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Situating the ‘beyond’: adventure-learning and Indigenous cultural competence

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In 2010, an Indigenous Elder from the Wiradjuri nation and a group of academics from Charles Sturt University travelled to Menindee, a small locality on the edge of the Australian outback. They were embarked upon an ‘adventure-learning’ research journey to study ways of learning by creating a community of practice with an Elder from the Ngyampa/Barkandji nation. This article first explores the implications of this innovative approach to transformative learning for professional development and for teaching and learning practice. It then reflects on the significance of location for pedagogic approaches aimed at closing the education gap between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal Australians in universities.

Keywords: Australia; Indigenous; cultural competence; pedagogy; location

Introduction

Indigenous people are vastly under-represented in higher education. Addressing access, success and retention problems for Indigenous students is a matter of the highest priority. Indigenous Australians suffer high levels of exclusion. Higher education is one way of allowing them to realise their full potential. To do this, higher education providers must not only address their learning needs but also recognise and act on issues such as the culture of the institution, the cultural competence of all staff – academic and professional – and the nature of the curriculum. (Bradley, Noonan, Nugent, & Scales, 2008)

A critical pedagogy of place challenges all educators to reflect on the relationship between the kind of education they pursue and the kind of places we inhabit and leave behind for future generations. (Gruenewald, 2003)

The 2008 Australian Government-funded review of the nation’s tertiary education sector, widely referred to as the Bradley Review, identified the following ‘seriously under-represented groups at our universities: those from remote parts of Australia, Indigenous students, those from low socio-economic backgrounds, and those from (rural and) regional locations’ (Bradley et al., 2008).¹ Although there are non-Indigenous people living in remote and regional areas, and not all Australians from low socioeconomic backgrounds are Indigenous, the Indigenous peoples form a very high proportion of all four categories. Thus the problem, as the review itself outlined, is racial in dimension as well as economic and cultural, and solutions need to reflect this:

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... higher education providers must not only address [Indigenous Australians'] learning needs but also recognise and act on issues such as the culture of the institution, the cultural competence of all staff – academic and professional – and the nature of the curriculum. (Bradley et al., 2008)

Divided into two parts, the first part of this article discusses this problem from the perspective of Indigenous learning and teaching at an Australian regional university determined to take its staff and students on journey of transition from Indigenous cultural awareness to Indigenous cultural competence. The second part reflects upon the significance of place for developing a critical pedagogy of (dis)location aimed at increasing the number of Indigenous students in tertiary education.

Part 1

Historical background

To appreciate the full significance of the under-representation of Indigenous students in tertiary education today, it is necessary to know something of Indigenous Australian history which is, of course, also part of non-Indigenous Australian history. While many facts and figures concerning the traditional owners of the land are disputed, it is generally accepted that an estimated 270 Indigenous nations occupied the 'Great Southern Land' at the time of first contact by Captain James Cook in 1770. It is now known that each of these nations possessed well-defined land boundaries and its own language and political, legal, economic and trades systems in addition to distinctive complex social organisation and spiritual belief structure.

The lack of written evidence about who owned what land and where boundaries lay, however, was quickly exploited by the British colonisers. As Schlunke (2007) reminds us, the grand narrative of Cook landing in Botany Bay, home of the Eora people, to claim possession of the East Coast of Australia for Britain under the doctrine of *terra nullius* (the Latin term from Roman law meaning 'land belonging to no one' or 'no man's land') is fraught with inconsistencies yet it remains largely unchallenged in Australian historical discourse. What is certain is that native title rights were ignored. The autochthonous people were said to be mere wanderers and nomads, and New South Wales was declared a land hitherto free, not only of sovereignty but of ownership by anyone: 'a blank page ready for the pen of empire' as a 1786 British Government document maintained (cited in Atkinson, 1991, p. 71). With no treaty between the British and Indigenous peoples and no acknowledgement of Indigenous nations and their sovereignty, the land was simply grabbed.

