



The Australian Journal of **INDIGENOUS EDUCATION**

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EDITORIAL

We are very proud to present this Special Supplementary Issue of *The Australian Journal of Indigenous Education* guest edited by Lynette Henderson-Yates (University of Notre Dame, Perth, Australia) and Darlene Oxenham (University of Western Australia, Perth, Australia). This collection of 12 papers drawn from the 2009 Indigenous Studies and Indigenous Knowledge Conference held in Perth, highlight approaches to researching Indigenous knowledges, Indigenous research methodologies, and the ways that these come together in classroom and community contexts.

There are several themes which emerge from this volume. The ways in which Indigenous knowledges, pedagogies and methodologies are represented, enacted and offer alternative approaches to Western orthodoxy in tertiary settings continues to be a significant issue in Indigenous Australian education. Many of the papers in this volume send strong messages about the centrality of consultation and collaboration for researching, teaching and learning, and representing Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, communities, cultures and knowledge systems in educational settings. One of the most powerful approaches to researching, and teaching and learning emerging from this collection of papers is the centrality of storytelling to Indigenous pedagogies, Indigenous methodologies and Indigenous education.

Each and every paper in this special issue of *The Australian Journal of Indigenous Education* brings a sense of creativity, commitment and courage to finding and implementing the kinds of educational change needed in Australia today to actively work towards “closing the gap”. We hope you enjoy this collection of papers and find inspiration, affirmation and renewed enthusiasm for opening up doorways and making space for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples to achieve their educational potential however they may choose to define it.

Elizabeth Mackinlay & Michael Williams
Editors



INTRODUCTION

LYNETTE HENDERSON-YATES¹ & DARLENE OXENHAM²

¹ University of Notre Dame Australia, Broome Campus, PO Box 2287, Broome, Western Australia, 6725, Australia

² School of Indigenous Studies, University of Western Australia, 35 Stirling Highway Crawley, Perth, Western Australia, 6009, Australia

The papers in this special supplementary edition of *The Australian Journal of Indigenous Education* bring together papers from the 2009 Indigenous Studies and Indigenous Knowledge Conference that was co-hosted by the School of Indigenous Studies, The University of Western Australia and Nulungu Centre for Indigenous Studies, The University of Notre Dame Australia, Broome Campus. This fourth Indigenous Studies and Indigenous Knowledge Conference was held in Perth, Western Australia, on The University of Notre Dame Australia's Fremantle Campus and was the first Indigenous Studies and Indigenous Knowledge Conference to be held in Western Australia. The conference featured four keynote panels, 20 small group sessions and over 60 speakers exploring the key theme of "Indigenous Studies: Dialogue or Conflict in the Academy?" One hundred and thirty delegates, including 67 from interstate or overseas, came from Australian universities, community based organisations, government departments and schools, and a sizeable representation came from remote locations in Queensland, the Northern Territory and the Kimberley.

Keynote speakers included the following noted Indigenous scholars: Martin Nakata (University of Technology Sydney); Sally Morgan (The University of Western Australia); Steve Kinnane (The University of Notre Dame Australia); Pat Dudgeon (The University of Western Australia); Jeannie Herbert (Charles Sturt University); Associate Professor Glen Stasiuk (Murdoch University); Michael Wright (Telethon Institute for Child Health Research) and Lyn Henderson-Yates (The University of Notre Dame). Native American scholars Nancy C. Maryboy and David Begay made a keynote panel presentation on their work with the Cosmic Serpent project and the National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA).

Highlights of the conference included the launch of the *Westerly* journal's new Indigenous issue which was devoted entirely to contemporary Aboriginal creative writing; and the "gendered" breakfasts held on the second day. The women's and men's business breakfast's were an opportunity for each group to discuss issues of relevance to them and to experience and share stories of sisterhood and brotherhood. We thank Jill Milroy, Pat Dudgeon and Tracey Bunda for hosting the women's breakfast; and Michael Wright, Blaze Kwaymullina and Martin Nakata for hosting the men's breakfast. An outstanding component of the conference and for which special mention must

be made was the number of young Indigenous scholars who presented quality papers at the conference. This was a particularly exciting aspect as it demonstrated the growth of a new generation of Indigenous scholars.

