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Reconciliation and Transformation through Mutual Learning: Outlining a Framework for Arts-based Service Learning with Indigenous Communities in Australia

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Abstract

Service learning is described as a socially just educational process that develops two-way learning and social outcomes for community and student participants. Despite the focus on mutuality in service learning, very little of this literature specifically deals with the intense importance of mutuality and reciprocity when working with Indigenous community partners and participants. This is problematic for Indigenous service learning projects that seek to partner respectfully with Indigenous communities in Australia and elsewhere. To address this issue, the paper draws on existing international literature and data from an Indigenous arts based service learning project conducted in the Northern Territory of Australia to propose a framework centred on relationships, reciprocity, reflexivity and representation that can be adapted for future Indigenous service learning partnerships and research.

Introduction

The interface between Australian higher education institutions and Indigenous Australian¹ communities has gained increasing attention since former Australian Prime Minister Kevin Rudd's historic 2008 apology to members of the "Stolen Generations" of Indigenous Australians who were forcibly removed from their families by government officials in the late 1800s and early 1900s². There is growing pressure on higher education institutions to support reconciliation by making higher education more representative of and responsive to Indigenous culture. The National Indigenous Higher Education Network, for example, recommended in its report to the United Nations (2009, p. 7) that higher education institutions should "systemically embed Indigenous perspectives in curriculum and acknowledge the scholarly contributions of Indigenous communities in developing a culturally ethical framework to underpin research and learning". Likewise, the authors of the 2008 Review of Australian Higher Education (Commonwealth of Australia, 2008, p. 32) recommended that:

higher education providers must not only address [Indigenous students'] learning needs but also recognise and act on issues such as the culture of the institution,

¹ The term "Indigenous Australians" denotes people of Australian Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander descent. Our use of terminology this has been guided by the advice given by Aboriginal members of our project's Advisory Group.

² See http://www.clan.org.au/images/transcript_of_apology_speeches.pdf for a full transcript of Rudd's speech.

the cultural competence of all staff – academic and professional – and the nature of the curriculum.

The most comprehensive move toward embedding Indigenous content in Australian higher education was Universities Australia's 2012 *National Best Practice Framework for Indigenous Cultural Competency in Australian Universities*. This provided "a framework for embedding Indigenous cultural competencies within and across the institution in sustainable ways which engender reconciliation and social justice by enabling the factors that contribute to social, economic and political change" (Universities Australia, 2012). The Framework centres around five guiding principles, namely that:

1. Indigenous people should be actively involved in university governance and management;
2. All graduates of Australian universities will have the knowledge and skills necessary to interact in a culturally competent way with Indigenous communities;
3. University research will be conducted in a culturally competent way in partnership with Indigenous participants;
4. Indigenous staffing will be increased at all appointment levels and, for academic staff, across a wider variety of academic fields; and
5. Universities will operate in partnership with their Indigenous communities and will help disseminate culturally competent practices to the wider community. (Universities Australia, 2012)

In response, many Australian universities have established formal initiatives to embed Indigenous culture and intercultural competency across the curriculum. Recent initiatives include policies and reconciliation action plans which seek to embed Indigenous cultural competency for staff and students; Indigenous community engagement, service learning and partnership programs; committees, networks and councils of Elders who advise on or oversee activities related to Indigenous policy and engagement; and incentives and grants schemes for recruiting and supporting Indigenous staff and students.

Despite the proliferation of such initiatives, the incorporation of Indigenous perspectives into higher education curricula and cultures remains a challenging political, social and practical task, which has even prompted negative media coverage (Trounson 2012a, 2012b, 2012c). In many cases the inclusion of Indigenous curriculum, cultural awareness and content has been presented in an abstract manner that is removed from the lived experience of Indigenous culture and traditional Indigenous protocols for sharing knowledge (Newsome 1999). Mackinlay & Dunbar-Hall (2003) have suggested that these in-class learning experiences can lack the intercultural relationships required to promote reconciliation and deeper understandings of Indigenous ways of seeing and being.

