knowledge. We all seem to have a sense of obligation, perhaps externally imposed, to maintain our cultural identities and to maintain our knowledge making outcomes (the status quo?) yet the opportunity to imagine and pursue shifts in the process and to experience new outcomes is always available – a change of the status quo. We are both the custodians and the creators of knowledge at the same time on an individual and communal scale and via decisions that can effect the present or the long-term future.

Arguably, today's Indigenous knowledges in Australia are more diverse than ever, having been influenced and affected by knowledges from around the world (Flavier et al. 1995: 479). This does not take away from the authenticity of these knowledges as being reflective of unique and particular human genius. There is a common essentialist notion that Indigenous knowledges are only authentic and 'pure' if they remain the same as pre-

colonial or orthodox traditional knowledges is a gross misrepresentation of what I mean by authentic (Dei 2000). My focus on authenticity is that which rings true in consideration or application by Indigenous people engaging contemporary situations and circumstances. I also believe that much of this knowledge remains as subjugated knowledge, despite its potential to have profound influence on thinking and doing outside the Indigenous cultural and social space.

It is also important to consider the possibility and impact of being overly discriminating and essentialist in considering who holds Indigenous knowledges and who has the authority to represent and share knowledge (Dei 2000). I believe this issue has potential to exclude many people from being recognised and respected as Indigenous knowledge holders. There is also the potential for Indigenous people deemed as 'authentic' knowledge holders to be exploited and in turn for those who define Indigenous knowledge via narrow and essentialist perspectives to exclude others. It's an incredibly complex space, worthy of a far bigger, more philosophical discussion.

Following from this is the possibility that we can develop new and truly post-colonial world-views and values in Australia if there is both an authenticity and integrity to the process. This will require major disruption to the status quo via significant change or shift in the dominating worldviews and values that are maintaining it. The unmaking of the mainstream status quo. This is a very different proposition to Indigenous knowledges being 'given recognition' in the mainstream or Indigenous people being included in mainstream activities and agenda. That is what is already happening now.

So what do I mean by authenticity and integrity in this context? It's an important clarification, particularly given the use, misuse and abuse of authenticity as a measure and critique of Indigenous peoples and cultures in contemporary socio-political contexts (Moreton-Robinson 2010). I am not interested in a divisive discussion about whose cultures and worldviews are more 'true' or 'real' than others, particularly if that discussion is generated outside of the social and community circles that generate and represent those cultures.

I was initially inspired to think about the significance and importance of authenticity after listening to a video interview with Aboriginal Canadian scholar Taiaiake Alfred. During the interview Taiaiake Alfred makes the point that Indigenous Canadians have often not engaged in various processes that have been deemed by the mainstream to be about equity or inclusivity because those processes do not feel authentic, they do not resonate as having integrity within an Indigenous cultural and value based framework (Alfred 2014). The processes are more about having to assimilate into a mainstream, colonial system in order to access an opportunity that is largely referenced around and limited to the worldviews and values of that mainstream, particularly those of material wealth and political power (Alfred 2014). Taiaiake makes the point that Indigenous people are suffering deeply because their vision and worldview is not present and accessible via institutions: "having a different definition and identity to the one being institutionalised...so you have a state of permanent alienation" (Alfred 2014). Taiaiake's points about the importance and significance of authenticity resonate with me very strongly and clearly as I believe the argument being made relates directly to the situation and circumstances of Indigenous

Australians and in particular about the concept of benevolent assimilation within education.

In terms of my broader research and this discussion my use of the term authenticity relates to the vision and intention Indigenous people have regarding how they will share knowledge and the choices made about the sharing process, in combination with how all those that participate in the process feel about that experience. To this end it is up to the holders and custodians of knowledge to decide how, when and where they want to share knowledge. That's what makes it an authentic process and experience. My intuitive sense, or 'hypothesis' for the benefit of future academic scrutiny, is that if it's authentic the process will resonate and inspire, not just with the knowledge holders but with all participants in the process. It will feel right and feel true. It will mean more than 'politically correct' box ticking. So I'm going further with the notion of authenticity here and suggesting that the concept of authenticity includes all participants – including non-Indigenous participants and Indigenous people not immediately connected or in relationship with knowledge holders and sharers. I'm suggesting that we all know when we are involved with a process that is authentic and has integrity. Just as we know when we are involved in a process that is inauthentic and lacks integrity.