The main theme – “Indigenous Studies, Indigenous Knowledge: Dialogue or Conflict in the Academy?” – encouraged conference delegates to engage in conversation and analysis of the place and position of Indigenous studies and knowledge in universities; as well as the tensions and possibilities that arise from this. This overall focus was carried into and discussed in further detail in the four sub-themes of the conference:

- *Indigenous Studies: Implementation in the Academy* examined a variety of implementation matters ranging from pedagogical approaches to the establishment of policy frameworks;
- *Indigenous Knowledge and Western Science: Knowledge in Conflict?* asked conference delegates to explore the issues, nuances and dilemma’s of working within and between knowledge systems;
- *Healing People and Healing Country* showcased projects that are framed and informed by Indigenous knowledge and which each have the goal of strengthening Indigenous people and communities; and
- *Stories and Storytelling: Indigenous Knowledge in the Academy* offered the opportunity to delegates to discuss and demonstrate how Indigenous knowledge is included in the academy, particularly through storytelling and narrative.

The 12 papers presented in this edition of the journal arise from the conference sub-themes and focus on topics ranging from the importance of storytelling, the need to support Aboriginal languages, the politics of knowledge production through to exploring the Aboriginal cyber community and its role in cultural identity. Classroom pedagogy, Indigenous studies and the power of higher education were considered important by a number of authors who devoted their presentations to exploring and challenging the issues and opportunities that were inherent in such themes.

■ Indigenous studies: Implementation in the Academy

Vicki Saunders, Roianne West and Kim Usher focus their paper on postgraduate research and keenly argue the need for Indigenous postgraduate students to negotiate Indigenist methodologies to frame their research projects. Saunders and West reflect on issues, challenges and opportunities that they have faced during their postgraduate research journey in the discipline of Health Sciences that

have led them to this conclusion; while Usher, their supervisor, reflects on the challenges and opportunities for non-Indigenous supervisors of Indigenous postgraduate students. The authors suggest a number of considerations that Indigenous postgraduates students and their supervisors should take into account and address throughout the research journey. In their paper, Shirley Morgan and Barry Golding take their experiences as lecturer and manager, and Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal to explore a collaborative, cross-cultural approach to teaching an Indigenous education unit in an education degree programme at the University of Ballarat. Through their work, they were able to examine the dynamics and outcomes from such an approach and encouraged their students to adopt methods of consultation and collaboration as an important part of their teaching of Indigenous and non-Indigenous students. Keeping with the theme of classroom teaching, Lilly Brown writes of the vital role that educator-learner relationships play in the development of the student’s inner self that leads to a better understanding of Indigenous ways of knowing. This emphasis on the need for students to develop their personal and academic selves is echoed by Jeannie Herbert in her paper on the role Indigenous studies plays in student empowerment in the university setting. Herbert highlights the place of higher education in providing opportunities for students to learn about and examine their own issues and find solutions to resolve them. In this way, Indigenous studies in higher education enables students to become empowered. Jeanine Leane examines representations of Aboriginal issues from another position and her paper begins by stating that non-Aboriginal students find Aboriginal writing and representations difficult to accommodate with their own individual experiences and understanding of what they consider to be Aboriginal writing and representation. Leane states that one strategy to overcome this is by providing opportunities for non-Aboriginal students to examine non-Aboriginal representations of Aboriginality. In this way, the possibility of arriving at reciprocal understandings between cultural groups, as opposed to contestations, is increased. Berice Anning, through her paper on embedding Indigenous graduate attributes into the University of Western Sydney’s courses, reminds us of the important role that universities play in developing their student’s moral compass and social responsibility to others, particularly to Aboriginal people. The example provided by Anning is that of her University’s strategy to ensure that their graduates are just and principled individuals who are aware of and embrace Aboriginal people and culture and recognise their important place in Australian society.

■ Indigenous knowledge and Western science: Knowledge in conflict?

