

CHAPTER FIVE

DINAWAN DREAMING: SEEING THE DARKNESS OR THE STARS

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Abstract

This chapter uses Indigenous research methodologies of walking together, yarning about our experiences and critically analysing the meanings of conversations and writings created by three women. We are a university educator and recent migrant to Australia; an artist and educator of Aboriginal Australian heritage, and a woman of the Kamillaroi people; and a pre-service teacher whose family migrated from Europe in the last century to farm the land in Queensland. The chapter builds upon traditional Indigenous Australian ways of knowing and understanding as the authors share their understandings of an immersive experience during a day visit to Gummingurru: a ceremonial site of cultural importance to the Jarowair Aboriginal people. An art work created by Donna Moodie becomes a key and a metaphor for understanding the different ways of seeing and understanding land, self and culture, as the authors walk together on and through a site of spiritual and cultural significance. Film of their yarning about the day and a critical revisiting of the transcribed interviews allows a three-way re-framing of the day so as to generate new understandings of identity and culture, the land and time. The interwoven voices of the three highlight differences but also embody the potential for re-connection and transformed understandings through walking, yarning and writing together.

This chapter is dedicated to Janice Moodie-Hall, 1937 - 2013

Introduction

On one level this chapter offers a story of a day trip to a site of cultural significance, the Gummingurru site in South East Queensland on the Darling Downs. On another and more symbolic level the chapter explores ways of reading and understanding the land, time and belonging through visual art and ‘yarning’ or storytelling (Fredericks et al., 2011). It does so by interweaving the recollections of two researchers and one pre-service teacher who travelled to Gummingurru as part of an educational visit.

The Gummingurru site

Anne Ross (2010) describes Gummingurru as “one of the largest intact stone arrangement sites in Queensland” (p. 113). On a site spanning some 5 hectares, it is situated between Toowoomba and Meringandan, lands traditionally part of Jarowair country. However, most of the Jarowair Aboriginal people were forcibly relocated to Fraser Island, Cherbourg, Palm Island and other settlements between 1950 – 60 by the government of that time, losing connections with family and the land. As custodian of the land, Brian Tobane (Ross, Ulm, & Tobane, 2013) has worked with Gummingurru Aboriginal Corporation to ensure that the site is preserved for its archeological significance, but also as a place of living heritage (Ross, 2010, p.120) where Aboriginal Australian’s voices are heard over those of bureaucratic institutions, and where traditional ways of sharing knowledge continue through storytelling.

The Jarowair were among the many Aboriginal groups who travelled to the site on their journey to the Bunya Mountains for feasts and ceremonies that were held there once every three years (Ross & Ulm, 2009) when the trees fruited. It was a ceremonial place where young men were initiated into manhood before travelling on to the Bunya nut festivities. In the late 19th century Gummingurru was still being used for initiations, and it has long been a place of teaching for the Jarowair and other Aboriginal peoples who travelled there: “The activities at Gummingurru and the Bunya Mountains included knowledge sharing, alliance making, trade and exchange” (Ross et al., 2013, p. 62).

Brian Tobane’s role as caretaker of the site and in re-creating the site as a source of cultural knowledge has been reported in some depth by Tobane with co-researchers Anne Ross and Sean Ulm. Their most recent publication refers to Brian’s direct ancestor, Bunda, who was Brian’s

grandmother's brother (Ross et al., 2013). It indicates the history of the site and the people who knew its stories:

The first European settler in the area was James Benjamin Jinks, who in 1871 settled the land on which Gummingurru is located. Jinks' great-great-grandson, Ben Gilbert, took up the property in 1948. Most of the knowledge about the use of Gummingurru and interpretations of its motifs comes from Gilbert (1992). Until his death in 2009, Gilbert was regarded by many, including the current Jarowair traditional custodians, as being the knowledge custodian of the site because of his close friendship with 'Bunda' (also known as John Darlow or Henry Darlow), a Jarowair man who remained in the vicinity of Gummingurru even when others were removed to Cherbourg (Ross et al., 2013, p. 63)

What is not mentioned so frequently is that it was a child's play that led to the re-discovery of the site. When Ben Gilbert's young daughter mentioned her play in the 'fairy rings' on the farm, her father began to explore further.

