

ALAR

Action learning and action research journal



**Decolonising
Action Research
Special Edition**



Volume 17 No 2 October 2011

ALAR Journal

Vol 17 No 2 October 2011

ALAR Journal is published by the Action Learning, Action Research Association (ALARA) Inc

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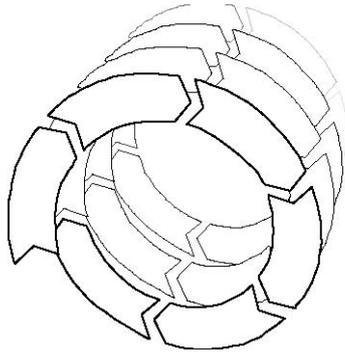
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ALAR Journal
Volume 17 No 2
October 2011
ISSN 1326-964X

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Editorial:

Decolonising Action Research

Bronwyn Fredericks and
Karen Adams

This edition of the ALAR *Action learning action research journal* aims to capture some of the current dilemmas, solutions and actions researchers experience in the decolonising space. This collection of papers demonstrates that researchers are not only undertaking action research with and within Indigenous and non-Indigenous contexts, but that they are doing so in exciting and dynamic ways across a diversity of situations. First we will address some of the literature on decolonisation. Then we will explain how this specific edition of the Journal came to fruition and aspects of action research.

Decolonisation

Sherwood, Keech, Keenan and Kelly (2011) assert that 'decolonisation is a process that requires the positioning of oneself in history and the recognition of ideas and assumptions that have informed one's worldview' (2011, p.194) Sherwood (2009) explains that decolonisation requires us:

to examine the impact of colonizaton has upon their past and present in order to formulate a future that does not reinstate the past. To take these steps requires a balance of histories, informing our current political and social context, critical reflexive practice and open communication with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples (Sherwood 2009, p.24).

The work of Sherwood (2009) and her colleagues (Sherwood et al. 2011) along with Battiste (1995); Rigney (1999); Smith (1999); and others assists us all in the process of learning and developing a deeper understanding of the relations between Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples. Lowman explains that 'the concept and process of decolonization and self-decolonization are critical in moving towards new peaceful and just relationships between Settler and Indigenous peoples' (Lowman, 2007). We assert that it is through decolonisation and decolonisation that we can come to know ourselves and each more and that action research offers a medium for doing this. Decolonisation is not just a process for non-Indigenous peoples. It is also a process for Indigenous peoples

for we too are a product of a colonial history. It is understood that both Indigenous and non-Indigenous people have been colonised through the global colonial project (Henderson, 2000; Smith, 1999). This is regardless of whether we are in Australia, Canada, the United States of America, New Zealand, South Africa and many other places in the contemporary world.

The 2010 World Congress

This edition came about through the decolonising stream that emerged at the *World Congress on Action Research and Action Learning*, held in Melbourne, Australia in September 2010. The work however started many years before this. A number of people involved in ALARA had been discussing since at least the early 2000's the need for a stronger focus on Indigenous peoples and action research. This led to a congress in 2007 in Adelaide with an Indigenous stream (see Kim O'Donnell and Janet Kelly's paper in this edition). In 2009 we (Bronwyn Fredericks and Karen Adams) were approached by Bill Genat (from ALARA) to assist in the development of a praxis stream in relation to Indigenous peoples. We decided upon the theme of decolonisation and action research as many action researchers refer to the term decolonisation as part of their methods and processes. We thought that the praxis stream would allow action research practitioners to come together to discuss what this meant and present the work they had been doing in this area. To encourage Indigenous people to attend we put the call for Congress abstracts out through many networks and ALARA supported several scholarships to cover costs of travel and accommodation. The scholarships enabled a number of people to attend including, Elder Uncle Ross Watson and Pamela Croft also called Pamela Croft Warcon. We benefited from having these two people at the Congress in terms of their experience, stories and wisdom.

The Decolonisation and Action Research Stream witnessed fifteen presentations and two workshops over the four days. The presentations came from many Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples drawn from Australia, Canada, Philippines, Mexico, Papua New Guinea and New Zealand. Notably there was a broad number and mix of Indigenous peoples who attended the Congress. Presentations covered an array of disciplines and fields of research but all endeavoured to centre on decolonising practice and decolonising spaces of research. Topics such as the murky boundaries of insiders and outsiders, benefits for both colonisers and colonised, seeming blindness to Indigenous knowledges and the importance of careful listening were but a few of the discussions held.

The first day involved a number of presentations from a broad range of topics and countries. On the second day Professor Linda Tuhiwai Smith gave an

entertaining and insightful keynote address. She weaved her story demonstrating practitioner skill development over many years and shared knowledge gained from her action research practice (Smith 1999). This was followed by more presentations and an experiential workshop on unspoken cultural rules. On the third day people were bussed to the Koorie Heritage Trust, a not-for-profit Aboriginal community controlled organisation that aims to protect, preserve and promote the living cultures of Aboriginal people of south-eastern Australia. There were more thought provoking presentations and a second experiential workshop in diversity and role play that involved tea sets and a lot of imagination. There were some main themes that emerged across the three days that included: the researcher's role; partnership development; and methodologies. A number of papers and workshops raised much discussion and debate about methods and processes for conducting this type of research.

We are appreciative of the invitation from the Action Learning Action Research Association for a Stream at the Congress and then a specific edition of the Journal. It is important that Indigenous peoples be given space and opportunities to speak and engage within research forums such as the World Congress on Action Learning Action Research and other forums, symposiums and conference along with contributing to journals. Particularly as action research is often recommended for use with Indigenous peoples. We must be provided with opportunities for intellectual dialogue with others, within academic contexts. These spaces and opportunities need to be provided by non-Indigenous people that control access. These engagement opportunities ensure that Indigenous and non-Indigenous people connect with the dialogues that we are having with one another – regionally, nationally and internationally about Indigenous peoples and research. In addition, in not engaging with us, non-Indigenous people risk learning about Indigenous people and our issues, our history, our worldviews and our different knowledges only from and through the eyes of other non-Indigenous people. In this, non-Indigenous people risk only ever knowing Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people from the position of being studied as objects and being written about as objects. This doesn't work does not allow for the process of decolonisation and self-colonisation.

The Action Research Action Learning Journal

Following the momentum of the World Congress it was suggested that the theme of decolonisation be carried through to a future edition of the *ALAR Action research action learning journal*. This 'decolonising action research' collection of papers is that edition and we were invited to be guest editors. We worked with Susan Goff (Journal Chief Editor) in the journey drawing on her expertise and skills and to ensure that this edition of the *ALAR Action learning action research journal* process and formats was consistent with other editions. As the invited

Guest Editors for the Journal we issued a 'Call for Papers' in October 2010. We invited people to submit papers for peer review, essays, poems and other mediums to showcase their action research practice. Since the call for papers we have worked with reviewers and authors to develop and finalise the papers that appear in this collection. Consistent with the ALAR journal processes we wanted to encourage authors to strengthen their work in ways that would enhance the decolonising action research understandings of others. We wanted the process to be developmental in nature and believe we achieved this through the process we undertook.

We opted not to seek papers that would explain the multiple meanings of what decolonising meant, but rather sought papers that would focus on showing and demonstrating this through the sharing of practice and examples. Authors have drawn on various authors in order to explain their practice for example works by Battiste (1995); Henderson (2000); Rigney (1999); Smith (1999); and numerous others. Throughout the papers multiple forms of partnership building, methods and reflection on practice are described and demonstrated. The papers draw on existing understandings and knowledge and then apply it to their research contexts. A small number of papers were published in the hard copy edition of this Journal. We were fortunate that the other papers submitted to this edition (along with the papers from the hard copy edition) are in this, the first electronic version of the ALAR *Action learning action research journal*. This has allowed a wider breadth of information sharing from a number of practitioners.

The Editorial Panel for this collection (listed alphabetically) were: Karen Adams; Paul Aylward; Maya Cordeiro; Phil Crane; Susan Goff; Shannon Faulkhead; Bronwyn Fredericks; Mat Jakobi; Janet Kelly; June Lennie; Janet McIntyre; Marion Naidoo; Amoy Ong; Adreanne Ormond; Rirepti Reedy; Shankar Sankaran; Jill Sanguinetti; Malia Vellias; Fernando Wagner; Jack Whitehead; Michael Wright; Margaret O'Connell and Janette Young. We acknowledge all of these individuals and their specific knowledges, skills and abilities they brought to the peer reviewing and editorial process. We additionally acknowledge Susan Goff for her hours of work spent on this the collection and for her transparency and flexibility which made development of this edition an exciting and pleasurable experience. We would particularly like to mention, that as the Guest Editors, we wanted the Editorial Panel not to alter the context or content of the writing or the spirit contained within the essence of the pieces. We thank them for this and for recognising the power within the words and the power of the collection as a whole.

We were gifted an artwork by Pamela Croft specifically for this edition. The artwork (Figure 1.) named *Fish Fish Come into the Dish* was developed in 1991 as is a mixed medium piece, made from ceramic, found objects (natural and man-made) and ochres, oils, and glaze.



Figure 1. *Fish Fish Come into the Dish*, Pamela Croft, 1991.

Pamela's work offers an expressive way to understand decolonisation and action research practice through offering a piece which depicts old and new; layers of different things; the practical and the groundedness (which we think you need to work in this area); firm and delicate materials (let's face it, sometimes when we are working people we need to be delicate at times and at times firm); the waves and the dots indicate movement and change, flow and notions of flexibility; it is transforming in that all that is here is used in a different new way and shows ways of movement; and the fish skeleton to us indicates both loss and sustenance. We know we need to acknowledge loss when we transform and we know that processes and people within action research practice can be a sustaining force in our work. Pamela weaves for us notions of deconstruction and reconstruction within her artwork and through some of her writings (See Croft 2003). We thank Pamela for her gift to this edition.

Our Research Reflections

We want to take the opportunity to reflect on research, action research and decolonisation practice and in our involvement with the World Congress on Action Research Action Learning and this edition of the *ALAR Action learning*

action research journal. We acknowledge that at times action research can be challenging and that action research practitioners may experience difficult situations working with both Indigenous and non-Indigenous people. Through our individual and collective experiences we have witnessed that sometimes people become extremely stressed and concerned whether they are working well with Indigenous people or whether they aren't. We have also witnessed some non-Indigenous people get so caught up in whether they are doing the 'right thing' that it makes them less effective than they could be. Depending also on their level of expressed self-reflection on whether they are doing the 'right thing' or not, non-Indigenous people may appear to be overly self-indulgent and driven by self-interests, rather than the interests of the Indigenous participants and the tasks at hand. They are seen to be problematic as is the situation with community members caught between continuing in the action research process to get a desired outcome, product or program or withdrawing which may result in the community 'missing out' on the outcome, product or program. We know critical reflexivity is very important as is self-awareness in action research, they are also important in decolonisation and self-decolonisation processes. However, we all need to be careful of being so critically reflective and so self-aware that it works to disable us from being as effective as we can be in the processes we are trying to undertake. Equally, we have witnessed some Indigenous people within an action research process assume they know what other Indigenous people want and think and assert from these assumptions. Advisory committees often include Indigenous people who are not the participants in research. These people's roles need to be clearly and transparently understood as they have a different role to the research participants. It is instances such as these where one needs to consider what is meant by participation in action research. These behaviours and numerous others can act to further disempower Indigenous participants through the participatory action research process. They maintain the status quo and re-instate the existing relationships instead of working to transform positions of power and contexts.

We want to speak to the notion of 'best intentions' which at times enters into the discussions between Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples and action research. We sometimes struggle with non-Indigenous people who want to work with us and are seen by both Indigenous and non-Indigenous people as having the 'best intentions'. We need to be aware that sometimes there are people who although well intentioned, still work in ways that act against Indigenous voices about our being, our knowledge, our culture and our land, and show no concern for our rights or empowerment. They work against us in ways that insulate themselves in order to protect their privileges (Moreton-Robinson 2000; Smith 1999). There are times when the non-Indigenous people who participate in this process are positioned as the 'good white people' (Lampert 2003, 24) who are only trying to help and provide rescue. The dissenting Indigenous people are then sometimes positioned as 'bad' Aboriginal people and even as 'ungrateful'

Aboriginal people (Fredericks 2009). Aboriginal people who will align with and feel comfortable with these types of reliant and compliant relationships can be considered preferred partners. At this point we need to be clear that sometimes statements of 'goodwill' and 'benevolence' assist in masking power differentials (Riggs 2004) and deny the truth of Indigenous dispossession and non-Indigenous privilege, power and hierarchy (Smith 1999). When non-Indigenous people maintain positions of 'benevolence' and 'goodwill' as researchers, they also maintain the power differentials which keep us in 'our place' and maintain their privileged dominant positioning within the hierarchy (Fredericks 2009; Moreton-Robinson 2007). This includes hierarchies found within society, research and universities and the Settler-Indigenous relationship. Decolonisation allows us to open up communication in heartfelt and meaningful ways, to focus on our current political and social contexts, and to engage in critical reflexive practice of and between ourselves.

In looking at action research and decolonising practice the above described behaviours surely need to be addressed. Consideration also needs to be given to the practices of how Indigenous people are engaged in research activities such as grant writing, research project development and publication addressed. For example, sometimes, Indigenous people might be invited to be part of the advisory committee for a project, or be asked to give input into a project's development as a 'targeted resource' (Gareau 2003, 197), cultural adviser or community broker rather than as co-investigators. We want people to think about how they engage with Indigenous people in commencing and developing research projects. Similarly, Indigenous people might be asked to write support letters for research grants when in fact they should be asked to be co-investigators or active partners rather than passive recipients in the research project. At the time of writing this editorial, Bronwyn was invited to be on an Advisory Committee for an Indigenous specific health project in Queensland worth approximately \$400,000. All the Chief Investigators and Associate Investigators for the project are non-Indigenous people. They have employed Indigenous people as the project workers to provide support and coordination with training within Indigenous communities, along with interviews and other activities. In this regard, Aboriginal people are positioned in a service relationship to the non-Indigenous people for the purposes of the project despite the project focusing on Indigenous health issues. In the past Aboriginal people were required to service non-Indigenous people in colonial history (Huggins 1989; Rintoul 1993). As Moreton-Robinson (2008, 86) explains, placing us in such a service relationship also positions our Aboriginality 'as an epistemological possession to service what it is not' and to 'obscure the more complex way that white possession functions socio-discursively through subjectivity and knowledge production'. In these relationships, there is often little recognition of

what is being shared, offered, given or asked for, and little the true recognition of our skills and abilities. In this, there is a reproduction of the Settler-Indigenous relationship. There is no power sharing and equity, and there certainly is no capacity for decolonising or self-decolonisation processes.

We are extremely grateful of the opportunity to be the guest editors for this edition of the Journal. ALARA in asking us to be the guest editors have opened up an opportunity for us to contribute to a journal in a meaningful and engaging way. We are not nor are any of the other Indigenous authors positioned in the position of informants, to service non-Indigenous people and help them become or remain in the position of the knowers. The knowing in this context is shared within the process. We individually and collectively are all offered a role of subjective voice of scholarly critique. In ALARA making the offer for us to be involved in this edition and also future editions, it is working on addressing power inequities. It has opened up the space for Indigenous peoples to feel that they 'really' can contribute to the Journal and that their work will be respected and regarded with the other work submitted. ALARA has offered an opportunity for Indigenous people to speak with an Indigenous voice through the works and to offer critique from an Indigenous worldview. In this, the Indigenous contributions add to the non-Indigenous contributions in a dance floor of dialogue with each other. It has resulted in a rich and valuable edition of the Journal and demonstrates that we can work together in ways in which we unlearn old behaviours, and work towards self-reflection, self-awareness and personal and collective engagement.

Conclusion

Sometimes it is easy to think it would be 'nice' and 'lovely' for Indigenous and non-Indigenous people to all 'get along' and to 'work together'. But if Settler-Indigenous relations are not considered and challenged and instead are re-instated through the warm and fuzzy engagement, then Indigenous peoples are still being marginalised, denigrated and exploited. Non-Indigenous people are also disadvantaged in this process taking on dysfunctional positions that inevitably lead to difficult situations. In this way the on-going oppression, systemic marginalisation and institutional privilege continues to subjugate Indigenous peoples. We as Indigenous peoples need more than 'good intentions', 'best intentions', 'benevolence' and 'goodwill' (Riggs 2004). It is the responsibility of non-Indigenous people to investigate their own subjectivities and their own societal, political and cultural positioning in order to fully engage with Indigenous people (MacIntosh 1998; Nicoll 2004a; 2004b). It is also the responsibility of Indigenous people to do their work too in looking how we too are a product of the colonial project (Rigney 1999; Sherwood 2009; Sherwood

et.al 2011; Smith 1999). Failure to do so, will maintain the countervailing voices of power and privilege between Settler-Indigenous peoples.

This edition of the ALAR *Action research action learning journal* aims to capture some of the current dilemmas and solutions actions researchers experience in the decolonising space. This collection of papers demonstrates that researchers are not only undertaking action research with and within Indigenous and non-Indigenous contexts, but that they are doing so in exciting and dynamic ways across a diversity of situations. We think that the papers highlight and showcase how Indigenous and non-Indigenous individuals and groups undertake this process through their action research practice. We encourage readers to think about how the learnings from this special edition can be translated into action research practice.

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Engaging the practice of Indigenous yarning in Action Research

Bronwyn Fredericks,
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Robert Hall

Abstract

This paper discusses the technique of 'yarning' as an action research process relevant for policy development work with Aboriginal peoples. Through a case study of an Aboriginal community-based smoking project in the Australian State of Victoria, the paper demonstrates how the Aboriginal concept of 'yarning' can be used to empower people to create policy change that not only impacts on their own health, but also impacts on the health of others and the Aboriginal organisation for which they work. The paper presents yarning within the context of models of empowerment and a methodological approach of participatory action research. The method is based on respect and inclusivity, with the final policy developed by staff for staff. Yarning is likely to be successful for action researchers working within a variety of Indigenous contexts.

Introduction

The terms 'yarn' and 'yarning' are used by Aboriginal peoples in everyday language. Bessarab and Ng'andu (2010) describe yarning as 'an Indigenous cultural form of conversation' (p. 37). Yarning is more than just a light exchange of words and pleasantries in casual conversation. A yarn is both a process and an exchange; it encompasses elements of respect, protocol and engagement in individuals' relationships with each other. Yarning establishes relationality and determines accountability (Martin, 2008).

Yarning can take a variety of forms. Bessarab and Ng'andu (2010, pp.40-41) describe four types of yarning: social yarning, therapeutic yarning, research topic yarning, and collaborative yarning. Research topic yarning involves a process whereby:

... both the researcher and participant journey together visiting places and topics of interest relevant to the research study. Yarning is a process that requires the researcher to develop and build a relationship that is accountable to Indigenous people participating in the research (Bessarab & Ng'andu, 2010, 38).

Yarning is a valuable research tool for Aboriginal people within an Aboriginal organisation, because it allows for a relaxed and familiar communication process within a known and culturally safe environment. It can be used to embed cultural security within the research process, therefore enabling participation of and by Indigenous people. Moreover, yarning allows for honesty and openness to unfold through the relationships that are developed and renewed as the yarn progresses. Yarning enables Indigenous people to talk freely about their experiences, thoughts and ideas, and 'enables the researcher to explore the topic in more depth, which results in information emerging that more formal research processes may not facilitate' (Bessarab & Ng'andu 2010, p47).

As a research tool, yarning is supportive and facilitative of both Indigenous ways of working (Martin, 2008; Moreton-Robinson, 2000; Tuhiwai Smith, 1999) and knowledge sharing (Martin, 2008; Nakata, 1997; 1998; Tuhiwai Smith, 1999). It is a research strategy that assists in decolonising, re-positioning and supporting Indigenous knowledges and research methods (Rigney, 2001; Tuhiwai Smith, 1999; Warrior, 1999). It can be used as an 'Indigenist methodology', as a 'step toward assisting Indigenous theorists and practitioners to determine what might be an appropriate response to de-legitimise racist oppression in research and shift to a more empowering and self-determining outcome' (Rigney, 1999, p.110).

In this paper, we discuss and reflect on yarning as a participatory action research process within an Aboriginal community-based smoking cessation and reduction project at the Victorian Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Organisation (VACCHO). We seek to demonstrate how the Aboriginal concept of yarning can be used as a research and development tool to empower Aboriginal people to create a smoke-free policy that influences their own health, the health of others and the organisation. The yarning action

research process used in this project was part of a framework based on principles of empowerment, respect and inclusivity, rather than being based on hierarchy. We suggest that the processes employed within our study might be of interest to other Indigenous action researchers.

Empowerment and participatory action research

We position yarning as a participatory action research method working within a research philosophy of empowerment. Wallerstein and Bernstein (1988) draw on the work of Frère (1970) to explore empowerment within the context of community development and consider how it can be applied to health education. They define empowerment as:

... a social action process that promotes participation of people, organisations, and communities in gaining control over their lives in their community and larger society. With this perspective, empowerment is not characterised as achieving power to dominate others, but rather to act with others to effect change (Wallerstein & Bernstein, 1988, p. 380).

Wallerstein (1992, p.198) adds that this process of social action is about working 'towards the goals of individual and community control, political efficacy, improved quality of community life, and social justice'. She argues that empowerment is an important promoter of health and that powerlessness, or lack of control over destiny, is a broad-based risk factor for disease, and therefore ill-health (Ibid, pp. 197-205). It is vital for people working within health environments to understand the role that powerlessness and power relations have in Aboriginal people's lives and that empowerment approaches are, therefore, vital in achieving outcomes at the psychological, organisational and community levels (Wallerstein, 2006). Frère (1970) proposes that becoming 'critically conscious' is the first step in the process of empowerment. In this way, people can see the causes of their problems and how they are rooted within the structures in which they daily live. Empowerment becomes a vehicle for people to challenge themselves, question their own internalised powerlessness, and develop opportunities to gain a sense of control within their lives (including the environments in which they live and work).

People cannot empower others in the sense of 'do to', 'do to others', 'do for', or 'give'. As Labonte (1989) notes, people can only empower themselves (p. 87). Throughout his work, Labonte describes the processes of building empowerment, and the ways in which organisations, specifically health and well-being organisations, can work in ways that are more empowering (1986; 1989; 1991a; 1991b). Labonte's works reinforce that empowerment is the result of self-awareness, self-growth and resources, not the result of the services provided. This explains why there can exist so many services for Aboriginal people, so many programs that state they 'aim' to improve health status 'for' Aboriginal people, and so many specific government programs 'for' Aboriginal people, and yet, the health, social and economic status of

Aboriginal peoples remains fairly much the same. Policy decisions and funding cannot just be based on health strategies that don't explore or address the systems and theories that keep us in 'our place'.

Models of empowerment

Wallerstein's (1992) Empowerment Education Model provides a useful frame of reference. Her model advocates for an approach that engages 'people through a group dialogue process in identifying their problems; in critically assessing the social, historical, and cultural roots of their problems; and in developing action strategies to change their personal and social lives' (Ibid, p. 203). She suggests that others may call this approach 'problem-posing', 'transformational', 'libratory', 'and democratic 'or' civic competence' (p. 203). This links well with Frère's (1970) use of the term 'liberation' in his highly successful literacy programs; he makes it evident that the purpose of education should be human liberation and empowerment.

The first step in the empowerment model, as put forward by Frère and re-told by Wallerstein (1992) is 'listening' (Ibid, p. 203). Listening is an active process of attending to 'people's life experiences and making participants into co-investigators of their shared problems in their community' (Wallerstein, 1992, p.203). She explains that this involves a continued participatory process, which may bring to the surface issues or experiences of emotional and social significance.

The model's second step is developing a 'dialogue' around the issues that were brought up during the listening phase. The dialogue becomes a place of critical thinking, and analysis takes place as to the 'root causes of one's situation in society' including the 'society, cultural, and historical context of personal lives' (ibid, p.204). The critical thinking then turns into strategising for individual and social action, in a process that has the capacity to unite people as members of a group or community in working towards the changes articulated from the participants.

The third step in the model is called the 'educational dialogical approach', which requires the facilitator to incorporate people's experiences and pose questions that draw out the experiences into an analysis and an understanding of people's roles (including roles that will be challenged) (Ibid, p.204). Any actions or challenges should be determined by the participants themselves, as part of the process.

In reflecting on her own work and the work of Labonte (1997; 1989), Wallerstein explains that:

Empowerment is an action-oriented concept with a focus on the removal of formal and informal barriers, and on transforming power relations between communities and institutions and government. It is based on an assumption of community cultural assets that can be strengthened through dialogue and action ... and focuses on power relations and intervention strategies. Empowerment includes both processes and outcomes with empowerment of marginalised people as an important outcome in its own right, and also an intermediate

outcome in the pathway to reducing health disparities and social exclusion (Wallerstein 2006, p.18).

Placing empowerment within participatory action research

Empowerment processes and models sit comfortably within the framework of participatory action research. This approach is particularly valuable within the context of research with and for Aboriginal communities. One of the more important statements made in relation to participatory action research and Aboriginal peoples was contained in *The Royal Commission into Deaths in Custody Report* (RCIADIC, 1991) in the form of recommendation number 330:

Research into patterns, causes and consequences of Aboriginal [problems] should not be conducted for its own sake. Such research is only justified if it is accepted by Aboriginal people as necessary and as being implemented appropriately. Action research of the type that produces solutions to problems is likely to be seen by Aboriginal people as being most appropriate (RCIADIC, 1991, Recommendation no. 330).

It also recommended that:

Where research is commissioned or funded, a condition of the research being undertaken should be the active involvement of Aboriginal people in the area which is the subject of the research, the communication of research findings across a wide cross-section of the Aboriginal community in an easily understandable form, and the formulation of proposals for further action by the Aboriginal community and local Aboriginal organisations (RCIADIC, 1991, Recommendation no. 320).

While *The Royal Commission into Deaths in Custody Report* is some 20 years old, time does not minimise the recommendations or the words it contains.

Participatory action research is still a vital methodology to use with Aboriginal peoples and within Aboriginal organisations and communities. It is a research tool that supports Aboriginal peoples to counter colonialism and speak back to the knowledges that have been formed around what is perceived as Indigenous positionings within Western worldviews (Nakata, 1998, p.4; Rigney, 1999). This includes knowledge that has been generated about Indigenous positionings across all disciplines, including health.

Participatory action research is a way to encompass Aboriginal ways of knowing, being and doing (Martin, 2008). It provides a process of empowerment (Frère, 1970; Labonte, 1997; Wallerstein, 2006) and is a way to bring about change in individuals, organisations and communities (Michell, 2009; Kenny, 2000; Reason & Bradbury, 2001).

Aboriginal people cannot and will not become empowered if Aboriginal people continue to be spoken to, spoken for and spoken about. It is only through Aboriginal people's voices being heard and being enacted that Aboriginal people will become empowered to bring about change.

Participatory action research, operating within the context of empowerment models and drawing on methods such as yarning, offer great potential for influencing this change.

Bringing theory into practice

Yarning was used as a research and development tool within a smoking project at the Victorian Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Organisation (VACCHO).

VACCHO is the peak body for Aboriginal health in the Australian State of Victoria, representing 24 Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Organisations (ACCHOs). VACCHO's role is to build the capacity of its membership and to advocate for issues on their behalf. In 2008 VACCHO began a three-year tobacco project titled *Goreen Narrkwarren Ngrn-toura – Healthy Family Air*. This project aimed to:

- Develop, implement and evaluate a multifaceted holistic intervention aimed to reduce smoking amongst Aboriginal women during pregnancy and amongst carers of young children
- Increase the understanding and knowledge of how to best support smoking cessation amongst Aboriginal women during pregnancy and amongst carers of young children.

The project has three key parts: Organisational Development, Training, and Community Development. As part of the Organisational Development phase, smoking policies were developed or redeveloped for VACCHO and the ACCHOs. Strong policy implementation is vital to supporting health promotion and cessation activities at both VACCHO and the ACCHOs.

Smoking in Indigenous communities and VACCHO

In Australia, cigarette smoking is responsible for at least 20% of all deaths in Aboriginal communities (CETIC, 2008). In addition, smoking is directly responsible for 12.1% of the burden of disease experienced by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples (Vos, Barker, Stanley & Lopez, 2007).

Data from the 2002 National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Social Survey indicates that 53.5% of Aboriginal Victorians smoke (Thomas, Briggs & Anderson, 2008). Smoking doesn't just impact on Aboriginal people's health; it also adds financial stress to their lives (Briggs, Londorff & Ivers, 2003).

Smoking significantly impacts on the strength of communities and the transfer of cultural heritage to future generations. Scores of Aboriginal people die from smoking-related illnesses before they have passed on their knowledge, skills and experiences.

Smoking is an issue for staff at VACCHO and throughout the ACCHOs. In the past, staff members have struggled to effectively implement smoking policies. Smoking tobacco has become a contemporary social norm, and it is seen as a way of maintaining relationships through people smoking together. A large number of health workers and other staff members in the ACCHOs smoke. Health workers, who carry out a substantial health promotion role with Aboriginal communities and who smoke themselves, are also community members. Aboriginal smokers are also family members of other

Aboriginal people, including health workers. Many staff members at VACCHO were also part of this complex web of relationship realities.

The start of the yarning

Project staff felt that extensive consultation was the key to developing a successful smoke-free policy for VACCHO. The consultation needed to be inclusive and the smoking policy needed to develop from the ground up, rather than be a directive from senior management and the Board.

In the first cycle of the participatory action research process, meetings – called ‘yarns’ – were held with staff. They were led by an external facilitator and the coordinator of *Goreen Narrkwarren Ngrn-toura – Healthy Family Air* project. VACCHO’s CEO, who was a strong advocate for developing a VACCHO workplace smoke-free policy, added her support and briefly attended the yarns.

Mutual respect was an essential part of the yarns. All participants had an opportunity to speak, and participants all respectfully listened to one another. Through the listening, each person witnessed the sharing of issues and emotions expressed by other participants. The listening reflected the process explained by Wallerstein (1992) – where listening to each other’s life experiences is the first step towards people becoming co-investigators in the issue at hand (Ibid, p.203).

The project involved three yarns with staff and two yarns with managers, held over a period of four months. The yarns worked towards developing a workplace smoking policy for VACCHO that could be put to the Board for approval. The consultation process involved:

- Yarn one with staff
- Electronic survey for all staff
- Yarn two with staff
- Yarn one with managers
- Yarn three with staff
- Yarn two with managers.

Yarn one (staff)

The first yarn was designed to initiate conversation around smoking and start to understand the attitudes and culture of smoking at VACCHO. It was an opportunity for staff to express their smoking experiences and their personal feelings – including their fears and thoughts about what should be in VACCHO’s smoking policy. Project team members and staff yarned together about smoking in general and smoking in the workplace. All staff members were encouraged to attend, including managers.

Participants in the first yarn agreed that it would be beneficial to conduct an anonymous survey amongst all VACCHO staff. The survey was done electronically and took about 5–7 minutes to complete. Two-thirds of VACCHO staff responded to the survey.

Yarn two (staff)

The second yarn built on the outcomes from the first yarn, and involved a comparison of workplace smoking policies and a discussion of the survey results. Participants talked about what VACCHO's draft policy should contain.

The staff members who attended the second yarn had a variety of smoking backgrounds. Not all had been involved in the first yarn.

Through the yarn, participants worked in a 'dialogue' around the issues connected with smoking in the workplace that had been brought up in the first yarn's listening phase (Wallerstein, 1992, p.204). Participants were also able to engage in critical thinking and analyse the ideas discussed in relation to their workplace and their daily lives.

Staff members were encouraged to participate in developing the policy by suggesting wording, concepts and ideas, and by providing feedback on the policies of other organisations. This yarn was the beginning of staff uniting to work towards changing VACCHO's practices by introducing a smoking policy.

After the second yarn, the project coordinator drafted a policy that was emailed to all staff for feedback. Feedback on the draft policy was then discussed during a yarn with managers. The managers' yarn was brief, as it was an agenda item within the managers' fortnightly meeting rather than a separate meeting. Managers were particularly interested in discussing the language of the survey; language was a concern for them because they would have to implement the policy and they wanted it to be clear for themselves and for staff to reduce the likelihood of misunderstandings. They felt that the language needed to reflect the sentiments expressed in the yarns, be respectful to smokers and non-smokers, be concise and be easy to interpret.

Yarn three (staff)

The policy was amended following the yarn with managers, and was then presented for discussion in the third staff yarn. As with the previous yarns, the staff members who attended this yarn had a variety of smoking backgrounds.

During the yarn, staff expressed some concern about the language used in the smoking policy, and suggested amendments to avoid misunderstandings. They acknowledged that, while VACCHO's draft policy is outside of the comfort zone of smokers, it does not go as far as the policies of either Quit Victoria or The World Health Organisation (WHO does not employ people who smoke).

The amended policy was discussed with managers at a second managers' yarn, where the implementation of the policy was also discussed. Given the different smoking histories of staff and managers at VACCHO, some managers were concerned about how they would implement the policy. The yarn provided managers with an opportunity to discuss, in a safe way, some

of the barriers to implementing the policy. It also allowed for peer-to-peer support and learning between the managers.

In the final yarns, the project coordinator needed to use an 'educational dialogical approach' (Wallerstein, 1992, p.204). This meant that the facilitator and project coordinator incorporated the participants' experiences, the survey results and the draft policy outcomes into their analysis. Moreover, they needed to do this in a way that helped people to understand the process, outcomes and analysis.

Throughout the process, other project team members provided support and input. The final outcome was an organisational smoking policy that was developed by participants themselves and would challenge the organisation as a whole to move to a smoke-free environment. At the conclusion of the process, the final draft policy was handed over to the Board of VACCHO.

Reflection

The Board passed the policy one month after the second managers' yarn. It was implemented two months after the Board's approval. In the two months between policy approval and implementation, the project coordinator prepared for the policy by putting up signs and posters, and making literature available to support people who wanted to quit.

The project team deemed the consultation process a success due to the level of participation, acceptance of the policy and ease of implementation. Some key features of the process encouraged its success:

- The project coordinator worked at VACCHO, which meant that staff could have one-on-one conversations about the policy and express their concerns
- Staff members were encouraged to participate in the policy development. Smokers, in particular, were encouraged to have their say
- Staff members' and everyone's opinions led the yarns and views were equally considered. The facilitators encouraged mutual respect and understanding among staff - smokers and non-smokers alike, and
- The content and wording of the policy came from the staff, not from the facilitators.

Interestingly, managers' concerns about implementation and the possible need for disciplinary action as a result of policy breaches have not been an issue. Due to the high level of staff buy-in, the policy is almost self-monitoring and policing.

The policy was developed to meet the individual needs of VACCHO as an organisation. While the policy may not be considered best practice in broader health forums (particularly in the context of QUIT Victoria or the WHO), it can be considered best practice for VACCHO right now. The organisation will review the policy periodically, and may become more aligned with QUIT Victoria and the WHO in time, as needs within the organisation change.

All research processes involve challenges, and these yarns were no exception. Staff availability was a problem, and it was particularly difficult for managers to attend the yarns. In some yarns, there was little participation from smokers.

Staff members were busy with their core VACCHO work, and found it difficult to find time for this project. Some of these issues were addressed by emailing the policy to all staff for comment. Staff members were invited to either email a response or to speak directly to the project coordinator. The survey was another way of engaging with all staff in a safe way while minimising the time taken away from their other work. The project coordinator also spoke individually to a number of staff who were smokers and who had not participated in the yarns.

Conclusion

Yarning is a tool and a process that can be used within participatory action research. As the case study of the *Goreen Narrkwarren Ngrn-toura – Healthy Family Air* project at VACCHO shows, the Aboriginal concept of yarning can be used to empower people to create policy change. In this case, the policy change not only influences their individual health, but also the health of others and the Aboriginal organisation for which they work.