Our work seeks to position arts based service learning (ABSL) as a strategy through which Australian higher education institutions can promote Indigenous cultural content for all students in ways that potentially overcome the above limitations and directly support Indigenous communities. Consonant with Molnar (2010) and others (see Lawton, 2010; Russell & Hutzel, 2007; Russell-Bowie, 2007; Thomas & Mulvey, 2008) we argue that ABSL can provide a culturally sensitive and enabling process for embedding Indigenous content. We make this claim on the basis that the arts foster interpersonal expression and empathy, individual control over personal expression and identity, and non- or extra-linguistic intercultural communication.

This paper highlights the benefits and potential of arts based Indigenous service learning for higher education institutions, and outlines key challenges and requirements for designing and implementing service learning in partnership with Indigenous communities. We first provide a summary of the existing literature on service learning and highlight aspects of that literature that are most relevant to engaging with Indigenous communities. We then draw on data from our pilot Indigenous arts based service learning project in the Northern Territory of Australia to highlight aspects of Indigenous service learning that warrant specific attention. From this we begin to form a framework for how these service-learning programs might be conceptualised. Centred on relationships, reciprocity, reflexivity and representation, the framework provides the basis upon which we are undertaking an Office for Learning & Teaching (OLT) funded study of arts based service learning with multiple Indigenous communities in Australia. We conclude with a number of suggestions for future Indigenous service learning projects and research.

Background

Service Learning

Service learning has the dual aim of enriching learning and strengthening communities. The core concept is the combination of service and learning objectives, with activities designed to positively affect both service recipient and provider (Furco, 1996; Furco & Billig, 2002). Higher education students who have engaged in service learning have been found to demonstrate greater complexities of understanding than non-service learning comparison groups (Eyler & Giles, 1999); thus service learning has emerged as an effective pedagogical strategy with benefits beyond the integration of community service into the academic curriculum (Cho, 2006; Robinson & Meyer, 2012). A key feature of service learning is that it is an *organised* activity wherein community service is integrated with classroom instruction or structured assessment (Cho, 2006; Robinson & Meyer, 2012). Furco (1996) emphasised that service-learning programs were distinguished from other forms of experiential education by ‘their intention to equally benefit the provider and the recipient of the service as well as to ensure equal focus on both the service being provided and the learning that is occurring’ (p.

5). For many authors, service learning is also defined by shared control over projects between educators and community participants (see Boyle-Baise et al., 2001); by the mutual learning between students and community participants and not just the exchange of service; by the pursuit of concrete outcomes for participating communities; and by student contributions to broader civil society (Kraft, 1996; Soska et al., 2010; Stoecker & Tryon, 2009).

In Australia the phrase “service learning” is often used interchangeably with “community engagement”; however a number of authors have established critical aspects of service learning that separate it from other community engagement activities. Purmensky (2009, pp. 4-5) for example lists five critical aspects of service learning:

1. Reciprocity: benefits for both students and the community;
2. Meaningful service: activity that meets the curriculum standards and objectives of the subjects taught;
3. Reflection: Learning and feelings contemplated through formal and informal discussions and writing;
4. Development: for example, a continuum from observation to experience and leadership; and
5. Diversity: students working in a diverse setting with a diverse population that they would not normally experience.

The contemporary literature on service learning offers numerous iterations of the above-mentioned criteria, but authors almost uniformly agree that the core aspects of service learning include reflection, structured activity, and reciprocity between students and community participants (see Cho, 2006; McCarthy, 2003; Russell-Bowie, 2007; Siebenaler, 2005). Butin (2003, pp. 1676-1677) identifies that “[i]rrespective of the definitional emphasis, service-learning advocates put forward a consistent articulation of the criteria for service learning to be legitimate, ethical, and useful. These may be glossed as the four Rs Respect, reciprocity, relevance, and reflection”. Hironimus-Wendt and Lovell-Troy (1999) further emphasise that service learning’s structure and “deliberate integration of service delivery and course content” (p. 361) differentiates it from volunteerism and internships, which are less structured and often more indirectly related to course content.