The integrity, in terms of this discussion, is about how the authentic process of sharing knowledge is actioned and supported by all concerned. This is perhaps even more relevant to those institutions, groups and individuals that hold the power and resources to action and support an authentic process rather than to ignore, subvert or prohibit it. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander philosophies, systems, processes and values have been prohibited, ignored and subverted, even by Indigenous people, in regards to the design and implementation of education programs and experiences in Australia. There is no integrity in this situation. There are various explanations and excuses offered as to why this has happened and continues to happen although more often than not the mainstream assumption and insistence, without apology, is for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people to accept and engage with Anglo/Euro Australian philosophies, systems, processes and values in order to gain opportunities for a better socio-economic position within the mainstream status quo.

We are already able to see the consequences of what happens when we focus on content rather than process. By content I mean the information about Indigenous peoples or relevant to Indigenous people, that is commonly bundled into the ambiguous term 'Indigenous content' and 'Indigenous perspectives'. When the focus is on this content rather than engaging with authentic Indigenous teaching and learning processes there are a number of consequences. First nothing changes in terms of the colonially established socio-economic and socio-cultural status quo. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people as a population and society remain the poorest; the most discriminated against, the most unwell, the most incarcerated and the youngest to die (AHRC 2014). This status, formally engineered by Anglo Australia during the majority of the 20th century has not shifted despite the legislative and policy move to an anti-discrimination and equal opportunity/benevolent assimilationist approach to education during the 1970's and 1980's. Indeed, after nearly twenty years of an equal opportunity and assimilationist approach there is no disruption to the status quo. What's

worse is that in some of those measures the entrenched position of Indigenous Australians has become more deeply established and seemingly intractable. The most recent Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Social Justice and Native Title Report confirms this in regard to issues of poverty and incarceration (AHRC 2014).

There is no denying that, despite the failure of this equal opportunity and benevolent assimilationist approach to address the curse of the status quo, there are individuals, families and some communities that have transcended the circumstances of previous generations and peers to take up positions of improved economic status within the mainstream society. Perhaps this also translates to some improved social outcomes, although a place in Australia's middle class, even upper middle class, as measured by income, provides no protection from racism and bigotry as we have seen via the recent racist tirades and campaigns mounted against well known, well paid and 'successful' Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people by the likes of journalists and media personalities such as Andrew Bolt and Alan Jones (Bolten 2015). Both Bolt and Jones enjoy a broad and numerous audience. They are clearly popular within the mainstream. They are not the lunatic fringe. Not in Australia at least. Their bigotry and racism appears to be broadly supported and defended by their audience. It seems that racism is still a popular ideology in the Australian mainstream. White supremacy is hardly a belief that is likely to appeal to Indigenous Australians let alone anyone else who is not white. The mainstream is starting to sound like a tough compromise.

This brings me to the second obvious consequence of the equal opportunity and benevolent assimilationist approach: the unfair and discriminatory pressure put on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people to make choices about what to engage and how in regards to education. It's the damned if you do, damned if you don't situation. This is part of the dilemma that Taiaiake Alfred was referring to in the interview that so inspired me. Whilst this notion may be challenged as setting up a false or essentialist based type of polar dichotomy I believe it will have resonance with any Indigenous audience in similar circumstances to what we have in Australia and also with those who are truly engaged with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people at a community and social level.

I'm happy for academics to debate the validity and value of this position. My worldview embraces the existence of diversity, multiple realities, individual interpretation and expression of truth and individual autonomy. In contrast but hopefully not contest with the mainstream academic approach my most credible and consistent reference source to support my 'damned if you do damned if you don't' point is the story of my own life as an individual, parent, community member, education activist and education practitioner, and my window into the lives of others through observation, interaction, conversation and collaboration. It's a 49-year long point of reference at this time, with approximately the last twenty of those years including my experience as a teacher, researcher and education activist in spaces that range from independent Aboriginal community schools through to the large international university and most everything in between.