In recent years, there have been some land settlements and title agreements between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians, particularly after the 1992 High Court judgement, commonly referred to as 'Mabo', which rejected the *terra nullius* fiction and legally recognised the native title rights of the Indigenous peoples.² Mabo bestowed only limited ownership rights on the traditional owners resulting in some bitterly contested land claims and counterclaims but, by overturning *terra nullius*, Mabo succeeded in positioning the location and the related notions of space and place at the centre of the long process of reconciliation and the struggle for social justice.

Towards a pedagogy of Indigenous cultural competence

The argument that Indigenous cultural awareness and Indigenous cultural competence need to be recognised as vital elements in the education of all Australians has been noted, if not widely discussed, for some years now. In reference to the education of members of the legal and law enforcement professions, this was raised by the Royal Commission into Indigenous Australian Deaths in Custody (RCIADIC) (1991) whose Commissioners recommended:

... the adoption of a 'within culture' framework for the training of professionals. This will ultimately result in a service which is specifically attuned to the cultural imperatives of the community involved, rather than applying a 'cross-cultural perspective' which so often means, in practice, a dominant cultural perspective being applied more, or less, sensitively to another culture. (RCIADIC, 1991)

A 'within culture' approach requires a knowledge and understanding of Indigenous cultures, including pre-invasion societies, historical and contemporary experiences, critical reflection on personal values and attitudes and those of each profession, and the development of culturally appropriate skills and strategies. This definition of cultural competence transcends and incorporates notions of cultural awareness, cultural safety and cultural sensitivity by providing not only knowledge and understanding of the many Indigenous Australian cultures, histories and contemporary issues but also skills and strategies for working confidently and effectively with Indigenous peoples and within the context of the many different Indigenous nation groups in Australia.

These are all aspects of what has evolved into the Cultural Competence Pedagogical Framework now being applied at Charles Sturt University (CSU) (2009) in relation to both staff development and training and the incorporation of Indigenous curriculum and pedagogy for its students (Ranzijn, McConnochie, Nolan, & Day, 2007).³ Cultural competence is undoubtedly a complex issue that can arouse conflicting views and emotions, but a widely shared understanding of its significance for pedagogy is emerging. Accepting, as Sutton (2000, p. 58) states that 'the word competence... implies having a capacity to function effectively', cultural competence can be said to be about developing:

... attitudes, behaviours, values, policies that recognise the central role of culture. Cultural competence is a set of congruent behaviours, attitudes and policies that come together as a system, agency, or among professionals to enable that system, agency or those professionals to work effectively in cross-cultural situations. (p. 58)

There is widespread agreement that cultural competence is 'a process, not an event... a journey, not a destination' (Campinha-Bacote et al., 2005, p. 1). The link between cultural competence and social justice is also gaining recognition as the Indigenous Higher Education Advisory Council (IHEAC) makes explicit, stating that Indigenous cultural competence 'provides the basis upon which Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians may engage positively in a spirit of mutual respect and reconciliation' (Indigenous Higher Education Advisory Council [IHEAC], 2010a, 2010b).

Locating cultural competence learning

Charles Sturt University is a multi-campus, rural university largely based in central New South Wales with a focus on educating for the professions; an emphasis adopted by a small number of Universities and outlined in the CSU University Strategy 2007–2011. Its five main campuses are in relatively small population country towns, all well over three hours drive from the nearest large city. It has a large cohort of distance education students, many of whom live in rural and regional Australia. In its determination to significantly increase the number of students from low socioeconomic and Indigenous backgrounds and from rural and regional Australia, it is positioning itself as Australia's foremost inland university.

Charles Sturt University maintains that for conditions to change for Indigenous Australians, the students who will become the professional service providers of the future need to have a deeper understanding of the contemporary issues affecting Indigenous Australians and know how to work more effectively as culturally competent professionals. The introduction of cultural competence into the curriculum can be expected to have a significant impact upon a much larger number of people than the students themselves: upon graduating and entering the professions these students become potential ambassadors, advocates and educators of cultural competence for successive generations of colleagues and clients (Nolan, Hill, & Harris, 2010). The value of cultural competence for improving the current high attrition rate of Indigenous students within the tertiary education sector also informs CSU policy.