While Australian universities have explored service learning for well over a decade (Kenworthy-U’Ren, 2008; Print, 2001; Sunderland et al., 2004), it is now the object of renewed attention across the fields of management education and business ethics (Hrivnak & Sherman, 2010; Kenworthy, 2010); literacy education and teacher education (Naidoo, 2011; Power, 2012); computer and information science (Evans & Sawyer, 2009); women’s health (Parker et al., 2009); and law (Blissenden, 2006). However, other than in music education (Russell-Bowie, 2007; 2009) there is little evidence of Australian service learning projects for creative and performing arts students.

Indigenous Perspectives on Service Learning

As the name suggests, Indigenous service learning is a subset of service learning in which Indigenous and non-Indigenous students work directly in Indigenous, community-led projects. Research on service learning with Australian Indigenous communities has primarily focussed on literacy support and teacher education in remote schools with Indigenous students and our own previous work on collaborative music programs (see Bartleet and Carfoot, 2013; Jay et al., 2009; Naidoo, 2011). Elsewhere, literature on Indigenous service learning has drawn on the perspectives and experiences of law, environment and education students working with Native American, Hawaiian, Mayan, Andean, and South African Indigenous communities and cultures (see Feinstein, 2005; Guffey, 2008; Porter & Monard, 2000; Tirado & Rivera, 2002). Indeed, Littlepage, Gazley and Bennett (2012, p. 306) maintain that most research in the US has examined service learning's impact "from the limited perspective of a student's pedagogical experience and the campus's ability to support service learning". While not typically tailored to Indigenous experiences and contexts, broader discussions of service learning for social justice and change (see Mitchell & Humphries, 2007; Lewis, 2004); multicultural service learning (see Zygmunt-Fillwalk & Clark, 2007; Boyle-Baise, Epler, McCoy, & Paulk, 2001); and 'interracial' service learning (see Murphy and Rasch, 2008) may offer important insights on the socio-political and intercultural dimensions of Indigenous service learning which we will explore in detail elsewhere.

While there is relatively little existing literature dedicated to Indigenous service learning, there is even less literature that conceptualises service learning *from Indigenous perspectives*. Notable exceptions to this include Guffey's (2008) Keynote Address to the 2008 NWIC Second Summit on Indigenous Service-Learning in which he described building

a "strong link" from indigenous ways, the earth and nature into the larger society. ... I ask the question: how do people learn to find and know themselves in this world? The answer that I have come to is two-fold: first, by encountering and establishing spiritual connections with the earth through the senses, the intellect and the emotional body. Second, through the inter-relationship of storytelling and service-learning. Think of storytelling as a needle and service-learning as the thread. The story makes an impression and creates an opening, then service-learning follows. Together they draw the fabric of life: people, places and nature together in new experiences. Connecting the power of storytelling with each generation takes more than repetition and reflection on the stories. It also takes real-life encounters in the form of service-learning. (pp. 2-3)

In addition to the deep formulation of intercultural reconciliation and reciprocity in the Indigenous perspective of service learning, authors also invoke distinct "asset based" approaches. These approaches uphold "a commitment to appreciating the assets of and serving

the needs of a community partner while enhancing student learning and academic practice through intentional reflection and responsible civic action” (Guffey, 2008, p. 9). As Hutzler (2007, p. 306 in Molnar, 2010, p. 11) has discussed, focus on the “social, physical, environmental and human” assets of a community promotes respect for community members as capable agents and partners, rather than “people in need of being saved”.