Yarning techniques, coupled with empowerment strategies, can be adopted in part to suit Aboriginal liberation struggles for broader empowerment, self-determination, self-management and sovereignty. Furthermore, they can be adapted to work within smaller contexts of policy formation, program development, intervention and research activities (Fredericks, 2008; Tsey & Every, 2000). Through techniques such as yarning, it is possible to shift the way we research and the way we work in health towards forming relationships that are based on equal and respectful partnerships, support, cooperation and respect for us as Aboriginal peoples.

In conducting this work, we drew on a variety of processes within the action research framework to foster confidence building, education and true inclusion without tokenism to develop a smoke-free organisational policy. Of course, each organisation will have a different set of dynamics and a different set of needs and concerns. The yarning methods are not limited by the needs of organisations, nor restricted to specific policies such as smoking. Yarning may also be a useful tool in developing other policies that have the potential to be sensitive in the workplace or with groups of Indigenous people.

Acknowledgements

The authors acknowledge the staff of the Victorian Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Organisation (VACCHO) for their participation in the work discussed and in the development of their smoke-free policy; Summer Finlay (Project Coordinator) and Gillian Fletcher (External Facilitator) for their roles in the yarn process; and the Management, CEO and Board of VACCHO for their support and commitment to ongoing Aboriginal empowerment and improved health and wellbeing. We acknowledge that the *Goreen Narrkwarren*

Ngrn-toura – Healthy Family Air: Reducing smoking amongst pregnant Aboriginal women in Victoria project is funded by the former Victorian Department of Human Services (now the Department of Health).

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As is evident, we have a diverse team. We also have new members of the team who add to the collective skills, abilities and experience. They are: Bradley Brown, Kulan Barney and Amelia Maxwell who are all based at VACCHO.

Research as intervention: Engaging silenced voices

Michael Wright

Abstract

The emergence of Indigenous researchers into the public health research sector presents a challenge to what have traditionally been Western-based research approaches and practices. Among these challenges are those owed to the distinctive methodologies and different epistemologies, ways of knowing or world-view that regularly characterise members of these distinctive cultural groups.

Globally, there are many distinct Indigenous epistemologies, but for the purposes of this paper I focus on Australian Indigenous world-views, and the ways that these have been shaped by Colonial practices.

By exploring the concept of Indigenous world-views, and how power imbalances occur between these and more culturally mainstream alternatives, attention will be directed to how such imbalances continue to present major challenges for public health researchers. I will argue that most, if not all, research is a form of intervention. Research as intervention needs to be transformational by both engaging and empowering the 'silenced' voices.

Research as intervention: Engaging silenced voices

If you have come to help me, you are wasting your time, but if you have come because your liberation is bound up with mine, let's work together (Lilla Watson 1992).

Australian Indigenous¹ educator and activist Lilla Watson presents this challenge to those from the cultural mainstream who are involved in Indigenous people's struggle for liberation. I have written this paper as an Indigenous Australian and public health researcher. It is very clear among those of us who are Indigenous that there is still much work to be done to correct the misunderstandings and imbalance that persist in research currently being conducted by non-Indigenous people. Allen Kelleher (1996) asks of researchers who are intending to undertake research into health care, whether they have seriously examined why they have chosen their research topic. I would go further and ask the following four questions of researchers intending to conduct research with Indigenous people:

- Have they explored whether the research will be of benefit to the Indigenous community participating in their study
- What mechanisms will they put in place to ensure that their study will do no harm and will be conducted ethically
- Have they considered how they will engage with the community to ensure that their research practices empower, as oppose to silence and oppress, and
- What will they do to ensure that the dissemination of the findings from the study is done in a culturally safe and respectful manner?

All research methodologies, whether qualitative or quantitative, arise out of often unrecognised and unspoken epistemological commitments. The impact of colonisation in Australia has had a powerful influence on the knowledge systems within Indigenous culture. I agree with Nakata (1998) and Rigney (2001) that this has in effect both been used to oppress Indigenous people and de-legitimise Indigenous ontology and epistemology. What especially marks research by Indigenous investigators (and the extent to which they take this standpoint is variable) is the operation of a unique Indigenous epistemology that underpins an Indigenous research framework (Denzin & Lincoln, 2008). As an Indigenous researcher I was determined to adopt research methods that would not further disadvantage and oppress Indigenous people. There have been challenges because as an Indigenous researcher I am considered an insider, and often tested because of my cultural and familial responsibilities (Tuhiwai Smith, 2003). Therefore, as an Indigenous researcher, which I discuss later in the paper, I have generally approached research in ways that are different to my non-Indigenous colleagues.

What is being presented here is not necessarily new knowledge. I wish to acknowledge the many Indigenous and non-Indigenous scholars who have been working on the development of an Indigenous standpoint theory (e.g. Rigney, 1997, 2001; Nakata, 1998; Moreton-Robinson, 2000; Henry, Dunbar, Arnott, Scrimgeour, Mathews, Murakami-Gold, Chamberlain, 2002; Tuhiwai

¹ The term 'Indigenous' has been used in this article to refer both to the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people of Australia as well as other Indigenous groups residing in other parts of the world. The author acknowledges that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people may identify with their local clans or group name and means no disrespect in using the collective term Indigenous.

Smith, 2003; Foley, 2003; Foley & Valenzuela, 2005; Bishop, 2005; Battiste, 2008, Denzin, Lincoln & Smith, 2008). Their work has provided much of the inspiration and foundations on which this article is built. I am grateful for their efforts and insights in establishing my own path.

Of the many articles and other related ethics documents written on public health research with Indigenous Australians, most have focused on the ethics of such research practice (Eades & Read, 1999; Humphery, 2001; NHMRC 2002, 2003 & 2006; Kowal, Anderson & Baille, 2005; Thomas & Anderson, 2006). By contrast, this article focuses on identifying research methodologies that are effective and culturally safe. In so doing it is hoped that these efforts will make a new contribution to the growing body of work on Indigenous research.

This paper is structured around four themes. The first of these compares the standpoints of Indigenous research and related forms of 'participatory action research'. The second consists of a demonstration, illustrated by my own research practice, that the combination of an Indigenous research framework and participatory action research are effective and safe methods for doing research with Indigenous people. Third, an account will be made of the critical roles of advocacy and activism among researchers working with disenfranchised groups. Fourth, and finally, because I propose that all research is a form of intervention, I have offered up recommendations that I believe will assist researchers in ensuring their research practice is culturally safe, responsive and respectful when working with Indigenous people.

Insiders or outsiders: Learning from an Indigenous research and participatory action research

The Maori academic Linda Tuhiwai Smith reminds us that 'scientific research is implicated in the worst excesses of colonialism [and therefore] remains a powerful remembered history for many of the colonised peoples' (2003, p.1). Both research approaches, Indigenous research and participatory action research, have much in common, as they are both committed to redressing power imbalances by empowering individuals to seek and demand change. Despite these similarities, there are never-the-less, philosophical differences between both these approaches. Most of these disparities lie with the research process and with the broader aspirations regarding research outcomes. Those Indigenous researchers who use an Indigenous research framework do so with a serious purpose. Indigenous researchers, operating within an Indigenous research framework, have an intimate understanding that research outcomes are not limited to one single issue. As researchers their intent is twofold; the first is to incorporate Indigenous knowledge in the research process and second to use research so as to mitigate the damaging effects of colonisation. Research outcomes necessarily have wider

implications because they optimally contribute to the dismantling of the broader structures of colonisation.

Those operating within an Indigenous research framework acknowledge the need to operate within a cultural framework that recognises and enhances cultural protocols. If not they risk, not only their careers, but more importantly their reputations in their community. By using an Indigenous research framework there is an understanding that they will need to both heal and transform the damage of the official policies of colonisation whose sole purpose was to undermine and demean Indigenous knowledge and culture (Scott, 1990; Bishop, 2005). Those who use an Indigenous research framework know that they will need to both highlight and work for the broader acceptance of the positive qualities of Indigenous knowledge and culture (Chandler, 1998). The focus on transforming the effects of colonisation is the significant difference between both research frameworks.

Indigenous research standpoint

Within an Indigenous context, where family, community obligations and commitments are considered core values, the concepts of individualism and objectivity can seem incongruous (Rigney, 1997; Moreton-Robinson, 2000; Tuhiwai Smith, 2003; Watson, 2004). Indigenous researchers often struggle with the traditional Western approach to research precisely because it privileges individualism and objectivity, and is consequently seen as counter-intuitive in the context of research with and by Indigenous people (Tuhiwai Smith, 2003; Foley, 2003; Dudgeon, 2008, Bessarab, 2010).

Hidden colonising practices are still very common in most research methods. The noted academic bell hooks (1990) especially questions the ethics of research process requiring engagements with Indigenous participants. In particular, she questions the commitment of non-Indigenous scholars who identify themselves as 'critical' researchers in changing the system that continues to privilege non-Indigenous people. It could be argued that the colonising process of subjugation and disenfranchisement continues in the very process of research itself. Too often, the non-Indigenous researcher appropriates the cultural knowledge and experiences of their Indigenous participants, and then, using the theoretical frameworks of Western knowledge, reinterprets those experiences and presents it as their own. Colonising Indigenous knowledge continues, under such guises, as a legitimate way of building academic knowledge. hooks describes eloquently the colonising process of research, between researcher and participant:

No need to hear your voice when I can talk about you better than you can speak about yourself. No need to hear your voice. Only tell me about your pain. I want to know your story. And then I will tell it back to you in a new way. Tell it back to you in such a way that it has become mine, my own. Re-writing you I write myself anew. I am still author, authority. I am still colonizer the speaking subject and you are now at the center of my talk, (1990, p. 343).

A major dilemma for Indigenous researchers undertaking research is how not to commit the same act of appropriation of cultural knowledge through the collection of stories that either misrepresent, or, worse still, make public what should not be made public. As noted by hooks (1990), too often participants, regardless of their relationship with the researcher, continue to be held in a position of subordination and control. Control in the research context can be subtle and not easily identifiable. As participants are often more than willing to give over their stories without questioning how the stories will be used. Researchers are not so transparent with their own intentions, as they do not always provide the necessary information. As Weseen and Wong state 'We ask [as researchers] for revelations from others, but reveal little or nothing of ourselves; we make others vulnerable, but we ourselves remain invulnerable' (2000, p.34). Too often participants are not informed of the findings before they are published, or even given the courtesy of a follow-up visit by a researcher. Central to an Indigenous research approach is an understanding of the critical importance of not compromising the network of relationships that bind communities. Indigenous researchers realise it would be both disrespectful and indeed foolish to risk those relationships.

An Indigenous research standpoint: Relationships and collectivity

As an Indigenous researcher I found it particularly challenging in selecting a research method that would allow me to be culturally reflexive in my work with my community. It was challenging as I was engaged in health research where the conventional view held by the academy is that a research methodology should follow strict guidelines that ensures 'objectivity' so as to reduce either researcher or participant bias. The objective rule in positivist research rests upon its so-called immutable laws of duality, meaning that the researcher is required to be an observer only and to position him/herself outside of the research process, and definitely, not to be influenced by what is happening in the study (Guba & Lincoln, 1989).

Research objectivity according to most health researchers is not only essential, but also the correct method for doing research. I, as an Indigenous researcher, do not agree with this position for in my view adopting the position of 'objectivity' is at best impractical, or at worst disingenuous. The notion of 'objectivity' in an Indigenous context is impractical given the importance of cultural obligations and commitments that are inherent in Indigenous settings (Rigney, 1997; Moreton-Robinson, 2000; Tuhiwai Smith, 2003). I agree with Weseen and Wong (2000, p. 34) who state '...researchers who opt to be objective in their approach do so at some risk for they "hide behind the cloak of neutrality"'.

An Indigenous world-view and experience is about shared obligations and commitments, with the Indigenous researcher being an integral part of the web of community relationships. Indigenous researchers commonly understand and accept the cultural responsibilities that are inherent in their

role as researchers (Anderson, 1996; Rigney, 1997; Moreton-Robinson, 2000; Smith, 2003; Foley, 2003). Tuhiwai Smith states, "Indigenous methodologies tend to approach cultural protocols, values and behaviours as an integral part of our methodology" (2003, p.15). An Indigenous research framework is further based on values meant to enhance and heal community (Foley, 2003; Dudgeon, 2008; Bessarab, 2010) values that are often in conflict with traditional Western research approaches, particularly health research that insists upon the 'expert' standpoint of objectivity and individualism as 'gold standards' (Maiter, Simich, Jacobson & Wise, 2008; Tuck, 2009). As Eve Tuck, an Indigenous researcher, further emphasises the concept of 'collectivity' is a feature of Indigenous communities that 'begins with the group, and stretches to include, celebrate and support the diversity of its members' (2009, p.62). The relational approach in Indigenous research is, then the recognition of the importance of family, community and connection to country as places that provide sustenance, a sense of identity and meaning. Indigenous researchers implement a relational approach to research because it is a key element of their own Indigenous world-view. Brown states the core collectivist values in Indigenous society are law, family, country and caring (Brown, 2009). Indigenous scholars conducting research in their own communities understand that research should be part of the healing process. They also understand that they have a responsibility to use research as an intervention that will challenge and dismantle structures that oppress and cause ill-health (Henry et al, 2002; Tuck, 2009).

An Indigenous research standpoint: Reciprocity and trust

Trust between the researcher and research participant/s is essential if research is to be part of the healing process. Unless there is trust, any research undertaken will fail because it is unlikely that either the data/information that is sought, or the context through which it needs to be understood, will be forthcoming or reliable.

Those holding to an Indigenous research standpoint are culturally prepared to understand the complexity of the concept of 'collectivity' and its characteristics of reciprocity and trust (Kirkness & Barnhardt, 1991).

Reciprocity in the research process is also a necessary condition for developing trust (Maiter et al, 2008). As Bishop states,

Reciprocity in indigenous research, however, is not just a political understanding, an individual act, or a matter of refining and/or challenging the paradigms within which researchers work. Instead, every worldview within which the researcher becomes immersed holds the key to knowing (2005, p.124).

Reciprocal responsibilities place relationships at the core of family and community life. Reciprocity in Indigenous research is therefore important because it enhances relationships, and it is critical for the strong bonding, nurturing and sustaining of relationships within families and communities (Bishop, 2005; Brown, 2009).

Trust is the key for reciprocity and consensus to occur in the research process. Once trust is developed then there is a greater likelihood of obtaining worthwhile information about, for example, health status, risk factors, beliefs and other understandings that may explain health behaviour. Without reciprocity and trust, any information gathered could be at best incomplete and at worst, incorrect. We see evidence of this in the efforts of certain public health services that are based on Western world-views – efforts that fail to engage with or succeed in building trust with Indigenous people.

Participatory action research standpoint

It is widely accepted that social researchers who use participatory action research approaches are committed to redressing social inequalities. Participatory action research can trace its theoretical beginnings to the Frankfurt School of critical theory. Critical theory provides the lens to an understanding for the important questions of power and exploitation (Lather, 1991). Participatory action research is the praxis² of critical theory. Theory in conjunction with research is used 'to interpret or illuminate a social action' (Madison, 2005). The relationship between critical theory and participatory action research is fundamental, then, because theory provides the necessary framework for analysis, ethics and practice performance (Ibid, 2005). Participatory action research is praxis-based, predicated upon action-reflection-action sequences in which control of the research process is given over to the participants. Using both the action orientation of praxis-based and cultural frameworks can serve as the catalyst for both individual and community transformations (Wallerstein & Sanchez-Merki, 1994; Bishop, 2005; Fine & Weis, 2005; Battiste, 2008).

Participatory action research: Redressing social inequities

Although addressing social inequities is important, it is not enough, because research with Indigenous people demands much more. Non-Indigenous researchers engaged in participatory action research need to recognise their more privileged positions in Western societies – in particular those societies where non-Indigenous people have benefited because of colonisation. Researchers are an influential group who can and do play a major role in the lives of the participants. If non-Indigenous researchers do not have any understanding of their privileged positions and of the oppression of Indigenous people because of colonisation, then they are at risk of reinforcing and legitimising the structures of colonisation that have oppressed Indigenous people.

² Praxis, according to Macey is 'The Greek word meaning 'doing' used as a synonym for purposeful human activity' (2000, p.311).

I hasten to add that I am not suggesting that non-Indigenous researchers are incapable of working with Indigenous people, but I am convinced that they will definitely need to be prepared to learn and change and at least have an understanding of their privileged positions and cultural biases. As Nina Wallerstein, states researchers 'need to understand our personal biographies of race, educational or social status, gender and other identities; how these characteristics inform our ability to speak and interpret the world and how they inform power dynamics within the research relationship itself' (1999, p.49).

Indigenous research and participatory action research: Working together

Indigenous scholars are constantly searching for research practices that are culturally safe for working with their communities (Coffin, 2007). In my view participatory action research does have a natural fit for Indigenous researchers. Participatory action research is underpinned by the social theory, critical inquiry, which works from the premise of social justice, human rights and personal and community liberation. They are unfettered by an ideology that seeks to constrain, as Foley (2003, p. 45) notes, they are 'guided by a vision that there is more than just one worldview and interpretation'.

Indigenous research and participatory action research can work together if there is the recognition that the Indigenous world-view is different. It is different because, as stated previously, Indigenous researchers are mostly preoccupied with decolonisation and the legitimacy of Indigenous knowledge (Rigney, 1997; Moreton-Robinson, 2000; Tuhiwai Smith, 2003; Foley, 2003; Dudgeon, 2008; Tuck, 2009). Indigenous research is more than just a research activity; it is more because it offers Indigenous researchers the opportunity to begin the process of decolonising their efforts by engaging in a research practice which acknowledges that Indigenous people have experienced the oppression of colonisation, and that to be effective Indigenous research needs to be both an act of defiance and an act of healing.

It is my belief that Indigenous populations continue to be at risk from researchers who fail to recognise that research should be both an intervention and a transformative experience (Lather, 1991). There are, unfortunately, still many researchers who view advocacy research as contradictory (still wedded to the view that research is an objective activity) and as result, they are limited in their ability to recognise 'the interdependence of method, theory and values' (Lather, 1991, p.14). Consequently non-Indigenous researchers have a responsibility firstly to do no harm, and secondly to ensure the research they are conducting is transformative in ways that shape policy and practice and improve the health and wellbeing of those most vulnerable.

Knocking at the door: Learning from an Indigenous research approach

In exploring the concept of an Indigenous research framework I will use as an example of research methods used for my PhD thesis *Out of the Blue. Giving and receiving care: Aboriginal experiences of care-giving in the context of mental illness* (Wright, 2009), and will provide an illustrative commentary of the process.

There is limited information about the incidence and prevalence of serious mental illness in the Indigenous Australian community (Swan & Raphael, 1995; Henderson, Andrews & Hall, 2000). But what is evident is that there are major concerns in Indigenous communities about the lack of support for Indigenous families living with a serious mental illness (Zubrick et al, 2005). The lack of research-based knowledge about the experience of providing care for Indigenous people living with a serious mental illness is what motivated this study. The aims of the study were to gain a clearer understanding of the issues that impact on the quality of mental health care for Indigenous people. The research questions posed centred on how Indigenous people living with a serious mental illness interpret the issues, problems or concerns surrounding care-giving; how mental health services can be more effective in supporting and enhancing care-giving; and how wider socio-political implications of such research, and more particularly, how racism affects the lives of Indigenous people living with a serious mental illness?

The target populations for the study consisted of both Indigenous Australians living with a serious mental illness and also their care-givers. The participants were recruited from across the Perth region in Western Australia. A key criterion for selection into the study was that the person living with a serious mental illness had to be Indigenous. Care-givers could either be Indigenous or non-Indigenous.

The study was carried out using an 'Indigenous research framework', an approach motivated and inspired by Indigenous colleagues, personal experiences and writings by Indigenous scholars (Smith, 2003; Rigney, 1997; Moreton-Robinson, 2000; Watson, 2004), and by contributors to the literature on both 'participatory action research' (Stringer, 1996; Wallerstein, 1999; Pyett, 2002; Fine & Weis, 2005), and 'emancipatory research' (Lather, 1991; Frère, 1983; Wallerstein & Sanchez-Merki, 1994).

As a structure for this section I will use the following questions posed in the introduction as a way of framing the research process that was carried out:

- Was the community informed and consulted on the benefits of the study?
 - What mechanisms were used to ensure that the study was conducted ethically?
- And
- What was done to ensure that the dissemination of the findings from the study was done in a respectful manner?

Research framework: Consultations and governance

There were five key phases in my study. The first of these phases involved informing and consulting with the community on the benefits of the study. I began this process twelve-months prior to beginning the data gathering process. I had discussions with Aboriginal health workers, Aboriginal community members and mental health practitioners about the viability of this type of study. I had worked for four years as the manager of an Aboriginal mental health service within the *Derbarl Yerrigan Health Service*, the local Aboriginal community controlled health service in Perth. Due to my previous work experience and consultations with the community I had confidence that the proposed study was acceptable to the community. The consultative phase continued into the second phase with the establishment of a 'Cultural Governance Framework' for the study that involved the formation of a *Study Reference Group*. The Aboriginal population in the region where the study was conducted is relatively small, so being Indigenous and having 'insider' knowledge of the community offered a special challenge as boundaries are easily blurred (Dickson-Swift et al, 2006). The involvement of the *Study Reference Group* was critical as its members were able to provide cultural advice on cultural and community matters that occurred during the study without compromising confidentiality. The Indigenous people on the *Study Reference Group* were recognised as leaders in their respective communities, as well as being acknowledged as competent professionals in the areas of Indigenous health, higher education and welfare by their Indigenous and non- Indigenous peers. This group closely monitored all aspects of the project and was actively involved in the study design, recruitment of participants and provided advice in the ethics process. The members of the Group ensured that the researcher worked with integrity, and they continually assessed and evaluated the cultural aspects of the study.

Research framework: Engagement

The data-gathering phase of the research involved recruiting participants and conducting interviews, which required sensitivity and an adherence to cultural protocols. The process for selecting participants for the study involved a third party introducing the researcher to a prospective participant. The third party was either: a non-Indigenous mental health worker; an Aboriginal health worker; or a family member or a friend. This individual would discuss the study with the likely participant who, if he or she proved interested, would then be introduced to the researcher.

The participation of the Indigenous health workers and non-Indigenous mental health workers assisted the study in three ways. It protected participants from feeling pressured into becoming involved in a research project; it provided a justification for the involvement of the participant's mental health worker or health worker in the study; and, as these health

workers already had a trust relationship with participants, it allowed participants to feel safe in the process. Relationship building and authenticating the suitability of the researcher occurs on two levels: the personal; and the cultural. At the personal relationship level, the prospective participant is able to check out the suitability of the researcher, and at a cultural level, the cultural placing or checking out of a person (if the researcher is Indigenous) occurs in the context of community connections and family. This is an important cultural process in forming and negotiating Indigenous relationships. Acceptance by the community of a research project, and of the researcher, is critical and also essential for the success of any meaningful study with Indigenous people. Trust and reciprocity were taken to be essential in my research process. From the outset I invited participants to be involved in assisting in the design of the study. An example of their willingness to be involved occurred early in the research process. They initiated a change in the study design; it involved the recruitment of participants. Originally I was planning to interview family members who provided care to an Indigenous person living with a serious mental illness. The participants requested that I also interview those who were receiving care. The families involved in the study were very keen that both the story of the person providing care and the story of the person receiving care be heard.

Research framework: Hidden and public transcripts

The fourth phase involved further partnership activities with participants including where possible, a visit to each participant with a transcript of their interview, as well as a two-page summary and critique of the interview for their review. Returning the transcripts to participants provided participants with a deeper understanding of the interview process. The summary of their interview was strengths-based and its purpose was twofold. First, it provided a brief overview of the main points from their interview. Second, it highlighted the strengths of each participant. Each participant had their own unique strengths and I wanted to capture and emphasise each of these in their respective critiques.

The opportunity for the participants to see the transcripts and make comments was part of the transfer of knowledge; a process that was later described by participants as very empowering. Participants also had the opportunity to edit the transcripts, if they felt there was a problem with how they were being represented. This process helped to curb some of the power issues present within the interviewer - interviewee relationship.

This process, as described above, is consistent with Foley's (2003) theory of 'deeper engagement', and Lather's (1991) concept of 'reciprocity' and co-authorship. The process for 'deeper engagement' involves returning with a transcribed copy of the interview to the participants and allowing participants the opportunity to make changes. Lather's concept of reciprocity similarly

includes greater co-authorship and ownership of the research process, with researchers being 'majority shareholders who must justify decisions and give participants a public forum to critique' (Lather, 1991, p. 58).

Where there is a method in the research process that facilitates a feedback loop it allows for a more meaningful relationship between researcher and participant. This process builds mutual trust, respect, reciprocity and relevance into the process. Importantly, it provides for the 'capacity building' of research knowledge in disenfranchised communities and begins the process of educating community members about the benefits of research, thus aiding in the process of decolonisation (Pidgeon, 2002).

In the area of knowledge development and advocacy, the enduring structures of colonisation continue to restrict the ability of Indigenous people to gain legitimacy for their own worldview (Battiste, 2008; Tiffin, 2006; Ashcroft, 2006). Researchers working in a reflexive manner understand the disproportionate power differential that exists between researcher and participant. Allowing documentation to be reviewed 'does not relinquish authorial authority, [but] it does add a great deal of reflexivity to the data collection and representational process' (Foley & Valenzuela, 2005, p. 223). According to Lather, the lack of opportunity for participants to be involved in the analysis of the findings 'makes possible a situation where the entire issue of false consciousness is skirted' (1991, p. 59)

To truly engage with Indigenous people in the research process requires openness and trust. Unfortunately Indigenous people rarely experience openness or trust, either from researchers or the wider society. Consequently there are continuing tensions around the different levels of community engagement. Chavez et al (2008) and others cite James Scott's (1985) 'levels of community dialogue: public discourse, hidden discourse, hidden transcripts, coded defiance, and open defiance' (p. 96). Status and position in society have a huge influence on community dialogue.

Public dialogue is the official and legitimate language of government institutions. Hidden dialogue is the language of the disenfranchised; unfortunately powerful interests in society regard it as both 'inferior' and less reputable. By definition dialogue, when it remains hidden, has its own power. Researchers need to be aware of the different levels of discourse, in particular when working with Indigenous people. Because, as Chavez et al state, 'With internalized oppression, community research partners often self-censor and conform to what is present. They may nod their heads and say yes in resignation when their heart feels no, as a result of having been led to believe that they are "deficient" and dare not challenge' (2008, p.97).

For this reason participants in my study were not only provided with their own interview transcripts, but also with draft copies of the findings chapter. They were able to make comment on this work. There was ongoing negotiation with participants, and, where necessary, changes were made to the text. A truly collaborative research approach like this provides for greater capacity building in Indigenous communities, as suggested above, by

educating community members about the benefits of research, in particular redressing past research processes that have reinforced the structures of colonisation can be a transforming experience (Tuhiwai Smith, 2003; Pidgeon & Cox, 2002).

Research framework: Research as activism

There is now widespread agreement about the need for public health research projects, especially those conducted with Indigenous people, to be more culturally safe (Humphery, 2001; Tuck, 2009). Unfortunately, there continues to be glaring occasions where research is both misguided and harmful. Eve Tuck (2009), an Indigenous woman from Alaska speaks of a common practice she calls “damaged-centered research”. This is the practice, particularly among public health researchers, of representing all Indigenous communities as being both dysfunctional and broken. She challenges non-Indigenous researchers to rethink their research practices, and, in particular the long-term implications of misrepresenting all Indigenous cultures as universally dysfunctional. Russell Bishop (2005) a Maori researcher, also refers to this type of research practice as a form of “pathologising”, which in the context of research, misrepresents Indigenous culture as inferior, uniformly dysfunctional and incapable in coping with the demands of modernity (Bishop, 2005). Such pathologising is degrading, and, when practised by public health researchers (even with ‘good intentions’) the effect is still to demean and debase such targeted cultures.

From a public health perspective, a major issue that has yet to be resolved is how Indigenous people are represented in the interpretation of research findings (Bishop, 2005; Wright, Dudgeon, D'Antione & Wilkes, 2007). Sadly, when the health and wellbeing of Indigenous people are at stake researchers, the media and policy makers are still too often held captive to the practice of ‘social pathologising’. This approach to research is damaging in that it both maligns and reinforces cultural racism. Not surprisingly such ongoing practices have resulted in a failure to improve health and other long term social outcomes. As a result a sense of hopelessness and failure is being experienced not only by Indigenous people but ironically, also by mainstream service providers.

Many, perhaps most, researchers are still more focused on outcomes than on process. Among the problems with this approach is that there are no safeguards against researchers acting independently, and with concern only for the safety of the wider community. The challenge therefore, for public health research, is not only to conduct high quality scientific research but also to engage in a research process that is both transparent and supportive of the long term interests of both the target and wider community (Wallerstein, 1999; Humphery, 2001; National Health and Medical Research Council, 2003; Tuck, 2009).

Recommendations for culturally safe research practice

I have endeavored to present a challenge to researchers, to excite and encourage them to better understand Indigenous world-views and lived experiences. As well, I am hopeful that this will also be a motivation to work in collaboration with Indigenous researchers in areas of public health. In this section, I present the following recommendations to assist researchers who are involved in research with Indigenous people.

Acknowledge that research practice based on Eurocentric principles and values continues the process of colonisation.

Researchers should not participate in research practices that continue to oppress and marginalise anyone, especially Indigenous people. Research methodologies presuppose their own particular epistemology with the result that some research practices are culturally inappropriate when applied to Indigenous people. An Indigenous methodology similarly has its own unique epistemology but one that may embed a variety of non-Indigenous practices that fail to compliment an Indigenous world-view. The academy needs to accept the proposition that there are unique Indigenous epistemologies that underpin Indigenous research practices, and encourage their use.

Acknowledge the impact of racism and exclusion on Indigenous peoples, and examine the practices of exclusion that encourage discrimination and racism in the lives of Indigenous people.

There are three propositions relevant to the effects of racism on Indigenous groups, which must be acknowledged by non-Indigenous researchers in this area. First, for Indigenous Australians (and for many of the worlds Indigenous peoples as well) racism is a part of their daily experience (Larson, 2007). Second, the cumulative effects of continual and repeated experiences of racism are stress, trauma and poor health outcomes (Paradies & Williams, 2008; Paradies, Harris & Anderson, 2008; Larson, Gillies, Howard & Coffin, 2007; Stuber, Meyer & Link, 2008; Krieger, Rowley, Herman, Avery & Phillips 1993; Krieger, 2003; Williams, Neighbors & Jackson, 2008; Jones, 2000). Third, the constant presence of racism in the wider community forms the narrative of 'us versus them', such that racism becomes normalized, and experienced across generations on a community level.

Researchers working with Indigenous groups need to accept that racism is a part of their experience and reflect on what they should do about it in their research practice. For example, one of the participants from my study told me of an experience she had with a mental health worker regarding her son who had a serious mental illness. She had requested on numerous occasions that a mental health worker come to her home to do an assessment. Due to his condition her son would not leave the house to attend a clinic. She was told by the worker that her situation was too difficult and that she would be put in the 'too hard basket'. She was angry, but not surprised because being treated in this way confirmed for her that the mental health system had given up on both her and her son. Her perception of mainstream services was confirmed.

She believed that this was a typical response to Indigenous people, for as an Aboriginal woman her experience of mainstream services was consistent with her view that Indigenous families are seen as being too difficult by mainstream services, and that any intervention provided by the services is unlikely to make any difference. She believed that she was discriminated against because she was Indigenous.

Encourage research practices that are based on Indigenous principles and values. Emphasise and invest in practices that underpin the Indigenous research framework.

The key principles that underpin Indigenous research are reciprocity and reflexivity. Indigenous scholars conducting research in their own communities understand they have a responsibility to use research as part of a healing process, and to challenge and dismantle structures that have oppressed and created situations of power imbalance. Trust between the researcher and participant is essential if research is to both effective and relevant. Unless there is trust any research undertaken with Indigenous people will fail. Reciprocity in the research process is one method for developing trust. The best way for non-Indigenous researchers to do this is to collaborate with Indigenous researchers and use the appropriate methods as described and illustrated above.

Encourage researchers to discontinue the practice of pathologising that occurs through the negative representation of Indigenous people in reports and publications.

An issue of concern for Indigenous researchers is the practice of pathologising whole Indigenous groups. Indigenous researchers Bishop (2005) and Tuck (2009) speak of 'damaged-centred' research. Both researchers discuss the practice of social pathologising by researchers as damaging because they portray Indigenous culture as dysfunctional. Such across the board pathologising is consistently harmful as it deeply misrepresents Indigenous culture. The practice has the twin effects of implying that Indigenous culture as a whole is dysfunctional and not able to cope with the demands of contemporary society, and that Indigenous culture is inferior to that of Western societies. The research practice of presenting findings that exclusively compare Indigenous and non-Indigenous populations is both damaging and harmful. Continuing to represent Indigenous people as 'at risk' is a mis-representation. It ignores the strengths of culture that has enabled Indigenous people to not only survive, but also to thrive despite significant obstacles.

Encourage public health researchers to adopt a more proactive position when conducting research with Indigenous groups.

Researchers can and should play a positive role in the lives of whole communities because they become an integral part of individual people's lives. Researchers need to understand more about their own cultural backgrounds, their own beliefs and ideologies. Researchers working with Indigenous people need to work with an activist focus, prepared to examine,

and to argue for the dismantling of societal structures that continue to oppress Indigenous people. Most importantly, the community should not be harmed or compromised by the researcher, and should instead ideally emerge from any research process stronger and more capable.

Being attentive in the research practice to the hidden and public transcripts that privilege and support racism.

When working with Indigenous people researchers need to be aware of the different levels of discourse that operate. Internalised oppression is an ongoing issue for Indigenous people. Researchers need to be attentive to their societal privilege and power accorded to them as researchers as this will affect their relationship with Indigenous participants. They therefore need to be prepared to work with humility and to accept the role of student and learner, while being prepared to concede and accept that authority should come from the community. Two-way learning is a good example of this.

Finally, the application of a combination of both participatory action research and Indigenous methodology proved to be successful for my own study, as both research practices encourage activism and transformation. I found that both practices complemented each other, as they are both based on the principles that challenged and implicated ways to change systems that oppress and marginalise disenfranchised groups. The outcomes from my study were reflected in a positive relationship between researcher and participants that was based on trust, respect and reciprocity.

Summary

There is now a growing body of research that shows that researchers using either 'participatory action research' and/or 'Indigenous research methods' are more likely to adopt methods that empower and promote change (Fine & Weis, 2005; Battiste, 2008; Giroux & Giroux, 2008). They understand that research outcomes and processes need to go beyond the artificial boundaries of traditional academic research (Madison, 2005; Fine & Weis, 2005).

The aim of this paper was to highlight the relationship between research practice and intervention, and the differences and commonalities with Indigenous research and participatory action research approaches. As a researcher I do believe that research is a form of intervention and it is my view that both participatory action research and Indigenous research practices operate in ways that support an interventionist approach to research.

Both research approaches can be transformative for both researchers and participants. Even though there are differences between the two approaches, researchers who adopt either an Indigenous research or participatory action research approach have much in common as they aim to be agents for change. Practitioners of each approach believe research should be a form of intervention that dismantles oppressive systems and empower participants to seek and demand change. Research as an intervention should be the aim for

researchers – research about action and change should both challenge and transform systems.

Acknowledgements

I would like to thank and acknowledge the efforts of Professor Pat Dudgeon, Dr Alex Brown, Professor Fiona Stanley, Professor Michael Alpers, Professor Michael Chandler and Ms Clarissa Choo for their very helpful comments and advice. I also acknowledge my colleagues, both Indigenous and non-Indigenous, involved with the Indigenous Capacity Building Grant coordinated by the Telethon Institute for Child Health Research and Curtin University, an initiative funded by the NHMRC. I also acknowledge the suggestions from several other Indigenous and non-Indigenous colleagues who offered advice during the development of the article.