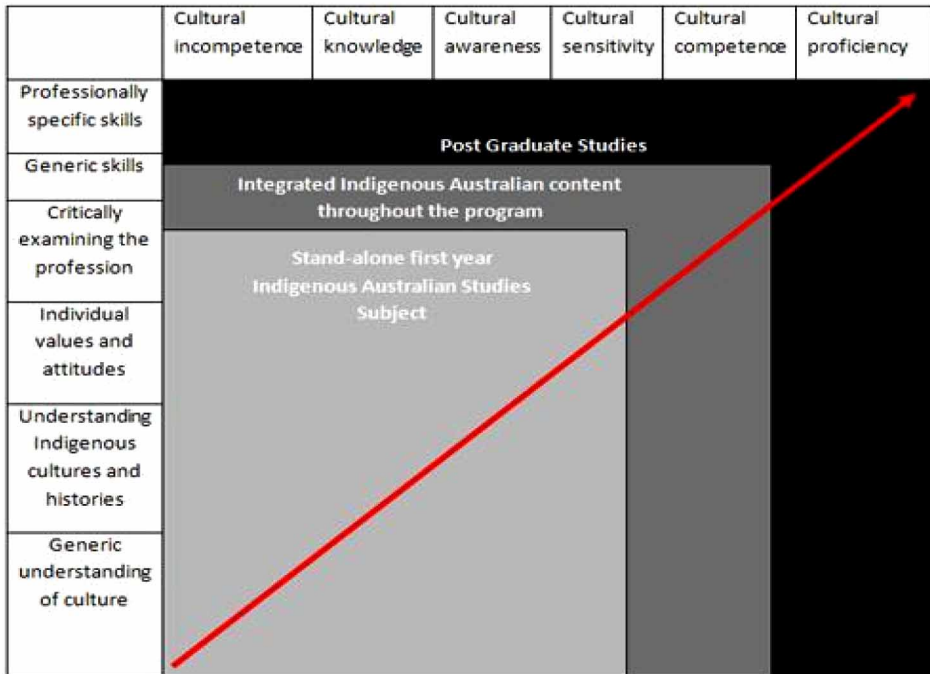
What forms cultural competence teaching and learning take tends to be influenced by the particular institution and its location. Given the mobility required for staff and students as they continually travel (literally and virtually) considerable distances between home and campus and between the various campuses, it is not surprising that CSU conceptualises cultural competence as a journey. The following model articulates this developmental journey in relation to skills and proficiency (Figure 1).

Charles Sturt University is not the only Australian university to introduce cultural competence learning into the student curriculum. But while most universities would agree that as 'sites of critical learning, universities are powerful agents for social change and have a responsibility to provide an environment free from racism in all of its forms' (Wright, 2002, p. 36), to date only two of Australia's 39 universities have made it an essential part of every student's experience.⁴

Implementing an Indigenous Education Strategy (IES)

Those involved in implementing the CSU IES quickly became aware that in order to encourage a mutual understanding between academic and Indigenous cultures, and for academics to develop skills and strategies for working in Indigenous contexts, there was a need to engage with Indigenous communities. From this sprang the proposal for a group of staff to participate in a cultural excursion to meet with Elders of an Indigenous community from a neighbouring nation.

So it was that in April 2010, a group of academics selected by their Deans in each of the Universities four Faculties, a technical officer and Auntie⁵ Gloria Rogers (traditional name: Dindima), an Indigenous Elder of the Wiradjuri people on whose



Adapted from Ranzijn, R. *et al.*, 2008

Figure 1. Developmental model of cultural competence.