Arts Based Service Learning

Educators in the USA have explored ABSL as a way of connecting students and community members and promoting community arts practice, placing “art in a community context as both a creative practice and a teaching method to fulfill arts-based educational objectives ranging from creative self-expression to competency with discipline-specific standards” (Krensky & Steffen, 2008, p. 15). ABSL is distinguished from general service learning by the fact that the arts are “central to the experience as both a means to meeting community-identified needs and an end in and of themselves” (Krensky & Steffen, 2008, p. 15).

The literature on ABSL lists the benefits as: facilitating expression, communication and connections between diverse participants; evoking participants’ strengths and abilities (Thomas & Mulvey, 2008); developing empathy and compassion between participants and for other groups (Molnar, 2010); building community through “empathetic social interaction” (Jeffers, 2009, p. 19); providing opportunities to inquire into and affirm “personal, cultural, or spiritual values” (Jeffers, 2009, p. 18); and providing the ability to “mirror” society in the form of artworks and “subsequently invoke social change” (Molnar, 2010, p. 19). We argue that many of these benefits are highly compatible with Indigenous perspectives of service learning. These perspectives have been identified in the existing literature and in our own ABSL work with Australian Indigenous communities. Yet, while some attention has been paid to using ABSL with culturally and linguistically diverse communities (see Southcott & Joseph, 2010), little attention has been given to specific applications with Indigenous communities in Australia or elsewhere.

Arts Based Indigenous Service Learning in Australia: Queensland Conservatorium’s Pilot ABSL Program in Tennant Creek

Our Approach

The authors of this paper are currently engaged in an Australian Government Office for Learning and Teaching funded arts based service learning research project incorporating ABSL projects with Indigenous communities at three Australian universities. The purpose of this article not to report the outcomes of that ongoing national research but, rather, to document the key learnings and developments that *led* to our current national project framework and partnerships with Australian Indigenous communities. Subsequent papers will document the empirical approach and outcomes drawn from the national research project and

individual ABSL projects in the three participating universities.

Within this paper we combine a range of conceptual-theoretical resources with the voices and experiences of students, community members, and university staff members involved in pilot arts based service learning projects through the Queensland Conservatorium at Griffith University between 2009-2011. Together these resources and experiences have formed the foundational framework for ABSL work presented in this paper. Participant experiences from the Queensland Conservatorium pilot project are drawn from: digital stories and interviews with students completed as part of their service learning assessment and related evaluation of the ABSL trips; interviews with community elders and partners as part of ABSL project evaluation and related pilot research on the benefits of ABSL projects with Indigenous communities led by the lead author of this paper; and fieldwork diaries and observation notes prepared by Griffith University staff who facilitated the ABSL trips to Tennant Creek between 2009-2011. Ethical approval was sought and granted for all elements of data collection and reporting associated with the ABSL trips through the Griffith University human research ethics committee. The Griffith University project leaders maintain ongoing relationships with local elders and partners to reaffirm community permission to re-present information gathered through these processes in previous years, and have continued their work in this community into 2013 and have plans for 2014 and beyond.

The potential for academic work to achieve social change has long been emphasised (see for example Somerville & Perkins, 2003); however, “emancipatory” research projects working in intercultural contexts are often prescriptive in terms of how power should be shared between researcher and researched. In response to these concerns, we sought to work beyond the emancipatory paradigm that has characterised much critical intercultural research (Somerville & Perkins, 2003). We situate our understanding of culture (and thus intercultural teaching and learning experiences) in critical theories of difference and diversity (cf. Carrington & Saggars, 2008; DePalma, 2008). These approaches build on socio-cultural understandings of “whiteness” and other critical constructions of race to arrive at a post-colonial position. Such a post-colonial approach enables the project to explore “alternative possibilities to the forces of colonisation” via “hybrid historical productions” (Somerville & Perkins, 2003, p. 255), by:

- Recognising and reconceptualising categories which maintain borders (e.g. Indigenous/non-Indigenous) (Giroux, 1992);
- Acknowledging hybrid subject-positions e.g. “temporal and contextual coalitions” (Haig-Brown, 2001) or the “third space” (Soja, 2000);
- Redrawing boundaries between constructions of experience and power (Giroux, 1992); and
- Questioning who has a right to speak and what is appropriate in particular contexts at particular times (Mackinlay, 2008).