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Decolonising activism/deactivating colonialism Clare Land

Introduction

Non-Indigenous activism in support of Indigenous struggles in south east Australia aims to redress colonialism. However, at times this activism is marked by colonialist attitudes and behaviours. This paper is my attempt to analyse and communicate the key issues raised at a forum in August 2010 which aimed to gather together knowledge around the practice of solidarity with Indigenous struggles in south east Australia. The forum was generously hosted by the community-controlled organisation Melbourne Aboriginal Youth Sport and Recreation (MAYSAR), in Fitzroy, Melbourne.

Entitled 'Decolonising activism / Deactivating colonialism', the forum was concerned with the two projects it names. That is, it was organised according to the idea that colonialism by individuals, institutions and the state remains an active, ongoing process that needs to be de-activated; and that the practice of solidarity needs to be interrogated and reshaped through an attentiveness to any colonising dynamics that might manifest there.

It was proposed that via the forum, a protocol would be developed; and that I would analyse the forum and return copies to the community. In this sense the forum itself was a form of inquiry, or research.

I am a PhD student with a background of support for Indigenous-led struggles and collective work towards self- and community education around Indigenous struggles and colonial history in south east Australia. My PhD pursues questions generated by this background, via interviews with people active in driving and/or supporting Indigenous struggles in south east Australia.

Over 65 people active in or supporting Indigenous struggles gathered at the forum to generate and discuss ideas towards a protocol to guide activist endeavours. A panel of experienced community educators and leaders delivered a range of questions and challenges at the forum: Robbie Thorpe, of the Gunai & Maar Nations, and voice of Treaty Republic and Black GST – Genocide to be stopped, Sovereignty acknowledged and Treaties made; Sina Brown-Davis, Indigenous Activist & Mum from Ngati Whatua ki Kaipara in

Aotearoa/New Zealand; Peter Lewis, non-Indigenous, Chair of ANTaR Victoria (Working for Land Justice and Reconciliation); Gary Foley, member of the Gumbaynggirr Nation, historian, lecturer and activist; and Glenda Thorpe, Gunai & Maar Nations, CEO of MAYSAR.

The challenges included: thinking about how solidarity is not only something that non-Indigenous people 'provide' to Indigenous peoples, but that Indigenous peoples have a history of solidarity with each other; interrogating whether non-Indigenous support is directed where Indigenous people are asking for it (for example, the agenda of The Black GST); considering whether solidarity is usefully understood as about 'helping' Aboriginal people, or more broadly through asking, 'Are *you* happy in this society?'; questioning the apparently widespread impulse of 'running off to the Northern Territory'; and considering how racism and dispossession relates to non-Indigenous people personally (Do you know what happened to the local mob where you now live?).

This paper is my attempt to analyse the forum. The paper discusses the forum as a form of inquiry or research, with reference to related research methods such as action research, Indigenist research (Rigney, 1999) and the politics of research in connection with Indigenous peoples (Tuhiwai Smith, 1999). It includes a critical engagement with the inquiry process, pointing to some of the dilemmas, challenges and issues that emerge when non-Indigenous researchers attempt to engage in activist research in connection with Indigenous peoples. The paper then draws out the substantive issues raised at the forum placing them in the context of key literatures and intellectual traditions.

Finally, it discusses some of the evaluation and feedback from the forum, which clearly point to further steps. I have included at the end of this paper several useful activist resources coming out of related contexts (North America and Aotearoa/New Zealand). While the proposal to come up with a protocol has not yet been realised, the forum, and the analysis in this paper, offers an engagement with some of those existing resources which suggest key local nuances in light of which those existing resources can be read.

Who, what, and why: Background about myself, the forum, and my PhD

The forum and its analysis are part of an ongoing story of and journey of working together with Gunai-Maar man Robbie Thorpe, with whom I co-present a radio program and have worked on campaigns such as the Black GST. Robbie instigated the forum as part of his response to my request to interview him for my PhD. I understood this suggestion by Robbie as, in part,

a deft strategy to convert my obsession with reflection into real action on the ground.³

The forum was well attended, bringing together Indigenous people and non-Indigenous people engaged in or interested in reflecting on their practice in the field of political action towards decolonisation (by that I mean fighting and campaigning for Aboriginal rights; community education/awareness-raising work around history and reparations; and political solidarity by non-Indigenous people and organisations with Aboriginal-led struggles).

The substantive issues raised at the forum, as suggested in its name, involved a critical engagement with decolonisation. That is, in what ways the engagement between Indigenous people and non-Indigenous activists – understood as a microcosm of wider colonising relations (Foley, 2000; Rigney, 1999; Frankenberg, 1993) – is the site of efforts by those people to decolonise themselves/each other. I have personally reflected on questions about the practice of solidarity since 1997, when, as a privileged, white, feminist university student, I first started to think about and act upon my position in relation to colonialism. These questions also guide my current PhD research. The PhD project, which has the working title 'Decolonising solidarity', is based on interviews conducted (mainly in 2008) with Indigenous people in south-eastern Australia and non-Indigenous supporters of their struggles; 23 people altogether. The forum aired a similar range of crucial challenges to those that concern the people I interviewed, confirming to me the relevance of the PhD questions.

The analysis presented in this article, to be published and made widely accessible, is part⁴ of meeting my commitment to documenting, analysing and returning community-based knowledge and reflections to the community of Indigenous people and activists who have articulated it and/or who are concerned with it (this commitment should be read in the context of ethical principles such as 'reimbursement for investment by the community' in Vickery et al, 2010). The promise to do this was broadcast in the call-out for the forum (see Appendix 1 - Forum flyer, and Appendix 2 - Questions inspiring the forum, for further details of the forum); such practice is also central to the ethical framework for my larger, related PhD research project (see also Aal, 2001 on the duties of academics).

There was a sense that the forum should deal 'once and for all' with the questions and anxieties of non-Indigenous people and the frustrations of Indigenous people working to activate and guide such supporters in order to

³ Robbie has given me permission to write this.

⁴ Another part of this process was completed immediately following the forum: a sound recording of it as well as copies of all the resources promoted at the forum, contact lists of those wanting to participate in further events, and evaluations of the forum were given to MAYSAR, the community organisation which hosted the forum. Resources and web links were emailed around to all who provided their contact details and to people who had not been able to make it on the night.

galvanise the promise of political support into an effective force. As Robbie said in opening the forum:

A lot of our time – I know I’ve certainly heard Mr. Foley talk about this issue and Sina, two of our key speakers here tonight, talking about the time and the energy taken educating non-Aboriginal people on things that they should know. This country’s been denied a lot about its true history and we want to address that problem. And this forum tonight is part of that... So we’ve got that information and we don’t have to keep going over it and over it. So if people want to get involved with our struggle in this country well, there’ll be some protocols to go by, a guide to go by. And that may save a lot of our time and energy (Thorpe, 2010b).

The analysis of the forum and the distribution of the insights that came out of it was seen as key to the aim of getting ‘better value out of our activists’ and short-circuiting the repetitive Indigenous experience that ‘energy is taken up educating generation after generation of non-Indigenous people’ (see Appendix 2 - Questions inspiring the forum). This paper articulates how I have made meaning of the ideas aired at the forum and serves as one method of putting key elements of an eventual protocol on the record for wider access.

Action research: The forum as a form of inquiry

The forum was a form of self-reflexive inquiry or research, in that it was addressed and attended by people whose practice it interrogated. It was not as participative as a workshop-style inquiry process such as that which would have been employed in the development of a document such as *We don’t like research...*, for example (VicHealth Koori Health Research and Community Development Unit 2000). In what was something of a tension in the way the forum played out for some in attendance and in terms of the varying wishes of the panellists, the forum took the form of a fairly conventional, slightly haphazard speaking-and-question-time event. Panellists were privileged as providers of information (in a way that I hope honoured their collective experience of the issues at stake), and those attending were positioned as recipients (and welcome discussants) of the information.

There are several senses in which the forum (and the related PhD project) bears some aims and practices in common with action research / action learning. Firstly, the forum was conceptualised as a method of gathering together knowledge and input in a way that could be used to resource those who attended and other interested people more broadly. This can be understood as an attempt at generating reflection upon action. The forum attempted a decolonising move by both privileging Indigenous perspectives and requiring an active, critical non-Indigenous engagement by inviting a majority of Indigenous panellists and one non-Indigenous panellist. The forum can also be understood as an activist intervention on the scene of Indigenous rights political work. This is because it promoted – and for some people, constituted – valuable reflective work amongst non-Indigenous

activists and community practitioners, in which group I include myself. My PhD works in a similar way, being my attempt to enact and in some cases pre-figure future/ongoing reflective conversations about non-Indigenous activist practice through the form that I adopted for my research (that of semi-structured interviews, including small groups). Comments by several non-Indigenous people who I interviewed or who attended the forum suggest that reflective conversations are wanted and valued. My own participation in political work in support of Indigenous struggles⁵ provides to my PhD a participatory research character; the PhD then, is an elongated moment of reflection and learning in an ongoing commitment to acting-politically-with-self-understanding (see more on this notion of 'acting-politically-...' below). This political work and related experience has led to – and continues to generate and rely upon – a questioning of the nature of the relationship between myself and Indigenous people in the context of anti-colonial activism, which is the preoccupation of the PhD. This preoccupation is explored in the PhD project through my interviews with Indigenous and non-Indigenous people, and in the first person in the form of autoethnographic text (Ellis, 2004; Etherington, 2004). In other words, I weave through the PhD a learning-story, which makes visible my understanding of how the research changed me.

It is also this political work that positions me somewhere on the murky boundary of insider/outsider as a PhD researcher and an analyst of the forum. The question of what is on either side of the insider/outsider boundary is still alive for me and it relates to both being a researcher-outsider and yet an activist-insider. I own my non-Indigeneity, while noting that there is a breaking down of the colonialist binary division between 'Indigenous' and 'non-Indigenous' entailed in manifesting a shared critique of empire (Gandhi, 2006). To me there remains a profound necessity to acknowledge the distinct and politically salient community and life histories of those who come together as fellow critics, and their/our⁶ many differing relationships to and privileges under empire. One thing that is clear is that any direct benefits of the PhD project flow to me, comprising not only what I learn, but significant material benefits: a scholarship payment and an eventual higher degree qualification. Any benefits to anyone else are much more indirect.

⁵ My political work includes significant commitments to several collectives and campaigns, including Students for Land Justice and Reconciliation (1999-2002), The Black GST/Camp Sovereignty (2005-2006) and lesser contributions to a number of others, such as the campaign against the Jabiluka uranium mine. I volunteered on a project led by East Timorese student activists in East Timor for 6 months in 2000, and undertook paid community development work for ANTaR Victoria (2004-2006). See also my biographical note for this paper.

⁶ Although I write as a non-Indigenous person, I use 'their/our' (and related sets of pronouns) in this and other instances in this paper so that both Indigenous and non-Indigenous readers might feel addressed by this text.

An ethical framework for this paper

The project of setting up the forum, documenting it and analysing it was undertaken within a similar ethical framework to that of my PhD project, which included consent to participate, strategic/political considerations of the research, returning research to communities, and interrogating my own position as activist and researcher as part of the research.

The PhD project was constructed in cognizance of the colonising tendencies of research in connection with Indigenous peoples. Nevertheless, the PhD research project is located within a continuum of 'Aboriginal research', which in its early form could be defined as: 'the conduct of research on, or about, Aboriginal *People* and the telling of our Stories as though they were not ours, in which we struggle to see, to recognise, to hear and know ourselves in these representations' (Martin, 2008, p. 26). Martin demonstrates that since the 1980s, methods have changed, so that there is now more research 'with' Aboriginal people. However, she concludes that 'Aboriginal research remains unchanged as an instrument of colonialism, when entrenched in non-Aboriginal worldviews, theories, beliefs, values, and agendas' (Martin, 2008, p. 29). Even participatory action research, which is 'advocated by Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal scholars because of its emancipatory goals to empower the participation of Aboriginal *People* and its compatibility with Aboriginal cultural and communication codes' may still be 'entrenched' in the ideas which render it an instrument of colonialism, as Martin describes (Martin 2008, p 29). In recognition of Martin's argument I have sought out the insights of Indigenous theorists in analysing the forum. Martin contrasts 'Aboriginal research' with 'Indigenist research', a practice promulgated by Lester-Irabinna Rigney and developed by Martin in the specific context of her doctoral research. Rigney, in outlining three fundamental principles of Indigenist research, emphasises the importance of political integrity: that Indigenist research is undertaken by Indigenous people; that Indigenous people set their own political agenda for liberation; and that there is a link between research and the political struggle - 'in and through those Indigenous Australians who are simultaneously engaged in research and the Indigenous struggle' (Rigney, 1999, p. 117). Nevertheless, Rigney 'is not suggesting in any way that critical research by non-Indigenous Australians should not continue or that such research cannot serve to inform the struggles of Indigenous Australians for self-determination' (Rigney, 1999, p. 117). Likewise, Martin argues that 'Aboriginal research', when used effectively, 'can be a tool to counter the ongoing forms of Aboriginal dispossession' (Martin, 2008, p. 28).

The forum was intended as a form of inquiry, and aimed to be thought-provoking through its encouragement of self-questioning and self-education. The discussion in the paper thus far demonstrates that a critical engagement with the process of inquiry is the basis for the insights communicated in the next section.

My framework for analysing the forum

The remainder of this article will be devoted to considering the challenges that were presented at the Decolonising activism / Deactivating colonialism forum and to collecting together and discussing learnings from the forum. This has been undertaken as a way of making their political significance more widely known and available. However, it is important to precede this by revealing the framework I used to analyse the forum and how I identified the substantive issues that were raised at the forum.

I relied on my personal sense of the politics of solidarity to identify the substantive issues. This is grounded in my ongoing (no doubt idiosyncratic) interpretations of challenges made by Indigenous scholars and educators including Gary Foley, Lillian Holt, Tony Birch, Wayne Atkinson and Robbie Thorpe, who were formal or informal teachers during my student days and beyond. Collectively, their insights across history, politics, law, activism, community development, intellectual and cultural property, and cultural critique are grounded in experience and community memory as well as at times being articulated through languages of critical theory. The genealogy of various strands of critical theory – such as the burgeoning field of critical whiteness studies to which this paper makes some reference – is important to note. The study of whites and whiteness was initiated by non-whites. Those who have had to – ‘in order to accommodate to or challenge White privilege’ – have been keen observers of Whiteness (Seidman, 2004, p. 239). Several convictions drawn from engagement with critical theory inform my approach to analysing the forum. One is ‘the idea that *no* white person is exempt from participation in racist discourse or practice’ (Frankenberg 1993, p 170). The implication for non-Indigenous people involved in promoting justice and Indigenous self-determination in a colonising society such as Australia is that ‘we’ must ‘always remember that we act from within the social relations and subject positions we seek to change’ (Frankenberg, 1993, p.5). Prevailing social relations cause unearned privileges to accrue to white people. This is something that white non-Indigenous activists are challenged to work at undoing having realised that political support does not confer immunity from manifesting the privileges of whiteness (Foley, 2000; Holt, 1999). There is a range of responses to these challenges: to what extent do non-Indigenous people recognise our/ themselves as addressed by such challenges? And to what extent do we/they accept and manage to work through such challenges?

Another conviction, which develops out of those just articulated and which is regarded widely as crucial to the political endeavour of concern to this paper, is the necessity of acting politically with self-understanding (Frankenberg, 1993, p. 168, p.169, p.173, p.185; Burghardt, 1982; Kendall, 2006; Tamasese & Waldegrave, 1996; Jensen, 2005). In other words, there needs to be a balance between ‘personal work’ and ‘acting politically’. That this conviction is widely

shared was also clearly stated by Aotearoa/New Zealand-based activist and researcher Jennifer Margaret who, in the days leading up to the forum, published a report called *Working as allies* (Margaret, 2010). Margaret's report distils and promotes the learnings of pro-Indigenous and anti-racist 'allies' in Aotearoa and North America; her wider work has examined how learning occurs in social movements, again with reference to non-Indigenous (Pakeha) ally work (Margaret, 2009). She reported a central commonality between the work of allies in North America and in Aotearoa/New Zealand:

...the importance of understanding the dominant / white / colonial mindset and the need for allies to engage in specific and separate work amongst their own people, as well as supporting the struggles of those they are in alliance with. (Margaret 2010, p. 8).

This supports the notion that non-Indigenous activists must undertake both the personal work of understanding the dominant / white / colonial mindset, and political work amongst their own people and in support of Indigenous struggles. To me this suite of work flows from an 'honest' reckoning with the dilemmas inherent in coming to know one's complicity (Barker, 2010); that is, in Albert Memmi's words, in living with the contradiction of being a 'coloniser who refuses'; in coming to regard oneself as a non-Indigenous critic of empire in Australia (Frankenberg, 1993; Memmi, 1965; Gandhi, 2006). These convictions resonate strongly with the concerns people expressed in interviews I had already undertaken and more broadly with the work of Indigenous scholars and educators. They form the framework for my analysis of the forum.

Key issues and challenges in the politics of solidarity

The presentation of key issues and challenges begins with the beginning of the forum: attention to the way in which the forum unfolded helps in making meaning out of what people said in relation to each other and to certain texts on the night.

Decentring white people

After Robbie opened the forum and Glenda Thorpe introduced MAYSAR where the forum took place, Robbie asked me to introduce the panellists. I introduced Sina Brown-Davis as the first speaker. Sina began in Maori. Immediately Sina then aired her discomfort about the prospect of speaking on a panel with no Aboriginal women and asked Glenda to join the panel. Sina then introduced herself in English as follows:

I'm a Polynesian woman of Maori, Samoan and Tongan descent. I take a particular interest in supporting Indigenous struggles in this country, and that comes with a history, that comes with a whakapapa genealogy that started in the 70s with Gary Foley. Him and another bunch of freedom fighters came from this country and took part in the Land March in 1975 in Aotearoa New Zealand which was a fundamental turning point that put our Treaty on the modern political agenda. So I want to speak and pay respect to those relationships of Gary, Nga Tamatoa, and to the relationships of Gary, the Black Power movement and the Polynesian Panthers. So I'm not going to make it easy for you white

people and give you a checklist, we have relationships between Indigenous people in the Pacific that have been built over eons of time and in modern political times have been solidly built since the 70s (Brown-Davis, 2010).

Several important things happened when Sina spoke: firstly she pointed out that the make-up of the panel felt politically wrong and alienating, and affected a change to this to avoid feeling 'like I'm standing on the toes of my sisters over here'. This was a big lesson for me as one of the organisers. Sina then went on, as quoted above, to point to the recent and past history of solidarity between Indigenous people in Australia and the Pacific and this, it seemed to me, worked both to honour Aboriginal people present and to defuse any perception (and associated narcissism) that non-Indigenous people were exclusively the-ones-who-act-in-solidarity with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. When she said 'I'm not going to make it easy for you white people' Sina also pointed out that solidarity is hard work and it requires some effort on the part of white people. Later Sina returned more specifically to this saying:

Solidarity is hard work; it requires critical self-reflection and a commitment to action on the part of the settler population. Coming to grips with colonial privilege by acknowledging the role that us as settlers play in the maintenance of empire must be seen as a necessary aspect of the struggle to decolonise not only ourselves, but our communities and our institutions and this country.

Sina's point echoes that dual project of self-reflection (for which I adopt the term 'personal work') and action ('political work') introduced above. The point that work by non-Indigenous people amongst 'their own' was crucial was to be raised by Gary Foley later in the forum. He suggested that 'white supporters...go out and find yourself a racist':

Just go home, to the dinner table. You'll find your racist. Raise the subject of "Aboriginal..." - you'll find the really hard core racist arguments that are thrown up. And if you can't, as an individual, change the attitudes of someone who's really close to you and you personally care about, then don't think that you're going to be able to do anything about changing the attitudes of the broader society... (Foley 2010)

Sina was anxious to start openly facilitated discussion but briefly made many more important points about the basic principle of the struggle being led by Indigenous people; about her sense of duty to draw more Maori people living in Australia into supporting Aboriginal struggles; and about problematic dynamics around international aid and development work in the Pacific. Sina also stressed that 'the solidarity movement needs to recognise the real tendency to appropriate the voices of those with whom we are supposed to be acting in solidarity'.

Sina's address was followed by discussion and exchange during which Robbie Thorpe, Glenda Thorpe and Gary Foley each made what I considered particularly significant comments, which I outline below.

Robbie Thorpe: Can people see their way to supporting what we're doing here? Robbie brought up the issues of the Black GST (Genocide to be stopped, Sovereignty acknowledged and Treaties made). To paraphrase he said: 'This

is what we have come up with: support it, you don't need to bring your own ideas'. And he wanted to know 'Whether people see their way to supporting what we're doing here?'

I read Robbie's comments as reflective of a frustration that even while addressing some of the most dedicated supporters there was still a question in his mind as to whether they really took on board these fundamental, but (for many) confronting, unpleasant or complicated issues. This seemed based on prior experiences of supporters wanting to pursue their own ideas and even enrol Indigenous people in their own initiatives and projects rather than throw their support behind what Aboriginal people had been saying over and over again were their priorities.

When Robbie spoke about the Black GST as encompassing his understanding of the agenda for Aboriginal people it was to say not only what he thought the issues were, but to question the relatively low level of support forthcoming for that kind of politics. Robbie said, 'We've been around these issues all our life'. This latter statement was a justification of why Indigenous people had come to this agenda; it went towards proving the seriousness, the urgency and the conviction behind them. However, for me it raised questions about how and why supporters of Indigenous struggles decide what to support. Is it based more on the personal preference, interests and agendas of non-Indigenous people than it is on those of Indigenous people? Is this something that needs to be interrogated?

Glenda Thorpe: Is this the sort of society you wish to live in?

Glenda posed a question that functioned on at least two levels. One was the question of how non-Indigenous people identify their/our interests. Rather than understanding a contribution to Indigenous struggles as being about 'helping' or 'do-gooder things' Glenda argues that all people should ask themselves whether they are happy to live in this society as it now operates:

Can I just say I think it's as fundamental as asking yourself about: Are you happy in this society? And is this society going the way you believe we should be going, black or white? Capitalism is what Robbie says it is; it's evil. And if you believe that capitalism is the way that we should be growing ourselves and our children and our generations to come, well then let's leave it as it is. But it's not and that's why we're in this room: to come up with different ways as to what is a better way that we should be living. We certainly know what that is, OK? Indigenous people certainly know what that is... It's not about helping, it's not about those do-gooder things, it's about saying "I don't want my children and my grandchildren and my generations to come to live in this horrible world that we currently live in". We have the power as a small group of people to make that change. (Thorpe, 2010a).

Notably, Glenda spoke as 'we' in an inclusive way, suggesting that everybody who questions how society is going shares in the project of making change collectively. This works against the Indigenous - non-Indigenous binary that while at times salient, can help prop up a helping/do-gooder understanding of the struggle.

Foley at another point in the forum made a similar address to non-Indigenous people in attendance that I will mention here because of its connection to

Glenda's striking contribution. He said that for 'People who are committed to bringing about some sort of meaningful change in society – not just for us, for everybody' there's an enormous task that 'confronts us all' (that task being to redress appalling, widespread and deep-seated attitudes and ignorance). This reference to a shared task and the aside 'not just for us, for everybody' does similar work to Glenda's statement, asking non-Indigenous people to see their own interests reflected in a struggle that is much broader than seeking justice for Indigenous people. Further, Foley stated:

...For any person who sets about... thinking you can change the world like I did... it's a question of educating yourself about all aspects of what you're up against, and figuring out the strategies to contend with it. Part of the strategies for people like you will be being supportive of Indigenous people. But that shouldn't be the only thing you're involved in. I mean, if you're fair dinkum about seeking justice for Aboriginal people, then one would presume—I always assume that people who come to me and say that that's what they're about—they're coming from a fundamental, compassionate and humanitarian stance about a whole range of issues in society.

And so it's not just a question of "Oh, I'll go and help the poor little blackfellas". Don't come and help us, we don't need you. But if you're fair dinkum about achieving social change, your agenda is much bigger than us. And across all of those issues you've got to be constantly educating yourself so that you can be breaking it down and educating others. And it's a lifetime task.

Robbie shared the expectation that supporters would support Indigenous rights within a broader framework (of human rights) and also stressed the importance of education. Yet Robbie places more emphasis on the work of supporting an Indigenous-led political agenda and directly supporting Indigenous activists. This is partly reflective of a nuance in approaches: Robbie expressing urgency to change things now and Foley emphasising his conviction that the struggle is long-term and we are unlikely to see its ultimate rewards in our lifetimes.

Gary Foley: What happened to the local mob?

During the first long period of discussion, Foley made an interjection in which he raised several crucial issues including the points below:

Racism is embedded in Australian society. The evidence is there in abundance and people need to not only grapple with that, but also see how that relates to them, personally.

I mean, how many people here now know *who* the Koori mob was who lived in the land that they are now, where you live? And it's not just a question of knowing, "OK the Wurundjeri" or somebody, it's not just a question of knowing who they *were*, it's a question of: what happened to them? What do you know about what happened to the people who lived on the place that you live on now? And, you know, as you gain a sense of that, you gain a sense of just how enormous your own personal ignorance is.

This question was framed by the idea that racism and the history of Aboriginal dispossession relates to people personally. This kind of focus on the local is something that resonates strongly with Indigenous epistemologies, and with the work of Indigenous and other educators who challenge conventional education (Gruenewald, 2003, p. 3; Butler, 2009). It also links

into questions of complicity: how people benefit from or are entangled to various extents in the systems and structures that we/they would critique (McIntosh, 2003; Sanders, 2002). Further, it prompts thinking towards action: asking the question 'What happened here?' leads to the question 'What will happen here?' (Gruenewald, 2003, p. 11).

To summarise: by the time Robbie and Sina had spoken discussion amongst the panellists and responses to some questions had generated crucial challenges including the reminder that Indigenous people have a history of solidarity with each other, and that Indigenous people have an agenda and want help with it. Key questions included 'Are you happy in this society?'; and 'What do you know about what happened to the people who lived on the place that you live on now?'

Solidarity is fraught with mis-steps

Peter Lewis spoke about the question, 'What should we do if we are gubbas?' (gubba=non-Indigenous people). He said, 'I believe we are called to work in solidarity alongside, maybe slightly behind Aboriginal people', and emphasised that he believed gubbas should act out of responsibility not guilt and pity (Lewis, 2010). One thing that struck me was Peter's statement that 'Solidarity is fraught with mis-steps because of subconscious desire to take power back'. This speaks to a struggle against internalised racism and domination within some non-Indigenous people from the dominant culture. I have often wondered what the forces are within me that induce or enable my own mis-steps (although 'mis-steps' probably understates the damage and hurt that can be caused). Peter's statement also points to the need for self-reflection and for being open to challenges from others about ways in which that 'subconscious desire to take power back' is manifested given that this is often in ways unrecognised by the self (Dempsey & O, 2003).

Peter talked about three 'surrogates' for solidarity that he sees 'grabbing us back' from realising relationships of solidarity. These are charity, paternalism (which 'makes us believe that we can fix the problem'), and the 'dominant culture need for control'.

Peter said 'I know I continue to stumble' and paid tribute to the grace and patience of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people that continued to work with him despite the mis-steps. This tribute points to the tensions that are continually negotiated around the imperative of 'educating' non-Indigenous people about mis-steps, about history, about politics and so on. Ruana Kuokkanen, a Sami scholar working in Canada, engages with a range of questions and perspectives on this imperative (Kuokkanen, 2003) unpacking further some problems raised at the forum about voice, exoticism, the burden of educating and of keeping target audiences happy. Foley engaged with a (self-conscious) question about the apparent need for a 'real, live Aborigine' to attract non-Indigenous people to community education events and to generate deeply felt understandings. He demonstrated the tension at play in the imperative of devoting energy towards educating non-

Indigenous people by both offering to be that Aborigine but also stating his preference for 'minimal contact' with non-Indigenous people in this guise. Also self-consciously – recognising his own occasional 'abruptness' – Foley noted that in an ironic full circle the forum that itself tried to deal with such problems 'once and for all', was another iteration of the repetitive, tiring nature of working to educate non-Indigenous people who invariably ask questions he's been asked 'a *million* times' throughout his life:

And so it's a great tribute to the incredible patience and tolerance of the likes of me and Robbie and the other crew [general laughter] that we can sit here tonight and patiently again listen to the same old stuff, yet again.

Working with allies: Learnings from North America, with local remarks

Like the other panellists Foley gave input at the forum in response to questions as well as making a presentation.⁷ Foley devoted his panel presentation to engaging with a report that had been published on the internet in the days leading up to the forum: Jennifer Margaret's *Working as allies*. As introduced earlier in this paper, *Working as allies* sets out learnings derived in conversation with 'allies' working under structurally similar (settler-colonial) conditions to those of Australia. Having read the document earlier in the day Foley found that it contained a lot of 'valid' material that addressed 'the issues at hand'. He expressed a broad agreement with Margaret's 'key learnings', which she organised into four sections intended as discussion starters or 'think pieces'. He read from 'qualities for being an ally' and 'working as allies – challenges and responses'. Foley moved on immediately to discuss several issues such that his presentation functioned to nuance Margaret's text for the local, south east Australian context. The most emphatic point he made was in relation to the phenomenon of 'running off to the Northern Territory':

One of the things that's irritated me most especially about earnest, well-intentioned, good-hearted, young, white people in Melbourne ...who realise that they want to do something to assist the Aborigines, the first thing they do, is they go running off to the Northern Territory looking for some *real* Aborigines. And that in itself is a significant problem.

And too few of those people ever have the insight to realise what they're doing by thinking like that. You know: What? Are there no Aboriginal people in Victoria? Are there no communities in this part of the world where they live, in their own back yard, that don't have problems that are just the same sort of magnitude as any problems they're

Readers will note that I have placed quite some weight in this paper on Gary Foley's input to the forum. This is for two reasons: firstly because his concern with and engagement with modes of solidarity is well-established (as Robbie identified in the first quotation of this paper), and secondly because Foley's published writing in this area locates him, in my view, as one of the key voices in the politics of solidarity in the south east of Australia (see Foley, 2000).

going to go and find in the Northern Territory? ...And what is it, this idea of theirs that they have about real Aborigines? Where did they get that? Where do they get these ideas, and why do they think like that?

There's no attempt to self reflect before they go racing off, buying a VW Combi and heading off in their quest for the real blackfellas.

This way of thinking, about 'real Aborigines', would seem to be a case of being 'easily manipulated by colonial ideology' (Dempsey & O, 2003). Foley continued, and there was some discussion at different moments in the forum, about the ways in which running off to the Northern Territory is problematic. These included:

- It is a gross insult to the local Aboriginal people when non-Aboriginal people head off north in droves to 'assist the Aborigines', in that it raises questions like the ones Foley raised in the excerpt above about how these activists regard south eastern Aboriginal people.
- It appears to be something non-Indigenous people do to meet some need in themselves rather than being the actions of a genuine ally. It is also associated with the appropriation of a status in their local non-Indigenous community as 'the experts on Aborigines'.

To Foley:

That's not a sign of people who genuinely want to be allies in the quest for justice. That's all about people who've got some sort of serious, inner, psychological problem of their own who are looking for something for themselves, not for anyone else.

- There is no justification for the practice in terms of outcomes for Aboriginal people (for a related argument see Lea, 2008):

The other simple reason why I say to people "Don't go to Northern Territory" is, like I say, for 40 years—and long before I started observing them—young earnest white kids have gone racing off to the Northern Territory, mostly teachers, "Oh, we want to help the poor little Aboriginal children..."

And they've gone off in their *thousands* from Melbourne and Victoria. And yet here we are 40 years down the track, I look at the educational statistics of Aboriginal people in the Northern Territory: I mean, for all the good will and all the earnestness and all the expertise that these young white kids took to the Northern Territory for 40 years, thousands of them, they don't seem to have done much good! In fact things are worse in Northern Territory today than before all of them mob went up there. So where is their justification for going there? What have they done *really*, for mob in the Northern Territory? Sweet bugger all. But in many instances they have enhanced their own, personal reputation and image in the community down here...

- Strategically, it is an inefficient way of attempting to contribute to meaningful social change. He suggests that non-Indigenous people are unlikely to be as helpful amongst a community with which they are not familiar (and therefore less prepared to be able to work with and communicate with) as they would be in their own back yard. White people's reluctance to work in such contexts appears a commonality with some white antiracists in the USA, who found it more exciting to work with African American activists than to work with 'their own', as they were asked to by African American activists when black power politics was issued as a challenge to civil rights organising (Thompson, 2001).

To me, this case put by Foley about the Northern Territory pointed to the need for 'humility' and for 'letting go of knowing': two of the key qualities for being an ally that Margaret's report proposes. Margaret describes these qualities:

Humility — being passionately aware that you could be completely wrong

Letting go of knowing, of being right, of having the answers — always being aware of how much you do not know (Margaret, 2010).

To me, a message to take away from the forum was that as a prospective ally, you might not know or believe all the reasons at first, but it is worth following the advice of experienced people who are across the politics. This is about humility and the necessity to listen and to trust. Heeding such guidance will most likely help build up a better relationship with local people in the long term, as you will be regarded as someone who truly wants to be an ally.

Long term struggles need long term allies

Another commonality that appeared to Margaret — that ‘long term struggles need long term allies’ — and which Foley discussed on the night, I will address by including a longer excerpt. This is because it includes reference to several of the key issues that were raised in the previous section. Foley said:

In 40 years in my lifetime I haven't seen a lot of non-Indigenous allies—to use the term that's been used here—who've stayed the distance. That's not to say there ain't been any. There have been many. And some really admirable people. A person who's no longer here with us now, Dr Bill Roberts. He was a legend in this community. He was a Collins St specialist and he walked away from that at the peak of his career. He could have been a filthy rich man, he could have been an incredibly wealthy man when he died. Instead, half way through his career, he walked away from Collins St and all the wealth and all the privilege, and he came down here to the end of Gertrude St.

And he was our first dentist in the Victorian Aboriginal Health Service down here. He became the medical director of the health service and stayed with us till the day that he died. And you ask any Aboriginal person in the State of Victoria and all over Australia—the people who met him through NAIHO [National Aboriginal and Islander Health Organisation]—about him: he was revered and he was loved. But he was revered and he was loved because he was a man of great humility who did all of those things that I said there, when he came in to this community.

He conceded that he knew bugger all about our community and he was willing to learn, and he was willing to be respectful, and he became in the long term a tremendously respected man. There have been a few people like him over the years that have lasted that long and who have become that embedded in our community, you know, by the time that he died he was more of a Koori than a gub. So it is possible. And there are great examples of people who've done it. But in the community we know who the long-term ones are.

‘Analysis paralysis’, guilt and small actions

An issue which received some comment at the forum, was that of guilt. I will address it here given its recurrence as a concern at the forum and in relevant literature. For those who regard guilt (and/or discomfort or distress see Pease, 2002; Barker, 2010) as part of the process non-Indigenous people need to go through in coming to terms with complicity in the systems that create injustice, a reminder was offered that such feelings should not overwhelm or preclude action. As Margaret's report says:

After becoming aware of injustice people can get caught up in feelings of guilt or denial. White people like to be comfortable and “right” in their actions, and can become immobilised by these feelings and “not knowing” what to do.

If you are feeling uncomfortable it probably means that you are “doing the work”.

It is important to act and actions can be small; for example, sharing with other white people what you have learned about colonial history. Significant actions such as building alliances with indigenous peoples are best undertaken, initially at least, alongside other people/groups already active in this work, rather than being forged individually (Margaret 2010, p. 17).