Source: Adapted from Ranzijn, McConnochie, Day, Nolan, & Wharton (2008).

land the university’s main campuses are located, embarked upon the 11-hour drive to an old sheep station some 30 km from the small town of Menindee. Situated on land traditionally owned by the Ngyampa/Barkandji peoples on the banks of the Darling River running through the plains of western New South Wales, Menindee has a total population of 632 of which an estimated 46.4% is Indigenous.⁶ The next two and a half days were spent with Indigenous Elder Aunty Beryl Philip Carmichael (traditional name: Yungha-dhu) and some members of her family, walking her country, and in group discussions on student learning, staff development, and storytelling with a focus on personal history and the environment.

The pedagogical framework for this journey was ‘adventure learning’ which as Doering (2006) observes promotes fluid roles between teacher and student and, by offering a learning experience that occurs through dialogue based on collaborative opportunities and authentic experiences, encourages transformative learning. This involves ‘intense collaboration and reflective participation in a learning environment . . . [which] seeks to enable learners to understand why they see the world as they do while understanding the impact of prior knowledge on their newly constructed knowledge’ (Doering, 2006, p. 199). A further objective was to create a ‘community of practice’ to foster the process of storytelling in order to help individual members strengthen their skills as educators, produce a shared understanding of what bound them together, and a shared repertoire of communal resources (Lave & Wenger, 1991).

Pedagogies of storytelling and yarning

Within the community of practice created at Menindee, storytelling quickly became established as an effective means of learning about each other's culture, history and learning practices. Storytelling is widely associated with First Nation peoples, that is societies with a largely oral culture and in this context it is worth noting that, as Wenger, McDermott, and Snyder (2002) point out, although the term 'community of practice' was not coined until the 1990s, this type of learning practice has existed for as long as people have been learning and sharing their experiences through storytelling. A further pedagogic approach, that of yarning (Power, 2004), also informed the Menindee learning experience. Yarning is recommended by the CSU Centre for Indigenous Studies as a culturally appropriate method of cultural exchange to foster respectful partnerships based on deep listening, empathy and understanding. Narratives that emerge through yarning provide accounts of events, experiences and emotions that engage non-Indigenous staff and students with issues of identity and relations of power and privilege. Such narratives are furthermore a proven tool of organisational analysis that can mobilise personal, professional and institutional change processes (Rhodes, 2000). Thus, these narratives can provide exemplars that are richly situated and at the same time possess the generality and flexibility to trigger ideas and challenge beliefs, attitudes and behaviours far beyond their initial context (Riessman, 2008).

Fahy (2007) adds support to the value of these pedagogic approaches for developing Indigenous cultural competence, pointing out that storytelling provides a useful basis from which to reflect upon the power of personal narratives which in educational situations can offer evidence of a community engaged in learning as conversation. In this view, Fahy explains, social interaction occurs within the call of the story and the stories themselves convey more than that which is said. Moreover, the combination of social and cognitive engagement is seen as potentially richly educational, promoting understanding beyond mere acquisition of facts. The story form, Fahy maintains, engages those involved with its evocative and imaginative elements; the act of collectively listening to a story promotes social coherence (community), based on the emotions, themes and vicarious experiences shared by the listeners. Fahy (2007) concludes that:

... the effects can be deep: in case-based learning, engagement with even brief pedagogic narratives can perturb listeners' beliefs, sometimes causing reconsideration of fundamental convictions. There is the added benefit that knowledge gained through narrative appears to exhibit greater coherence, probability, and fidelity, resulting in better retention and increased higher-order understanding. (p. 268)

Outcomes

All members of this small, nascent community of practice recognised that their adventure-learning experience in Menindee represented only the start of what is anticipated will be an ongoing, mutual learning journey between the University and Indigenous communities. It was also understood that, for the academics, a long journey towards Indigenous cultural competence lies ahead. The undeniably problematic issue of inequitable flows of power and benefits arising from the

exchanges needs to be addressed. Similarly, the aim is to discover ways of ensuring that benefits in the form of curriculum change are experienced by the whole student population, and to learn how the University might deliver meaningful and tangible benefits to Indigenous communities. Blurring the boundaries between on and off campus is but a start.