The context of this chapter

The reviewer for this chapter commented at a 'singular voice' emerging from the writing. Acknowledging this, the main authors have walked together drawing on our strengths: Donna's oral tradition has emerged in her telling of the story of this experience, and I am honoured that Donna has entrusted me to give life to her telling, saying "That's your skillset - writing". Transcripts of our conversations and the 'story' of our experience have been drawn together by Janice with the agreement of Donna and Nicole. Both are named as co-authors with respect to their oral contribution: telling of stories goes beyond writing as described by Julia Christensen in her work with homeless Indigenous people in the Northwest Territories of Canada "storytelling and knowledge sharing are often one and the same"(2012, p. 231). By making transparent the intersections, boundaries and gaps (Licona, 2007) in our separate and combined accounts of the day we have strived to embody the intimacy of our shared yarning (Barusch, 2012), through respectful, and culturally sensitive relationships in research (Hill & May, 2013, p. 57; Lloyd, 2012). Through experiencing, yarning, transcribing and critically re-visiting our talk we have gained a greater understanding of our shared and distinct intercultural understandings. In this chapter, we strive to find a starting point for understanding self, culture and the land by revisiting an

experience whose intent was to help undergraduates in a Bachelor of Education program to understand Indigenous perspectives.

As storytellers we are Donna Moodie, a woman of the Kamilleroi people of Australia, artist and researcher; Nicole Hobson, a woman with a rural and settler heritage who chose to attend the day trip during her first semester of study as a pre-service teacher; and Janice Jones, an economic migrant to Queensland, of a diasporic Celtic heritage, and also an artist, lecturer and researcher. By interweaving our stories of that day we strive to make meaning, and bring a critical focus to our perceptions of the differences and similarities in our understandings of the land, self and time. Without knowing it at the time, our practices that day embodied teaching through community and the land, more than through content. In this way our practices were consistent with the 8ways pedagogy, whose interconnected dimensions include “Community Links; Deconstruct Reconstruct; Non-Linear; Land Links; Symbols and Images; Non-verbal; Learning Maps; Story Sharing” (Regional Aboriginal Education Team - Western New South Wales, 2013, p. 6).

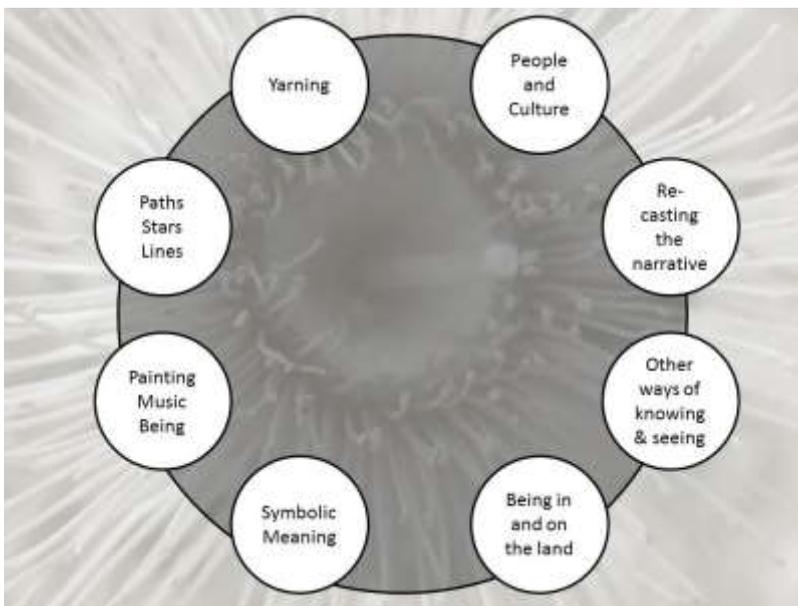


Figure 5-1: Indigenous research and teaching approach [Adapted from the RAET 8ways model, 2013, p.6]

The 8ways philosophy is presented (Fig.1) through words that have direct application to our conduct of the day, but each practice remains true to intent of the 8ways model, in its embodiment of “narrative-driven learning, visualized learning processes, hands-on/reflective techniques, use of symbols/metaphors, land-based learning, indirect/synergistic logic, modelled/scaffolded genre mastery, and connectedness to community” (2012, p.6). Our making meaning through holistic, arts-informed and land-based ways of teaching and learning through community has relevance within a national context of government imperatives to remove factors limiting equity in education for Indigenous Australians (Behrendt, Larking, Griew, & Patricia, 2012, p. 17), and for embedding Indigenous perspectives within university and school curricula (Mceetya, 2008). Land-and-community based ways of learning offer powerful ways of making meaning in global contexts where indigenous peoples’ approaches to relational learning (Goodyear-Ka’ōpua, 2013; Milgate, Purdie, & Bell, 2011), ways of knowing and research methods (Christensen, 2012; Tuhiwai Smith, 2012), are emerging as counterbalancing epistemologies and ways of re-presenting self and the world (Warrior, 1995).