There is a great deal that could be unpacked in terms of the 'damned if you do damned if you don't' dilemma for Indigenous Australians. In the limited

space I have here I will make what I believe are the key points. Perhaps the most obvious is that every minute of the day you spend immersed in an education space that does not reflect, reinforce, build-on and celebrate your own worldviews, beliefs and values is a minute that you don't get to spend in an education space that does. Minutes build to hours, hours build to days and days build to years and years. If we accept that our mainstream education institutions in Australia are not inclusive of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander systems and processes around education, as part of the day-to-day rather than rarely or in a disjointed ad-hoc manner at best then when do Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples get to practice their day to day lived education cultures, which includes being able to invite in and include other people to share that experience. Perhaps on the weekends or after many hours spent engaged with mainstream education systems and agendas or on those special days once a year or so when the mainstream sanctions and schedules it – NAIDOC day for example.

This is the predicament of the majority of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples in Australia, including most people that live in remote communities often labelled as 'traditional communities'. There is effectively no choice. A very large majority of formal education options, throughout life are designed, delivered and administered via mainstream systems, processes and values. You opt in or you opt out. Some people opt in, many people opt out. There are consequences either way that range from obvious socio-economic disparities and outcomes (Taiaiake 2014) through to the less obvious psychological, emotional and spiritual traumas Indigenous Australians face at disproportionate levels to the mainstream. There is no integrity in this situation. It is not equitable and it does not represent true social justice. Indeed, it represents a clear breach of the Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, via a number of sections but particularly Article 14 which relates directly to education:

Article 14

1. Indigenous peoples have the right to establish and control their educational systems and institutions providing education in their own languages, in a manner appropriate to their cultural methods of teaching and learning.
2. Indigenous individuals, particularly children, have the right to all levels and forms of education of the State without discrimination.
3. States shall, in conjunction with indigenous peoples, take effective measures, in order for indigenous individuals, particularly children, including those living outside their communities, to have access, when possible, to an education in their own culture and provided in their own language (UN 2007).

As a signatory to this declaration Australia has at least a moral and ethical obligation to honour it via legislation, policy and practice. Instead we have benevolent assimilation and it would appear that this does not resonate as an authentic experience for many Indigenous Australians. The status quo remains.

The final point I'd like to make about the consequences of the current assimilationist approach relates to what I believe is a lost opportunity for non-

Indigenous people to engage with Indigenous Australian teachers and to experience an authentic Indigenous knowledge sharing experience. In fact, I will go as far as to say that by being denied this opportunity non-Indigenous people are being denied an equitable Australian education experience, given that Indigenous teaching and learning processes are profoundly of and about the connections and relationships to the lands and waters that all Australians live on and around (Muir, Rose, Sullivan 2010). If non-Indigenous people do not have opportunities to learn about and experience Indigenous Australian philosophies, worldviews and values how can it be possible for those philosophies, worldviews and values to have an influence on the cultural, social and political shifts that will be required to disrupt and ultimately put an end to the hegemonic paradigms and practices of the mainstream? The consequence of non-Indigenous people not being included in authentic Indigenous Australian teaching and learning experiences is that ignorance, misunderstandings and social divisions between Indigenous Australians and others will continue, despite the availability of 'information'. There is no integrity, no social justice in this situation.

If Indigenous Australian teaching and learning experiences were there as part of the normal education experience from the earliest days of formal education in Australia every person would have an opportunity to embrace and be guided by these knowledges. It is not unreasonable to assume that many of the beliefs and values that Indigenous Australians hold most dear would resonate with others, particularly other Australians, and be adopted as primary reference points for a worldview. Perhaps not a clearly predictable worldview very more than likely a very different worldview to those that inspire and maintain the mainstream status quo.

There are already well known and respected academics, activists and other thinkers making important points about the critical and pivotal role that Indigenous knowledges and values can play in addressing some of humanities most critical social and environmental challenges and crises. "Wisdom of the Elders" by Dr David Suzuki (Suzuki and Knudtson 1993) highlights the significance of Indigenous philosophy and values in addressing major global environmental issues and challenges. Dr Wade Davis in his book "Wayfinders: Why Ancient Wisdom Matters in the Modern World" Davis highlights the valuable and vital role Indigenous knowledge and philosophy must play in navigating the current and future circumstances of humanity (Davis 2009). Both these authors are educators and scholars that believe that it is the West that must learn from Indigenous peoples in order to shape socially and environmentally sustainable futures. This can only happen when Indigenous knowledge sharing processes are active and accessible.