We have adopted service learning as a pedagogical approach that steps outside the traditional classroom to enable such intercultural experiences to occur. Within this paradigm we embrace a critical service learning orientation, which means that we focus on authentic relationships, social change and power redistribution. As Mitchell (2008, p. 65) explains, in this way we are able to develop and analyse initiatives with “greater attention to equality and shared power between all participants in the service experience and [opportunities for students] to analyze the interplay of power, privilege, and oppression at the service placement and in their experience in that placement”.

Service learning projects have been integrated into curricular and community development projects as diverse as public health, teacher training and local economic transformation. Service learning is also often applied in teaching and learning activities that focus on cross-cultural collaborations as it often occurs in “space[s] no longer controlled by ... conventions of Western academic discourse” (Mackinlay, 2008, p. 258), enabling students to critically question the positioning of the academy and of academic discourse in society more broadly. Our ongoing national project extends the pilot work in Tennant Creek to engage with students from three Australian universities across multiple creative arts disciplines as well as with pre-service teachers. These students are currently working with Indigenous communities in regional and metropolitan areas in Western Australia and the Northern Territory.

The Pilot Program

In 2009 the Queensland Conservatorium at Griffith University commenced a pilot ABSL program in collaboration with Barkly Regional Arts and the Winanjjikari Music Centre, located in Tennant Creek. Each year, students and staff have travelled to Tennant Creek for two-week programs during which they have worked alongside Indigenous artists and Elders on a range of community-led programs. These have included recording and writing albums, documenting cultural activities, managing community festivals, staging and recording performances, building community arts infrastructure, and running school holiday programs. The aims of the ABSL program are two-fold: first, to enhance the way in which Indigenous content was embedded in arts-based curricula at Griffith University; and second, to develop Griffith’s community outreach work with Indigenous Australia. Since its commencement the program has directly involved over 30 students across seven undergraduate arts programs. The pilot has also hosted students from The University of Queensland’s School of Music and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies Unit. Within Tennant Creek itself, the program has involved work with over 30 Indigenous artists and Elders and over 50 youth.

Tennant Creek is a township of approximately 3,500 people, located 500 kilometres north of Alice Springs and 1,000 kilometres south of Darwin. Approximately 70% of the current population is Indigenous, and the region is home to sixteen Indigenous language groups.

Barkly Regional Arts (BRA) provides an interface between Indigenous and non-Indigenous cultures and delivers 50 annual programs and projects to over 800 artists. Given the region's high levels of unemployment, social disadvantage and cultural erosion, BRA's programs focus on building social and community well-being, cultural maintenance, career pathways, and financial and health support. BRA auspices the Winanjjikari Music Centre (WMC), which operates as a music production house and training centre for Indigenous musicians and music production technicians in Tennant Creek. WMC projects promote social cohesion and community building through the generation of complementary income streams, positive lifestyle choices and intergenerational activities that transmit and celebrate traditional and contemporary music.

Like many Australian universities, Griffith University had expressed commitment "to the creation of a curriculum that is informed by and respects the knowledge systems of our first peoples—Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders" (Griffith University, 2011). However, participation and retention rates within the Conservatorium are variable for Indigenous students, and there has been concern about lack of alignment between the formal curriculum and the prior learning experiences of these students (QCGU Review Document, 2012). Given that service learning relationships "may prove to be the most effective means by which the Conservatorium can interact positively with Indigenous communities", the ABSL program was strongly positioned to form part of a solution.

The ABSL Approach in Tennant Creek

The ABSL program sought to be both systematic and responsive. The program has been offered in second semester to accommodate community events, requirements and seasons, and to allow sufficient time for student recruitment, gaining community permissions and establishing cultural protocols. Each year the same two people have facilitated the program, and this continuity has had a positive effect on the relationships formed with Indigenous Elders and artists. The program activities have differed each year in response to community needs. The first year involved setting up a recording studio, the second year aligned with the Desert Harmony Festival, and in the third year students worked on song writing and recording projects.