I think Margaret is spot-on in talking about the importance of acting and the permissibility of doing ‘small’ actions. Community development principles would tell would-be allies to start small and attain some successes before contemplating moving on to more ‘significant actions’ as Margaret says. Her suggestion of working alongside others works to manifest humility and to honour the experience of other allies who’ve already begun this work.

Conclusions and future work

This paper is grounded in the testimony of several experienced community practitioners and leaders who addressed a forum exploring modes of solidarity with Indigenous struggles for rights and justice in south east Australia. I have drawn out from this testimony several key challenges for non-Indigenous people to consider. These include:

- Having the humility to see one’s solidarity in the context of a genealogy of solidarities and to let go of knowing
- Interrogating to what extent non-Indigenous support is being directed towards agendas set by Indigenous people
- Thinking about how support for Indigenous struggles might sit within a broader agenda of meaningful social change
- Checking for how colonialist ways of thinking might drive impulses such as ‘running off to the Northern Territory’; and
- Considering how racism and dispossession relates to the local place and context, and to non-Indigenous people personally.

The notions of finding out what happened to the local mob, self-education, and the usefulness of *Working as Allies* were things that stood out in evaluations of the forum. Non-Indigenous researchers might see the insights highlighted throughout this paper as equally fundamental to the practice of useful, respectful and appropriate research with Indigenous peoples.

Throughout this paper, I have placed an emphasis on Indigenous perspectives and ways of knowing, drawing heavily on the issues raised by Indigenous educators who addressed the forum that has been the focus of this paper, as well as making reference to the work of Indigenous and other scholars writing on methodology, pedagogy, whiteness and Indigenous struggles. One of many ironies of engaging in research/inquiry in this realm is that while the PhD and the forum claim or aim to function as contributions to the work of encouraging non-Indigenous people to act politically, with self-understanding (Frankenberg, 1993, p. 168, p.169, p.173, p.185), as forms of inquiry they in many ways perpetuate the demand on Indigenous people to

repeat their teaching of me/us and swallow up effort in writing instead of other forms of doing.

Future work includes contributing to organising further gatherings of people including those who attended the forum, some of whom expressed interest in a variety of initiatives, such as workshop-style discussions, women's-only discussions, or forming a self-education collective. In addition, I have corresponded with several people based in other parts of Australia who are working through dilemmas in their political work and who contacted me wanting to find out about what came out of the forum. Already underway is the analysis of the interviews I have undertaken for my PhD project, which will enrich the current analysis with the reflective personal accounts of 23 people actively engaged in negotiating and working in relation to many of the same dilemmas and tensions raised in this paper.

In the process of helping stage the forum (and with thanks to Sina Brown-Davis in particular) I'm now aware of several resources that raise many of the common issues of protocol in non-Indigenous peoples' engagement with Indigenous struggles in settler-colonial contexts. These are listed below. While a south east Australian protocol remains as yet unwritten, this paper offers an engagement with some of the existing resources, suggesting key nuances for their interpretation in the local context.

Useful links

Several edited extracts from footage taken at the forum may be viewed on YouTube:

Gary Foley, Educate YOURSELF, then educate the people

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Iw8YVBbQgNg>

Gary Foley, Advice for white Indigenous activists in Australia

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uEGsBV9VGTQ>

Robbie Thorpe, Advice for white Indigenous activists in Australia

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xTij4mMFrRc>

Robbie Thorpe, Genocide = ecocide

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WA8PxzYFPyw>

See also a special issue of *New Socialist* entitled Indigenous radicalism today:

http://www.newsocialist.org/attachments/128_NewSocialist-Issue58.pdf

See also an article from a Canadian context by Tom Keefer, 'The Politics of Solidarity: Six Nations, Leadership, and the Settler Left':

<http://uppingtheanti.org/journal/article/04-the-politics-of-solidarity/>

Working as allies, by Jennifer Margaret, is available at:

http://awea.org.nz/allies_north_america

In addition to *Working as allies*, Margaret has developed a series of resources which are intended as discussion starters for groups or think pieces for individuals:

http://awea.org.nz/allies_resources

Acknowledgements

Thank you to Robbie Thorpe and all those who attended and supported the forum, especially MAYSAR, the speakers, and Giordano Nanni, who documented it (see YouTube links). For the writing, I want to thank the Brotherhood of St Laurence Research and Policy Centre, who provided me with a desk; those who offered ideas: Jacques Boulet, Bob Pease and Bruce Hart; and those who read drafts: Jacques Boulet (again!) and Gary Foley. Thanks also to ALARAJ, the guest editors, and the anonymous reviewers. An Australian Post-Graduate Award supports my PhD research financially. My extended family supports my working life, particularly by devoting significant time to looking after my kids.

Appendix 1 – Forum flyer

De-activating colonialism

Robbie Thorpe, voice of Treaty Republic and Black GST
will host a panel of speakers:

Sina Brown-Davis, Indigenous Activist & Mum from Ngati Whatua ki Kaipara

Peter Lewis, ANTaR Victoria

Gary Foley

Tuesday 31 August 2010 6:30-8:30pm

MAYSAR Gym 184-186 Gertrude St, Fitzroy

Light refreshments provided

Decolonising activism

A community forum for reflection and action in connection with Clare Land's PhD research, which tries to spread and deepen conversations about how non-Indigenous people support Indigenous struggles. Clare will be analysing the forum and providing copies to the community. Clareland@delajin.edu.au

A forum to gather and galvanise conscientious activists from key groups to adopt a protocol for supporting Indigenous struggles developed in conversation with experienced community educators and leaders.

Appendix 2 – Questions inspiring the forum

The email invitation to the forum included this list of discussion points:

- What are the pitfalls and dangers for non-Indigenous people's involvement in supporting Indigenous struggles?
- Non-Indigenous people want to help but don't know how
- How can we get better value out of our activists? Make the best use of their time and energy?
- How can we take control of our lives with the support of conscientious Australians?
- Let's come up with a guide/protocol for activists
- Our energy is taken up educating generation after generation of non-Indigenous people.

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Clare volunteers as a community radio broadcaster on 3CR in Melbourne with Krauatungulung man Robbie Thorpe. Together they present the show *Fire First*, which they co-created in 2003 as an Indigenous - non-Indigenous collaboration, discussing colonialism in Australia from invasion to the present day.

PAR/RAP: Participation Action Research/Research Action Participation Bronwyn Fredericks

Talkin' 'bout
Participation Action Research
PAR
Participation of the people
In da Community
Com-mun-it-ty
Of the Community
Com-mun-it-ty

PAR
Unlearning required
privileges
racism
colonial possession
Indigenous people
Country
requiring
needing
Conscientization
In da Community
Of the Community

PAR
focusing on
unpacking privileges
unpacking racism
unpacking injustices
understanding how -
I came to be me
understanding how -
you came to be you
understanding how -
you came to be

'educated'
'employed',
'housed' and
'got 'em land' too
Understanding how -
we became
'dispossessed',
'poor in health'
'locked up'
'with no capital wealth'
Structured inequality
Needing
Decolonising process
processes
Decolonsation
In da Community
Of the Community

PAR
can help you
recognise your privilege
hear what I say
don't marginalise my voice
bind my mouth
close your ears
lock me away
Get involved
PAR
Push the door
Challenge
On-going
Colonisation
Exploitation
Manipulation
Power over
Reverse UP
Back UP
Decolonisation
PAR
The way
In da Community
Of the Community

Now me
Now you

What you gunna do?
Can't run and hide
Crawl behind books
Don't go blame
Don't feel guilty
Don't feel shame
We can all be
Be in it
In it together
Together
In da Community
Of the Community
Us
PAR
Together
In da Community
Of the Community
Com-mun-it-ty
Com-mun-it-ty.

Intuition and congruence: Researching peace in Melanesia

Louise Vella

Abstract

Researching peace and conflict in the Solomon Islands is a sensitive and nuanced process.

The research must be guided by a methodology that is congruent with the epistemology and ontology of the Melanesian context, the peace studies discipline, as well as the researcher and participants involved. Research that is participatory and orientated towards action for positive social change is both desirable and necessary for effective research in this context. Participatory action research allows the research to capture and explore the affective, intrinsically intertwined nature of contemporary conflict in an indigenous setting. The key tenets of transformative research provide a relevant reference to the values that are inherent to participatory action research, an indigenous epistemology and peace research – that the research be a holistic, ethical, empowering and emancipatory process.

Introduction

Action research explicitly distinguishes itself from other forms of research through its commitment to the improvement of social practice. Proponents suggest that 'the direct and more or less immediate enhancement of practice only assumes primacy in the arguments for action research' (McTaggart, 1999, p. 493). It is further suggested that 'the effort to change practice as the primary route to understanding is fundamental to key forms of action research' (Ibid). Action research therefore operates with an acknowledgement and respect for the interconnected nature between method, process and outcome, in other words, the 'means and end' of action. Valuing the

fundamental interrelated nature between the 'means and end' is also inherent to peace research and indigenous epistemologies.

For action research to fulfill its goals it must be holistic, considerate, ethical and an empowering and participatory process for those involved. This paper reflects on the beginning of that process. It is an exploration of the journey of understanding and preparation of a coherent and relevant research methodology for peace research in Solomon Islands. While the methodology was designed to resonate specifically with the values of peace research and indigenous research, it very quickly became apparent that participatory action research shared a similar epistemological approach and inherent values. This paper will discuss the research philosophy and values it will be guided by, explored through the core tenets of transformative research. This will be followed by a discussion of insights gained so far at the preliminary stages of research. Weaved throughout the discussion on this experiential learning, reflections will be made on the understanding of the roles of intuition and congruence when researching peace in Melanesia. This discussion will be purposefully located within a broader exploration of the context of the research to draw comparisons and areas of congruence between the theoretical and human worlds that the research is located within in.

Defining intuition and congruence

The term "intuition" is being used in this context to define the 'gut feeling' or knowledge that is considered without intentional conscious reasoning. It refers to the seemingly 'common-sense' approach which 'seems right', which is discerned before purposeful research and reasoning has been conducted. Intuition, as defined here, is drawn from the cumulative experience and learned knowledge of its bearer, and is grounded within their personal worldview, epistemology and ontology.

In many ways the notion of "congruence" is intrinsically linked with intuition as it refers to the underlying desire or drive for holistic coherence – in which the social, economic, environmental, political, cultural and spiritual worlds are all interwoven. From this drive for holistic coherence, certain options are raised as possibilities due to their perceived congruence with the context. At times of incongruence in the preparation of this research methodology, a tension or hesitancy was intuitively felt. This unease prompted an opportunity - and need - to reflect on the theory or practice in question. At times of such tensions, it was often found that the research was diverging from a methodology that would resonate with the identified values inherent to peace research in a Melanesian context, therefore providing a clear opportunity to stop, re-think and re-consider.

The researcher's story

Understanding that 'what we decide to research and the way we conduct our research is a political statement about who and what is important to us,' and given the highly politicised context of the research project, I openly acknowledge my personal biography, values, worldview and previous experiences in order to be transparent about my role in the research process (Deshler & Selener, 1991, p.9).

I previously lived and worked in Honiara for a year and have spent additional time living and volunteering in Papua New Guinea and Vanuatu. As a student of Peace Studies I was interested in the peace building processes occurring in post-conflict Solomon Islands and so began my thesis research on that topic. Through this, the opportunity arose to commence a volunteer placement at the Solomon Islands Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) as a researcher. I have recently returned to Honiara to complete this role with the TRC. With this role, previous experience in country, knowledge of the language and culture of Solomon Islands, my position is well described by what Hermann refers to as that of the 'involved outsider' (2001, p.79).

Setting the scene: Stories of Solomon Islands, tensions, conflict and peace

Reflecting the holistic approach of this methodology, the following discussion provides a brief overview of Solomon Islands, 'the tensions', and the general nature of contemporary peace and conflict, as a means to provide context for the research. It is proposed that as the nature of conflict has shifted over time, there is an increased understanding of the potential of indigenous methods of conflict management and peace building. Likewise, the nature and approach to research in these contexts must also shift to resonate with the culture, *kastom*, and environment of the context.

Solomon Islands is an ethnically and linguistically diverse archipelagic nation in the South West Pacific. With independence gained from British administration in 1978 the country inherited Western forms of governance on an official level while cultural identity remained rooted in *kastom* and *wantok* relations. *Kastom* refers to cultural traditions, social practices and norms that influence expected modes of behaviour and actions. It refers to indigenous knowledge systems and an indigenous epistemology. While *kastom* is rooted in forms of life that are traditional to the region: it is dynamic, fluid and evolving (Brown, 2008, p. 190). *Wantok* is the term used to refer to close family and tribe or community ties. It implies a relationship of very strong obligation between its members.

Eighty-seven per cent of land in Solomon Islands remains under communal customary ownership and the majority of Solomon Islanders continue to live predominantly subsistence livelihoods in village settings (OXFAM 2003, p5). While developing a national consciousness among a group of islands whose

people are culturally and ethnically diverse is an ongoing challenge, indigenous village and *kastom* governance structures continue to retain influence (Kabutaulaka, 2002, p. 4).

Between 1998 and 2003 Solomon Islands experienced a period of violent conflict known locally as 'the tensions' in which militant groups, predominately from two provinces, formed and fought over issues rooted in socioeconomic and political concerns along seemingly 'ethnic' divides (Kabutaulaka 2002:4). Overall, the crisis was estimated to cause the displacement of 35,000 Solomon Islanders, and around 200 deaths (Hameiri, 2007, p. 410).

From 2003, in response to the tensions, Australia has led the Regional Assistance Mission to Solomon Islands (RAMSI) intervention with other Pacific Island Forum states. While RAMSI's criminal justice approach to law and order approach is coherent with imported Western modes of governance, it sits uncomfortably alongside local *kastom* methods of managing conflicts which have participatory, restorative and communal characteristics more akin to restorative justice processes, although not necessarily identified by this term locally (Dinnen, 2003, p. 4).⁸

The tensions in Solomon Islands, and the pattern of conflict in other Melanesian countries, demonstrate the changing nature of contemporary conflict since the Cold War. Defining characteristics include being *intra*-national rather than *inter*-national in scope and occurring in a relatively small proximity where the parties involved live in close contact with each other (Lederach, 1997, p. 11& p. 14). Contemporary conflicts often occur in the developing world, where the state itself may be considered fragile, weak, or not regarded with legitimacy from within, and they are often protracted, with deep-rooted causes (Boege, 2007, p.1). These conflicts are often rooted in issues of identity involve multiple parties with diffuse power and a weakened central authority. Despite these pertinent characteristics of contemporary conflict the approach to conflict management remains primarily state-based. This pattern of conflict and its management was seen following the tensions in Solomon Islands and the subsequent RAMSI intervention.

As the nature of contemporary violent conflict has changed since the end of the Cold War, the peace studies discipline has shifted accordingly. Following criticisms of Western approaches to peacemaking regarding their top-down approach and inability to engage with the affective dimensions of conflict and its management, such as trust-building and reconciliation, there has been an increasing dialogue on the potential role for indigenous and traditional methods of conflict management and peacebuilding (Ginty, 2008, p. 128). Indigenous approaches to conflict management are rightly receiving increased attention due to their higher levels of relevance and legitimacy from

⁸ For further discussion and examples of restorative justice in the Pacific, see Sinclair Dinnen (ed.), 'A Kind of Mending', 2003.

within the community involved, their process-orientated approaches which allow for differing perceptions of time, their consensus based approach which allows for broader participation, and their focus on restoring community relations.

In Melanesia, *kastom* and community practices - in social, cultural, political, economic and spiritual dimensions - play a major role in establishing thresholds for socially destructive conflict and continue to underpin powerful patterns of collective identity and order (Brown, 2008, p. 202). An indigenous approach to conflict management and researching conflict seems particularly appropriate as it provides an avenue for local worldviews and identities to be valued and considered along with contemporary approaches to peace. Participatory action research in particular allows the research in these contexts to capture and explore the affective, intrinsically intertwined nature of conflict in an indigenous setting.

The research philosophy

In preparation for this research, a variety of research methodologies, epistemologies, paradigms and methods were considered. The various approaches which immediately and intuitively 'felt right' for this context, while varying in scope, form and label, are all congruent with each other, and with the research field and context. A common thread of values was evidently weaved throughout the literature on peace research and indigenous research encompassing values inherent to action, participatory, and transformative research. Despite attempts to theoretically and methodically present these values and concepts in an ordered discussion, it has proved a formidable task. This difficulty provided an opportunity to question the tension experienced and prompted reflection regarding the difficulty of presenting a concise, coherent methodology. After re-considering the research context it became apparent that it is clearly not possible to divide and explain in parts what is experienced as a whole. Methodology is not a choice of set criteria for approaching research but a philosophy that reflects the ontology and epistemology of the researcher and the participants. In a Melanesian setting with a peace research focus this is multi-faceted, complex, and clearly defies division into sub-headings.

Overall however, the methodology is clearly guided by key principles and values that are congruent with participatory, action and transformative research. The tenets involved in these approaches also holistically reflect the philosophical position of the biographically situated researcher, and while it does not predicate specific paradigms or methods it encapsulates the priorities and values of the project. Deshler and Selener (1991, pp. 10-11) suggest that transformative research must include the following four tenets and offer these definitions:

- *Firstly*, it should be ethical so that the research process is conducted in the public interest with attention to human rights, social justice, reconciliation and the preservation of environmental sustainability
- *Secondly*, it should be emancipatory, that is, the research activity should contribute to the reduction and elimination of economic, social, political, and technical oppressive structures and situations
- *Thirdly*, the research should be empowering and should serve the emergence of marginalized and disadvantaged groups and promote the conservation and proliferation of different forms of life, and
- *Fourthly*, the research should be holistic, in that the research activity should emphasize, identify, and reveal relationships and interconnectedness between: the part and the whole, the subjective and the objective, the micro and macro contexts, and the local and the global.

This definition of transformative research encompasses values inherent to participatory action research. It is important to note that the values to this research preceded the design of the methodology. The specific research approaches are worthy due to their support for these values which are congruent with the research context, not least the people and their communities. It is the overall aim to be ethical, emancipatory, empowering and holistic that will ultimately guide this research methodology, and the following discussion.

Research as intervention

In a country that has experienced a formal foreign intervention in its economic, political and military spheres, it is important to note the parallel process that research itself plays as an intervention in the production of knowledge. As McTaggart highlights, the term 'research' 'carries with it some important connotations: intensive study of a situation and the *production of knowledge* in some form or another, including important ideas like *informed practice*' (1997, p. 27, emphasis added). When research is specifically designed to contribute towards social change, as this project and participatory action research does, the notion of research as intervention resonates even further. It is therefore necessary to recognise the role of research as intervention and to consider the means by which it is conducted as well as its overall objectives and consequences.

A commitment to action and respect for the interconnectedness between means and end, and therefore intervention, is also a core tenet of peace research. Peace research intends to aid individuals and groups in their efforts toward peace through the substantive focus of the research, as well as by 'utilizing methodologies that in themselves help those struggling for peace and justice' (Fuller, 1992, pp. 286-7). This is also reflected in Deshler and Selener's definition of transformative research as a philosophical stance which: 'views the focus, the process and the outcomes of research as the means by which confrontation and action against the causes of injustice, exploitation, violence, and environmental degradation can occur *through the*

research process and the use of research results' (1991, p. 10, emphasis added). As a methodology that operates with the recognition of research as intervention, participatory action research is pragmatically useful as it acknowledges the necessity of including those people and communities the research is for in the process of its design, collection and analysis.

Research as holistic

The core tenet of transformative research to be holistic is especially pertinent to this project due to its location in an indigenous setting. Drawing from the above definition of holistic as revealing the interconnectedness between 'the part and the whole, the subjective and the objective...' parallels with how life in Melanesian societies is experienced is evident, where the political, social, environmental, cultural and spiritual worlds are not experienced as discrete and detached entities, but as an interconnected whole. This is contrasted with the way knowledge is rationalized and compartmentalized in the Western paradigm, where Reason and Bradbury suggest we have 'disenchanted' our world by separating human and natural spheres, ascribing subjectivity, intelligence, rationality and intrinsic meaning to human beings, while devoiding the natural world of these qualities (2008, p. 8). For research to be holistic and resonate with an indigenous context it must respect the worldview of the participants and the interconnected nature of the various spheres of life as they are experienced by the participants and communities. Brown suggests the Western paradigm of knowledge sees the relationship between Melanesia and the West imagined in terms of sharp polarities, or 'borders of the mind', on the one hand between categories of traditional, a-historical and undeveloped, and on the other hand, as modern, rational, progressive and developed (2008, p. 183). Wallace agrees, suggesting the discourse on the Pacific has 'been simplified, or essentialized, in many analyses that refer to tradition *vs* modernity' (2009, p. 525). This mutually exclusive dichotomy creates rigid categories and does not give credence to the complex challenges Melanesian countries are experiencing in navigating processes of rapid change. These processes of change in the Pacific are often presented as a lineal transgression between polarities which have been drawn from other familiar models of knowing, such as from traditional to modern, more Pacific to less Pacific, less Western to more Western, or more exotic to more familiar (Teaiwa, 2006, p. 75).

Gegeo and Watson-Gegeo (2002) also highlight the differences between Western and Melanesian paradigms of knowledge, and draw parallels between indigenous knowledge and the process of action research:

The extractive, textual nature of knowledge is an Anglo-European, top-down assumption congruent with modernization, even when applied by those critical of modernization. To the contrary, when villagers apply indigenous knowledge in development, they are involved in a process of constantly (re)theorizing, (re)creating, and (re)structuring knowledge' (p381).

The increasing recognition of the value of indigenous approaches to research has seen contemporary moves to decolonize research and to locate research in the realities of the indigenous culture being investigated (Nabobo-Baba, 2006, p. 24). An indigenous approach to research offers a holistic perspective, differing from a Western, disciplinary approach to knowledge that is characterised by 'dividing into parts what people experience as a whole' (Wood, 2006, p. 36). Such a disciplinary approach to knowledge has been criticised as being introduced by colonisers as 'part of the homogenization of the world' (Wood, 2006, p. 37). Wallace expands on this, suggesting a selective use of knowledge, particularly that which excludes indigenous knowledge, maintains hegemonic relationships and undermines and devalues local knowledge by emphasizing western values and systems: 'A growing body of work from Pacific Islander writers argue that development literature is full of misrepresentations that fail to understand indigenous peoples' forms of representation' (2009, p. 527). In contrast Wallace highlights 'the language and metaphors of Pacific Island writers depict relationships to the sea and to the land which do not blend with traditional western models and ideas of development' (2009, p. 526).

An indigenous epistemological approach is 'based on the assumption that knowing and knowledge are not accultural, but are products of, and thus influenced by, particular culture, and can best be understood by way of research techniques that reflect that culture' (Nabobo-Baba, 2006, p. 24). Conceptually, it is concerned with 'the process through which knowledge is constructed and validated, and the role of that process in shaping thinking and behaviour' (Gegeo & Watson-Gegeo, 2002, p. 382). It therefore encourages researchers to rely on place-specific values, pedagogies, philosophies and epistemologies unique to the local context (Wood, 2006, p. 33). An indigenous epistemology therefore refers to the process of knowing which is organic to each situation: 'knowledge is created in a particular situation by a particular group of people. It may or may not be universalistic in nature, but it is always created situationally' (Gegeo & Watson-Gegeo, 2002, p. 382). Teaiwa also stresses this point, concerned that 'some assertions of indigenous difference from 'the West' ... do not account for changes in *indigenous* ways of knowing and being' (2006, p. 75). This caution serves to highlight the importance of understanding the dynamic nature of indigenous epistemology and not attempting to generalise an overall 'indigenous' approach.

The aspiration for holistic, indigenous research mirrors the shift to abandon the concept of the 'aloof observer' and embrace more action, participatory and activist-orientated research: 'The search for grand narratives is being replaced by more local, small-scale theories fitted to specific problems and particular situations' (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000, p. 17).

Research as ethical

The approach to ensuring ethical research is also sought through the explicit recognition of the inexplicable link between means and ends. Therefore, ethical research will be a goal in both the substantive focus of the research, as well as the method in which it is conducted.

Being concerned with producing knowledge which is useful, appropriate and reflective of the specific research context, an indigenous approach to research is regarded as an ethical approach, as it is framed in a context that the participants can appreciate and trust, and it is likely to increase the accuracy of the data collected from participants, and therefore its overall credibility (Nabobo-Baba, 2006, p. 24). An indigenous approach is also considered essential to produce knowledge which resonates with the people and is congruent with the communities whom the research is for: 'rural village-level development has a better chance of being sustainable, meaningful, and directly pertinent to people's immediate needs if it is grounded in their knowledge systems' (Gegeo & Watson-Gego 2002, p. 401).

As research grounded in the peace studies discipline, it is requisite that the substantive focus of this research is ethical - that it is conducted in the public interest, with particular attention to human rights, social justice, reconciliation and peacebuilding. Sharing close values with participatory action research, it is also a requirement of peace research that the research strives to contribute towards positive social change.

Research as empowering

The conventional research purpose of generating 'understanding' has been seriously challenged as a form of exploitation, typically imposing categories, meanings, homogeneity, and stereotyping on disadvantaged groups, all of which the people portrayed deny, resent, and regard as unhelpful. In cross-cultural situations, especially those where Western researchers work among indigenous people, these challenges are at their sharpest (McTaggart 1999, p. 497).

Ensuring the research is participatory provides a further avenue to achieve ethical research, as well as to navigate the challenges of practicing research in an indigenous setting, as McTaggart's description above demonstrates. Like McTaggart's observation of research in Australian Indigenous communities, researchers in a Melanesian setting face a difficult time gaining access unless they commit to the principles of participatory action research (1999, p. 497). A commitment to principles of participation is potentially empowering for those involved. It provides an opportunity to assert people's right and ability to contribute towards decisions that affect them and claim to generate knowledge about them (Reason & Bradbury 2008, p. 9). This is empowering as the participants see they are capable of constructing and using their own knowledge (Ibid). Participation is also an empowering means by which the human community engages with their own sensemaking and collective action (Reason & Bradbury 2008, p. 4). This is an integral element of action research, which is 'only possible with, for and by persons and communities, ideally

involving all stakeholders both in the questioning and sensemaking that informs the research, and in the action which is its focus' (Ibid). Furthermore, empowering participation is integral for better peace research, as it is likely to alter the substantive focus of the research to better reflect that of subordinate groups than what would be selected without their participation (Fuller, 1992, p. 294).

Research as emancipatory

For research to be emancipatory, it must contribute to the reduction and elimination of economic, social and political oppressive structures. In the peace studies discipline, Galtung differentiates between negative peace, in which there is an absence of direct or manifest violence, and positive peace, which additionally refers to the elimination of structural violence. Peace research is primarily concerned with addressing the root causes of direct violence and overcoming structural inequalities, or structural violence, to achieve social justice, or 'positive peace' (Galtung, 1969, p. 130). Emancipatory research is an inherent value of peace research, as well as transformative research.

Action research, as a method and an approach, is a practice of participation, engaging those who might otherwise be subjects of research or recipients of interventions to a position of inquiring co-researchers (Reason & Bradbury 2008, p. 1). Engaging participants as co-researchers increases the emancipatory potential of the research, as well as improving the quality of the knowledge produced (Fuller, 1992, p. 299). It not only leads to new practical knowledge, but to new abilities to create knowledge. In action research, 'knowledge is a living, evolving process of coming to know rooted in everyday experience; it is a verb rather than a noun' (Reason & Bradbury 2008, p. 5).

Symbols, stories and peace – PAR in Melanesia

To capture the affective elements of conflict and peace, research in Solomon Islands must be considerate of *kastom* and appreciative of the symbolic elements involved in peace and conflict in indigenous societies. While the 'primary purpose of action research is to produce practical knowledge that is useful to people in the everyday conduct of their lives', the explicit acknowledgement of its wider purpose being the use of this practical knowledge to increase the well-being – economically, politically, psychologically and spiritually – of humans and communities, and 'to a more equitable and sustainable relationship with the wider ecology of the planet of which we are an intrinsic part' is further indicative of its congruence with an indigenous context which does not separate human, environmental and spiritual worlds (Reason & Bradbury, 2008, p. 4).

A symbolic approach to interpreting conflict involves the consideration of factors inherent to the nature of contemporary conflict, such as worldview, culture and identity (Schirch, 2001, p. 145). It explores beyond rational and relational perspectives of conflict, which primarily see conflicts as arising over competing interests or resources, such as land, water money, or power imbalances, poor communication and dysfunctional social structures. If efforts are to be made to reconcile conflicting parties, their divergent cognitive worldviews and cultural identities must be addressed (Schirch, 2001, p. 145). A symbolic approach is highlighted here as it offers a heuristic tool for participatory action research in cultures where identity and worldview are core concerns, such as Melanesia. Adopting a symbolic approach justifies the necessary inclusion of indigenous perspectives of conflict transformation, peacebuilding and reconciliation in contemporary circumstances. Of course, within and across the local context, the indigenous perspectives may vary widely and at times be contradictory to each other, or incongruent with the research philosophy, field, or researcher. In order to navigate these different perspectives, research is being conducted by informal 'storying' and listening.⁹

'Storying' refers to a Melanesian cultural practice of sharing knowledge, and is an integral part of all indigenous research (Tuhiwai Smith, 1999, p. 144). Storying allows conversations and research to be fluid and flexible, to allow participants to allude to matters of concern, which are considered significant in their worldview. A challenge this method poses in Melanesian culture is the reluctance to embarrass, cause shame, or disagree with others. This can affect research as depending on how a question is framed participants may feel obliged to agree, or to remain silent, when in fact they have another opinion. To someone not familiar with the culture, silence may be interpreted as tacit agreement when in fact it is a vital sign that the researcher needs to slow down, backtrack and perhaps reframe the question or topic (Upton, 2006, p.9).

Throughout such dialogic processes, as an outsider, it is important to be aware of the cultural nuances that may be overlooked, and include the participation of local co-researchers to continually reflect, discuss, correct and validate the interpretations begin made. Sharing of knowledge in Melanesia is itself a political act, so 'while information and knowledge may be forthcoming on some levels, there are likely to be other unseen dynamics at work' (Upton 2006, p.8). Also in Melanesian culture, there is a desire to not embarrass, shame or belittle an outsider, or one another. This may result in the researcher/s being provided with information that is incongruent with people's actual experiences and beliefs (Waldrip & Taylor 1999, p.255). Thus Waldrip and Taylor stress the importance of crosschecking the information

⁹ For a description of the use of 'listening' as a method of research, see CDA Collaborative Learning Projects, *The Listening Project Issue Paper: The Importance of Listening* (March 2010), and *Field Visit Report, Solomon Islands, November* (2009).

with a trusted local participant. For this research, participation is necessary, not only for reasons of ethical and transformative arguments, but to ensure the validity of the information received and interpretations made.

(Re) theorizing the research - insights from preliminary PAR in Solomon Islands

Peace research and action research are both defined by valuing a close relationship between theory and practice: 'When all goes well, practice informs theory and theory is properly questioned as to its practical implications' (Rogers & Ramsbotham, 1999, p.753). The following discussion will explore how the theory, values and methodology discussed above have been implemented in practice thus far, providing an opportunity for reflection and re-theorizing for future research and practice.

Action towards peace

No research ever changes society in and of itself: it does so only through its effects on the actions of people. Thought must be translated into action. For peace research, in particular, to be true to its mission requires that it be useful to and used by people in their efforts to build a peaceful society (Fuller 1992, p. 286).

A crucial value test of peace research is its pragmatic pay-off in terms of better insights into practical problems and improved responses (Rogers & Ramsbotham, 1999, p. 753). Like peace research, the real test for action research lies in its potential effectiveness to be used for 'practical solutions to issues of pressing concern to people, and more generally the flourishing of individual persons and their communities' (Reason & Bradbury, 2008, p. 4). Action research resonates with peace and indigenous research as it emphasizes the importance of being located in a specific context rather than in a particular discipline: it 'ignores the boundaries between disciplines when they restrict effective understanding and action and advocates crossing the boundary between academia and society as a basic principle of operation' (Greenwood & Levin, 2000, p. 94). This allows action research to focus on real problems in specific situations. This differs from traditional positivist research, which tends to generalise and abstract from context, which as Greenwood and Levin suggest, may result in losing sight of the world as lived in by human beings (2000, p. 97). As a methodology, action research is also congruent with a Melanesian approach to change: 'villagers are pragmatic and orientated toward action. For them, learning involves doing and then drawing theoretical abstractions from the doing' (Gegeo & Watson-Gegeo 2002, p. 398).

Although initially conceived as an academic research project, the intention to align this research with an existing process or project in the Solomon Islands was outlined from the beginning to fulfil the intuitive desire for the research

to be of benefit and practical use to Solomon Islanders. The opportunity to volunteer as a researcher with the Solomon Islands Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) has opened the avenue for this action, and due to the workload in this position, this role has been prioritised over pursuit of any academic research. Therefore the following discussion will be primarily drawn from the researching experienced thus far at the TRC.

In this specific context, the action research cycle is occurring on varying, simultaneous and ongoing scales. Overall, the TRC is posited towards action as it is mandated to prepare a final report and recommendations for the government to prevent future conflict recurring and to promote reconciliation. Whether these recommendations are endorsed or honoured by the government is beyond the control of the TRC, however the report itself, so long as it is publicly available, will provide a useful tool for groups or organisations advocating on issues of human rights and peace.

On another level, the work of the TRC and the research team is actively creating a space for issues related to the tensions to be discussed. This can be understood as action research, as the very act of creation of a space for sensitive matters to be discussed, with a view to preventing conflict in the future, is contributing towards positive social change. The methods through which this space is created differs from one-on-one conversations and small-scale stakeholder consultations, to public hearings, mass communications via radio and newspaper, and a general increased public interest in the topic.

On an even more micro level action research cycles are occurring in regards to *how* the research is conducted. As McTaggart describes:

In the participatory action research genre, knowledge is not produced with a view to *later* incorporation into practice as it is in other research; knowledge production is embodied in the enactment of emerging understanding. That is, the *research* aspect of participatory action research is not an end in itself, it defers to practice (1999, p. 496).

For the area in which I am researching, the process of the research itself has been a topic of ongoing and careful consideration (and criticisms). A transparent approach to the research process has been adopted to invite ideas, opinions and criticisms of the way data and stories are collected. Through this approach the research process for the part of the report of which I am responsible for preparing is being continually adapted and moulded to better 'fit' the specific topic of research and the *kastom* of the places that the research is conducted in. This strive towards coherence with the local context has proved difficult as the perceptions surrounding the topic inside the context are varying and diverse. It is becoming apparent that committing to 'positive social change' is very dependent on the opinion of what change is considered positive by the communities and workers involved.

Participation in process

By definition action research is a necessarily collaborative and participatory enterprise, 'together, stakeholders and action researchers create knowledge that is pragmatically useful' (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000, p. 32). Coherent with an interpretive paradigm, participatory research allows the researcher and the participants to shape the research through a dialogical process of reiterative interaction and understanding.

While empowering participation is a key tenet of transformative research, it is also valuable here due to the cross-cultural context of the research. It is acknowledged that as an outsider in Melanesia the understanding of local culture, politics and social dynamics will always be limited (Upton 2006, p8). Referring to research in Melanesia, Waldrip and Taylor argue that 'in order to generate valuable knowledge claims that are both credible and fair, cross-cultural research should involve the local people in a sense of ownership and empowerment roles' (1999, p. 250). Upton echoes this when discussing his experience of working in a local NGO in Solomon Islands. He stresses the importance of building relationships and local participation in development activity in Solomon Islands: 'It requires a willingness to stand alongside people as they choose the path they wish to follow' (Upton, 2006, p. 8).