Nevertheless, several short-term outcomes were realised in the months immediately following. Interviewed for an internal video report, *Journey West to Menindee* [Division of Learning and Teaching Services (DLTS), 2010], produced by CSU's DLTS, staff members expressed the view that as a result of the experience, their own personal journey towards Indigenous cultural competence had begun. They felt better equipped to introduce the concept to their students and colleagues, and better prepared to start planning ways of implementing the University's Indigenous Curriculum and Pedagogy Initiative which requires that all onshore undergraduate courses include Indigenous content by 2015. There was also a shared understanding that a new, constructive dialogue between members of the academic and Indigenous communities had opened up. This was vividly expressed by Aunty Gloria who admitted that after spending four days with academics her 'preconceived notions of what academics were like, were shot down in flames. I went out with strangers but I came back with friends' (DLTS, 2010). These responses offer support for the University's plan to develop sustainable networks to facilitate ongoing partnerships with Indigenous communities. It is premature to judge if, or how, the journey might impact upon research activities other than a number of academic articles planned or published (Mills, 2010), but the journey contributed the above-mentioned video report and images to the resources on the CSU Indigenous Curriculum and Pedagogy website.

For one of the authors of this article, an academic whose research field is in communication studies, an unanticipated outcome of her participation in the Menindee trip was her reflections about the significance of place and space for a pedagogy of cultural competence that involves storytelling and yarning. These reflections inform the second part of this article which, noting Witherall, Tran, and Othus's (1995) argument that 'stories invite us to know the world and our place in it' (p. 40), explores the potential significance of a critical pedagogy of location for approaches aimed at closing the tertiary education gap between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians.

With reference to this 'education gap' it is not suggested that such a pedagogy could increase Indigenous student enrolment in tertiary education or improve Indigenous student retention rates single-handedly. Rather, it is asked whether a participatory, place-based pedagogy might offer a means of exploring the potential value of an educational philosophy and practice which does not essentialise place and, by recognising 'place' is not a fixed location, addresses some of the barriers and conflicts which arise in places (Harrison, 2010). By offering an understanding of place as the evolving context in which we live our lives, these reflections explore whether a critical pedagogy of location might shed light on a sense of belonging which, in turn, could point a way forward for a curriculum that enables more Indigenous students to take their place in tertiary education.

Part 2***Reflections on place and space***

The trigger for these reflections and for linking location to a pedagogy of cultural competence was the concept of *terra nullius*, the term used by the early British settlers to explain and justify their appropriation of the Indigenous people's lands. Being with and in the same place as the traditional owners of land that had once been declared a 'no man's land' made it impossible to ignore the implications of this legal fiction which supported the forced dislocation, relocation and consequent disempowerment of Australia's first nation peoples. Foucault reminds us that 'a whole history remains to be written of spaces –which would at the same time be the history of powers' (Wilson & Cervero, 2003, p. 21). Power – who has it, and who does not – informs a trialectical relationship between pedagogy, space and educational equity. Power and the lack of power is closely related to education and its lack which, in turn, is linked to the issue of space or place and the lack of any place to call one's own. The inequitable distribution of land creates a further link to the concept of social justice and its lack brought about by the enforced deprivation of one's 'homeland'. These reflections upon the connections between power, education, location and social justice suggest the need to acknowledge these links if we are to devise and implement pedagogic approaches which aim to close the education gap between Indigenous and non-Indigenous students in Australian universities.

Time, space and 'time-space'

Stories about place dominated the yarning at Menindee. Place and space infused and underpinned the personal stories heard and told. Sitting around a campfire, watching the sun rise and set, lying under the stars, walking in the reddest of soil on the flattest of land, swimming in the cool lakes, visiting the Mission where Aunty Beryl had been forced to live as a child, meant location could not be ignored. For once we were *inside* the landscape rather than standing *outside* gazing at it. While time could not be completely forgotten, the land and the actual experience of the large space we were in rather than the historical issue of ownership became all-important. Thus, place rather than time emerged as the crucial element in developing our understanding of Indigenous cultural competence.