As highlighted by Martin Nakata in his paper, Indigenous people are a people with immense knowledge. Nakata writes of how early Western Social Sciences described and depicted Indigenous people as different. This belief formed the basis for the way in which Indigenous knowledge is talked about and understood today and, if this discourse is not disrupted, a space for Indigenous people as a people of knowledge will not exist. Simone Ulalka Tur, Faye Rosas Blanch and Christopher Wilson continue with the topic of Indigenous ways of knowing, including its undervaluing in academia, in their paper where they examine the politics of knowledge production. The authors highlight the need for researchers to work collaboratively with communities so that community outcomes are achieved. Bronwyn Lumby's paper is devoted to exploring the place of Facebook in Aboriginal identity; an area of research that is new and much needed in contemporary times given the popularity of Facebook in so many young Aboriginal people's lives. Lumby takes us on a journey through relatively unknown territory where we learn that Facebook is a tool used by Aboriginal students to examine, discuss and establish Aboriginal identity. Lumby calls Facebook "a contemporary kinship interface" and informs us of the possibilities and limitations afforded by this technological space.

■ Healing people, healing country

From cyber space and a contemporary means of cultural identity to remote communities and support of traditional languages; the latter being the work carried out by Patsy Ngalu Bedford and Siobhan Casson at the Kimberley Language Resource Centre (KLRC) in the town of Halls Creek in the Kimberley region of Western Australia. Bedford and Casson's paper highlights the challenges of language continuation in the Kimberley and the communities concerns that young Aboriginal people are not learning their languages as a first language. Knowing that this has serious implications for the continuation of bio-cultural knowledge, the KLRC developed strategies to promote language and knowledge continuation through their programme Teaching on Country which places great importance on immersing pre-school children in contextual language situations.

■ Stories and storytelling: Indigenous knowledge in the Academy

The passing of cultural knowledge from one generation to the next is also considered crucial by Glen Stasiuk who devotes his paper to

exploring the role of storytelling in the lives of Indigenous Australians. Stasiuk brings together the traditional methods of storytelling with the more contemporary ways in which cultural knowledge is shared via DVD's or the internet. He believes it is through the more current forms of preserving and sharing knowledge that language and culture can be respected, spoken and archived. As Stasiuk points out, how this information and knowledge is presented is crucial and that all must be vigilant that appropriate integration in contemporary productions takes place. Somerville, Somerville and Wyld also focus on storytelling as a method used in the academy. Somerville et al. draw on their cultural heritage to share information on the traditions of the Martu people from Western Australia and show how their narratives serve to transmit and preserve their cultural knowledge. In turn the authors "story" their knowledge: Craig Somerville tells of the knowledge interfaces including the interface of songlines and survival (day-to-day as well as survival of government programs and policies) and the interface of Indigenous oral storytelling and Western systems; Frances Wyld discusses the need for and advantages of telling your own stories and researching your own culture as a way of reconnecting to people and country; and finally Kirra Somerville, a young Martu storyteller, shares how she came to write her first book – *The Lizard Gang*. The authors conclude by pointing out the importance of narrative and storytelling as a method of inquiry.

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■ About the authors

Professor Lynette Henderson-Yates, guest co-editor for this supplementary edition, is an Aboriginal woman from Derby in the Kimberley. Working in Aboriginal education for the past 31 years, Lyn has been employed as an Aboriginal teaching assistant, primary school teacher, education officer, Aboriginal studies consultant, Deputy Principal, researcher, writer, manager and lecturer. In 2006, Lyn took up an Associate Professorship at the University of Notre Dame Australia's Broome Campus as Assistant Dean in the School of Arts and Sciences and Director of the Nulungu Centre for Indigenous Studies. In March 2009, Lyn was appointed as Professor and Deputy Vice Chancellor on the Broome Campus.

Professor Darlene Oxenham, guest co-editor for this supplementary edition, is a Malgana woman from Shark Bay in Western Australia. Darlene is the Associate Dean of teaching and learning at the School of Indigenous Studies at the University of Western Australia. Darlene has over 20 years of experience working in Indigenous higher education. Prior to her employment at the University of Western Australia in 2006, Darlene held the positions of Director of the Curtin Indigenous Research Centre, and Coordinator of the Honours and Postgraduate program at the Centre for Aboriginal Studies at Curtin University.