Participation is also vital to ensure the research is sensitive to the local cultural context, and therefore considered with credibility and legitimacy. Understanding that local researchers are likely to be sensitive to nuances and relationships that the outsider researcher may not notice, their participation provides a valuable emic perspective (Waldrip & Taylor 1999, p259). This is not to say that the outside researcher has no role, but that they will have a different perspective. Therefore 'ideally, a collaborative research study would combine insider and outsider views' (Waldrip & Taylor, 1999, p. 258). Hermann supports this by suggesting the differences between insider and outsider research roles have distinct implications for the study of conflict, and that the differences between access, local knowledge and experience, and distance - physically and mentally - of the conflict provide the insiders and outsiders respectively with different advantages (Hermann 2001, p. 82). The degree to which participation is integrated into the research at the TRC at this stage is limited by the pending date of the report and the pre-existing mandate determining what is to be researched. For the area of research I am responsible for preparing, the participation of key stakeholders and networks is essential for the collection of data. The topic itself is sensitive and participants would likely not share information with an outsider alone. Therefore a co-researcher who is familiar with the local *kastom* and local language of each place is essential. Being 'insiders' Solomon Islander co-researchers are also essential due to their inherent knowledge and intimate understanding of the nuances and protocols when discussing the sensitive topic being researched.

Recruiting this participation has been a challenge however and continues to be one of the hardest tasks in this role. Without a formal budget or role to employ or compensate co-researchers participation in the research process is reliant on the motivation and interest of the persons involved. Despite this there has been support and participation from relevant or interested stakeholders and individuals. The biggest challenge in this regard has been logistical coordination for collaboration and participation. Working in a Melanesian context it is important to build relationships, rapport and trust with potential co-researchers. Considerable time is required to invest in these relationships. Managing the tensions and pressure of working with a deadline while attempting to integrate participation in every stage of the process is proving to be an ongoing challenge.

Conclusion

This paper has explored the use of participatory action research when researching peace and conflict in a Melanesian setting. Consistent with an indigenous epistemology to research is the need for flexibility and patience to be guided by what intuitively appears fitting for a given situation. This intuition, being drawn from the experience of the researchers involved and the cumulative knowledge gained over conversations, stories, and experiences, often presents options that are congruent with the research, the researcher and the context. Such methods resonate with the local population because they are products of stories and knowledge learned from that context. Ultimately the research design must be necessarily flexible, revisited and reconsidered at each stage (Richards, 2005, p. 14). Wary of committing to a certain technique or methodology this research will be continually philosophically guided by the four tenets of transformative research. Valuing the close relationship between means and ends it will be ethical in its conduct by being participatory and sensitive to the indigenous context as well as in its anticipated consequences (Deshler & Selener, 1991, p.12). Grounding the research in Melanesian knowledge systems and practice it will be emancipatory by committing to social change and linking theory to action. Being a participatory project this research will be empowering for those involved and ideally for their communities. Finally, this project will be holistic by considering peace processes from micro-macro levels and allowing for an indigenous approach which refrains dividing into parts what indigenous people experience as a whole.

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Acknowledgements and Disclaimer

Special thanks to Jennifer Borrell for encouragement, inspiration and guidance in the preparation of this paper. The views expressed in this paper are those of the author, and are not representative of the Solomon Islands Truth and Reconciliation Commission.

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The development of Cuckoo: Finding art through participative action and inquiry

Annie Liebzeit

Abstract

Secrets in the Woman's family are revealed as she loses her voice and learns to whistle. The Woman is fascinated with cuckoo birds. Slowly, she realises that they strike at the heart of her relationship with her Mum. The metaphor of the cuckoo bird, of a mother that leaves her eggs in another bird's nest, resonates with her own family's story: her Nanna's incarceration in a mental health institution in Melbourne in the 1950's and her Mum's subsequent placement in a children's home.

The work is told through the Woman who also embodies the voices of the Mother and Nanna. She encounters her unconscious as voice-over, in the form of thoughts and dialog with which she interacts. Throughout the piece the Woman's identity blurs, weaving and distorting with that of her family.

Planning/ Action/ Reflection

The audio piece of Cuckoo was created over many development cycles all involving the Action Research stages of Planning, Action and Reflection:

- (1) I entered into a naturalistic inquiry, placing myself as researcher within the research process, almost becoming a participant. My process involved researching thorough creative 'action', and 'reflecting in and on action';
- (2) The impetus to pursue creative enquiry stems from my social consciousness and interest in what underlies our social interactions. This includes 'how' we relate with self/ family/ society and what motivates the 'how'. Deeply rooted in my mind is the

sense of being part of a Diaspora, a lack of assimilation into Australia's dominant culture because of my Aboriginal and European migrant identity, and my experiences growing up with this legacy. Linda Smith talks about decolonising methodologies and acknowledges that we share experiences as peoples who have been subjected to colonisation of land and cultures.

(3) My experience of this is one of near erasure, coming from a family who became quiet, almost silent, carrying the weight of ambivalence about being Aboriginal in the first part of the twentieth century. I attribute this to mainstream racism from government attributing to social pressures stemming from views such as AO Neville's observation that biological absorption was the key to "uplifting the Native race".

(4) My family's experience is not unique; in fact I find it to be quite common. In a contemporary context by addressing the personal one can essentially comment on a broader socio-political position.

Action Research Stage one: North Melbourne Town Hall Artist in Residence program, 2005

Planning

I was interested in exploring the themes of displacement, impermanence and home (as a physical and psychological space). I decided that I would create large-scale structures with cardboard, a material chosen for their inherent strength and fragility. I contacted VISY and they donated large pieces of cardboard for my project.

Action

As part of my residency I was given a room in the North Melbourne Town Hall. The architecture is Victorian; ornate plaster cast ceiling roses, stencilled decorative friezes and a marble fireplace. When I began making cardboard 'architectural' spaces within the formal room immediately a new relationship was formed. There was a collision of materials (their properties and associations) creating a clash of identities, and this interested me. I made structures with the cardboard within the room and photographed them. At one point I fanned a cardboard structure and watched it fall. I had an unexpected emotional response observing this. I believe this to be about the ease in which the cardboard structures were broken apart within the larger context of a heavy, permanent Victorian building. These were silent works observed only by me.

Reflection

The relationship of my cardboard structures within the larger space of the establishment became symbolic of my identity, or how I experience it anyway. I decided that I could address this more directly by looking more closely at stories from my family. This was partly in response to the silence and isolation of the work in the action stage, (becoming a metaphor of how I experienced myself as an artist/woman in the world). I began to think more

broadly about how identities that are simultaneously defiant and entrapped within the flows and webs of individuality, relationships, economy and history can affect children and the children of children.

Action Research Stage two: Footscray Community Arts Centre Artist in Residence, 2005

Planning

I decided to interview/talk with my mum. I had been talking with her about my ideas around this project. She began to tell me stories as part of a dialogue around family and her/our history. At this stage I was not sure what would manifest.

Then a story was told, set in a 1950's kitchen. I decided I would re-interpret this scene through my lens of understanding. I would recycle the cardboard from stage one and introduce new mediums. Remembering through the visual art medium would hopefully be imbued with the deeper sentiments of the story told, that embedded within the violence is trauma, vulnerability, loss.

Action

I re-interpreted the scene in a large-scale paper and cardboard room held together structurally with a wooden frame. The room was a kitchen scene; table, cupboard with cups on hooks, a screen door, a wall sized painted spider obscured under handmade wallpaper, all meticulously made and cut from brown cardboard and fine translucent paper (similar to baking paper) and held in place with sewing pins and masking tape. On the table was a paper knife. I made the work so the audience could not enter the space, one had to view the scene through peepholes for obscured glimpses. There were no people in the room at any time, subject or viewer. The work was exhibited at the Footscray Community Arts Centre, in a room not too dissimilar to the room at the North Melbourne Town Hall. Architecturally there was disjuncture between the exterior of the room I made (I deliberately kept the exterior 'rough') within the more established Victorian room. I did not mind the awkwardness of this relationship. I called this work Membrane, referencing the pliable sheet like structure that acts as a boundary or lining in anatomy.

Reflection

By imagining and making a room from the past I felt I had begun to speak the unspeakable publicly. The effect of looking through peepholes into this room meant there was voyeuristic intent, a sense of entering into the unknown from the outside. The 'rough' box exterior was deceptive to its interior, which was more like a lit up jewel box, however with an eerie resonance of the unfamiliar within the familiar. This museum piece of the mind was sombre and imbued with the feelings of fragility, impermanence, absence and danger. I realised that I was still veiling complex family dynamics. I was cautiously entering difficult and personal terrain, however, the work revealed to me that

the story was bigger. People were missing from my story and their presence was necessary to give a bigger picture of the identity around loss and erasure. *Action Research Stage three: FCAC Artist in Residency, 2005.*

Planning

I decided to rebuild the room to be used for a public performance incorporating sound design and music composition. The sound scape would include the voices of mum, a narrator and me. I would embody the physical space and my 'character' would traverse identities of grandmother, mother, self in the broader context of memory and identity.

Action

I made a sound work based around recorded interviews I did with my mum. I found some main themes sung out to me that were embedded in stories from the past; longing for connection with mother, a dislocation of children from families because of mental health issues and government policies of the time, a forgetting of children from The State in the 1950's, a defiance and inherent survival mechanism activated by adversity. The performance was based around the songs and stories incorporating half sung and spoken texts with recorded voice-overs. Sound design and music was used to create a psycho acoustic response in the viewer, meaning the sound was also imbued with intent of the themes explored. An example of this is a seascape morphing into a mental institution then into a place within the body.

The audience was invited to the studio space where the room/performance installation piece was situated. There was no fixed seating so people could walk around the room as they wished throughout the performance. The lighting was subdued, there was hand cut lettering from translucent paper pinned together and dribbling from the ceiling, an enamel basin filled with milk, a translucent dress hanging in space. The space was to reference a room with familiar objects and also act as a space of confinement and restraint. There was the reference to looking at a bird within a cage by the design of the set as well. I called the work Cuckoo.

Reflection

I received feedback from the audience.

It is not that often that a performance of any kind brings me to tears, this did. It felt to me that you were bearing heart and soul for the public to see in a performance and that does not truly happen very often either. Jerome 9/12/05

It was one of the most moving pieces I had seen in a while. Your performance is always so believable. The set was mesmerizing - I wanted to move and see it from different angles, but I was afraid to lose sight of you! So I ended up being rooted to the floor. Your use of sound, spoken word, song is just so engaging. At points I wanted to know if this was your mother, and then it didn't matter whether I had that information or not. Wendy 15/12/05

I thought I was starting to get the message across, and this was validating. The performance/installation space was alive with shadows and glimpses. This lends itself to the non-linear format I wanted the piece to take.

I began to question: How could I make the work less directly autobiographical and more broadly accessible? Also, because this material is so personal and about other people, how can I show respect to the source that is giving me the information? There are some parts of history I couldn't explicitly tell so how do I decide what to use? How can I employ poetry to tell a story about my family? And almost most importantly, where am I positioned in all of this?

From the performance I was offered a commission with ABC Radio National's Airplay program to develop the work Cuckoo for radio.

Action Research Stage four: ABC Radio/home studio

The cuckoo is what is known as a brood parasite. It lays its eggs in the nests of other birds, who unwittingly hatch the chick and feed it, usually at the expense of their own young. Cuckoo is also a colloquialism for mental illness. Using these metaphors, I tell the story of my maternal grandmother Winnie, whose mental instability and involuntary confinement in the notorious Melbourne mental hospital Larundel meant that my mum was brought up as a ward of the state.

Planning

Cuckoo Birds: I decided to use the metaphor of the cuckoo bird to talk about the nature/nurture of my family.

I began researching cuckoo birds in libraries and through meetings with ornithologists at the Melbourne Museum. There I was granted access to the skins and mounts in the vaults of the museums. I was able to record vocal interpretations of cuckoos. I learnt about their behaviours and that there are cuckoo's that have evolved to rear their young in a couple.

Deep Sleep therapy: I researched deep sleep therapy practices in Australia through listening to an ABC documentary. (I learned of my nanna's 6 month induced coma from a story mum told me) I would use this information to comment on medical practices at the time of my nanna's incarceration. (5)

My nanna's mental health: I accessed my grandma's mental health records learning her diagnosis. This gave me a sense of the language used at the time.

Action

I began creating music and soundscape in my studio. I wrote text. I compiled all the information in a non-linear form with the outcome being the final piece Cuckoo. Subsequent vocal work and mixing was done at the ABC studio in Melbourne.

Reflection

I found that using a metaphor is a less traumatic way of telling a story. That working in sound alone lent itself to creating an environment that allowed a

more sensory experience, beyond the dominant sense of sight. That by researching and acting certain roles in the grand narrative new positions of understanding could be portrayed, beyond making work stemming from a purely emotional reaction to something.

Final Thoughts

By engaging in a process of deep listening I found that parts of me that were normally submerged rose up. (6) In this remembering, the facts of my own life merged with the lives of family that were no longer alive. As I relived these encounters, I felt my own identity threatened with erasure, under family history, loss and shame. Though I inherit rich stories from my family, during the process I struggled with the feeling that my voice would not be heard and is perhaps a voice that would not be heard by the storytellers. The trauma of losing a voice within one's own family and more broadly in the space we occupy in society becomes a metaphor for the trauma of my family over generations: Cuckoo exposes the cover up and finds a voice to speak the previously unspeakable.

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Healing historical unresolved grief: a decolonizing methodology for Indigenous language revitalization and survival

Thohahoken Michael Doxtater

Introduction

I coined the term 'decolonial era' to suggest that Indigenous Peoples resist subjugation and socialization to the dominant political hegemonies (Doxtater 2004). In many instances the neo-colonial view promoted by settler governments traps us in the 1800s. Escaping the 1800s means decolonizing an imposed identity and those of us who escaped the 1800s find something strange. Many of our innovations and inventions have been adapted to the contemporary world.

Examples of the influence on modern life exist in many forms. The *US Army Survival Manual* documents Indigenous Knowledge. The current craze called Mixed Martial Arts used to be known as "Indian Fighting". Our pharmacopeia includes codine, aspirin, lycethin, quinine. Our emotional and mental healing knowledge such as 'eye movement desensitization and reprocessing" and "emotional freedom therapies" have their origins in Indigenous sweat lodges, singing, and purging. Our cornucopia includes chocolate, tomatoes, potatoes, and corn. Survival training, naturopathic and psychological healing, and agriculture may not be well-known as Indigenous innovations, but have a place in contemporary times. Better known but much debated is another invention—democracy.

Indigenous democracy has a basis in tribal economics that deals with the fair distribution of social capital. Iroquois people's foundational principles have these three features that reflect our political economy:

- Everyone has a right to eat
- Everyone has a right to be healed, and by consequence
- Everyone has a right to be happy.

In Polanyesque terms, no one eats until we all eat, no one is healed until we are all healed, and no one is happy until we are all happy. Happiness, or healing grief, is paramount. These foundational principles apply to dispute resolution, consensus building, and ceremonies--in theory.

In practice these principles have become part of the performative culture that re-enacts these foundational principles as ceremony. As practiced in governance, the kind of perfunctory ritual consultation done through commissions and inquiries appears to convey a democratic sense, but denotes little effect on decision-making to diffuse innovations. Those in power make the decisions. In effect, colonization means removing the right of peoples to participate in decisions about their lives. In the case of my people, the League of the Five Nations, colonization has a distinct but recognizable evolution. The *ancien regime* of the Indigenous People known as the League of the Iroquois were signatories to international treaties during colonial times. Treaties like the Two Row and Friendship Wampum (1600s) and Nanfan (1700s) treaties recognize a country under the jurisdiction of an international Indigenous People. Roughly 320,000 squares miles covering the Great Lakes watershed in northeastern North America, was recognized as an inheritance for the heirs and descendants of the original signatories for all time. The American Revolution decimated the Iroquois population by 1784. After continual interference by Canada in Iroquoian affairs from 1820 to 1920, in 1920 League representative Chief Levi General made the now famous "Red Man's Appeal for Justice" to The Hague. In response, Canada and the United States lobbied and bullied League supporters in Central America, the Middle East, and Europe to ignore the Iroquois claim (Woo, 2003). Finally, Canada overthrew the treaty Iroquois signatories in an armed intervention in 1924 to effectively render harmless any international claim by the Great Lakes Indigenous Peoples to that resource rich trade zone. The reason – making way for the installation of a democratically elected government created and controlled by Canada and the removal of the tribal oligarchs.

Over the past 100 years Indian Agency meant teaching Indigenous Peoples that they possess little knowledge or ability to govern over their affairs. For example, the Department of Indian Affairs and Northern Development punctuated teachers' duties in education manuals in the 1950s with the object to "teach obedience to authority." With the power of a peace officer (policeman) the Indian Agent could incarcerate parents for not sending children to school, and also forcibly remove children to be sent to Indian Residential Schools. Socializing and subjugating individuals to dominant political hegemonies only occurs when individuals become obedient to authority.

The colonizer assumes the authority to undermine the identity of the obedient colonized and renders harmless any claims by Indigenous Peoples to their right to be self-determined. The transition has an historical basis. In the *colonial era* colonizers brutally forced Indigenous Peoples through treaties and surrenders to extinguish their rights or be extinguished in total. In the *post-*

colonial era, with a post-modern zeal for non-consequentialist ratiocination in the name of moral imperatives, local wisdom is attacked and collaborators supported by the neo-colonizers who assume authority to determine 'favoured nations'. These collaborative favoured nations are in most cases contrite believers of tribal religions or a business community willing to encumber underlying title to natural resources. In Canada, these favoured nations are deemed fit to be self-governed--Indigenous Children obedient to their White Father.

There has been a tradition in Canada of government funded research to continually inventory what is wrong with Indigenous Peoples that results in large research networks that catalogue the social, economic, political, medical, and psychological barriers to Indigenous Peoples' quality of life. The effect of colonization is trauma and family dysfunction through external change agency and external interventions. The *National Aboriginal Youth Strategy* (NAYS, 1999) depicts Native youth's woes as one example of the research produced by colonizers and their collaborators. Unless they are participating in negotiations for natural resources or performing ceremonies, many Indigenous People remain unfit and remain colonized. And we have the research to remind us how unfit we are. The older idea that unfit Indigenous Peoples have little capacity to govern over their affairs faces intellectual sovereigntists and international rights activists who escaped the deluded world of grandiose prisoners of childhood and regained a healthy narcissistic cathexis – have a good self-image (Miller, 1981). Instead of participating in research to inventory our unresolved grief, many of us now work to promote action to heal.

In the past 20 years Indigenous People in the decolonial era critique the colonizer's model of self-government before self-determination. The reunification of Germany, the collapse of Yugoslavia, the dismantling of the Soviet Union, the repatriation of South Africa and Hong Kong, contextualize the decolonial era's trend of self-determination. Indigenous writers like Tuhawai-Smith, Warrior, and Yellow Horse Brave Heart in the 1990s contribute to the critique by addressing indigenous identity, indigenous intellectual sovereignty, and the debilitating effects of attempted subjugation on the mental and psychological health of Indigenous Peoples (Tuhawai-Smith, 1999; Warrior, 1995; Brave Heart Yellow Horse and DeBruyn, 1998). My decolonizing methodology derives from working with Mohawk Elders. In the 1980s working with Elders included writing letters to Canadian and American government officials. Conflict and mediation duties for the Elders included acting as their representative in armed confrontations like Oka, Eagles Nest, Tutelo Heights, and the Red Hill Valley. One area that I never expected was a role in tribal bereavement practices. All crises have aspects of grieving, as does any change really. In my work for Mohawk Elders I learned that individuals' de-realization limits their ability to govern with varying degrees of incapacity. I pose that there is always grief that must be dealt with in any organizational intervention – whether it's organizational change, social

and political change, or a death in the family. *Healing historical unresolved grief*, a term coined by Brave Heart and DeBruyn in 1998, comes first.

Mediators and action researchers try and limit themselves to pragmatic steps in organizing individuals to problem-solve. Though adapted totally from Indigenous models - that is documented by writers like Lafitau, de Toqueville and Lewis Henry Morgan - contemporary action researchers mediate human interactions to identify problems, suggest solutions, and determine actions. Facilitators work quickly to overtake grieving. I disagree. I suggest that humans of any race should not ignore unresolved grief. In this part of human life we gain extremely significant self-knowledge. We learn about our resilience. We learn about survival. We learn that power is possessed and not given. We are not being empowered. We have power.

In this paper I describe an intervention requested by an Indigenous organization in northeastern North America. In this case the grief derives from the struggle to recover Kanienkeha - the endangered Mohawk Indigenous language. My model begins with the decolonizing methodology now accepted as *healing historical unresolved grief* to affirm the foundational principles of Mohawk culture and pays homage to the ancestors. Following this exercise delegates freely share their feelings about the ancestors and the value of Mohawk culture - and how that culture is communicated through Indigenous language. This collective memory exercise is especially relevant in facilitating a workshop about an organization with a mission to save a threatened Indigenous language. This emotional freedom had the emancipatory effect of revitalizing a plan that was generated by delegates in a one-day planning session in the community of Brantville, Canada. The workshop - titled Helping Brantville Become a Language Learning Community (HBLLC) - was attended by delegates from four Indigenous territories in the Great Lakes watershed within the Canadian nation-state. Focusing on a clear need for healing, critical reflection, and team learning; this paper describes the workshop and its outcomes.

Specifically the delegates produced work that describes actions, which advance plans created the previous year. However, the plans focus on the development of enriched language programs that have implications for BO's overall plans. For example the conference delegates created four action work groups (AWG) to undertake collaborative action in the following areas:

- The development of the academic and pedagogical programs in early childhood, elementary, secondary, post-secondary and adult language education networks and inter-institutional partnerships for audio-visual, textual, graphic, and performative materials

- To continue the promotion of Kanienkeha as a lived-language used in the community as an everyday occurrence in electronic media, community awareness programs, and events that BO's provide in-service opportunities for the stakeholders on the board, faculty, staff, and partners to use Kanienkeha as role models committed to the teaching of language;

Work plans focus in Program, Resources, Promotions, and In-Service working groups. I include all materials generated by the group to show the effect of

healing as central to a decolonizing methodology. The various transposed worksheets and flip chart sheets show a watershed in reawakening the commitment of a small group of people in preventing their Indigenous language from becoming extinct.

Strategic assumptions in research design

My praxis is consistent with much of the andragogical theory produced over the past 30 years. As a grassroots organizer, a graduate student advisor, and later in conflict resolution and organizational learning, I see that adults require respect for their life skills. I tell these adults “you’re not in your 20s trying to figure out what you want to be when you grow up.” Adult learning relies on the assumption that adults learn more by actively participating in learning that scaffolds on their experiences. The adult learning experience makes room for adult learners to reflect on their worldviews, assumptions, values, and experiences while working on projects. The use of Action Learning makes use of adults existing knowledge and experience, but acknowledges what the adult learner has learned and gains new understandings and insights into their own assumptions.

By using critical reflection as the basis of adult learning, adults find answers to questions that need to be answered. Adult learners critically reflect on problems, use their knowledge and experience to frame their assumptions and then seek new answers. Theorists like Mezirow base research assumptions on practice interventions that view action learning outcomes as emancipatory (Mezirow, 1990; Mezirow, 2000). Frère also views learning to resist socialization to dominant political and cultural forces as emancipatory (Frère, 1970a; Frère, 1970b). In the case of Frère “conscientization” helps individuals see their underlying fears, worries, or threats that are at the basis of assumptions and cultural presuppositions – the reality of their lives. The appeal of Action Learning includes recruiting groups of stakeholders to find answers to problems groups face at the local level. In the case of Adult Learning, educators become conveners, facilitators, and mediators of interpersonal interactions during activities designed to produce action (Cross, 1981; Boud, 1987; Huber, 2003; Marcellino, 2004). In many instances action-researchers help adults critically reflect on the issues they face. Issues include indentifying problems in all areas of organizational development, with researchers striving to posit local control over decisions in the local community (Walzer & Deller, 1996; Schafft & Greenwood, 2003; Hyland & Noffke, 2005; Coghlan & Brannick, 2005; Wamba, 2005). In this way the educators themselves must be exemplars of democratic processes as its main teachers.

Directly relevant to Indigenous peoples has been a need to develop processes to re-learn action learning. Action learning is used in a decolonizing method called *healing historical unresolved grief* (Brave Heart & DeBruyn, 1998; Abadian, 1999; Bopp, Bopp & Lane, 1998). In the case of Indigenous peoples

recruiting adults to participate in their own healing processes uses adult learning for “conscientization” (Henley, 1996; Warry, 1998; Couture, 2001; Bopp & Bopp, 2001). Individuals share their stories to create an environment for shared experience that becomes the collective memory of the local community – a vast storehouse of knowledge to be exerted on problems (Clandinin, 2007; Connelly & Clandinin, 1990).

Purpose of the Conference

The mission of BO is to keep “Kentehakeha (Brantville) words and way of life alive as a community by promoting and revitalizing our Kanyenkehaka (Mohawk People’s) language and culture.” The vision of BO is to maintain Kanyenkehaka language and culture as “the foundation upon which we thrive spiritually, mentally, physically and emotionally as Kanyenkehaka people.” The participants decided to post the mission and vision statements in English until a Kanyenkehaka translation was completed. In addition “Ne’e Onkwawenna tsi Onkwatstenhsera” was reaffirmed as BO’s motto (power of the first language).

The use of language in program titling is part of the branding currently being undertaken by BO. For example programs include the *Brantville Onkwawenna Shatiwennakarats* (they lift the words back up) Kanyenkehaka Diploma Program, the *Tewatahsawen (Beginners)*, and *Skahwatsirat Tewateweyest* (together we will learn – like one family). Pedagogically BO strives for grammar based learning, early childhood strategies, and innovations in language education. The mission and vision was interpreted to situate BO as a cultural advocacy group. To accomplish their cultural advocacy mission BO values foundational principles of Onkwehonwenaha (Indigenous Knowledge). The organization bases its work on “skennen”, “kashatstentsera”, and “kanikonhriyo” (the good message of peace and power of good thinking).

Brantville Onkwawenna (BO) director “Jenny Wilson” convened a “visioning” workshop that could be called a mini-search conference, in Action Research parlance. A diverse set of Indigenous language speakers from other territories and Brantville residents were invited to participate in the workshop to save the Mohawk language. The workshop title “Helping Brantville Become a Language Learning Community” (HBLLC) was designed to invoke the challenge identified by the convener. The workshop is similar to search conferences (see Schafft & Greenwood, 2003). Basic framing remains similar. A group of stakeholders see a problem. Discussions focus on problems and solutions. The final product outlines actions to be taken. This paper outlines innovations for the purpose of the HBLLC workshop that values heritage to renew the mission.

Workshop Design and Goals

The workshop had two purposes. First, the workshop would give participants an opportunity to reflect on the current state of Kanyenkeha (Mohawk-language) education. Secondly, the review and reflection on Kanyenkeha education would provide a basis for developing plans to revitalize Brantville's 10-year plan. In effect, the conference would be a one-play action-planning workshop where participants collaborate in the design of strategies to enact the long-term goals of BO.

As conference facilitator I helped the convener develop a conference plan that was designed to consider diverse human, material, and financial resources in Brantville and from other Kanyenkehaka (Mohawk) territories. The process included the following sequence of activities:

- Collective memory exercise to depict the shared experience of Mohawk People muralized on a chart
- Ideal future/probable future, an exercise for participants to chart the Brantville dream, and also the nightmare if nothing is done
- Breakout groups, an exercise where obstacles to the dream are identified, and actions analyzed for overcoming obstacles. Breakout Groups report what they have identified to the whole gathering who generate a list of actions
- Priority Action Teams, created for each priority, to analyze the priority under discussion, identify needed resources, and then create priority lists to take a series of actions, and
- Action Working Groups, created from the teams that will meet after HBLLC, recruit a temporary "chair", and schedule their first meeting.

All materials would be used to prepare a collaboratively designed strategic action plan (SAG) created by the conference participants.

With this mission in focus the workshop to renew and revitalize BO's 10-year plan was viewed as desirable. Reviewing the mission and vision statements, and values and principles based on Kanyenkehaka heritage would provide the participants with a platform to review their immediate goals and objectives through the lens of BO's strengths and weaknesses, identified opportunities, and threats facing the organization. Indigenous organizations like BO face challenges that have social, political, and economic barriers to success such as human capacity building and capital formation needs related to these constraints. Basic pedagogical aspirations include planning and implementing Kindergarten through grade 12-language education. The use of collaborative learning for BO staff and families was desired. However the need for substantive planning and scheduling demonstrates that BO's limited human and financial resources require a coordinated effort.

Specifically the limitations on human and financial resources affect the delivery of key programs in the 10-year plan. BO strives for community involvement, children's programs, and developing adult learning. The expected result would be increasing fluency, improving the role of fluent staff, and recruiting older speakers. Central to the planned children's language program is the development of the Language Nest program.

However staff, space, and community support limits this development. The Language Nest continues to be important in Indigenous language recovery. The convener planned for a group of about 15 participants. The previous year's strategic planning session was attended by a core group that included: Iehnhotohkwas; Treasurer, Kanonhsyonni; Secretary, Kawennakatste; Chairperson, Kawennashatste; Member, Konwanonhsiyohstha ("Jenny Wilson"); Coordinator, Karihwawishon; Instructor, Thonawayen; Language Instructor; and Tehawennahkwa, Student Mentor. Many from the core group attended the HBBLLC planning session. Added to the list were Brantville band councilor Teyoronhyayenteres, elder Warisso'se, adult learner, Kawannahawitha, and elder Tawatenniakhwa. A brunch and lunch were provided.

The convener wanted to examine longer term planning, but with a focus on the upcoming operating year. To accomplish outcomes requested by the convener it was decided that a review of short-term successes would lead to planning for long-term goals. However, the HBBLLC would also lead to action steps that put an emphasis on developing AWGs.

To accomplish the desired action plan, the convener and facilitator used a question as the foundation for the days work. Asking the delegates "How do I help Brantville become a Language learning Community?" would give participants a chance to talk about their successes and identify key tasks that needed to be acted upon. Consequently, a wall-sized mural was created that posed the focus for the workshop as "Helping Brantville Become a Language Learning Community."

Mapping Brantville's Road to Learning

The agenda consisted of mapping the day within time constraints requested by the participants. The conference consisted of five main areas:

- Emotional intelligence and a sharing circle to create a safe place for strong feelings for the participants to start the day
- A collective memory exercise to encourage participants to identify and chart the Language movement at Brantville
- The morning session also would be used for critical reflection on individual actions and interpersonal acknowledgments
- The lunch time session was used for a presentation on adult language learning through a multi-community action to save the Mohawk language, and
- The afternoon was filled with breakout groups and the development of itemized lists of actions and team building.

Included in each of these areas were an interdependent layering of knowledge created for purposes of refining BO's planning for the next year.

Emotional freedom

I see a strong need to provide opportunities for delegates to freely exercise their emotional intelligence. The strength of Indigenous languages comes

from the idea that customs passed down from ancestors conveys “power”. In particular the group was greeted with Kanonhweratohnsera (Greeting All Things) to open the meeting that was conducted by Tehawennahkwa. The convener and the facilitator greeted the participants with another customary invocation:

“The Mohawk People are a free and independent people who are governed by covenants made in very ancient times by our forebears and handed down to us their children. And these covenants protect our right and freedom to govern over our own affairs, in our own way. And we consider these rights and freedoms to be a precious inheritance for our children and future generations with which no one can interfere.”

The showing of a short film on the ancient roots of the Mohawk “Peacemaker” gave the delegates a chance to reflect on the mission and purpose of the Kanyenkehaka (Mohawk) people (Doxtater, 1992; see <<http://www.histori.ca/minutes/minute.do?id=10120>>). The video portrays the acceptance of a mission of peace by the Iroquois people in the past. This context provides the conference delegates with a chance for introductions. After many of the delegates affirmed their commitment to the Mohawk mission they offered hopes for what the day would bring. This focus on *healing unresolved historical grief* provided an emancipatory part of the workshop that led to a full day of work.

Collective memory of the Brantville Language movement

Delegates to the BO conference were able to describe the language movement since the 1970s. The Brantville experience had longer roots ranging from Teserontyo translations of scripture in the early 1800s, to the lexicography of contemporary university researcher Kanatawakhon. The BO workshop participants identified 1971 as the starting place for the contemporary Kanyenkehaka language movement. The following narrative describes the significant factors and events in Brantville’s language movement.

In general, the Iroquois people actively resisted language loss for over 100 years. In the early 1900s informal community language education occurred at a time when mother tongue speakers were slowly decreasing in numbers. Informal teachers wrote down Mohawk words in phonetic form, held impromptu and regular classes in their homes and community halls. Throughout these times Iroquois individuals translated hymns and song into various Iroquois languages.

The Mohawk language movement resisted language loss in Brantville as well. In the 1970s the Kanyenkeha language movement included institutional support in addition to the informal education that took place in the community. For example in 1971 Brantville’s local council chief supported the teaching of language in community schools. In addition the chief’s wife actively participated in language education that included dancing and singing with the children. In this era the older generation of mother tongue speakers actively promoted Mohawk language along with new researcher

Kanatawakhon. By 1976 elementary school teachers delivered second language education both at the elementary level and informally. By 1980 the program expanded to the Mohawk elementary school where Mohawk was taught as an official subject.

By the late 1980s a network was developed with the Brantville language movement. In addition to Brantville educators, support expanded to neighbouring Mohawk communities at Akwesahsne and Kahnawake. For example Akwesahsne singer Jerry McDonald began teaching traditional music at Brantville. As well, Kahnawake educators included Tsiorakwathe and Tewennitashon. From 1986 to 1993 Brantville language was nested within cultural revitalization in general. Cultural workshops conducted by McDonald in 1989 developed out of interest in ceremonies and culture when the pow wow was established in 1987.

Following 1990 Brantville began to form inter-institutional links to external educational organizations. Networking through First Nations Technical Institute (FNTI) external networking included work with Richard Johnson at Brock University. Mohawk was also taught in high school and elementary school. The increasing level of education required the recruitment of instruction from teachers named Kariwenhawe, along with Tsiorakwathe and Kahontente. In addition to adult language education the immersion schools began in 1995. As well community support continued in the form of the Mohawk Singers recordings of Mohawk hymns in 1998.

The creation of Brantville Onkwawenna (BO) in 2000 created the first cultural education institution located in Brantville, The focus on adult language education corresponds to current needs expressed in other Kanienkehaka communities, For example the first cohort of teachers recruited in the 1970s reached retirement age. The need for teachers in general, and Mohawk language teachers in particular, has been expressed from all seven Mohawk communities. Thus, developing adult language education by BO anticipated the need to provide an instructor base for language. Language education included expanding to a community based alternative high school program called Ohahase (new path) Mohawk language course

Instruction assistance included the use of a summer camp and a pilot language nest project. In 2004, 2005, 2006, Brantville welcomed home Kanatawakhon, but as well senior instructors Tehahente, Owennatekha, and Tehawennahkwa from Ohsweken. These instructors work in adult education and provided the foundation for institutional networks to partner with Trent University, Brock, Quinte Mohawk School, Brantville Library, Brantville Mohawk Council, and FNTI.

Reflecting on success

The participants reflected on their role in BO before their individual responses were placed on flip chart sheets. Specifically they filled out worksheets that asked the participants to identify how they “help Brantville become a

language learning community.” For example, the individuals were asked to write down “Three things I am doing well”. Then they were asked to identify “Two things I can do better” and finally they identified one thing “I can do differently now.” The responses demonstrate that BO’s participants were both conscious of their performance, but said they mostly needed to work harder. Included below are the responses from the flip chart concept maps.

