



Building an alliance with local Aboriginal Elders as a method for decolonising the Curtin University Social Work curriculum

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Acknowledgement

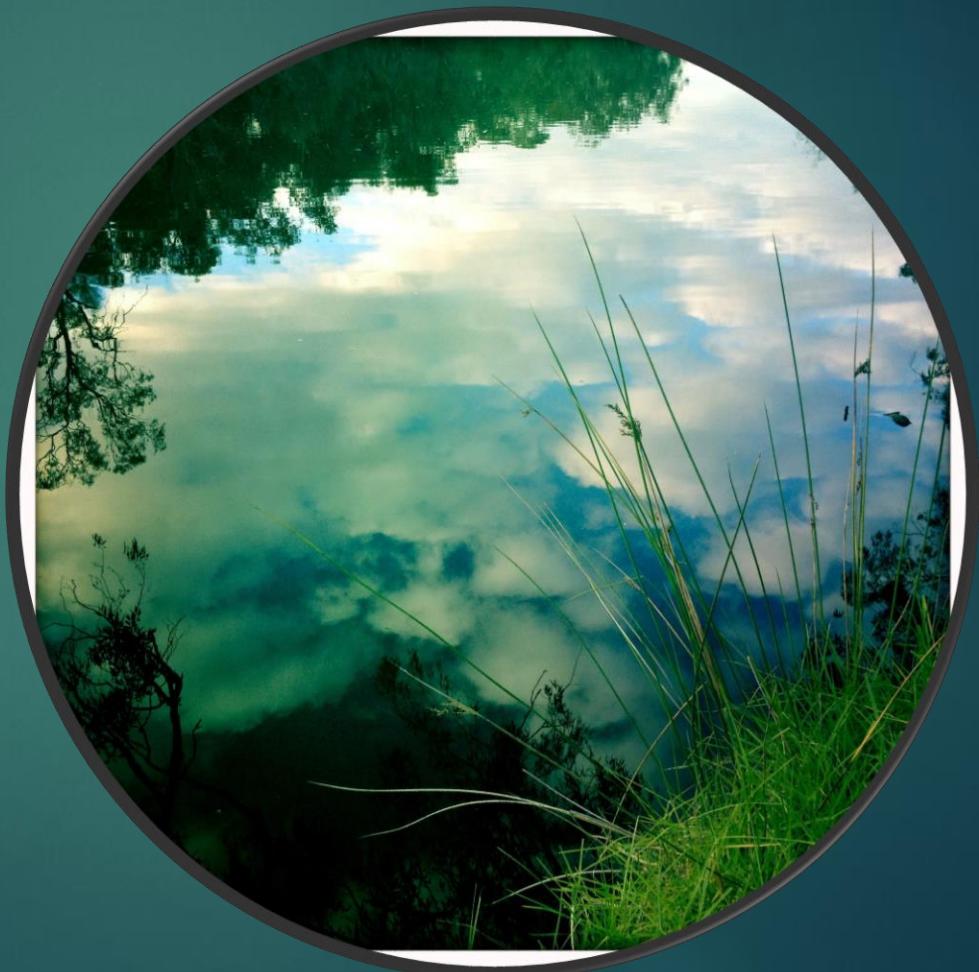
- ▶ We feel privileged to be here standing on ngati whatua
- ▶ We acknowledge we work, meet, yarn, learn and teach on the traditional land of the Noongar Wadjuk peoples.
- ▶ We acknowledge the Elders, staff and people before us.



Kirsty Oehlers



Reflection



Beginning the process

- ▶ Challenged our sense of self as academics
- ▶ Brought up emotions
- ▶ We had to learn a different way
- ▶ A settling into the unknown

Meandering through the middle

- ▶ When you let go, there is no clear direction
- ▶ Questions can arise
- ▶ Emotions are a springboard for reflection
- ▶ Trust and relationships build between participants that allows for more profound exchanges

Middle stage reflections

- ▶ We all want tips on ‘how to’ decolonise the curriculum – we are not getting this

Put aside expectations, structural changes needed, Elders guide

- ▶ The *felt* experience of understanding the impact of colonisation seems very important

As a product of whiteness/ privilege I can no longer not act

- ▶ To authentically teach in a decolonised way, we need to become allies locally with Aboriginal people, agencies and communities

Need to educate non-indigenous – ‘we can’t do this alone’

- ▶ To understand oppression from a privileged position, we need to feel some of the uncomfortableness of alignment with the oppressor

Making it an everyday struggle

Transformations (Kirsty's reflections)

- ▶ Process is still open ended, but more focus on students than staff
- ▶ More onus on us as staff to make changes in our curriculum
- ▶ I wonder if we will maintain momentum
- ▶ Will we become allies with local Nyoongar people and how?

Teaching Counselling - Kirsty

- ▶ I talked to people through my alliances with Aboriginal rights groups and Aboriginal mental health services about talk therapy versus other Aboriginal ways of helping
- ▶ Trauma needs to be acknowledged as a historical and structural issue as much as an interpersonal or intrapsychic one
- ▶ Ways of working have been extended to include concepts such as Dadirri, community healing and narrative storying

Full circle - Dadirri and this project - Kirsty

“Our Aboriginal culture has taught us to be still and to wait. We do not try to hurry things up. We let them follow their natural course - like the seasons. We watch the moon in each of its phases. We wait for the rain to fill our rivers and water the thirsty earth...When twilight comes, we prepare for the night. At dawn we rise with the sun.” (Ungunmerr, 1988)

Final reflection - Kirsty

Am I doing enough? I try. To be with Aboriginal friends and activists. Is it enough? To share, to witness the pain of colonisation. To experience Dadirri. Closest to this when sitting with people on the ground surrounded by the river and the scent of gums. Is it enough? To not be expert, to be student, learning other ways. To feel awkward, anxious, elated, accepted, rejected, companion, stranger, other, ally, me. Is it enough? Filling my arms with all I can and it's nearly enough, peeling the bark from my skin.



Sty Oehlers



Teaching and project work - Antonia

- ▶ Include much more content linked to my own whiteness and positioning of social work as Allies
- ▶ Next development from earlier staff involvement:
Reaching Across the Divide: Aboriginal Elders and Academics working together (RAD Project)



References

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- ▶ Hendrick, A. (2015). Working with Nyoongar Elders to decolonise the Social Work Curriculum. *New Community: A Quarterly Journal. Living with Mental Illness: Nyoongar ways of working & the Looking Forward Project*, 13(51), 43-49.
- ▶ Ungunmerr, M (1988). Dadirri: Inner Deep Listening and Quiet Still Awareness. <http://www.miriamrosefoundation.org.au/about-dadirri/dadirri-text>
- ▶ Wright, M., O'Connell, M., & Jones, T. (2013). *Open Hearts, Open Hands: A Spiritual Change of Journey. A Handbook produced for service providers participating in the Looking Forward Project.* Retrieved from Unpublished manuscript