Despite the varied activities, each iteration of the program has incorporated three key phases. First, students receive intercultural training. Where possible, this commences prior to the program and includes a brief cross-cultural orientation session. Once in the community, students attend classes on language and culture with respected Warumungu³ Elders. Second, students collaborate with Indigenous artists at Winanjjikari Music Centre in artistic tasks, and

³ The Warumungu people constitute the principal Aboriginal language group and traditional owners of the land on which Tennant Creek stands. Other major Aboriginal language groups in Tennant Creek include Warlpiri, Kaytetye and Alyawarr amongst others (Nash, 1984; Turpin, n. d.).

on everyday errands that form part of working in a remote community. All students engage in three reflective activities, which form their assessment and provide important data for the program's ongoing research (Swords & Kiely, 2010). Students: (a) produce field diaries, documenting the learning process as well as reflecting on the intercultural competencies developed through this work; (b) participate in an interview about the learning process and the implications of this for Indigenous content in the curriculum; and (c) create a five-minute digital story about the experience using footage from their trip. Lastly, students communicate their experience to the university and broader Brisbane community. Digital stories have also been shared with collaborators in Tennant Creek and have become useful advocacy tools for the project partners.

Key Learnings and the Formation of an ABSL Framework

Research aligned with our work across multiple sites has explored the centrality of relationship building, decolonising arts-based education, issues of colonial guilt and the construction of Otherness. Our research has also explored how these partnerships can transform students' understandings of Indigenous culture (see Bartleet & Carfoot 2013; Bartleet, 2011, 2012). In summarizing the research and distilling the key learning and teaching insights, our research has identified four significant central concepts: namely, relationships, reciprocity, reflexivity and representation. These four concepts resonate strongly with the ideas presented in the literature, and they form the basis of our key learnings and our proposed framework.

Relationships

One of the fundamental lessons has been the importance of relationship building and the need for personal connections to be in place prior to any significant creative or cultural work. This takes time, and some students find it hard to reconcile the highly structured and goal-oriented nature of their university learning experiences with the need for developing relationships within a new environment. However, over time we have seen students come to realise the importance of showing respect, developing trust, and taking the time to build relationships. One of the students, James, revealed this understanding in his fieldwork diary:

At times it has felt like things have been moving quite slowly and we might not be achieving as much as was expected of us. However upon reflecting on our first week I have realised some of this slow going has actually been a necessary and ideal way to settle in to the new environment, acclimatise and become familiar with who we are working with. . . . Taking the time to acclimatise and allow the people of Tennant Creek a chance to get to know us and feel comfortable with us in their town has been a very necessary aspect of this trip. (Fieldwork diary, 2009)

James returned to Tennant Creek to continue building on these relationships after he finished his studies, and has been working in the Tennant Creek region and other remote communities for the past 5 years. In many cases students built their relationships through music and performance, and these experiences emerged as important pathways for cross-cultural learning. Student Michael described the shared arts-based experience that foregrounded a friendship with local man Angus: “I’ve talked to Angus probably the most out of all of them. We both share a love for Zakk Wylde and his guitar playing, and so we had common grounds there” (Personal interview, 2010). Likewise, informal jam sessions often provided initial introductions that become important over the course of an entire fieldtrip. Student Jeffrey described interacting with Indigenous people through music: “Sometimes, I felt while playing that there was no need for talking. We could all understand each other very clearly” (Fieldwork diary, 2011).