Three things I am doing well:

- Eager to help
- Eager to Learn
- Willing to work hard
- Devote my time to language
- Teaching language phonics – what I know
- Promote language revitalization where I can
- My job and the library supply resources
- Volunteer at events
- Helping to teach Kanyenkeha
- Usage of Kanyenkeha everyday in the community
- Encouraging others to use Kanyenkeha
- I am teaching the adult program
- I am learning our ways
- I am preserving and living within the longhouse
- Talking Kanyenkeha
- I am trying to follow the traditional (ways)

- Working on my personal wellness and healing
- (if I am not in a good place I will not be able to help others around me i.e. community/nation)
- Speaking language at home with my family to the best of my ability
- Teaching and singing songs
- Learning and talking to Brantvilleron: nen
- Do one ceremony to help
- Support and advocate language initiatives
- Knowledge of “some” language
- Understand importance of language
- Seeking funding to provide language programming in community
- Coordinating delivery of programming
- Trying to learn the language
- Teaching the language
- Helping others with it
- Willing at times to help

This list of responses demonstrates the ardent view of the participants to their role in helping Brantville become a Language learning community.

The participants also interpreted their roles in the language movement as positive. However, there is an overall sense that they need to practice the language more, and help people become comfortable with Kanyenkeha. Participants identified their need to enact learning and teaching in their everyday lives as some they needed to do better.

Two things I can do better:

- Teach as many people
- Be there for those who wish to learn
- Learn the language
- Set priorities and focus on primary things
- Speak more language that I know

- Seek out programming/funding for intergenerational use of language
- My job – find more (resources?)
- Use the language I know at home and everywhere
- Being a more effective language instructor
- More everyday usage of

- Kanyenkeha everywhere
- Speak language at home
- Speak more
- Be more open minded
- Talk only in Kanien'keha Volunteer my time to help out with community language events
- Listen to people speaking Mohawk
- Study more with turtles in Brantville
- Learn more language
- Use more language
- Learn the Language and not enough effort
- Use what I know –the language

Generally, the group saw the need for language use and learning as the most important improvement they could make. However, there were institutional issues related more to BO's operations and programming implied in the list. The delegates also had the opportunity to identify one area they could use for action. They reiterated many of the items on the "do better" list, but the overall approach to the "one thing I can do differently now" yielded responses that required more of a commitment to the Kanyenkeha language movement. Also there is a sense that the younger generation needs attention in the home, but as well by elder teachers.

One thing I can do differently now:

- Make sure they (learners) become speakers
- Practice/use words if I know them
- Promote and raise awareness of the importance of language in the community
- Become an active learner
- Use more Kanyenkeha so that it is more present within the community in order to encourage others to start learning
- Speak more at home
- Teach Kanyenkeha to the younger generation
- Pass on my knowledge about my culture
- Start acting on my words – learn the language
- Work in my community
- Dedicate more time for language learning
- Use what I know at all times – say it
- Don't be intimidated – learn how to ask for help

There is a sense that Kanyenkeha needs to be an everyday language. Session two used the charts from the first session. The purpose of session two was to refine the lists made during the individual reflections. The group was partnered with the purpose of identifying how "You help Brantville become a Language Learning Community." Each partner was allowed to read the other delegates reflection sheet. The participants were invited to dialogue with each other. After the dialogue they were to say to each other "three things you do well", "two things you could do better", and "one thing you could do differently now." Noticeably, the reviewers were more likely to advance institutional and BO programs for their partners. The positive reinforcement provided the delegates with an emancipatory environment that was important for the afternoon sessions.

After reading the "I help..." sheets delegates responded with slight modifications to the "you help..." sheets. This collaborative performance assessment activity demonstrated understanding about roles participants held in the Brantville language movement. Of importance is the emerging pattern

of home, community and BO as partners that are valued in the work done in Brantville.

Three things you do well:

- Ability to network
- Work hard on the program
- Commitment to language education
- Speak language in the home as much as you can
- You have the patience to work with youth Committed your family to a traditional lifestyle
- Building a network in Brantville
- Carry on traditional knowledge of ceremonies
- Sharing your knowledge from traditional-academic perspective
- Share you gift of language with anyone wanting to learn
- Teaching in the language nest
- Read and write in Kanyenkeha
- Instructing the language
- Longhouse business and ceremonies
- Planning lesson plans and implementation
- Good at spelling Kanyenkeha
- Good classroom helper
- Good resource management
- Your job in the library
- Your volunteering at events
- Your work with the circle
- Open and willing to teach others by
- Being gentle and kind
- Knowledgeable of culture and language within culture
- Dedicated and committed to language learning in community
- You are dedicated, committed to this community – to the culture
- Your willingness to always help whenever asked for something
- You are a good listener, eager to learn and willingness to take notes for us
- Teach the language
- Help others
- Willing to help all the time

Going further than positive reinforcement the dyads also posed areas for improvement. In this case there were further attachments of individual gifts and work to the programs conducted by BO. Significantly the participants identified language use and confidence as factors in the Brantville language movement.

Two things you can do better:

- Put more effort into your own language
- Learning (be a role model)
- Use the language more
- Putting your baby in language
- Nest program
- Participate more in community language
- Activities/events
- Share knowledge of ceremonies with Brantville
- Have more of a presence in Brantville
- Implement language into everything in her life
- Make speakers of little babies
- Reading and writing skills in the language
- Become more approachable
- Become more confident in front on class
- More use of the language
- Look for more resources
- Use the language you already have
- Learn more language
- Use language
- Become more focused so we know what your real strengths are
- Continue to study the language

- Teach as many as possible
 - Be there to help those want to learn
- Helping Brantville Become a Language Learning Community (HBLLC)***

The emergence of the Brantville language learning community develops from use of the language that creates a generation of mother-tongue speakers. In fact teachers and learners create mutual commitments and become mutually interdependent. The commitment by delegates to the promotion of Kanyenkeha as a living language developed throughout the day. Positive affirmation of work through the dialogues in the self-appraisal and collaborative assessments exercise provided the opportunity for the delegates to generate responses for work to be done in the future.

For example the following list of “advice” from the dyads demonstrates how positively the delegates viewed each other’s work and future directions. Members of the conference were positive in their recommendation that they share a commitment to Kanyenkeha. With comments in front of them the delegates were asked to translate the “differently now” statements into the previous action plans developed by BO.

One thing you can do differently now:

- Learn how to ask for help to learn Mohawk in many ways
- (Become) committed to learning the language
- Full immersion-Language nest by moving to Brantville to help community learn more
- Use more language while instructing in the classroom
- Speak more Mohawk
- Keep using the language
- Speak the language when possible
- Use the words you know and the new words you are going to learn whenever you can
- Make sure they become speakers

After the delegates comments were translated to a large HBLLC “map” (see Appendix B). The map listed ideas and comments written by the delegates throughout the day. As a map the delegates were able to plot a direction for BO using their own observations and assessments of the performance of work done to help Brantville become a language learning community. To develop the collaboration for enacting the BO mission the delegates summarized their dyad comments into a group posting to suggest “what we could do” (see Illustration A). The theme that emerged focused on becoming role models for language learning and creating opportunities to teach children.

All delegates contributed to the collaborative design of the action plans. By seeing their co-generated knowledge as they mapped the future direction for BO, the delegates were able to substantively develop frameworks for various operational and program areas for HBLLC. Prior to deliberative dialogue about the future directions for BO the group assessed “what we do” in relation to “what we could do”. These directions were charted on the HBLLC map.

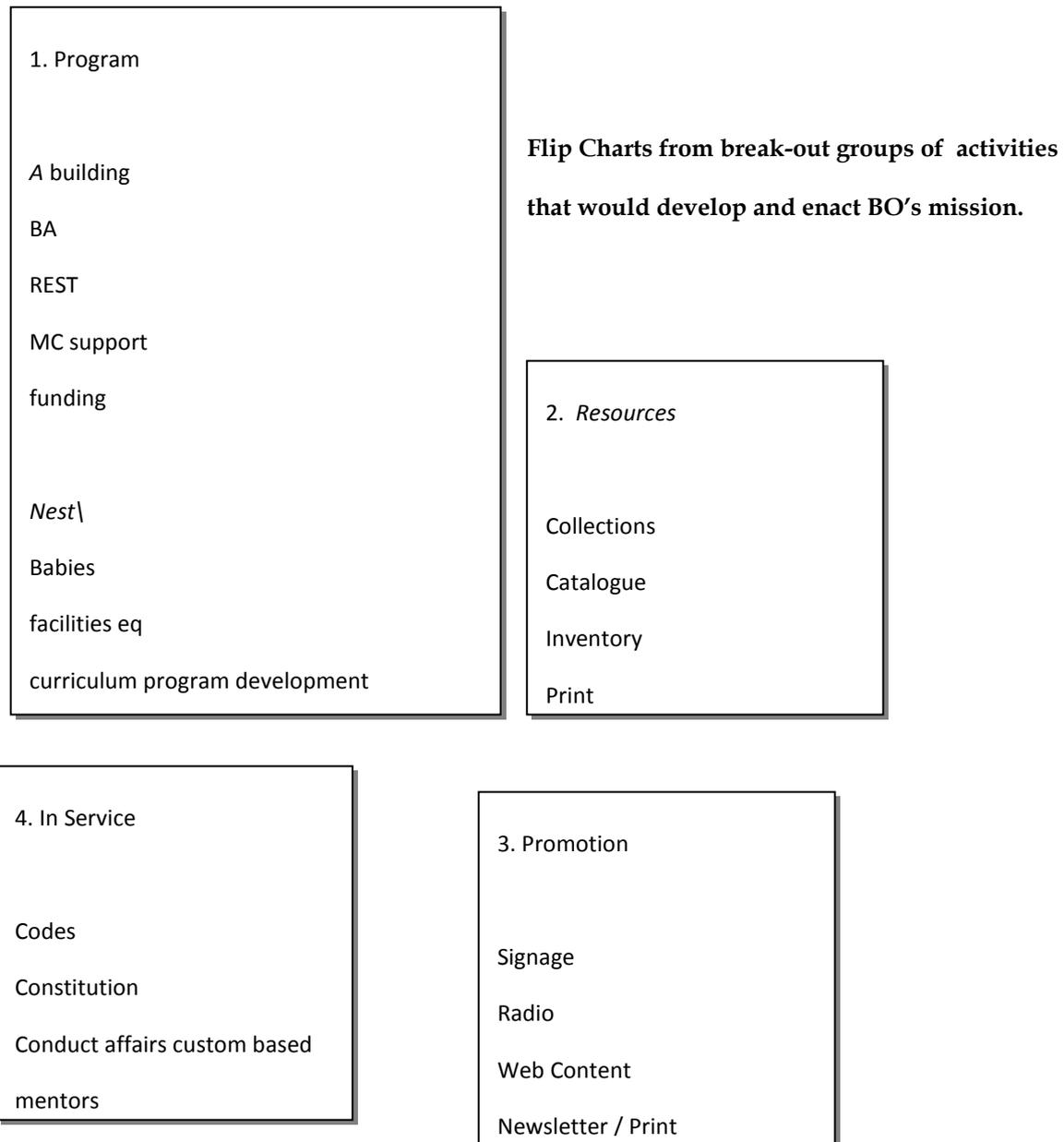
As the delegates charted the directions based on their assessments, the listings were plotted as sub-headings. The sub-headings were taken from previous BO action plans. In the case of the HBLLC planning session, the subheadings were used as a context for breakout-groups. The break groups were comprised of delegates who voluntarily participated in sessions they chose. The breakouts-groups then held separate sessions where they itemized duties and tasks for each sub-section. Finally the groups reported back to the entire workshop delegates their items and rationale. The itemization of work was listed on the HBLLC map (see Illustration B).

Illustration A: Flip charts of performance assessment and identified actions to take

<u>What we do now</u>	<u>What we could do</u>
use Kanyenkeha everyday	seek
devoted	continue to study
become more effective	role model
help teach	learn how to learn
build networks	promote language
ceremonies in Onkwehonwe	ask for help
Problem solve	speak
Participate stop being critical	Don't give up
committed to the language	Not be afraid to make mistakes
teach Kanyenkeha	Full immersion – implement
active learning	
open minded	
committed to learning	
encourage language use	
stay focused	
speak it	
promote	

Delegates participated in dialogues to create lists of their own actions and what they could do to improve their promotion and use of Kanyenkeha.

Illustration B: Language learning community: the Dream



The last exercise included redefining the work each group described. These work listings were added to a target circle depicted on the HBLLC map that were numbered to correspond to 1. Programs, 2. Resources, 3. Outreach, and Internal. These listings became Programs, Resources. The work plans generated for the BO include Promotion, and In-service in the final breakdown. Delegates then were given the opportunity to volunteer for membership on Action Working Groups for each area and enlisted by writing their names on the HBLLC map (see Illustration C).

The findings of the delegates have become transposed to work plans (see Appendix A). As the final act of the conference it was understood that the findings and plans developed through out the day would become the action plans to be administered and managed by the BO Director. Of central importance is the Director's role as the convener, facilitator and mediator of the group processes to operationalize the SAG. The "In-Service" function provides a "board policy governance" framework within which the director and staff would proceed.

This centrally important feature of the action planning process provides a map for the enactment of the BO mission

Discussion

Though the workshops were held in one-day the intensive nature of the workshop produced material that was used by the facilitator to create an Action Plan. The Action Plan describes detailed actions designed by the delegates to be undertaken over the next year to deliver the mission and long-term plans of BO. By 2011, Brantville Onkwawenna delivers programs for children and adults. Diligence and renewed commitment remain outcomes for the HBLLC.

I began this story with a primer on colonial, post-colonial, and de-colonial contexts for an Indigenous people who have resisted extinction. I suggested that self-determination precedes self-government. The HBLLC demonstrate this order. The struggle to save an Indigenous language remains an exemplar of that resistance. As a decolonizing methodology, *healing historical unresolved grief* is clearly identified as the starting point. As one of my Elders said when I was asked to work with our People, “your People have suffered a great trauma from the American Revolution for which they have never recovered – they will not hear your words until their tears are wiped.” Wiping the tears renews an older Indigenous covenant that is at the basis of Indigenous culture.

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**While we are together, this
is how we see it:
how we claim that our
approach to Action
Research actualises
decolonisation**
Riripeti Reedy and Susan Goff

Abstract

Two Action Research practitioners, one of Maori descent and one of Anglo descent, are collaborating as participatory facilitators in a contracted partnership with Aboriginal and Islander co-researchers in a publicly funded Participatory Action Research (PAR) project. The research explores a policy area that is key to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander life quality and expectancy.

The issue of decolonisation has become core to both the policy area under exploration as well as the form of Action Research that is developing to carry out the inquiry. The meaning of this term, "decolonisation" is unfolding and discussed in the paper. It is continually explored in the discourses between the participants, and in the instance of this paper, between the two facilitators.

Background

"I am the space where I am" (Arnauld, quoted in Bachelard, 1958, p.137).

"A communicative space is constituted as issues or problems are opened up for discussion, and when participants experience their interaction as fostering the democratic expression of divergent views. Part of the task of an Action Research project, then, is to open communicative space, and to do so in a way that will permit people to achieve mutual understanding and consensus about what to do, in the knowledge that the legitimacy of any conclusions and decisions reached by the participants will be proportional to the degree of authentic engagement of those concerned." (Kemmis, 2001, p.100).

The project that is the source material for this paper, came about as a recommendation made through a previous qualitative research strategy delivered by the Centre for Community Child Health (CCCH, 2008). At the conclusion of this initiative, the researchers identified that they had been unsuccessful in engaging Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander services in consultations.

The CCCH research had used a combination of focus groups and literature reviews to recommend the value of the intended strategy for all Australian populations in the policy's domain of concern. It was thought that the same benefits would exist for Indigenous populations, but this assertion could not be assumed. The funding body responded to the CCCH's recommendation with a request for tender to address this need.

The authors of this paper tendered for the project offering a Participatory Action Research (PAR) strategy, understanding that the right of self-determination was crucially important to Aboriginal peoples and Torres Strait Islanders in all things, and particularly with regard to life-concerning matters. Moreover, we were aware that assumptions about what constituted the policy's core business area, the programme's "target group", as well as the intended "beneficial outcomes" of such a strategy, were likely to be of a very different nature when considered through Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander world views as compared to mainstream thinking. PAR provided a means by which different ways of knowing, as well as different constructs of the substantive inquiry topic, can be drawn ethically into public view.

In order to tender we had to receive "endorsement in principle" from two, named peak bodies active in delivering services to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities in the inquiry domain. Both bodies courageously offered their endorsement and we were awarded the contract.

The proposed PAR project was structured along four stages of development:

■ Stage 1: Building Indigenous governance structures (the Steering Group), processes (e.g.: Learning Circles, Terms of Reference) and informed

assumptions (e.g.: literature review, draft quality framework) with which to progress the strategy

■ Stage 2: Forming an Indigenous Action Research Consortium with stakeholders in the core business areas; engaging the Consortium in its own formation and co-determination of the members' preferred PAR principles and processes

■ Stage 3: Implementing the agreed PAR strategy to generate the data and develop the emerging new sector and its conceptual basis, that the intended strategy required, and

■ Stage 4: Co-evaluating the strategy and co-reviewing the findings with the Consortium members and Steering Group to deliver the project's outputs: a final report, a training program, a development strategy and a quality framework.

Our research team was made up of Maori and Pakeha (a Maori term meaning a non-Indigenous New Zealander) Action Researchers, Anglo Australian and Israeli communications suppliers, and two Aboriginal Knowledge Brokers who worked directly with the Australian Indigenous services in the research project's domain of inquiry.

How we created this paper

This paper is the result of several stages of development.

We commenced with an audio-recorded telephone conversation. This exchange was transcribed, sections being agreed as relevant, then cut and pasted into the beginnings of a more structured narrative.

The chronological sequence was not interrupted.

As the drafts were exchanged between us we determined stylistic commitments, such as not to over-theorise, not to over-reference and over-analyse, to let incomplete conversation threads stay in the text, and not to observe many of the conventions of writing an academic paper.

These decisions reflected our commitment to record a "live dialogue", one that is open-ended and in many respects, still unfinished. Its primary purpose is to share with our readers how such collaborative conversations can amount to principled action which underpins thinking about methodology and praxis in Action Research. In systemic terms, they also embody decolonisation taking form in living reality, in the context of action research relationships, intervention and theorisation.

We submitted our draft paper for review, and responded to the editorial feedback to produce a final draft.

The text identifies each speaker: Riripeti is an Aotearoa/New Zealand Maori, and Susan is a Pakeha (an Anglo New Zealand/Australian).

What follows is true for as long as we are together, and only as we see it – understanding in this ephemeral sense, that you, the reader may well join us in our learning.

Decolonisation

Riripeti speaks first: “Dissonance resonates... First person inquiry is part and parcel of the dissonance that for me is about decolonisation. I am always conscious that I am always part of it - and - not a part of it. Decolonisation, I have no choice if it is research because that is always about knowledge and how we construct it; then I am always there and yet, decolonisation will move, or not move, with or without me. At an individual level then, what are the Action Research practices that trigger us to examine our harder questions? At that same [individual] level how does dissonance, discord, or difference play out for each of us as individuals and into the group we have become in this [Action Research] strategy?”

Susan says: This word, “decolonisation” - was a new term to me - I had heard about “post-colonisation” but not *decolonisation*. I learned early in this research strategy that the distinction is important: the former assumes that colonisation is no longer taking place; whereas the term “decolonisation” marks a turn, a halting or an intervening with ongoing colonisation. This is very dangerous and powerful work - because so many of us are unaware of the reality that business-as-usual, even with the best of intentions, is ongoing colonisation. It is potentially divisive and very disturbing. Does PAR have a place here? And if so, what kind of PAR? The term “decolonisation” clearly describes a quality of action that goes against an oncoming/ongoing taken-for-granted reality - something that PAR is well positioned to do. However, even though our traditions of PAR are designed to question assumptions, make the invisible visible, and hold within them the spirit of “emancipation” and the many codes of social justice and inclusion that are core aspects of their legacies, they do not necessarily carry the particular commitments to decolonisation that our endeavor requires.

We both say in an interplaying series of comments (which have been developed in a more “writerly” way for this part of the paper): We became

aware of the centrality and strength of demand of this commitment in this project through our literature research. The Steering Group, whose members, all of who were Aboriginal women, crafted eight thematic questions, to which our research team responded. One of their questions was: "What is health promotion as understood by Aboriginal peoples and Torres Strait Islander people and their practitioners?"

The papers we reviewed in response to this lead question repeatedly referred to the reality that if Indigenous communities were to realize self control and self determination over their health status – which is the intention of health promotion – then, in Australian and Torres Strait Islander settings, healing as well as engaging in decolonisation were crucial for this level of self control to become a reality.

The most explicit source about this claim was Vickery, Faulkhead, Adams and Clarke (2007) who affirmed how oral histories as "decolonised voices" can show the impacts of historical experiences on health and research in order to improve health.

The authors claim that the impacts of colonisation have been over-reported in comparison with the advances of decolonisation, and that Indigenous social determinants of health for decolonisation include not only reconciliation, land and control of one's own health (as discussed in the literature) - but also: cultural survival, affirming cultural ceremony, oral history, family support and connection, spiritual and emotional wellbeing, native title, state recognition, self-determination and community control. In the paper, amongst many other references, the authors made the following comments about decolonisation:

Decolonisation is where Indigenous culture and colonisation intertwine. Revisiting and rewriting the past is an integral part of the process of dealing with the unfinished business of colonisation (referencing Tuhiwai Smith, 1999) (Vickery et al, 2007, p.22).

Processes to promote decolonisation need to be well thought out and can be hindered by ongoing colonisation problems (Vickery et al, 2007, p.33).

In real terms, our developing PAR practice is a surface into which our cultures intertwine creating Maori and Anglo reflexive spaces, within Australian Aboriginal, Maori and Anglo spaces in the project context (as well as the many other cultural narratives related to the many other project participants). In this paper we reflect the ongoing revisiting and rewriting of the unfinished business of colonisation – which we are attempting to become decolonisation - through changes in our own stances and practices as Action Researchers in these different spaces. We are doing this as we continually run into the problems of ongoing colonisation within, between and around us. It is also not to forget that these problems include large-scale structural systems and issues that have widespread and ongoing ramifications of cultural damage. For example, those that relate to Native Title, that on another level

have far more disturbing consequences in the subtleties and the nuances of courage that are too often brutally dismissed when speaking of it.

Riripeti says: I am of the Ngati Porou tribe of Maori from Aotearoa New Zealand, I'm always one of the "colonised", so I have no choice. As a PAR practitioner who is Maori, I am part of this decolonisation space, I really cannot "not be part of it". The funny thing is I do forget this, until someone who is here in this decolonising space with me makes a statement that sets them apart from me, because inherent in their statement is their choice to be in this decolonisation space, whereas, I have none, and actually that's ok with me. Do they know that about me? I don't know, maybe it will make a ripple of change if I let them know this... perhaps.

Susan says: Suddenly my skin colour matters, my personal history matters, my grammar matters, my psychological capacity to accept (or otherwise) that I am always a coloniser and always my participating in decolonisation is just another act of colonisation - matters ... even the sequence of who talks when, and to whom we are talking, even here, all matters. Alternatively, it doesn't matter at all, nothing (about me) matters - and this suppression of my being is the just currency of my illegitimate presence on this land. I know this is how some Indigenous people see me. How does PAR work in this annihilating space?

These were all new questions to us - and became the heart of our discourses, the passion of our labors, the pain of our learning and love in our laughter.

Susan asks: Riripeti - how do we talk about this question in this paper?

Riripeti responds: Let's talk about decolonisation processes we have been involved in over the last 18 months in this project - our key experiences.

Susan chimes in: Could we call these "critical learning incidents"?

Yes, says Riripeti, [actually she says - "yeeus" - with her deliciously Kiwi vowel] ...Let's talk about critical learning

incidents that lead us to exposing different ways of working...
what we observe in each other in practice.

Susan remembers the many glasses of champagne on the flights back home after the workshops, the unceasing conversation between Riripeti and herself – reflecting, debriefing, turning over, looking through a different frame, seeking inwards, speaking outwards – we have witnessed much of each other in practice.

Riripeti says: Holding a “decolonising space” – is difficult, and the unexpectedness of what we might find there... the actions that take place within an Action Research framework and a discourse about this in the paper....

Susan says [in her mixed Ozzie/Kiwi confusion of vowels]: We are engaging in “nerrative” and “creetically refluxive discourse” – which is a PAR practice – but in a decolonising context now – let us make an overt link – as this is more than just an interesting discussion... (Our vowels carry the history).

Riripeti adds: there are a number of “depth interests” ... AR as background and foreground to how we talk about our experiences.

Susan runs on (now knowing that this desire to speak and be heard, to listen and learn - is claiming spaces with new meanings): Linking critical learning incidents/and dialogue are authentic AR practices... Critical incidents – boundary crossing, spaces of uncertainty – need to create engagement/participation in engagement, calling on the authentic nature of the persons/people in the moment – in such practices dissonance can take place – depending on what is playing into this. AR is about disturbing the system, because you can't really understand the systems (self, relationships, ontology, structures) without disturbing them. As I make this claim about what AR is - this now raises questions for me about whose version of AR we are engaging in and what are the colonising assumptions of this version... Up to now I was only focused on this question from a western (colonising) world point of view. Now that gathering of wisdom has to be

completely reviewed for me to be in a decolonising Action Research space with you. This is unexpected, something I would never have found unless I was here with you and the team.

Riripeti slips in: It's too large a starting place -

OK - says SG: Practical tools to the rescue - what about a Critical Incident Map?

You go - says Riripeti

Sure? Susan asks

Yeah - go, go... says Riripeti. We are into it!

Riripeti and Susan brainstorm: The first meeting with the Steering Group and the juice/water story; the presentation to the Aboriginal Shire Council and the visiting professional whites accusing Susan of unethical behavior; the same community and the Aboriginal Director of the early childhood service forgetting he had assigned staff to the training and Susan spitting the dummy - and then feeling such remorse; when we met with the Research Consortium and you Susan asked me, Riripeti, what my theory of practice was and I thought - what is she asking me? And the public meeting when one of our Steering Group members was described by a white person as being "of mixed blood" and told she wouldn't really know about Aboriginal spirituality - and I (Susan) didn't know what to do; and the conference - when we did the Action Research "Hypothetical Workshop" - and so quickly it became an "us and them" dynamic - us the research team and them the observers who identified with the hypothetical community. What was that?

Let's focus on Melbourne - Riripeti says.

OK. And the incident with the Service Director...

Riripeti says: OK. As PAR practitioners these events turn us to crises of methodological integrity - the basic questions - what

is data – what constitutes evidence and methodology? What is research?

Decolonising PAR praxis? Who are we to say?

Susan says: For example, our commitment not to capture yarning in the Steering Group as a qualitative researcher might, resisting objectification even though the stories were so powerful. Our having made this choice explicit with the Steering Group – and the quietness in which it was received. So very difficult. Always in it, always not in it.

And, our working to ethical guidelines (AIATSIS) for research with Aboriginal issues – establishing Aboriginal leadership and governance within the project – where does research expertise meet cultural leadership in a cross-cultural and decolonising relationship? How we addressed this tension with several discussions about methodology with the Steering Group, how we were nervous about how to talk about this ... the defaulting to providing our own research practices in response to the Steering Group's governance actions – and whether our determinations were evident, whether they mattered.

How do our critical incidents throw light on these matters?

Can the methodology questions be resolved outside of the culture that gives birth to them without being innately colonising if that culture is a colonising one? If we have boundaries around this – how do we cope with the - at times - torrential flow of paradoxes, uncertainties, grief and anger – and be in a position to make decisions as the culture at this moment, demands?

Riripeti says: These same issues are a part of kaupapa Maori research – research that is about Maori, for Maori and led by Maori, research that has at its heart, positive change for Maori as Maori determine it. And, let's not forget that before we academised it, Google is a good place to start for entries on

this. Kaupapa Maori research was to research that which is ordinarily Maori, that which is about our everyday and the things that give us meaning as Maori. So, the innate colonising, the boundaries and paradoxes, they continue to occur for all of us, Maori and non-Maori alike. In my most recent experiences 'at the Pa' - on my marae, I saw the protocols being taken into account with processes that take them and take the issue forward in an ethical, inclusive manner that recognizes traditional leaders, traditional values and practices *and* that we live in a modern world. Yes, even as it happened, the issue moved forward, the debate continued, and continues, that this has happened and opened new and other possibilities for other ways to happen tomorrow. That I believe is the fundamental integrity of culture - to continue. And, there is also a process called research that has its own integrity - equally as applicable in traditional, modern or a "culturally neutral" setting (one where culture is not in dispute, everyone is an insider) ... I recall saying to you: you must never forget the expertise around research process that is expected of you and that you demonstrate at all times.

Susan says: But those expectations are often born of objectifying assumptions, associated with genocide, associated with the anthropological disaster and protecting Indigenous knowledge from mainstream abuses... a messiness in the relationships - we have responsibilities with regard to research demeanor, research responsibility and distinctions - and we are also creating/inhabiting a transgressive, unfolding space where I/we remain largely confused about the notions of traditional culture - there is no one way. We are in a political space all the time - if there are no guidelines there is no authority - we are always answering to our own questions of legitimacy in the unfolding process. That political act [of answering to our own legitimacy] incorporates a spiritual resonance and an historical account - for which our political integrity needs to do the business of learning and healing. That is who we are to say whether what we are doing is decolonising PAR. We are the

primary witnesses of the methodology we are companioning AND we are witnessing the disturbances it is creating on multiple levels – initially on my own world view, and taken for granted conventions of what constitutes data, method, research and “making a difference”. This was felt most compelling for me in the interaction with the early childhood service director where on the one hand I had every right to feel done over, and on the other, that reality and even the reality of all that the project offered in terms of making a difference, just could not compete with the everyday realities of life and death in an Indigenous community.

Riripeti says: Yes, and you and I know that sometimes WE, the I in the we, are all it comes down to at this point in time in space and place: what to do? Carry on as best we can? Or, Fold over and Sleep? There is no choice, we, all of the WE's, all of those who came before us Know, with the capital “K”; we must carry on, pragmatically. That is no different for anyone who is a survivor of colonisation. It is always a political space – the construction of knowledge is always a political act. When the guidelines are not there for Indigenous people, cultural groups, working across cultures... you rely on your own history – the actions of your forebears for the people you are working with – they all come into play.

Susan says: And they, the forebears, come into different modalities depending on your cultural identity. As a first and second-generation migrant I have no sense of cultural identity – no identity in terms of relationship to land and very weak association with kinship. As a PAR practitioner trying to get my feet on the ground – my forebears are in my bibliography; my chosen canon of authors is my history and becomes the means by which I make decisions, defer or corral my questions to develop insight. My bibliography and community of Action Researchers is my means of determining what constitutes the basics: what am I doing here, who am I, how do I decide a right or wrong action? A lot of my critical incidents reflect this version of my forebears.

Riripeti says: So Action Research relies first, on a sense of reflective practice with the self, then second, a reflexive broader question with self and others. We, well at least I think Indigenous practitioners do, fundamentally recognize our genealogical relationship to land – that is what whakapapa is – tracing one’s roots to a space, place and time. Does that mean that in the terms with which we conduct Action Research that one has to have whakapapa embedded in oneself before one goes to others? Or at least a sense of space and place and time that anchors one?

Susan thinks... and the connections form: In terms of my references [she says out loud] a core distinction of PAR is that action happens – there is a change that takes place – changes in perception/or physical action – but always with feet on the ground – there are always people looking at stuff in the everyday – always the feet are on the ground. The question of “what is my relationship to landscape” is fundamental to decolonising Action Research – unless you ask that question you are participating in colonisation.

Riripeti jumps in: Write that down!

Susan: It’s a shared struggle across our collaboration. It’s not that unless I have a legitimate relationship to the land I cannot be a decolonising PAR practitioner. But if I have done /continue to do my reflection on that question, it gives me limited legitimacy – rather than inheriting unlimited authority from people who either did not (or do not) ask that question or did not (do not) have that relationship to the ground I am currently standing on (for example – the people in my bibliography).

Riripeti also draws a connecting line: This goes back to the conference event in Melbourne (the ALARA World Congress, 2010) – where the people in our workshop ¹⁰who were to be

¹⁰ This refers to the “Hypothetical” workshop (Goff, 2010) held at the ALARA World Congress 2010, Melbourne. The team from the project that provides the source material for this article and other action research colleagues participated in an observed hypothetical action research project. The workshop audience observed and gave feedback about how the action research team developed its praxis in response to “live” situations in a local community with which they were hypothetically

observers of our practice in ourselves as the researchers, quite quickly moved from being the observers of our practice and became “the” hypothetical community. The dissolution of the “we” that was the basis of the Hypothetical Workshop to an “us” and “them” was swift and profound. Because we don’t ask those starting position questions that help frame our practices as AR practitioners – failing to set up that question “what is my relationship to landscape” helps set up the competitive dynamic.

Susan suggests: Yes, of a landless people! As such we (the inheritors of – perpetuators of colonisation) are a people continuously seeking territory – generally aggressively claiming and defending territory – for self-definition – the shadow play of what was taking place in that room... We did actually ask the question of relationship to land with regard to PAR practices at the Koori Centre. I asked about 1st and 2nd Nation relationships with which each person in the room felt they might identify. That was also surprisingly disturbing in that communicative space. Perhaps it was also decolonising because it constituted a turn for everyone in their different places in the reflections. In that moment everyone in the room was the right person to say whether that was decolonising Action Research or not.

Riripeti says: we rarely practice with ourselves what we wish to practice with others... That question was unsettling though not intended to be – but also says – how do we move past this? How do we come to grips with this? What does it mean about us?

Your description of your relationship to land is something you have done over time – which stands you on a ground to take this process forward. I am not clear that this is part and parcel of the tool kit or repertoire of ARers to do work not only with themselves but also across cultures – or with people different

engaging. The team observed how the audience quickly lost its observer role and became the community in its stance.

to them... We are always in the danger of transgressing and dealing with the questions we need to face too.

Susan says: when these failures to face these questions become large cultural edifices like institutions, like departments of health, justice, education, these processes become the means of not seeing what lies in the question and what it says about us – the colonisers. Our project Steering Group talked about this straight up when they insisted on inserting the word “recognition” of existing practices in the project’s title. They created a decolonising Action Research turn right there – turning the mainstream assumption of “integrating” (as was initially in the title) such practices, right around, before we even started.

Riripeti says: we have brought to the project that we are not using the confused notions of the mainstream – we are not forcing Indigenous people to fit in. Using the painting and yarning and creation processes of the canvases (as we did in the project), we begin processes for us and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people to find their own reflections and reflect that back to the mainstream.... Forcing Indigenous people to reframe themselves so that they are seen by the mainstream is always culture-destroying; and then I am reminded that culture is as resilient as our ancestors were to travel these seas and out of the ashes... We can and will go forward into the 21st Century and beyond... and the coloniser continues. People have not seen it that way – that Action Research becomes a vehicle for people to articulate these things for themselves.

I want the practice that Action Research offers and the ability for people to have that opportunity offered again and again. Only with practice and confidence can we, can they, demand more of the system.

How we come to know that our AR practice actualises decolonisation

Susan says: Seeing is always a culturally constructed process too – the data in the project, from the services, is all about seeing – in

a conceptual sense first, then a physical sense. We were faced with a chicken and egg situation: how can you research a field, named by the colonising interests, to reveal decolonising practices that may be hidden in that naming? I really didn't know how we were going to escape that paradox. In this project, using reflective practices that provide a platform for collective, decolonising voices, the participants are reframing what is already done, as named by the mainstream, by following the outcomes into the community and looking for different decolonising consequences than the mainstream identifies in its narrowly defined concepts of "outcomes".

They are pushing current practice out to inter-connected social determinants, which are largely neglected by the mainstream, rather than the other way around of applying unconnected social determinants to change existing practices, as reductionist, mechanistic mainstream practices prefer to do. We are reworking existing practice as it is with a new meaning, more powerful and political – it is a seeing issue. So for example, a child's morning rest becomes a decolonising health promoting practice: building their resilience to cope with over crowded houses so they can get their sleep, helping them resolve conflict between their friends more peacefully, letting them dream as Yunupingu¹¹ softly sings on the ghetto blaster in the background of the centre's nursery.