Closer to home, public intellectual and feminist activist Dr Germaine Greer wrote an extended essay titled "Whitefella Jump Up The Shortest Way to Nationhood" (Greer 2003). It was considered a controversial and provocative exploration of how Anglo/Celtic Australians can be 'saved from themselves' and finally find a meaningful Australian identity by assimilating into an Aboriginal social and spiritual way of life. "Blackfellas are not and never were the problem. They were the solution, if only whitefellas had been able to see it" (Greer 2003: 2). Greer makes it clear that what she is proposing is not about cultural appropriation or the unauthorised adoption of Aboriginal beliefs and values. It is about a complex, negotiated shift built on new

relationships and clear acknowledgements of colonial dispossession and ongoing violence towards Indigenous peoples and their lands.

In a nation such as Australia with such a violent and traumatic colonial history and with such clearly unresolved social and political tensions between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians, Greer's vision was always going to be controversial, challenging and provocative. A unique sense of Indigenous identity is all that many Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people have left in the wake of such violent, uncompromising colonisation and in the face of ongoing assimilationist agendas. This is incredibly sensitive ground.

In the scope of my broader research I am currently exploring a question that is central to this discussion if we are to progress beyond assimilation and the maintaining of the status quo. The question is: what represents an authentic Indigenous Australian teaching and learning experience? It has been suggested I use the term pedagogy to replace the words 'teaching and learning process', however I feel that despite the accepted academic understandings of the word pedagogy it is not a word that most people outside the academy use and understand in discussion about education. A part of my methodology is to make my research questions as open and accessible as possible, particularly to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples outside the academy. It's a big open question that sits wide open to challenge and even contradiction. That works for me as it provides a platform for further discussion. It's a question that I am not about to try and answer without a broad and open consultation with as many Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people as possible within the life of a PhD completion schedule. I am attempting to choose people who are active or enthusiastic about education processes and possibilities outside of the current mainstream options. It's a yarning methodology.

In considering the question "what represents an authentic Indigenous Australian teaching and learning experience?" I am not starting from scratch in terms of my own knowledge and experience nor relying on current published research or opinion via a typical literature review. Which is fortunate, as my initial review of literature that relates directly to my question has produced very few results. Even the addition of a committed research assistant has failed to provide the volumes of material that most literature reviews produce. I suggest this says a great deal about the attention and support this question and discussion has attracted to date within Australia. In the paper "Indigenous Pedagogy as a Force for Social Change" Marcelle Townsend-Cross makes the point that "Over the past decade, there has been a lack of engagement with Indigenous pedagogical concepts by Indigenous academics" (Biermann and Townsend-Cross 2008: 146). This is in contrast to the far more prolific scholarship and leadership demonstrated by Indigenous Australian academics in the increasingly available published material discussing Indigenous research methodologies. Of course there is a strong link between the discussion about sharing Indigenous knowledges within and via research and the sharing of Indigenous knowledges via formal education experiences. I hope to talk to a significant number of these scholars in my yarns about what makes an authentic Indigenous teaching and learning experience.

Of course a significant challenge in seeking this understanding about Indigenous pedagogies is choosing whom to talk to. Unlike the Western

cultural model experts and practitioners of Indigenous knowledges have not been conveniently clustered into academic institutions or broadly published in dominant academic discourse. This does not mean that there are not Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples in these places with a deep understanding of Indigenous pedagogies however it is also important to recognise that those who champion and support the inclusion of and engagement with Indigenous pedagogies may not be deep knowledge holders themselves. This is particularly true in colonised spaces in which Indigenous knowledges and indeed knowledge holders have been broadly subjugated. There is no doubt in my mind that the consideration around who to talk to about Indigenous teaching and learning processes will involve engaging people, places and spaces well outside of and away from mainstream educational institutions.

Closing Thoughts

To briefly conclude I wish to emphasise that despite the current mainstream practices in Australia, driven by assimilationist ideologies and agendas that maintain a culturally hegemonic status quo there remains a great potential for better outcomes. However, this will require a significant shift in how Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples are imagined, represented and engaged by the mainstream in regards to the theorising, design and implementation of formal education from the earliest experiences through to the most senior levels of scholarship. To this end it is all about the process and the ways in which knowledge is shared. The process will determine the content via authentic experiences that have integrity. All Australians have a right to access teaching and learning experiences that provide the greatest opportunities to live healthy and sustainable lives as an outcome of their day to cultural realities and values. Whilst we maintain the focus on assimilating Indigenous peoples into socio-cultural and socio-economic spaces that are not of their free choosing and contrary to what is valued we do nothing very different to what has been done since British invasion.

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