If this initially seemed surprising it may be because modern educational theory has all but ignored questions of space and geography (Peters, 1996). Pedagogy is dominated by considerations of time, by historically orientated theories, by temporal metaphors, by notions of change and progress exemplified, for instance, in 'stages of development', whether conceived in terms of individual psychology or of modernisation theory (Edwards & Usher, 2000). We need to ask why time has been valued above space and place. Why has location been under-theorised and marginalised in relation to the modernist emphasis on time and history (Usher, 2002) and why, as Rose (1993) discusses, this emphasis on constructed space as neutral, fixed and immobile, with little or no relationship to the social or cultural, and without significant impact on the formation of subject identity and biography? What are the dangers of ignoring or downgrading the spatial in education theory if we are to create pedagogy for a tertiary educational environment that is inclusive and ethical?

In response to these questions it is important to not set up space as time's binary opposite. Rather, 'we need to think . . . in terms of "space-time", of a conception and actuality of time and space as inseparable and interactively relational' (Usher, 2002, p. 43). It is also important to note that in recent years there has been the beginning of an understanding, increasingly affecting educational theory and discourse, that 'space makes a difference in theory, culture and politics' (Soja & Hooper, as cited in Usher, 2002, p. 42). Despite the relatively recent 'spatial turn' in pedagogic and other areas of contemporary thinking, time continues to be considered safer than space or place. Which is not to propose that time is innocent – after all, how long the subaltern is allowed to speak (if awarded any time at all) reveals just how implicated time is in power relations. But as Cresswell (1996) points out:

. . . in common phrases such as . . . 'know your place' or 'she was put in her place'. . . the word *place* clearly refers to something more than a spatial referent. Implied in these terms is a sense of the proper. Something or someone *belongs* in one place and not in another. (p. 3)

Time is generally experienced as less volatile than space, less consciously contested in terms of both ownership and financial profit. In a nation such as Australia with its white-settler colonial history, 'place' raises issues of possession and dispossession, deterritorialisation and reterritorialisation, dislocation and relocation all too uncomfortably.

In short, space and place have the power to make visible a shameful, often bloody, contestation and exploitation. This helps to explain why, as Soja (1989) cogently argues, critical social theory did not simply ignore space but actively repressed and denied spatiality, and why it has been necessary for dominant, white colonial ideology to consider place an 'essentially neutral category' and as 'completely transparent, unmediated and therefore utterly unknowable' (Rose, 1993, p. 70). It also helps to explain the plethora of terms Australians use for the geographical spaces once owned by the very people who are 'vastly under-represented' in our universities (Bradley et al., 2008). In terms such as 'the dead centre', the 'outback', the 'never never', 'beyond the black stump' and 'the back of beyond', the Australian Indigenous peoples are an absent presence.⁷ These terms simultaneously invoke and repress 'the imagery of trauma and separation and dislocation' (Brah, 1996, p. 193), and position the Indigenous peoples 'beyond' educated society. They tell of imaginary spaces and places which serve as euphemisms for displacement and diasporic space. To relate these ideas to our place-based learning experience at Menindee, it should be noted that the enhanced awareness of place was not only experienced by the sojourner academics. The yarning took the form of a mutually informing process in which we all began to explore identity in the context of an evolving sense of place which, in turn, offered the possibility of creating 'the means to overcome the rigid politics of "native vs incomer"' (Harrison, 2010).

Locating the 'beyond'

Soja (1989) argues that diaspora and dislocation are also potential sites of hope and new beginnings. They involve movement – the travelling from one place to another – and mobility is an important element in social, political and cultural participation

which, in turn, offers the possibility of empowerment. If we acknowledge the significance of ‘the spatiality of human life’ (Edwards & Usher, 2000, pp. 31–32) we can begin to recognise the difference that space can make, particularly in educational theory. For academia to collapse the distance between the non-educated ‘there’ and the educated ‘here’ and to bring the ‘beyond’ within pedagogic purview, we need to rethink what we mean by ‘education’ by locating the ‘beyond’.