It is disturbing – to stop, to value, to see what we do through a different window, which sets up a reconsideration of what has gone before, and to realize the power of what we are doing in very different terms. Indigenous peoples have the capacity for this two-way seeing and action – but mainstream people do not have this capacity yet. It is interesting that the participants have suggested that we use this form of AR in the mainstream for that reason.

¹¹ Manduwuy Yunupingu is an Aboriginal musician, well known for his participation in the group Yothu Yindi.

Riripeti says: This is a very difficult and dangerous place to find oneself in, or to make evident to others who never knew they were there too. Decolonising PAR is born, carries all these elements and can die here too, that is the difficulty and the dangerousness, making it evident to others who never knew...

In conclusion

We agree that as Action Researchers we can only answer to our own sense of legitimacy in the act of inquiry – that is, each act (within the flow of action) and the overall dynamic of participatory questioning and learning. In this very personal location of “self” that understands we are in different worldviews, we claim, our praxis is intended to be, and actualises a decolonising praxis. Would we knowingly commit to any other kind of action?

We witness this questioning and claiming - or otherwise- in each other as we open up our thinking to each other. In so doing, we go on occupying the always colonised/always colonising dynamics of blindness and realization in our inquiring. We go on transgressing, realizing, sharing the mutual endeavours and keeping much to ourselves in the many shadows of history. We hold on to each other, co-authoring new kinds of action and legitimacy together, the same acts being of a very different quality with another person, in another place: they are only as they are for us, as long as we are together as Action Researchers in the personal and public life worlds in which we act together.

As Kemmis, in reference to Habermas notes, at this deep connection between person, place and time, there is a potentially colonising effect between the Action Researcher and the “life world” surrounding us:

...In short, the economic and political legal systems have become insensitive to the imperatives of mutual understanding on which solidarity and the legitimacy of social orders depends (2001, p.97).

Such insensitivity is at its brutalising zenith when it is actualised as colonisation. If nothing else, our knowledge co-production and inquiry-based action, drawn from our mulling together and offered as our decolonising actions, are those that we hope go some way to re-sensitising these systemic forces to found a legitimately decolonising world.

Post script

This exchange is a record of a conversation, preserved as such and not translated into an academic text. We have kept it this way to create a record of

the communicative action space that can open and connect practitioners around the origins and implications of how we think about our action in research practices.

In this post script we need to honour those who have named this quality of action, that of dialogue between two practitioners, as being significant to how we become critically aware of the cultural architecture of knowledge and its capacity to intervene with oppression or otherwise. Kemmis's reflection of the relevance of Habermas to action research (2001) is one such source of recognition. For example he says:

Habermas's theory of communicative action was a decisive contribution to substantive social theory – it privileged the kind of reflection and discussion (communicative action) we do when we interrupt what we are doing (generally technical or practical action) to explore its nature, dynamics and worth (p.93).

The question arises – how do we name its nature, witness its dynamics and ascertain its worth? Linda Tuhiwai Smith's construction of decolonising methodology (1999) is an Indigenous feminist response to these questions. Smith encourages us to have such conversations to heal, to affirm and to see who we can be beyond the ongoing violating malaise between shameful ignorance and the remorselessness of surviving colonisation:

Decolonisation is where Indigenous culture and colonisation intertwine. Revisiting and rewriting the past is an integral part of the process of dealing with the unfinished business of colonisation (Tuhiwai Smith, 1999).

Mostly, we need to attend to Riripeti and her mother:

“Can you hear me Riripeti?

Yes mother, I am listening.”

Acknowledgements

We present our reflections with necessary care for anonymity and confidentiality to protect the participants' and the funding body's interests, given that the commissioner's endorsement of the source research findings is still in carriage at the time of writing this article.

Accordingly, we acknowledge anonymously the custodians of the many lands on which we meet and work, and the many kinship groups who are progressing this strategy.

We acknowledge the participants in the project and the representatives of the funding body, all of whom offered high levels of trust for the project to become as it has, with full endorsement of all participants.

Our thanks go to Sandra Levers for her critical feedback in the development of this paper.

And we each acknowledge each other, for the absolute privilege it has been to work together in this project as cross-cultural action researchers exploring and realizing decolonisation with our Aboriginal and Islander co-researchers – such generosity of spirit and imagination – nga mihi.

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Using Ganma knowledge sharing as a decolonising approach to conference planning and facilitation

Kim O'Donnell and Janet Kelly

Abstract

This paper discusses how the 2007 Action Learning Action Research Association ALARA conference was purposefully planned and facilitated with the intention of creating a safe space for Indigenous and non-Indigenous people to come together to share knowledge and understandings. Concepts of Ganma (knowledge sharing) and Dadirri (deep listening) were used as a theoretical framework for both the conference planning, and the conference event. This collaborative approach enabled the planning team (Team SA) to ensure that Indigenous voices and preferences were fully heard and centrally positioned, rather than placed at the margins of decision making. The prevention of Western dominance and silencing of Aboriginal voices was a purposeful act of decolonisation. We explain how the planning process and teamwork ensured a suitable venue, affordable registrations and inclusive program. We then discuss the conference proceedings and how Ganma and Dadirri were central to our facilitation process. Finally we use the participant and planning team evaluations to highlight the challenges and benefits of this approach.

The authors

Presenting one's standpoint and agenda upfront is a transparent practice in Indigenous settings (NHMRC, 2003) as it is in feminist and critical research

(Browne et al, 2005). An explanation of who we are, where we come from and our motivations is an integral part of respectful practice. Therefore, we begin by introducing ourselves and our motivations in organising this conference. We are two researchers with a common interest in contributing to improving health outcomes for Indigenous people.

Kim – I am a Malyangapa/Barkindji woman and a custodian of Mutawintji Lands in Western NSW. I was working in the Aboriginal Health Research Unit at Flinders University, seeking opportunities to showcase projects in partnership with Indigenous people that supported the strength and resilience of individuals and communities. I was also working to promote Aboriginal health research ethics.

Janet – I am an English/German woman with a dash of Welsh, raised on Kangaroo Island SA. Leading up to the conference I was involved in PhD studies as a nurse researcher, drawing on concepts of Ganma knowledge sharing and postcolonial feminist theory to guide my work with Aboriginal community women and urban community health providers.

Together, we sought to highlight the importance of meaningful Indigenous involvement in research discussions, decisions, processes and dissemination, and to promote the sharing of knowledge and skills between Indigenous and non-Indigenous people, communities and projects.

Introduction

This paper provides a discussion about how the 2007 Action Learning Action Research Association (ALARA) conference was planned and facilitated to become a decolonising space where Indigenous and non-Indigenous people could come together respectfully to share knowledge and understandings. We offer our perspectives as two instigators and leaders of a wider collaborative process. We begin by providing background information about ALARA and the conference planning. We then discuss the four theoretical concepts we used as a framework to plan, organise and facilitate the conference. These are; the colonisation of Aboriginal research approaches, recent guidelines toward more ethical Aboriginal health research, the development of Indigenous approaches to cross cultural knowledge sharing and collaboration such as Ganma and Dadirri, and how these resonate with, and differ from critical, feminist and postcolonial theories. Next we outline our methodological journey involving the synthesis of these theoretical concepts with participatory action research (PAR). This involved a team of enthusiastic people (Team SA) coming together to plan a conference in a short amount of time, with few financial resources. We present the conference process at two levels. First we consider the planning process and identify how key aspects of PAR and Ganma and Dadirri informed our decision making and actions. We then discuss the operationalisation of the conference, highlighting how Team SA worked behind the scenes to encourage knowledge sharing, and to support participants during the process. The results of the participant

evaluation are used to determine to what extent the conference enabled democratic knowledge sharing and de-colonising processes to occur. We begin with background information about the conference. ALARA is an Australian based practitioner association and strategic network of people who use action learning and action research to generate collaborative learning, research and transformative action in a range of settings. Each year a national conference is held, hosted by different states and groups of people working in collaboration with a central ALARA committee. In 2006, South Australia was invited to host the ALARA national conference, with a specific focus on Indigenous and non-Indigenous people working in partnership and collaboration. Using our networks, we invited a group of like minded people from diverse settings, disciplines and backgrounds to come together. Only two were previously members of ALARA. As a group we named ourselves Team SA and worked with Aboriginal, health, education and environmental groups and the central ALARA committee to create a conference that met both national ALARA and local expectations and priorities.

The conference agenda was planned to ensure every effort was made to challenge the often unspoken and unrecognised Western dominance of research discussions and settings, and the silencing of Aboriginal voices. Rather than providing a single session or stream focused on Indigenous research, the entire conference was planned in consideration of processes and relationships with, by, and preferred by Indigenous people. Bringing Indigenous epistemology and ontology (ways of knowing and doing) from the margins of Western research and conference planning, to become a central guiding theme, was a purposeful act of decolonisation (as discussed by Smith 2003). The concepts of Ganma (knowledge sharing) and Dadirri (deep listening) underpinned our actions to provide safe spaces for both Indigenous and non-Indigenous researchers, educators, project workers and community members, enabling them to discuss their experiences and knowledge in respectful two way conversations.

Many Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples are clear about strategies necessary for a decolonisation of research agendas. An Elder group associated with the planning of this conference stated:

It is about making that playing field level - the Western way of knowing is always wanting to be up here, and all the Aboriginal people's way of knowing is put down there. We don't want to be here or there, we just want a level playing field. So how do we get from here, to here (holding her two hands at different levels)? It is getting respect from up here, and meeting us on our own grounds. Having respect; doing it two-ways (Aboriginal Women's Reference Group in Kelly 2004, p.43).

The term decolonisation in the context of this paper refers to our acknowledgement and understanding of the impact of colonisation on Indigenous Australians and the need to act to ensure that elements of colonisation such as dominance, oppression, marginalisation, individual and systemic discrimination, and racism are not continued (Taylor, 2011). It's about levelling the playing field. One way we choose to address colonisation

is by creating safe spaces for deep listening and respectful two way knowledge sharing to occur, when the timing, location and interaction is appropriate and beneficial for all involved. We recognise the importance of Indigenous only spaces for knowledge sharing at times, and also the need for wider intercultural collaborative spaces. Both can be healing and decolonising, in different ways. This conference focused on intercultural collaboration, but was also mindful of the need to create opportunities and spaces for Indigenous people to gather together.

The theoretical journey

The planning and facilitation of this conference was based on four theoretical concepts. Firstly, that Indigenous people tend to be positioned as objects of research rather than engaged collaborators. Secondly, specific approaches have been developed to try to overcome this such as the Aboriginal ethical health research guidelines developed with Indigenous peoples through the NHMRC. Third, key conceptual and theoretical ideas about Indigenous approaches to knowledge have been developed and shared by Indigenous people, such as Ganma and Dadirri. These have both theoretical and methodological implications as they invite cross cultural collaborations. And finally, Indigenous approaches to ethical research; knowledge generation and sharing resonate with critical theories and feminist postcolonial theories. We utilised the combination of these ideas as a framework to organise, and conduct the conference.

Indigenous research methods

Research itself is not a new concept for Indigenous people. Adjunct Professor Christine Franks (2002) reminds us that Aboriginal people have effectively conducted research for thousands of years in order to survive:

It is evident that Aboriginal people have always done research...They knew how to measure very precisely the numbers of people needed in groups for social, emotional, spiritual and physical well-being. It was very critical that research was conducted and that it had to be a continuous process, because it was a matter of survival on a daily basis. So these discussions about health and social issues were conducted with the utmost integrity and intellectual rigor (Franks 2002, p. IV).

Thus there exist research designs developed by Indigenous peoples that are relevant and useful for a range of settings and applications. However, with colonisation, Indigenous research approaches were often ignored or discredited, and many Indigenous people were forced to become recipients of research conducted on, not with them, usually without their informed consent or any tangible benefits for them (Brands, 2005; Chong, 2005). In addition Indigenous people were actively discouraged or prevented from applying their own knowledge, skills and findings both locally and nationally as demonstrated through policies of welfare, missions, segregation, assimilation, and integration (Mattingly & Hampton, 1998). Most forms and

practices of Western research were closely linked to imperialist beliefs and regimes that many Indigenous people came to mistrust until research became *probably one of the dirtiest words in the indigenous world's vocabulary* (Tuhiwai Smith, 2003, p.1).

Keeping Research on Track

Over the last twenty years, Indigenous concepts and priorities have gained traction in the wider research arena, reflecting international trends of increased support of Indigenous self determination; the participation of Indigenous people in policy development and service delivery (Anderson, 2006). In Australia, community forums were held and an agreed framework was developed between the National Health and Medical Research Council (NHMRC), Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisations, health services, and researchers, (NH&MRC, 2003) to outline core values required for research with Aboriginal people and communities, as summarised in Table 1 below.

Table 1: Core Values of Ethical Research with Aboriginal People

Reciprocity	Shared responsibility and mutual obligation fair exchange and tangible benefits for Aboriginal people
Respect	Respect for each others dignity, cultures and individual ways of living
Equality	Recognising the equal value of all individuals A commitment to fairness and justice A right to be different
Responsibility	Recognising and supporting the multiple responsibilities that many Aboriginal people and communities have to country, kinship bonds, caring for others and the importance of maintenance of cultural and spiritual harmony.
Survival and protection	Responsibility of doing no harm to any person, or place, Taking responsibility for country, kinship bonds, caring for others and the maintenance of cultural and spiritual awareness
Spirit and integrity	Recognising the strengths and abilities of Aboriginal people, families and communities. Spirit refers to the ongoing connection and continuity between past, current and future generations, and country. Integrity is about respectful and honourable behaviours

	that hold Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander values and cultures together
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(National Health and Medical Research Council 2003)

These core values were used to guide our conference planning. They enabled us to identify aspects integral to ensuring the conference met Indigenous needs. Team SA made decisions by asking the question- how does this activity ensure reciprocity, respect, equality, responsibility, survival and protection, and or spirit and integrity for Indigenous participants?

'Doing it two ways' (reciprocity) is a purposeful step away from the kind of research that contains hidden agendas and unequal power dynamics (NHMRC, 2003). It begins with effective communication. We have been guided by two Indigenous approaches that have been developed by Indigenous people called Ganma and Dadirri.

Ganma- sharing knowledge

Ganma provides a conceptual framework for both Indigenous and non-Indigenous people to communicate effectively on a level playing field. It is shared by Yolgnu people of Arnhem Land, Northern Territory, Australia, who draw similarities between the mixing of water on their lands and the sharing of Indigenous and Western knowledge:

A river of water from the sea (Western knowledge),

and a river of water from the land (Indigenous knowledge)

mutually engulf each other upon flowing into a common lagoon and becoming one.

In coming together, the streams of water mix across the interface of the two currents and foam is created.

This foam represents a new kind of knowledge.

Essentially, Ganma is a place where knowledge is (re) created (Pyrch & Castillo 2001; Yunggirringa & Garnngulkpuy, 2007).

Creating foam requires more than a joining of intellect and egos. In order to hear the quiet sounds of foam, one needs to listen with one's heart, to be aware of the experiencing not just the experiences, and recognise the importance of process as well as outcomes. Ganma is a way to deepen understanding of who we are, what knowledge we bring, and how we can engage in respectful relationships. It requires deep listening, (Yunggirringa & Garnngulkpuy, 2007).

Dadirri - deep listening

Ngangikurungkurr people of the Daly River area of Northern Territory, describe deep listening as Dadirri- a form of contemplation and non-obtrusive observation. People are recognised as being unique, diverse, complex, and interconnected; part of a community where all people matter and all people

belong (Atkinson, 2002; Ungunmerr, 1993). Dadirri is especially appropriate across cultures because:

Our shared experiences are different, but in the inner deep listening to, and quiet, still awareness of each other, we learn and grow together. In this we create community, and our shared knowledge(s) and wisdom are expanded from our communication with each other (Atkinson 2002, p. 17).

Dadirri enables reflection of one's own beliefs, influences, assumptions, intrusions, decisions and choices. These factors impact on research and ongoing relationships in both positive and negative ways. Dadirri guides researchers to 'act with fidelity in relation to what has been heard, observed and learnt; to understand the pain beneath anger; what a body says when a tongue cannot; and to listen with the heart as well as the ear', (Atkinson, 2002, p.18). Ganma and Dadirri were two important principles that encouraged us all to prioritise Indigenous preferences and needs, and to find creative ways to meet these with limited resources and time.

Postcolonial theories

These three theoretical concepts; Indigenous approaches to ethical research, Ganma knowledge sharing and Dadirri deep listening, resonate with critical theories and feminist post colonial approaches (Browne et al, 2005). Critical and feminist theories also provide an analytical frameworks for challenging power imbalances, exclusions and Othering, and highlights the importance of creating a level playing field. Postcolonial and postcolonial feminist theories focus particularly on race thinking and colonisation effects combined with issues of inequities related to culture, gender and class (Anderson, 2004; Browne et al, 2005). However, like Canadian scholars Browne, Smye and Varcoe (2005) and Battiste (2000), we acknowledge the important distinction between postcolonial and decolonising theoretical perspectives that arise from Western epistemologies and discourses, and those grounded in Indigenous epistemologies. We agree that these can be brought together, but that it is important to distinguish between them, and acknowledge their origins in order to prevent dominance of Western thought or further colonisation of Indigenous knowledge. In order to combat colonisation influences, a decidedly indigenous approach to the generation of knowledge (and of organising and facilitating conferences) is needed.

The methodological journey

The planning and facilitation of this conference was based in participatory action research (PAR) methods and methodology that resonated deeply with Ganma and Dadirri. PAR is a form of action research that has two objectives. The first is to produce knowledge and action directly useful to a group of people, and the second is to enable the self empowerment of people at a

deeper level through the construction and use of their own knowledge (Reason et al, 2006).

The feminist movement has assisted PAR researchers to consider how issues of gender, race and domination impact on consciousness raising and life opportunities (Moreton Robinson, 2002; Reason et al, 2006). Post colonial and decolonisation theories have encouraged researchers to recognise and address inequality linked to discrimination, colonisation practices and the domination of Western knowledge (Browne et al, 2005; Tuhiwai Smith, 2003). Indigenous methodologies such as Ganma and Daddirri can further encourage researchers to value, respect, and ensure that more than one form of knowledge can come together to legitimately create new knowledge (foam) (Gullingingpuy, 2007). The PAR process is cyclical, participative and qualitative with earlier cycles informing later cycles. Data collection, analysis, interpretation and future action are developed through and by each cycle so that knowing and doing are intertwined (Stringer, 2007). Stringer has developed a form of PAR with repeated cycles of Look, Think and Act that can easily be comprehended and adopted by those new to action research, while also responding to deeper methodological and decolonisation needs for democratic knowledge sharing and truly collaborative action. It enables the creation of a level playing field where all participants are heard and actively involved in decision making. In a previous project we had worked with Indigenous community people and workers to collectively adapt Stringers cycles of Look, Think and Act to become Look and Listen, Think and Discuss and Take Action. This increased emphasis on deep listening (Daddirri) and genuine two way discussion (Ganma) was made in response to Indigenous people's concerns of not being heard or included in health care, education and research decision making. We used this PAR process to pragmatically guide our efforts. It enabled us to continually consider and enact the six core values of ethical research with Indigenous people; reciprocity, respect, equality, responsibility, survival and protection and spirit and integrity. Each aspect, and the specific methods used within the PAR process are explained as they occurred in the planning and facilitation sections that follow.

Planning the conference

The conference planning began in late 2006. Kim and Janet invited Ernie Stringer to Flinders University to discuss action research in the context of Indigenous health. Ernie was president of the Action Learning Action Research Association (ALARA) then known as ALARPM – Actions Learning Action Research and Process Management. He posed the question 'how could an ALARA conference be more inclusive of Indigenous people?' After much discussion, we envisaged creating spaces that could enable respectful knowledge exchange between Indigenous and non Indigenous people, with a purposeful focus on Indigenous research perspectives to bring balance to an area strongly dominated by Western ideals. Ernie offered us the challenge of organising and facilitating such a conference, in Adelaide, within nine

months. There was a possibility of a seeding grant, but ultimately the conference would need to be self funded.

The planning team – Team SA

Using our networks, we invited a diverse group of Indigenous and non Indigenous people who were interested in planning and facilitating such a conference. We strategically sought representatives from the Aboriginal Health Council of South Australia (AHCSA), a range of health, education, academic, environment, legal and welfare agencies and other enthusiastic individuals who wished to be involved. This conference organising committee developed a consensus approach to decision making, based on open and transparent communication. Although the team had diverse personal, cultural and professional backgrounds, we shared commitment to collaborative and strengths based approaches. Each person was recognised as contributing unique knowledge, skills and expertise (fresh and salt water knowledge) that was shared (Ganma way) both within the team, and with external stakeholders. Maintaining and developing new and existing networks with community members, practitioners and organisations was crucial to the successful planning and facilitation of the conference within a short timeframe and within a very limited budget. We saw ourselves as a dynamic group of people and decided to call ourselves 'Team SA'. We agreed on a 'no blame' working process that recognised committee members held busy positions with many commitments. If a member was unable to complete a task, then he/she would inform the team as soon as possible and another person with adequate time, energy and/or skills would pick up the task. After much consideration, Team SA decided on the theme "Moving Forward Together: enhancing the well-being of people and communities through action research and action learning". We advertised the topic areas as being education, environment, health and Indigenous ways of knowing and doing. We identified three key aspects integral to ensuring we could fully support indigenous participation in the conference itself, and these were that the venue, program and registration costs were appropriate, affordable and responsive to indigenous people's needs.

Appropriate Venue

We spent considerable time seeking the most appropriate conference venue. We agreed that it needed to support Indigenous people and self determination and be a place where both Indigenous and non-Indigenous participants could meet, and feel welcome. It needed to have adequate meeting rooms, IT support, car parking and outside meeting places, and to be close to public transport and affordable accommodation. Tauondi College, an Aboriginal community controlled independent college that provides a range

of education, catering, tour guiding, conference support and IT, met this criteria. This venue had natural lighting, small and large breakout rooms, bush gardens, outdoor seating and a fire pit for informal gatherings. As we walked around we could envision both small groups of people meeting informally, and larger groups coming together.

Team SA discussed the need for both public and private spaces at the conference. Sharing our experiences in previous conferences, we identified the need for indigenous only spaces where indigenous people could come together to share stories and experiences with each other without outside interpretation or judgement. We also recognised the need for spaces for non-Indigenous people to withdraw and examine concepts of colonisation and its profound intergenerational impact in the lives of Indigenous people. Thus while purposefully creating an intercultural knowledge sharing conference; we also recognised the need for quieter contemplative or time out spaces. Individual cultural process may need to take place before two or more groups can come together effectively and safely (Ramsden, 2003; Consedine, 2005). Our choice was affirmed during our first visit as having spiritually and cultural integrity. During a tour of the site we entered one room and Kim saw a poster on the wall of her uncle, and shared the story of how he had been forced by police to work with researchers from a prominent Sydney University to explain the significance of men's sacred sites in his homeland. After hearing this account, a Tauondi guide spontaneously removed the picture, gave it to Kim and said, 'Here, you have this picture- we have two of them'. The following weekend Kim recounted the experience with her mother and aunties, who advised her that this was a sign that Tauondi was the right place to hold the conference. Through this series of events, the conference became more meaningful spiritually for Kim and most members of Team SA. One member, who found the situation intriguing rather than personally meaningful, still recognised and respected the importance of this event for the remained or the team. This deep respect for each others beliefs and priorities, which may be quite different from one's own, resonated throughout the Team SA planning process. The overall collective vision was created through an acceptance of difference, and working together toward what was possible. A formal agreement was developed between Team SA, ALARA and Tauondi management that clearly defined the roles, responsibilities and resource commitments of each group. In the interests of reciprocity and equality, Team SA negotiated ten free registrations for Tauondi students and staff to attend the conference proceedings, in exchange for additional conference assistance, catering and tours of the college. This agreement based on trust relationships ensured that low income Indigenous students could attend the conference and that Tauondi college could be actively involved, and benefit educationally as well as financially. In this way, the conference became part of the college curriculum, with discussions continuing beyond the two days.

Responsive programming

Conference programming was a balancing act between promoting Ganma knowledge sharing across cultures and among diverse groups of people, actively responding to the six principles of Aboriginal Health Research Ethics, meeting ALARA expectations, and ensuring there were enough speakers (and associated registrations) for financial gain. The order of the opening ceremony was carefully planned and negotiated to ensure respect of country and custodians, of Tauondi protocols and of ALARA. We planned to begin with a welcome to country by a Kurna Elder, followed by a welcome to Tauondi College by the chair of Tauondi Board of Management, then an address by the president of ALARA. This would take place outside to enable a smoking ceremony and welcome dance by young Aboriginal dancers from Kurruru. A fire was lit in the fire pit to welcome participants and to provide a warm place outdoors to encourage intimate conversations. It remained alight throughout the conference as deeply significant cultural symbol for many indigenous participants.

Team SA decided against key note speakers, to avoid the representation of one person's knowledge being valued higher than another, a concept at odds with Ganma and with decolonisation – particularly if the key note speakers were non-Indigenous. In addition, we wanted to introduce effective intercultural partnerships between Indigenous and non-Indigenous people in each of the main areas; health, education and environment. We therefore invited Indigenous and non-Indigenous people to discuss their partnerships and practice in collaborative action learning and action research. In recognition that many participants may be new to these topics, we invited speakers from a range of positions, from emerging Indigenous researchers and Elders to people working in universities, health and education. Our intention was that each conference participant could relate to at least one panel member, their research, and/ or how it developed.

The conference program included short presentations and longer interactive sessions, workshops, and a meeting place/market place where people could meet leisurely, experience massage, healing and bush medicine, obtain academic information, attend cultural tours, and be entertained by Aboriginal dance, music and art. Originally, we programmed more time for networking and informal conversations, but the large number of presenters and, the pressure for academic peer reviewed presentations to be included, led to reduced networking opportunities in the final program. Our decolonising strategies needed to exist pragmatically alongside the realities of financial, time management and academic parameters.

Affordable registration

It was agreed upfront that for the conference to be accessible it must be affordable. Team SA negotiated a sliding scale of registration fees that enabled people to attend regardless and regardless of financial circumstances.

The cost of the conference dinner was also included in registration fees, as low income participants often miss out on conference dinners. In addition, Team SA members spent considerable time and energy seeking, arranging, cajoling and ensuring external sponsorship and transport/ accommodation assistance to ensure that Indigenous people from rural and remote areas could attend. Local Elders attended for free, in recognition of their unique knowledge and skills, and the financial difficulties, past and present, they endure.

The conference

Over one hundred people attended the conference from each state and territory in Australia, as well as one person from New Zealand and the USA. People travelled from urban, rural and remote areas, with approximately half identifying as Indigenous. Participants came from health, research, education, environment, policy, legal, information technology, management systems and community backgrounds.

As part of the PAR process, all participants were invited to evaluate the conference in two ways. First evaluation questions were printed on green leaf shaped cut outs which were placed in each conference bag. Conference participants were encouraged to fill these out and place them on a 'tree' positioned in a wall in a meeting place, providing opportunities for people to share their thoughts with others, anonymously or named. The questions asked related to what participants had learned during the conference, how they planned to put their new learning into practice in their work place or community; what they liked most about the conference and what they found most challenging, and what was important for future ALARA conferences. There was also a specific evaluation and reflection session at the end of the conference where participants responded to these points either individually by writing, or in small discussion groups. A larger group discussion followed.

Gamma knowledge sharing

Many participants discussed appreciating the opportunity to share their experiences, strategies and learning formally and informally throughout the conference. Positive comments were made about holding the conference at Tauondi. One group said it provided *safe spaces for most Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people to come together*, and another said that *they learned how easy it is to think and learn and reflect on change and growth in a warm, receptive, flexible environment of this conference in this venue*.

These comments suggest that the choice of venue is vital in creating safe knowledge sharing spaces. Another participant spoke of a *generosity of spirit between participants, and between speakers and participants, and a high level of acceptance and flexibility occurring within a relaxed atmosphere*. However, for some, *such a deep level of sharing, connection and knowing was challenging*. Importantly, participants were able to hear about Gamma from the Indigenous people involved in developing this knowledge. Two Yolngu women, Dorothy

Yunggirringa and Joanne Garnggulkpuy were sponsored and supported by Team SA to attend and discuss Ganma concepts and practice between Indigenous and non Indigenous people working in their community. They were able to share their research outside of the Northern Territory and have their intellectual and cultural property rights and action research methodology formally recognised for the first time. A Team SA member who worked in partnership with Dorothy and Joanne accompanied them throughout the conference, assisting with transport and other needs. These women indicated that attending the conference and sharing their work, while being well supported, was a very positive experience.

A significant event regarding Ganma occurred for Janet. Over three days, the two Yolgnu women observed, listened and talked with Team SA about how Ganma was being used to guide the conference, and Janet's PhD studies. At the end of the conference they gave Janet permission to use Ganma as an Indigenous concept and methodology in her PhD. This practical and significant step enabled respect and acknowledgement of Yolgnu peoples' knowledge to be upheld.

Safe spaces for sharing

Indigenous people who presented at the conference indicated that the audience was highly supportive, and they felt it was a safe space to have their voices heard. One community woman, new to speaking publically in intercultural spaces, said she was pleasantly surprised by the high level of support she received by all participants. This led, she said to the realisation that *there are people that do care, have understanding and knowledge*. This positive experience mean that she could *now be brave and strong, stand firm, and go forward*. This was particularly significant because she had been feeling unheard and undervalued in other locations.

Indigenous people who attended as participants indicated that they felt supported and safe to participate in group discussions:

...seeing the respect in tangible ways, between all the participants... it was a safe environment, where I felt I could speak up and not feel embarrassed.

Many Indigenous participants were new to action research and action learning and deeply appreciated the clear and sometimes detailed explanations given by experienced researchers and teachers, both Indigenous and non-Indigenous. These conversations often continued into meal and session breaks, and Team SA members were flexible with timing to accommodate these conversations.

Indigenous participants also relayed how profound the sharing in Indigenous only spaces had been, with two relating specific stories to Team SA. One involved a young Aboriginal man and an Elder man who sat talking together in the corridor at the end of a session. The young man said he was told that his family came from a particular area and that he was trying to find this family but he didn't know where to start. The Elder man asked a series of

questions about what the young man knew about his family- surnames, 'country' connections and so on. The Elder man knew of the families the young man had mentioned and immediately made a phone call to reconnect the young man with Elders of his family.

In another exchange, an Aboriginal Elder woman shared a dream she had had prior to coming to the conference, with a younger Aboriginal woman. They had not met previously, and the moment and message was deeply profound. The Elder recounted the dream of a young Aboriginal woman standing in the mouth of a whale. In trying to make sense of it, the Elder said that maybe this dream was about the young Aboriginal woman she was talking with- maybe it represented strength and leadership skills of the young woman. This young woman was encouraged by the Elder to continue on her pathway of building bridges between black and white Australia. These encounters highlighted the need for and importance of both public and private spaces for different kinds of knowledge sharing- personal, spiritual and formal. Team SA members were mindful of these opportunities and careful not to interrupt them.

Levelling the playing field

In the evaluation session at the end of the conference, many participants, particularly non-Indigenous, spoke of changing or reminding themselves to work in ways that enabled Indigenous communities to have greater ownership of programs and research that impact on their lives. Some discussed having *gained increased insight into Indigenous ways of being and applying AR/AL ideas and methods*, and others on *managing change in ways that ensure it is positive for us all.*

Participants spoke of undergoing a *state of transformation*, and *having actively listened and now being ready to change*. One participant said this conference was the first time they had an opportunity to exchange knowledge with Indigenous people and they found the matter of fact discussions about the impact of colonisation very profound and disturbing. They were *'going home to re-think everything*. Another reflected that the *Indigenous stories were bruising to some extent because they are stories of white oppression*. Team SA members, being mindful of these transitions, provided safe spaces for participants to talk through their awareness, understandings and feelings, particularly when people were faced with the reality of colonisation for the first time.

Challenges and concerns

Bringing together people from diverse backgrounds and understandings of action learning and action research, raises the potential for tension and conflict. In one session, a group of co-researchers including Indigenous community members and practitioners purposefully focused their presentation on their experiences of collaboration, rather than discussing methodological and theoretical frameworks. One academic researcher in the audience, who had spent many years contemplating deeply PAR

methodology, asked the presenters to differentiate between community development and action research. The co-researchers indicated that for them these concepts were intertwined in a very pragmatic sense and differentiating was not useful. A discussion followed in which the co-researchers felt misunderstood and some became angry. A skilled but impartial third person was brought in to facilitate respectful understanding of differing world views. Follow up debriefing was provided by Team SA members for the co researchers over several months to ensure that this experience would not stop them from presenting at future conferences.

Other concerns expressed included the need for *a space to breathe and more informal discussion time and increased flexibility*. A few participants indicated that it was not clear what the theme or unifying characteristics were and that more extensive explanations were required at the beginning of the conference to set the scene. Another would have liked more theoretical and methodological discussion, but *'not at the expense of restricting the scope and range of presenters.'* These concerns highlight the difficulty of meeting very diverse needs and agendas, and provide valuable insights for future activities.

Elder wisdom

Throughout the conference, a theme of respecting and valuing Elder wisdom grew and resonated. Indigenous Elders from South Australia, Northern Territory and Aotearoa New Zealand discussed challenges and strategies to address colonisation. The Maori Elder woman had recently completed her PhD on the life experiences of Maori women Elders guided by Kaupapa (a Maori research methodology) and she shared Maori strategies for healing and survival with other Indigenous Elders. These conversations, many of which were open to other participants, were profound and highlighted the intergenerational effects of a lived history of colonisation and its impact on the lives of both Maori and Aboriginal people. Team SA members supported the continuation of these discussions by quietly arranging extra catering, assisting with transport and accommodation and ensuring flexible timekeeping.

The concept of respecting and listening to Elders rippled across the conference, and in the final session, ALARA members spoke about acknowledging Action Research and Action Learning elders, and the important contribution of their work. This idea has been actioned in subsequent conferences and is a positive example of non-Indigenous participants endorsing values held in common with Indigenous people.

The role of ALARA in Indigenous focused research

In the final evaluation session, most groups suggested that ALARA maintain a focus on building relationships with Indigenous organisations into future conferences and publications. One group of Aboriginal participants wrote:

Researchers need to help and support us with the recommendations from these conferences- stand with us and work with us to implement recommendations. Don't leave us standing alone to do the work in our communities. We need long term sustainability. NO SHORT TERM quick fixes.

A special interest group has since been developed, and a focus on research with Indigenous people and learning in the recent 2010 World Congress held in Melbourne.

Team SA evaluations

In addition to the conference evaluations, all Team SA members were invited to reflect on their experiences of being part of Team SA. A questionnaire was sent to each participant by email and a debriefing meeting held during a post conference dinner. It was agreed that this discussion could be in the evaluation process.

Embedding Indigenous health research ethics and collaboration in the planning and facilitation of the conference within a short time frame was described as *both invigorating and exhausting*. With ALARA and Tauondi undergoing restructure and management changes in the six months prior to the conference, negotiations were made, and remade. Holding the space within meetings and between agencies flexibly; enabling room for creativity and Ganma to occur while meeting deadlines, financial constraints and ALARA's agendas was challenging. Having two people (Kim and Janet) co-ordinating the team and process was seen to be *important for communication and keeping the process on track*. However, Team SA members also valued the *shared leadership with different people taking the lead at appropriate times*. They discussed how everyone *shared the well-being of the conference and its intentions as an equally held responsibility as well as passionately regarded priority*.