Porter and Monard (2000) have suggested that relationships in the context of Indigenous service learning must be habitually tended to maintain their integrity, and Jeffrey’s return to Tennant Creek in 2012 signalled the importance of building longer-term relationships. Beyond our yearly ABSL fieldtrips, one student moved to Tennant Creek to work in schools and arts organisations, others took remote teaching positions or embarked on related research programs, and others returned as peer mentors in the following year of the program. The community has welcomed this ongoing commitment, as Alan (BRA Executive Officer) explained:

People who do take that extra leap to come back, without any expectations even; there will be a place somewhere in the region for them to land, especially if they have come through this program. It carries a little bit of a badge now, of acceptance. They’re the folk who become friends of the region forever. That’s a badge of honour itself because that’s not an easy thing to happen. (Personal interview, 2011)

Reciprocity

A related and central concept is the reciprocal exchange of musical and cultural knowledge. Indeed, the ABSL team has been mindful of the potential benefits for both students and the community. Indigenous artist Lynette explained reciprocity from a community perspective:

Everything that I hope the students have learnt and the people have learnt is that it’s a two-way process. I think that the musicians here have engaged with the Conservatorium students in a way that they’ve never engaged with other people before, other musicians, because the Conservatorium students are so open to new ideas and very good at what they do. . . . So I think we’ve both learnt a lot from

each other. You know, I don't want them to go. (Personal interview, 2009)

Alan also touched on the shared nature of these musical experiences:

Griffith University's immersion into Barkly Arts and the Winanjjikari Music Centre work in the Barkly has been totally invaluable. Not only for the hands on work that they're doing there but just for the cultural fusion across musical styles and cross-cultural understanding of each other's work. (Live CAAMA Broadcast, BAMFest, Desert Harmony Festival, 2010)

As Alan's comment suggests, these musical connections can provide important opportunities for cross-cultural learning. After two weeks of musical and cultural exchanges with local artists in Tennant Creek, student Mitch reflected:

In learning about other people's culture and musical styles, I felt I learnt more about my own. . . . I saw great value in the cultural exchange that took place, and realised that as an urban Australian, I really knew nothing about indigenous culture. . . . Culturally, I will be able to take a lot of knowledge back home about the indigenous community that I otherwise wouldn't have learnt had it not been for this trip. (Fieldwork diary, 2010)

The reciprocal nature of these learning encounters resonates strongly with the notion of asset-based approaches to service learning, which promote respect for community members as capable agents and partners rather than "people in need of being saved" (Molnar, 2010, p. 11). Through this approach, students developed a much stronger appreciation of Indigenous culture and they came to recognise how limited their previous understanding had been. The powerful learning experience that followed this realisation was described by student Cody, who wrote: "I went there thinking that the community would really learn from someone different coming into their community, but I left learning a lot more from them instead! [It was] truly a once in a lifetime experience, and something that I will carry with me for the rest of my life" (Fieldwork diary, 2010). Students' comments highlighted the reciprocal nature of this encounter and the mutually beneficial exchange of ideas and learning experiences.

Reflexivity

The processes of relationship building and reciprocity prompted students to engage in deeply reflexive processes about their racial subjectivities, cultural biases and assumptions (for further discussion of this, see Bartleet & Carfoot, 2013). While this could be confronting, the backdrop of collaboration and community support provided a supportive environment. We found evidence of this reflexivity in the students' fieldwork diary entries. One such example came from student James, who wrote:

As we developed a stronger appreciation for just how complex and detailed the indigenous culture is I felt an increasing sense of shame for what has been inflicted on these communities and the ongoing difficulties they encounter as a result. What we learnt in only two weeks broadened my understanding and appreciation for indigenous culture immeasurably. Even though this was only enough time to touch the surface of one of the oldest and proudest histories on earth, it saddens me to know it is still well and truly so much more than the vast majority of white Australians have or will ever be exposed to. I can't help but feel that it is simply ignorance and lack of understanding on behalf of white Australia that has led to such a divide between two cultures. (Fieldwork diary, 2009)

Representation

Invitations for students to work creatively, help with a range of tasks and talk about culture, kinship, hunting and country, are all important indicators of relationships and reciprocity; however, appropriate representation of these encounters can be problematic in all research and reporting processes. Although we have been keen to include Indigenous community members' voices in our research, interviewing community members with video cameras has not always been desirable or appropriate. In some cases we have had to rather rely on informal discussions, observations, and gestures of generosity as indicators of community experiences and perspectives.