Menindee provided a situated learning experience which took academics away from their campus-based workspace on land from which the traditional owners had been dispossessed, to land still occupied, if not necessarily owned, by its traditional owners. The adventure-learning research trip involved mobility and challenged conventional understandings of what pedagogy is and where it is, or might be, located. Reversing colonial history, if only for a nanosecond, this time it was the non-Indigenous who were dislocated and relocated. Unlike Australia’s traditional landowners, however, the dislocation was not imposed. This suggests, nevertheless, that dislocation is not inevitably accompanied by painful rupture, theft and abduction. It tells us that the location/dislocation opposition is yet another binary that needs to be rethought. It supports Edwards and Usher’s (2000) argument that a pedagogy of (dis)location offers a way of rethinking the teaching and learning process, of challenging the ways in which some people(s) are ‘kept in their place’ by our sites of higher education by failing to offer them any space in which to learn (p. 115).

Location, identity and mobility

As indicated earlier, location has always been intricately involved in the production of power (Lefebvre, 1974/1991). Foucault argues that it is also implicated in the construction of identity: space is fundamental in any form of communal life; space is fundamental in any exercise of power, and identity is relationally constructed through and in place (Edwards & Usher, 2000). Identity and location are inseparable: the question ‘who am I?’ cannot be separated from the question ‘where am I?’ Mapping where one stands involves recognising the role mobility plays in education and in liberation. Education, especially literacy, involves travel both real and virtual: it is what enables people, communities, and even whole nations, to relocate and participate voluntarily in the wider world, beyond the nursery, the kitchen, the locality. The mobility that education offers makes it possible to seek new horizons, explore different landscapes – not to ignore or forget the local but connect it to the global (Mills, 2010).

But, as Lankshear, Peters, and Knobel (1996, p. 166) point out, our education system largely comprises ‘spaces of enclosure’. These spaces contain only a narrow understanding of that which constitutes knowledge and this exclusive and excluding notion of knowledge is organised through a curriculum lacking the flexibility to accommodate difference and otherness. Furthermore, the presentation and dissemination of learning is largely dependent upon a fixed and bounded pedagogy promoting the primacy of the printed and written word above other, non-textual literacies and learning approaches (Mills, 2011). The ensuing inequity in which oral cultures and storytelling approaches to learning are devalued cannot be justified.

The journey to Menindee was undoubtedly a rich learning experience for the academics. That this was also true for the Indigenous members is indicated by the

invitation for follow-up visits to Menindee, the ongoing dialogue which has shown the boundaries between on and off campus locations to be porous, and the significant involvement of Aunty Gloria in developing the cultural competence curriculum. Although small, the community of practice created there enabled its members the traditional landowners and the academics to apprehend the meaning of transformative learning as a process of 'becoming critically aware of one's own tacit assumptions and expectations and those of others and assessing their relevance for making an interpretation' (Mezirow, 2000, p. 4). It furthermore offered experiential learning in the form of 'adventure learning' as an approach that could mobilise academics and their students by offering them opportunities to explore real-world issues through authentic learning experiences within collaborative learning environments (Doering, 2006).

New landscapes, new pedagogies: new students?

Menindee offered a different landscape for the academics to inhabit, even if only briefly. This new location made it possible to learn about the significance of (dis)location for learning and teaching practice and to begin the process of thinking about the pedagogies that need to be discarded as well as those for which a cartographical imagination must be employed if we are to create new orderings of learning. Could any of this have been learned from our offices on the university campus? Perhaps. But from our desks, could we have understood quite so clearly the ideas of the cognitive anthropologists Lave and Wenger (1991) who argue that learning should be situated and viewed as a social process whereby knowledge is co-constructed? Or appreciated Gee's (2004) arguments for located learning to create affinity spaces capable of bridging the barriers of age, race, socioeconomic status and educational level? This seems unlikely. The combination of actual, physical experience and (dis)location resulted in new understandings of how the journey from cultural awareness to cultural competence might be incorporated in new, more inclusive pedagogies.