This involved everyone pooling their resources and skills and working together to ensure the conference was a success. One academic reflected:

I have never participated in an integrated conference, bringing together disparate disciplines, for bridging harmony... I like the idea of helping out people that have never given a paper before, or people who would normally be too shy to put themselves forward.

The outcomes of the conference that had most meaning for Team SA members were the unanticipated but very positive and decolonising experiences that occurred; the young Aboriginal man reconnected with his family; the 'light bulb' moment for a participant who suddenly understood the depth of colonisation in Australia and its impact on the lives of Indigenous people; the re-invigoration of tired workers who were struggling to meet complex needs in their workplaces; and the quiet pride of an Aboriginal community member whose knowledge had been publically and respectfully heard for the first time. These outcomes, they said, were what made the significant effort they put into the conference worthwhile.

Conclusion

The 2007 ALARA conference was purposefully planned and facilitated to provide spaces for Indigenous and non-Indigenous people to come together to respectfully share knowledge about action learning and action research in a diverse range of areas. Using an adapted PAR process informed by the six core values of Aboriginal health research ethics, Ganma knowledge sharing, Dadirri deep listening and postcolonial feminism, Team SA developed a respectful and decolonising way to work together, plan and facilitate the conference. Working collaboratively with Tauondi College and ALARA, they ensured that Indigenous preferred ways of working together and sharing knowledge became a central rather than a marginal theme.

As evident by participant evaluations and feedback, the conference became a safe and inspiring space for most Indigenous and non-Indigenous people to meet and share knowledge. A level playing field was created where a diverse range of knowledges were respected. First time presenters were pleasantly surprised by the level of support and encouragement they received from other participants, and many discussed the value of formal and informal discussions with experienced researchers, educators and Elders. Some non-Indigenous participants, including experienced researchers, spoke of beginning to understand the extent of marginalisation and colonisation of Indigenous peoples and their knowledges for the first time. Some Indigenous participants valued opportunities to share strategies and experiences with other Indigenous peoples in private spaces. Together, everyone discussed partnerships and collaborations in more depth. Therefore, this conference became a small but significant step forward in decolonising research and conference processes. We conclude with the sound advice from an Aboriginal Elder of the Mutawintji Lands in Western NSW:

Providing a space where people feel safe to talk about issues that may be sensitive is important because it leads to resolutions. (Department of Environment & Climate Change, 2008).

Acknowledgements

We would like to thank the members of Team SA, and in particular Helen Murray for taking up the challenge with us to demonstrate how decolonisation can be put into practice. Thanks also to Ernie Stringer for his ongoing support and guidance, to Tauondi College for being fantastic collaborators and to ALARA for the opportunity to create this event. Thanks also to Eileen Willis for assisting us in writing this article.

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Appendices – Terminology

Decolonisation: in this paper we describe decolonisation in research as being a process that shifts Aboriginal knowledge and priorities from the margins and a position of ‘the other’, to a central position as described in Smith 2003. It is a process of challenging and changing the dominance of Western knowledge production and colonial ideology in research, policy and practice (Sherwood, 2010).

Indigenous: we acknowledge the objections of some Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and organisations to this term. It is used where repetition of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander would make the text difficult to read, or where we are referring to indigenous peoples internationally. The word Indigenous is capitalised in keeping with current practice, to indicate its specific use to apply to Australian Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. It is not capitalised when used generically.

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Participation as a method of sharing Koorie narratives

Ian Hamilton

Abstract

This paper describes research currently being conducted in the Gippsland region of Victoria, Australia.

I recorded a range of stories acknowledging that valuable information was available in the local Koorie community as part of a public library service project. The resulting project was “Woor-dungin Nambur: Sharing Talk”.

In the research I plan to extend the library project in partnership with the Gunnai/Kurnai community to:

- Facilitate the recording of available narratives referring to current issues, recent history and dreamtime stories
- Provide information emanating from the analysis of Gunnai/Kurnai stories, and
- Provide the opportunity for participants to assist with the research plan.

By using Participatory Action Research methodology I aim to increase the knowledge base regarding Australian Indigenous epistemology as well as achieve some kind of social benefits for all people involved in the research. Cultural aspects of the research community are recognised.

With this paper I explore the scope of the research before focusing on reasons for methodology selection and also examine ethical issues.

Introduction

Beginning of the research

Personal factors were significant in initiating the research project. The valuable time I've spent with the Koorie community in Gippsland has opened my eyes to many stories that some people might perceive as devastating. Other stories might be considered enlightening and others as enthralling.

Koorie is the term used when referring to Australian Aborigines in the Southeastern region of Australia. Koori is more common if we travel a little further West. My long personal interest in Koorie cultural issues has continued during my time working as a schoolteacher and also as a Public Library Assistant. As a schoolteacher my role included assisting students with various difficulties encountered in the school situation. The teaching role also involved firsthand experience with a range of Koorie issues. At the public library I organised Koorie story time sessions and I also collected audio recordings of narratives from local Koories in the Latrobe Valley region. The reasons I was given these tasks included my long-time association with the local Koorie community as well as the need observed by library staff for local Indigenous knowledge to be held at the library. From my personal perspective some productive consultation with the Indigenous communities is vital in the process of decolonisation. I have this opinion because nearly every Koorie I have spoken to seems to have the view that consultation between mainstream society and Koorie communities is seriously lacking. The public library recording project was entitled 'Woor-dungin Nambur: Sharing Talk' which was commissioned by the Latrobe City Council (Hamilton, 2000). Various contributors offered a wide range of narratives and other creative arrangements. The project included recordings of memories, music, stories, cultural narratives as well as some recent historical perspectives. Almost everyone who was approached was very pleased to offer information.

My regular conversations with many local Koories and from what I knew of broader Australian society has led me to believe that much Aboriginal cultural information is misunderstood or devalued by the broader Australian community.

The purpose of this paper is to present an overview of an Indigenous research project that utilises Participatory Action Research Methodology (PAR) in the Central Gippsland region of South Eastern Australia. The Indigenous community in this region is a marginalised but representative part of the broader community with many different interests. In some ways of a suburban nature such as the dependence on retail outlets but also it has country aspects such as quick bushland visits.

The paper has the following format:

After the outline of the general scope and the beginning of the project there is a statement of the research question and the aims of the research.

Second, a literature review supports the analysis of the major theoretical framework and the choice of PAR.

Third, some significant ethical issues are explored which includes a consideration of ethical dilemmas and plans for solutions to these problems.

Fourth, the ethical discussion is continued with a focus on the dilemma of payment to participants.

Research question

Gunnai/Kurnai narratives have much to offer for someone interested in history because the information backdates some 40,000 years (O’Dea, Jewell, Whiten, A., Altmann, Strickland & Oftedal, 1991). Gunnai and Kurnai are two different terms used by various Indigenous Australians referring to tribal groups from the Gippsland area. The community I have associated with often is in the Central Gippsland area. Narratives of many cultural issues are available. I have had conversations with many people keen to discuss a wide range of topics. Collecting and organising this historical information may well be considered important in the field of education for both educators and learners who desire access to the Australian Indigenous knowledge. Historians and cultural researchers may also be keen to access this information.

To enable access to Indigenous knowledge the following research question has been devised:

What does it mean to preserve, explore and share narratives provided by the local Aboriginal community?

Since much information is available from the Gunnai/Kurnai Community in the central Gippsland region but not necessarily well utilized by the wider community there is a prominent need to fill this space (Gippsland Area Consultative Committee, 2000, Pepper & De Araugo, 1980). Some literature is currently publicly available (Pepper & De Araugo, 1985, Jones, 2001). However the supply of Australian Aboriginal literature is almost certainly not in abundance (Leonard, 2001). Examples of information not easily located include local dreamtime stories, history, issues surrounding the invasion of Australia, stories about artwork and narratives of some more recent Indigenous issues.

The research question was developed as an open question. I proposed that the question ought to be interpreted as the research participants see fit. This is important in order to allow research participants to provide information, which they personally feel important for a broad audience. Hence, the research methodology I have selected is a format known as Participatory Action Research (PAR) that is discussed in the methodology section of this paper.

Purpose of research

The essential aim of the research was to explore, share and preserve Indigenous narratives from the Gippsland region. For many years, Koorie cultural information was maintained by the Indigenous people using oral history techniques (Pepper & De Araugo, 1985; Harvey, 2003). The knowledge possessed by the information providers slowly dissipates as the Aboriginal population decreases and has also been assimilated into the

mainstream Australian community due to the historical impacts of colonisation as well as other historical processes including survival (Dodson, 2007). I wish to show respect for the use of oral history methods because of the long-time use of these methods by the Aboriginal community. However, I have used digital audio recordings to store the information gathered by my research for future access. Since the method includes no visual aspect and no live component, the method should be viewed as an alternative and not a replacement to oral history methods. The research project will address the issues of information storage and lack of public access.

Another purpose of the research was to locate information that might be useful in the education process in general community. Thus the knowledge is made accessible to the wider community rather than restricted to the Indigenous community. This is a way of possibly assisting with reconciliation because an increased understanding of one culture does seem to assist this process (Gadacz, 1981). I consider education to be a way of reaching a range of people in Australia, or an even wider audience. The importance of Koorie narratives for this research is central to the theoretical theme for a participatory research methodology.

Koorie narratives

Even with the limited nature of Gunnai/Kurnai community literature certain difficulties confronting Koories have been mentioned and comparable accounts in other Aboriginal communities are mentioned in other literature (Pepper, 1985; Bowden, 1990). The lives of the son of Phillip Pepper, Percy Pepper and Lucy Thorpe have been outlined in detail by Flagg and Gurciullo (2008). The story provides some significant points that warrant further investigation because some concerning topics are raised. For example, some obvious lack of family history data as well as the issue of racism which are both stressed by Bowden (1990). I know racism is experienced by many local Koories because I have often noticed Koories confronting this issue. Examples include Koories feeling uncomfortable when alone in a regular township, Koories being verbally abused, Koorie children needing to avoid the mainstream community and Koories having to read derogatory written comments. I have observed all these examples many times in real life situations. I also listened to numerous different Koories explain these situations.

In personal conversations of my own, many local Koories have highlighted, often despairingly, the lack of publicly available information regarding Australian Aboriginal issues (Pascoe, 2007). The artwork by Lynette Solomon-Dent (2008, 2008) is an effort to counter this gap. For example, Solomon-Dent's books provide material which allows people of many ages to read about Australian Aboriginal phenomena. Personal conversations of my own with teachers, librarians, state government ministers of Aboriginal Affairs and the general public have also made this gap in the literature quite evident.

Logic used by Cochran, Marshall, Garcia-Downing, Kendall, Cook, McCubbin et al. (2008). suggests as valid the Indigenous ways of knowing. Cochran et al (2008) illustrates that knowledge is often gained in both Indigenous and in Anglo-Saxon societies by trusting our elders rather than doubting everything. For example, even in complex tasks such as learning a language from narrative guidance. There are, of course, research limitations about the validity of narratives. I will deal with such limitations by discussions with various community members assessing the accuracy of recordings, obtaining community members' approval of selected stories and following up doubts with appropriate people.

A detailed text by Abrams (2010) about oral history theory illustrates that a narrative is never totally free of the presenter's influence. Abrams argues that effects are usually added to make an event more interesting or to increase the understanding. Polkinghorne (2007) recommends judging reliability and possibility. He also explains that conventional modes of judging induction and logic are not always available in qualitative research. I accept Polkinghorne's (2007) arguments as well as his claim that all research is credible only to the extent of the reader's assessment.

Theory associated with PAR

The aims and purpose of this research prompted a literature review, which is relevant to the theory of my chosen methodology, Participatory Action Research. Some general theory concepts which have directed my Indigenous narrative research are presented in this section. Comments about the value of Indigenous knowledge and an application of an Indigenous theory for this research complete the section.

Participatory action research

With a Maori feminist agenda Gatenby and Humphries (2000) discuss research with Indigenous people using Action Research methods which are necessarily relevant to PAR (Walter, 2009; Argyris & Schon, 1989). Examples of issues raised include sensitive topics such as potential future recognition of participants by readers of the research and the challenging of the trustworthiness of the researcher. Gatenby and Humphries present the idea of PAR methodology promoting some kind of social change. Cochrane (2008) describes PAR as a method suitable for Indigenous research and has discussed the methodology in detail.

Also discussing the idea of social change as a product of PAR is Maggie Walter's instructive chapter about Participatory Action Research (Walter, 2009). Introductory comments, diagrammatic presentations and method

descriptions are all clearly presented in the text. Walter argues that the key to action research is in its name noting that the words participation and action form the basics of the PAR method. Walter illustrates the idea that both participation and action are very important to complete the research in the methodology known as Participatory Action Research.

The fact that Walter's (2009) as well as Gatenby's and Humphries' (2000) works both refer to social change shows that this concept was significant to several researchers. Studies applying PAR have had the dual aim of making the research both useful to a particular group of people and also offering some kind of power or control to a group of people in an effort to promote some kind of social change (Edmonson Bell, 2001). PAR has often been applied when pursuing Indigenous research (Contos, 2000; Tuhiwai Smith, 1999). Kildea (2009) and White (2004) both underline the point that passing power from the researcher to the researched is an important factor in PAR methodology.

Indigenous research

Erick, Mooney-Somers, Akee and Maher (2008) relate PAR specifically to Australian Indigenous groups for research about health. Advantages of PAR as well as difficulties are described. Difficulties discussed include necessary perseverance, the overcoming of the leadership role of the researcher, peer contact, inconveniences when discussing sensitive issues and the need to offer workshop assistance for anyone seeking help. When working with Indigenous people, Giles (2006) claims to have found PAR methodology useful in the field of health research. Others also have claimed that the PAR method is valuable for research with Australian Indigenous groups (Varcoe, 2006; Mason & Noble, 2000; de Ishtar, 2005). Varcoe's work addresses the issue of racism and suggests that PAR is a way of dealing with some of the racism issues. One example is the involvement of an affected person in the research project. Varcoe argues that this can overcome the problem of the participant not being allowed to feel significant. de Ishtar (2005) draws a parallel between white feminist methods and methods suitable for Indigenous research. de Ishtar additionally notes the significance of PAR for the involvement of the researcher with the participants to plan the path of the research.

A problem, noted by many authors, in working with colonised groups in the world, including Australia is the removal of all power from the colonised group and the introduction of a controlling paternalistic attitude (Allimadi, 2002; Sangster, 1999; Sartre, 2003). With this in mind the application of participatory approach is applicable in my research because the method is necessarily an attempt to shift power from the researcher to the researched (Walter, 2009; Varcoe, 2006).

Community Based Participatory Research as a product of action research

Community Based Participative Research (CBPR) has a direct link with Action Research (Dick, 2009). However, authors' exact interpretations do vary. CBPR is sometimes considered action research and sometimes not (Dick, 2009). PAR usually involves only the research participants whilst CBPR intentionally includes the whole research community (Dick, 2009). Dick highlights the work of Reason and Bradbury (2006), which is a milestone in Action Research considering aspects such the definition of research participants considering many points such as the definition of participants.

The group of participants in PAR is usually identified as the researcher and a group of research participants (Walter, 2009). I point out that exactly who is included as research participants is a perception of researcher. Are participants in PAR restricted to only the people who provide interviews or should others also be included? Consideration of this point illustrates that a Community Based Participatory Research group involving participation of a community may be interpreted as closely related to a Participatory Action Research group. Participation of more than just the researcher is important (Walter, 2009). Of course the researcher cannot demand that any individual must be involved. Some individuals entitled to be included may well not take any part. My technique of having the research available to all community members who show interest may well be interpreted as CBPR. Therefore I will use the term CBPR from now on when referring to my research project.

The value of Koorie knowledge

When comparing Western and Indigenous research paradigms, Getty (2010) points out that Indigenous knowledge has often been dismissed as folklore. Getty goes on to point out that this has resulted in harm due to the value of the knowledge not being recognised. Note that studies of the sky are usually termed "mythology" when discussed as part of Indigenous knowledge but related studies are termed "astronomy" when studied as part of Western science. My own personal conversations have helped me to learn that there is much valuable knowledge currently held by Indigenous Australians. To help appreciate the extent to which Aboriginal culture has been ignored in the recent history of Australia we only need to consider question which I have raised in various conversations:

How much different would Australia look today if that instead of immediately denying everything that native people said the Westerners had asked for help and tried to find out how to live in this land, as the Indigenous occupants had been doing successfully for some 40,000 years?

I suggest that Australians might now have a completely different view of the need for irrigation, general farming techniques and the value of activities such

as basket weaving to a general lifestyle. Our entire cuisine might even be different.

By involving Indigenous participants in the research as in CBPR the kind of information alluded to in the above question is possibly made available. This research project is my attempt to address the ongoing issue of Indigenous Australians being ignored. Importantly CBPR has a direct link with some Indigenous knowledge acquisition processes. For example some of the oral history methods involving conversational aspects involve anyone who joins in (Abrams, 2010). That is, it is set within a community content.

Ganma and Indigenous research

To complete Indigenous research, techniques are usually used which recognise Indigenous ideas and practice (Tuhiwai Smith, 1999). This forms the basis of the Indigenous research paradigm, which helps guide, my research. Maggie Walter (2010) argues that an Indigenous research paradigm must recognise what is valued as knowledge from the Indigenous perspective and is therefore directly challenging to traditional Western thinking about social research. This is also relevant to this particular paper since this research involves aspects of cross-cultural research (Miller, 2003). Note that I have lived much of my life in a Western cultural environment and I am now completing research regarding an Australian Indigenous community. Ganma (Pyrch & Castillo, 2001) is an Australian Indigenous concept which I believe is quite relevant to my research.

To illustrate the care required when Indigenous knowledge is studied in relation to a different culture I present the quote from Pyrch and Castillo (2001) in their thought provoking philosophical paper analysing the combining of Indigenous and Western knowledge:

For Ganma (the foam represented by connecting sea – Western knowledge and land – Aboriginal knowledge) to exist there has to exist the possibility, the desire for connectedness to be penetrated, not just in our heads, but also in our hearts. (Pyrch & Castillo, 2001, p. 468)

The authors point out that if we try to capture this foam in a rough manner it evaporates therefore we must be gentle to allow the foam to linger and reveal itself to us. The model is also used by other authors realising that problems exist if we try to be too harsh and abrupt when connecting Indigenous and Western knowledge (Pyrch & Castillo, 2001). The general idea of Ganma is interpreted with other names in other Australian Indigenous communities (Hughes, 2000). For example, Yerrin is used in the Gurringgai language (Hughes, 2000).

The Ganma concept started as a synergy between language groups Yorghtharngba and Ya'idmidtung but was clearly extended for describing the interface between Western and Aboriginal Australian knowledge (Westby & Hwa-Froelich, 2003). Yunkaporta and McGinty (2009) point out that Ganma had a clear political focus according to many authors but was valued as an

opportunity for creative progression by others. For example, the validity of this concept for a research report, the relevance to general population and the actual reality of the idea could all be debated.

Hughes (2000) explains that Ganma is way that action researchers are able to liaise constructively with Indigenous groups by integrating different streams of knowledge. Therefore the process of reconciliation is supported. I consider the concept of Ganma as the most appropriate model. I have therefore selected it as an Indigenous guide for the methods used in this research project as preparation for interaction with the research community by using CBPR. I have judged the methodology I have selected as suitable for Indigenous research. A primary aim is to include the research community in the whole process including important aspects such as the consideration of ethical issues (Henry, Dunbar, Arnott, Scrimgeour & Murakami-Gold, 2004; Ferreira, 2006).

My own personal experience within the local community influences this decision. For example I have had numerous discussions with various artists who support actions related to that of the preservation of Ganma. I have also heard others in the general community encourage researchers to be careful and thoughtful when liaising between cultures. I have never heard the specific term Ganma used in the Central Gippsland region. Therefore, the name and description of the Ganma concept should be raised during research and various opinions sought.

Ethics

Supporting the view of Punch (1994) that “sound ethics and sound methodology go hand in hand” (p. 94), I discuss here some ethical issues, which I find significant for my research. There are specific issues associated with a participatory methodology that are often even more evident when analysing Indigenous research (Ermine, Sinclair & Jeffrey, 2004).

Guiding principles

As pointed out by Babbie (1999) no-one is perfect and our own mistakes are not always apparent to us. Therefore, for my research, decisions will be discussed with anyone in the general community who has an interest in the research. This of course must include research participants. This idea has justified the choice of using the methodological approach known as Community Based Participatory Research (CBPR), used by a range of researchers involved in Indigenous research (Dick, 2009; Singleton, Rola-Rubzen, Muir, Muir, & McGregor, M. (2009); Fletcher, McKennitt &

Baydala, 2008). However, I recognise that many questions of ethics effectively start and finish with the researcher (Neuman, 2003).

As explained by Walter (2010) many ethical issues may be addressed by CBPR because of the involvement of the research community. Important aspects of the process include meetings discussing previous actions and community plans for future actions (Walter, 2010). For my research, participants will be consulted about ethics decisions, methodology, data collection and data analysis.

Another ethics principle which I consider important is Wiersma's and Jurs' (1995) common sense principle. This acknowledges the belief that, ultimately, even the choice of whether or not to consider an issue is usually the decision of the researcher. Ideally, I would like to have all issues investigated but issues are bound to arise including time, resources and unavailability of assistants. All these influential issues may inadvertently result in some ethical issues arising during my research.

Some other ethical concepts are also useful when undertaking qualitative research (Punch, 1994). Cohen, Manion and Morrison (2000) recommend informed consent of participants, the right to privacy for all involved and protection from harm. These issues will be handled by presenting clear explanatory documents about the project and also completing consent forms before interviewing. Community discussions during the participatory research process will provide for various individual comments about the research (Clark, 1980; Ford & Fasoli, 2001). I anticipate some ethical dilemmas and I have made some plans for solution.

Ethical dilemmas and planned solutions

This section discusses some of the ethical dilemmas that I have confronted since accepting the CBPR methodology as a suitable technique for my research. I have planned to use a community consultation approach to solve some of these problems.

I confronted several significant difficulties of the traditional ethics process when completing the Ethics Application Form (Monash University Human Ethics Committee [MUHREC], 2009). This is supporting the argument by Flicker, Travers, Guta, McDonald, & Meagher (2007) who notes that traditional ethics systems do not particularly correspond with CBPR. For example, the Guidelines to Application Forms (MUHREC, 2007, p. 1) clearly states that "Recruitment of participants or collection of data must not start without written approval from MUHREC". Ideally, with a CBPR methodology collaboration with participants should help guide the selection of research aims, specific methods and even the ethical ideas (Gatenby & Humphries, 2000). If practice with research is not able to begin until approval is achieved then the requirements of the application cannot easily include research aims, scope and general summaries. These are all necessary parts of the application but I would appreciate being able to involve participants in

the research design before having to submit the application to MUHREC. National ethics principles are a necessary guide since the university is following these guides (MUHREC, 2009, Australian Government Australian Vice Chancellors Committee, 2007). The research process I undertake will involve a very early series of discussions that will begin after ethics approval of the research. These discussions will consider research design.

The national ethics document (Australian Government & Australian Vice Chancellors Committee, 2007) referred to in the relevant ethics application, insists that cultural needs of the researched community are addressed. The CBPR methodology will help to ensure that cultural needs will be dealt with according to the requirements of the research participant group. Ford and Fasoli (2001) suggest establishing a reference group within the researched community. Consultation with the participant group helps provide for cultural needs as well as individual needs. For my research project views will be sought from a range of people who are involved.

Who actually owns the research data is another question which a range of authors have discussed in depth (Jacklin & Kinoshameg, 2005; Lundy & McGovern, 2006; Kildea, Barclay, Wardaguga, & Dawuma, 2009; Klabebe, 2005). I consider data ownership to important for Indigenous research. Kelly Bannister (2005) discusses this issue referring to a range of disciplines. Bannister argues that traditional research ethics processes may foster, hinder or even impede Indigenous ownership protection. A discussion with the research community will hopefully reach a consensus about the ownership of data. I aim to reach a consensus of agreement amongst the research community as to where ownership responsibilities should be assigned.

Participatory methodology involves participants and passes some research power to participants in an attempt to minimise risks (Kaufert, Cranley Glass, Freeman, & LaBine, 2004). Examples of risks include participants changing their mind during interviews, embarrassment of individuals and various stressful situations. Transferral of power in research relates to organising data collection and distributing data after collection, preparing interviews and general rules (Boog, 2003). Further to the dilemmas of traditional ethical processes, unforeseen circumstances and ownership of data, the issue of payment to participants also required consideration during my ethics preparation.

Payment

An examination of the literature debate regarding the process of payment to participants is followed by consideration of the issue with a Koorie perspective.

Primary arguments against payment

A common belief in traditional research is that payment is an unethical way to conduct research (Festinger et al, 2004). There are those who argue that payment is simply a “token gesture” and cannot be maintained at a professional rate (Gilley, 1990). The answer to this is that surely some payment is more acknowledging of one’s effort than zero payment. This is at least an indication of thank you to the participant. Drawing a conclusion is difficult about whether payment does actually coerce participants to join the research. Should monetary payment not be considered culturally appropriate then the position will be respected for my research project. My perception of the culture is that an offer will not be refused but a strict fee is not necessary.

Avoiding coercion of participants (Festinger et al, 2005) is certainly one strong argument against paying participants. Researchers have stated that payment presents coercion and therefore negates exercises such as random sampling and treating all participants as equal because it could draw in participants who would otherwise not be involved in the research (Festinger et al, 2005). This is supported by National Statement on Ethical Conduct for Human Research which accepts reimbursement of costs (Australian Government, 2007). However, since all participants are different and therefore all have at least a slightly different relationship with the researcher as well as a different reason for being involved, I argue that total randomness is usually very difficult anyway. Funding difficulty is another reason why payment might be avoided because budgets are usually limited to some degree. Funding sources are not available in my postgraduate research project.

Some reasons for offering payment?

Members were paid \$30 on the basis they were making personal and professional contribution to a body of research about family services. (Gilley, 1990, p.94)

Gilley’s text has a methodology section which begins with the above quote. Clearly, significant points for Gilley are the facts that the contribution is professional, personal and also significant to research. Taking these comments seriously I have concluded that offering payment to participants should be a realistic consideration.

The current economic climate in Australia has effectively imposed the beliefs about payment onto Indigenous Australians that any personal or professional contribution is worth money (Gilley, 1990). Therefore payment for research could certainly be considered. Indeed, we need to note that people are paid money for a wide range of activities (Conn, 2009). The research participant is offering a favour (Roberts & Indermaur, 2003). The idea that the effort made by the research participant is a favour is a view taken by a range of authors and seems to be a sensible line. I have not found many who disagree with this including researchers as well as people who have participated in research. One might argue that the favour is simply a concept of one’s perspective and therefore cannot have a specific cost associated.

In contrast, in some ethics debates the questionable argument of judging participation as a reward could be presented (Finkel, Eastick, & Matthews, 2007). Note that a reward is viewed by some researchers as providing outside influence which affects results (Toumbourou, McMorris, Mathers & Catalano, 2004). I also point out that in most cases this favour cannot possibly be duplicated. Duplication is not possible since time frame, memories, outside influences and many other factors all change even if the same person is contacted again. Arguments are even presented suggesting that maybe participants should actually pay a cost for the “reward of participation” (Finkel, Eastick, & Matthews, 2007).

The strongest argument supporting some form of payment for participants is that some people involved in this research could be in a difficult financial position and monetary support will be invaluable. Of course, others will be in a much different position and this kind of support will not be needed. My selection of participants does definitely not take into account the participant’s financial position. I have considered that many other factors also affect participation. Examples include experience, skills, personal comfort and personal status in the community. To help reach an appropriate decision some pertinent literature has been investigated.

Significant Ideas in the Literature

White, Suchowierska and Campbell (2004) argue that some form of advance payment should be made to participants to cover costs such as travel and time. This seems a reasonable consideration although White does not follow up this discussion with anything about exactly how rigorous the researcher should be with measuring costs. Do we need to observe official receipts? Is each participant’s time worth the same amount of payment (Ripley, 2006)? In the current economic environment in Australia these kinds of questions are often considered important when someone claims money for providing something (Liamputtong, 2007).

An informative review is authored by Elizabeth Ripley (2006) showing that there are definitely two sides to this debate. Ripley notes here that each participant is in a different position and has a different personal perception of the costs and benefits of the research activity. Ripley points out that both risks and benefits of payment should be considered.

The perception by researchers in various parts of the world may differ. Toumbourou, McMorris, Mathers and Catalano (2004) discuss this particular view in depth after pointing out that payment to research participants is less tolerated by ethics committees in Australia than in America.

A Koorie Perspective and a Decision for this Project

The decision made for this research project depends on my interpretation of the local Koorie community perspective. This is because the research method

chosen is CBPR, which involves the community from which participants have been selected in the research process.

The university ethics committee that I confronted gave me a clear indication to follow the national guidelines document which does in fact provide provision for payment. The national guidelines stipulate that the ethics committee must be satisfied that an ethical procedure is followed (Australian Government, 2007). The indication I received from the ethics committee was that acceptance of participant payment for postgraduate research would be difficult to be accepted (Human Ethics, 2011). Therefore, to simplify the Ethics guide to complete this research payment has been viewed as not acceptable, certainly not "in a manner that coerces participants to take part" (Australian Government, 2007, p.20). I will adopt a CBPR methodology as well as follow the National Statement on Ethical Conduct that advises that the customs and practices of the relevant research community are considered (Australian Government, 2007, p.20). I will therefore raise the issue within the research community. I am attempting to acknowledge the culture of the researched community.

My final decision is based on my own understanding and discussions within the relevant research community. If someone claims that there is need for help with money or some other material benefit this need should be fulfilled provided the goods are available. This is adhering to my understanding of cultural practice of sharing material goods whenever exchanges are reasonably feasible. This interpretation is supported in the literature (Johnston & Thomas, 2008, Peterson, 2009).

Conclusion

The information presented in this paper provides a discussion of why this research started and has stated the purpose of my research. A very brief literature review was presented which is directly related to the theory of the research. The literature investigated supports the choice of CBPR methodology as appropriate for Indigenous research. Aspects of PAR theory were highlighted that are crucial to my study. This includes the role of participants in preparing, reviewing and organising the research process. Ethical dilemmas were explored which included combining CBPR with traditional ethical systems, ownership of research data, participants altering their views during research and the payment of participants. The CBPR approach is a realistic attempt to solve ethical problems. I have judged that the PAR and CBPR methodologies are supported by a common sense approach. Thus, opinions of participants and other relevant people will be carefully considered.

The scope and methodology of the research involved in the project has been explored. I look forward to establishing a reference group within the local community to thoroughly consider perspectives of Gunnai/Kurnai knowledge. Relevant ethical issues will be considered carefully throughout the research

process. My attempt is to complete one more step in the journey of decolonisation and to encourage others to do the same through sharing my research findings with the broader community.

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My professional career started in the field of applied science. My career path continued in the areas of teaching and consultant support. I have also been employed at public libraries.

I am personally interested in association with various cultures, food preparation, disability issues, sailing and chess. I am currently studying a Masters in Education by Research and have qualifications in education, librarianship and applied science.

Both my professional and my personal life have often involved a special interest of mine, which is the Australian Aboriginal culture.

Book Review:
**“Power and the Passion:
Our Ancestors Return
Home” by
Shannon Faulkhead and
Jim Berg
Bill Genat**

Published Nov 2010, by the Koorie Heritage Trust, Melbourne

This poignant account of an Aboriginal leader’s commitment and courage to enshrine respect for Aboriginal culture, in particular reverence for the remains of departed loved ones buried previously with ceremony and honour by their families, is a wonderful contribution to reconciliation and healing in this land we now call Australia.

Beautifully and movingly presented with the “Women in Mourning” as guardians on the front cover and at the beginning of every chapter, Shannon Faulkhead weaves together a polyphonic account: multiple stories regarding Aboriginal leadership of community transformation, empowerment and decolonising practice. The poignant foreword together with the graphics of the “Women in Morning” and the abundant acknowledgements of elders, family and community envelop you in a powerful sense of connection and loving protection as you enter the narrative.

Uncle Jim’s story tells of his unwavering commitment to kin and community, past, present and future born on the wings of both his power and passion: his determination to honour the ancestor’s footsteps, maintaining spirituality, identity and dignity in following his own heart and destiny. Again, his story is also the story of others, his lifetime “Soulmate,” Kylie Mim Berg, elders, family, community, and colleagues. At the centre of the story about challenging the medical establishment and leaders in the discipline of physical anthropology is the issue regarding control of Skeletal Remains of Our Ancestors.

Uncle Jim describes the pivotal Reburial March through Melbourne in 1985 and the Reburial Ceremony in Kings Domain Gardens where the

unprovenanced remains were returned to our Spiritual Mother the Land. His account is accompanied by other powerful narratives of participants in the Reburial March, in particular its healing power. For example, Nicole Cassar was only eight years old when she participated in the march:

[It] made me feel proud to be Black and gave me a sense of comfort too, like someone is there with you watching over you – what I would describe today as being spiritually connected to my culture . . . (p39)

Employing multiple voices and perspectives of participants in the unfolding events, Shannon takes us further into the arcane labyrinth of historical anatomy, physical anthropology and the collection and use of Skeletal Remains of Our Ancestors. She presents the voice of Ross Jones, a medical educator at the University of Melbourne who explains how historically, the hunt for Aboriginal skulls, bodies and bones commenced in the 1860s at the University of Melbourne prompted by Darwin's, *Origins of Species* (1859).

Jones recounts the tragic story of the 'bone collector', George Murray Black, and how his lifetime collection in the end was given no scientific value being subsequently returned to our Spiritual Mother the Land. As Jones observes:

The sorry history of the Murray Black collection probably tells us more about the relationship of medical scientists with their community and also about the ethical practice of conducting research. (p55)

From the university we journey with the Skeletal Remains of Our Ancestors into the museum, and again through multiple narratives, track the caring practices of the institution and likewise engagement with the justice system.

Shannon Faulkhead and Uncle Jim Berg together have recorded another Indigenous hero's story that stands equally alongside the pantheon of Indigenous leaders who have been a shining beacon of light in the heart of darkness – the ongoing and unrelenting saga of colonisation.

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JOURNAL SUBMISSIONS CRITERIA AND REVIEWING PROCESS

The Action Learning Action Research Journal (ALARj) contains substantial articles, project reports, information about activities, reflections on seminars and conferences, short articles related to the theory and practice of action learning, action research and process management, and reviews of recent publications. It aims to be highly accessible for both readers and contributors. It is particularly accessible to practitioners.

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- process management

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- be both aimed at and grounded in the world of practice;
- be explicitly and actively participative: research with, for and by people rather than on people;
- draw on a wide range of ways of knowing (including intuitive, experiential, presentational as well as conceptual) and link these appropriately to form theory;
- address questions that are of significance to the flourishing of human community and the more-than-human world;
- aim to leave some lasting capacity amongst those involved, encompassing first, second and third person perspectives; and
- critically communicate the inquiry process instead of just presenting its results, and some reflections on it.

These overarching criteria should be considered together with the following questions:

- Is the article logical?
- Is it based on evidence? If so what kind?
- Does the article consider ethics?
- Has it considered the viewpoints of many stakeholders? Is it dialectical?
- Does the article consider the consequences for this generation and the next?
- Does it illustrate good practice in AR and AL?
- Does it progress AR and AL in the field (research, community, business, education or otherwise)?
- Does the writer present ideas with flare and creativity?
- Would the writer benefit from some mentoring to produce an article of journal-standard?

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ALARA is a strategic network of people interested or involved in using action learning or action research to generate collaborative learning, research and action to transform workplaces, schools, colleges, universities, communities, voluntary organisations, governments and businesses.

ALARA's vision is that action learning and action research will be widely used and publicly shared by individuals and groups creating local and global change for the achievement of a more equitable, just, joyful, productive, peaceful and sustainable society.

ALAR Journal Vol 17 No 2 October 2011