Despite these difficulties, representing the depth of the program experiences can be limited when using only the written word. One of the strategies to overcome this was the production of digital stories *to* draw together stories of people, places and nature (Guffey, 2008). Digital storytelling, increasingly used in community cultural development to give voice to individuals and groups who have not customarily been heard, allows people to impart aspects of their life story through a combination of images, narration, video, text, animation, music and sound. Students created digital stories to convey the transformative nature of their learning experiences to their peers, their Indigenous collaborators and the broader community. The stories played an important role in encouraging a continuing commitment and investment in the project from the Indigenous artists involved, and they become a useful advocacy tool for all concerned.

At the same time, some critical tensions arose from the representation of Indigenous culture through personal narratives. While students' stories presented interesting themes of cross-cultural understandings, transformative learning and daily reflections, they also used deeply symbolic images and sounds. These were often significant to Indigenous collaborators and we gained permission for their use. Even so, we still question the politics and tensions that arise in this performative act of sharing; these are our students' stories told from the lens of their

personal experiences, but they are intertwined with important relationships with others. In a creative medium such as music, the risk that these issues can be forgotten amid artistic concerns remains a key concern.

Closing Comments

Central to the development of successful service learning partnerships between universities and Indigenous communities is the notion of relationships. This refers not only to the interpersonal relationships developed between students and members of local communities in the field, but also to the ongoing relationships between university personnel and the Indigenous communities that collaborate in service learning programs. Community trust of institutions and institutional understanding of Indigenous community strengths and needs are important aspects of service learning partnerships that develop over time in the course of multiple repeated opportunities for interpersonal interaction. While for individual students the immersion in the life of an Indigenous community may be of limited duration, the potential for continuity of relationships is significant in determining the success and sustainability of service learning programs.

Just as other forms of fieldwork may acknowledge “a reality of sharing and interaction, one predicated on negotiated relationships” (Shelemay, 1997, p. 202), service learning requires true reciprocity in the design and implementation of programs. Such forms of reciprocal engagement may be difficult to enact, given the frequent difficulties of consultation between geographically distant partners, and the forms of cultural distance that must be traversed by service learning collaborators. However, experiences must be both authentic and of mutual benefit to community members and participating students, offering genuine prospects for dual furthering of knowledge, relationship and opportunity.

McCarthy (1996 cited in Brody & Wright, 2004) has argued that without such experiences and the opportunity to reflect on them, “students’ perceptions about social problems are less likely to change, little learning occurs, and expectations for continued active involvement are limited” (p. 14). In examples previously discussed, race was visible to everyone involved in the project that formed the focus of this article. Through a reflexive process, students came to realise that *they* could also be “Other”. This resonated with Giroux’s words about the social, political and cultural insights that come not from undertaking the “patronizing notion of understanding the Other,” but rather understanding “how the self is implicated in the construction of Otherness” (1992, p. 32). In this setting, the acknowledgment of nuanced concepts and embodied experiences of race played a significant role in students’ understanding of themselves and the Indigenous collaborators, as well as their ways of learning. Provision of varied times and ways in which reflection can occur is integral to the learning that proceeds from student participation in service learning projects.

Appropriate forms of representation both during planning, implementation and reporting phases of service learning projects is also of key importance. We are keenly aware of the need to maintain strong relationships with our Indigenous collaborators, not only during our service learning project but as we represent the stories of this to the broader community. This includes ensuring that we adhere to appropriate cultural protocols and keep community interests at the forefront of our work. Aware also that the communication of these stories could become “colonised” by Western ways of learning, teaching and research, we follow our collaborators’ lead on the ways in which we negotiate the representation and communication of these experiences.

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