Location is hugely important to our students; for many it is the main reason why they do or do not go to a particular university, or what encourages them to take the decision to engage in tertiary education in the first place, as well as whether they graduate or drop out. It is likely to be of significance to future Indigenous students for whom academia must create pathways and a positive tertiary education experience. A critical pedagogy of location means that learning needs to be located and dislocated.

Being there – putting the 'where' into my own learning is what encouraged these reflections about (dis)location and its potential significance for those Australians for whom there is currently no place in tertiary education. Becoming so intensely aware of how much remains unknown about the 'beyond' suggests the need for further research involving mapping ideas from the field of cultural geography on to pedagogic approaches aimed at closing the education gap between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians. Developing a critical pedagogy of (dis)location could be the start of creating an educational space in which Australia's Indigenous peoples are no longer vastly under-represented.

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Notes

1. In this article, the term 'Indigenous' refers to Indigenous Australian Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, not Indigenous peoples in other parts of the world.
2. After a decade of litigation instigated by Torres Strait Islander Eddie Mabo, the Court ruled that the native title of the Indigenous peoples was recognised in common law. For more detail, see <http://home.vicnet.net.au/~aar/aarmabo.htm>
3. Co-ordinated by Dr Barbara Hill in a close working relationship with the Centre for Indigenous Studies. In particular, the Centre's Acting Director, Wendy Nolan, CSU is incorporating Indigenous Curriculum and Pedagogy in all its undergraduate onshore courses by 2015. Under the University's Indigenous Education Strategy (IES), the institution has made a large commitment and has structures to support the IES at all levels of governance. CSU has a top-down and bottom-up approach; there is resistance but there is also a strong movement of support. The content can be in existing subjects and courses and is also being introduced via new subjects or suite of subjects. The Indigenous Board of Studies looks at all this content and makes its determinations accordingly. More information can be found at <http://www.csu.edu.au/division/landt/indigenous-curriculum/>
4. To encourage more widespread adoption, in 2010 Universities Australia commissioned guidelines to be drawn up for 'National Best Practice for Indigenous Cultural Competency in Australian Universities'. These are being written by a consultancy group led by Wendy Nolan, Acting Director, Centre for Indigenous Studies at CSU. For more information see <http://www.universitiesaustralia.edu.au/category/indigenous>.
5. 'Aunty' and 'Uncle' are the common English language honorifics for Indigenous Elders.
6. Indigenous people constitute 2.1% of the population of New South Wales. Information retrieved 10 May, 2011, from http://www.daa.nsw.gov.au/communityprofiles/Community-Portrait06_H_Menindee.pdf
7. The 'Never Never' is the name of a vast, remote, imaginary area of the Australian Outback, first described in Barcroft Boake's poem 'Where the Dead Men Lie' (1897). Isolated white pioneer life in the Northern Territory was described by Mrs Aeneas Gunn (Jeannie Gunn) in her classic novel, *We of the Never Never* (1908). 'Never Never' is the name of the fictional desert in Baz Luhrmann's film *Australia* (2008) across which no white person has ever succeeded in travelling and which, but for an Indigenous shaman (David Gulpilil), almost proves the undoing of the white heroine (Nicole Kidman) and hero (Hugh Jackman). The term 'beyond the black stump' has been used since the early nineteenth century for an imaginary point beyond which the country is considered remote and uncivilised, an abstract marker of the limits of established white settlement. The poetic documentary film, *The back of beyond* (John Heyer, 1954), is about the journey of a white postman whose post-delivering route many kilometres long, lies along the Birdsville Track in the desert regions of southern and central Australia. The feature film *Back of Beyond* (Michael Robertson, 1995) is a thriller/adventure set in the central Australian desert which in the past, ignoring the many Indigenous people who had lived there for millennia, was widely referred to by white Australians as 'the dead centre'.

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