Research and ethics of practice

The data from which this chapter is drawn from a three-year study into undergraduate pre-service teachers’ self-perceptions of creativity, and their perceptions and experiences of learning through natural environments at the University of Southern Queensland (USQ), Australia. In 2010 and 2011 Janice Jones gathered written reflections from a cohort (n=120) of first year pre-service teachers during their immersion over 6 hours’ in a groomed environment over 3 weeks. In 2011 a sub-project the ‘RejuveNation’ Study involved a research team of five: two researchers (authors of this chapter) focused upon learning in and through engagement in natural environments and learning through engagement to in sites of cultural importance. This involved a group (n=12 students, one of whom is an author of this chapter), who engaged in a full day immersion experience on 24th May 2011 with a focus on Indigenous perspectives in education. The lead author and two other researchers focused specifically upon natural-seeming virtual environments (Second Life). This part of the project was funded by an internal research grant. Ethics approval was granted by the university for research, but more nuanced permissions were essential for culturally sensitive practices in relation to female researchers’ engagement at sites with spiritual and cultural significance for Jarowair men and other Indigenous peoples with historical connections to the place.

The research team therefore sought approval for the visit to the Gummingirru site from caretakers of the site, and a virtual world was created (Farley, Jones, & Murphy, 2012) with the advice of Aboriginal advisors and with approval by the Centre for Australian Indigenous Knowledges at USQ. Informal consultation with Aboriginal advisors supported our plans for pre-service teachers to understand the protocols for respectful access to Gummingirru as a site of cultural and historical importance. Our intent was for the experience of land-based learning to support visitors' sensitivity to Indigenous ways of understanding the relationship between the individual, the community and the land (Fig.1).

As teaching researchers Donna and I had hoped that all participants would gain a greater understanding of different ways of experiencing time, and that aspects of nature carry symbolic meanings. However, Nicole as a student who attended on the day reflected that, inevitably, the day was experienced differently by individuals. For participants who did not report changes in their thinking or awareness, and for whom feelings of resistance made learning difficult, our belief is that time and further experience may bring a re-visiting of the experience and a re-connecting with memories for greater understanding. Part of working with Indigenous methodologies for learning is a readiness to accept that learning comes when we are ready, and although our experience of life includes temporal awareness (Lefebvre, 1974) our learning is not always informed by 'clock time'. For some participants, the opportunity to gain factual knowledge about the local history of a site of cultural and archaeological significance, so as to share that knowledge with other learners will have been sufficient for that day.

As organisers, the lead authors wished to create an experience where participants came away with a sense that Gummingirru is a living site (Ross & Ulm, 2010) where heritage is constantly evolving. Gummingirru is a site of regeneration, creation and sharing of knowledge and cultural pride of the Indigenous peoples of this land with peoples of all cultures. Donna's advice ensured that the day coalesced around a gathering, sharing and re-framing of the physical narratives embedded in the landscape, through her use of story, through the medium of her painting *Dinawan Dreaming*, and through the didgeridoo playing of her adult son, Ben. In writing this chapter, I removed some references to 'Queensland'. I feel uncomfortable at my relatively recent sense that the name of the state where I live embodies a history of recent and genocidal domination of the original inhabitants of this land. Donna's research strives to recapture the Indigenous peoples' knowledge of astronomy, plants, and healing and their many languages and song-cycles. Donna, whose people have lived

through that colonisation, is more sanguine – not accepting, but focussed on a positive future where Australians work together to gain from their rich diversity of culture and knowledge. For us both, an acute awareness of the loss of so many indigenous peoples’ languages and stories, and their importance for culture and our global knowledge store is supported by the work of Tove Skutnabb-Kangas and Robert Dunbar (2010) who decry the dominance of English in Education and its genocidal impact upon the store of knowledge of indigenous cultures worldwide. In Australia, “more than 20 unique projects commenced by separate Indigenous language groups” (Behrendt et al., 2012, p. 103) are underway to digitally document and to teach those languages.

While the focus of this chapter is upon a visit to the Gummingurru site, the broader experience of that day included storytelling and a focus on curricula for sustainability at the Amaroo Environmental Education Centre. The day concluded with a tour of the Cobb and Co museum, hosted by Donna Moodie and with a focus upon first settlement of Queensland, and upon its ancient and recent history. During the day, participants were asked to record their impressions in writing after each stage of the program. Eight weeks later, participants were invited to interview. Three students responded. Filmed interviews captured the three participants’ recollections of the day. Nicole, as one of the participants is pleased for her words, which were transcribed from the interview, to be part of this narrative. Donna Moodie and Janice Jones talked during two 1.5 hours in two sessions about their recollections of the day. Those conversations were filmed, transcribed and discussed in depth by the researchers for key issues and points of critical interest. This second conversation provided a further layer of data. Themes emerging from the data were coded visually, and in note form by both researchers. They included: cultural understandings of time - event time and clock time; mapping and reading our relationships with the land and one another; visual and metaphorical/symbolic representations of human issues.

Theoretical and philosophical positioning

At the intersections of those narratives, and in the contingent spaces between the binary and essentialist constructs of postcolonialism, we experienced “contradictions, ambiguities and ambivalences” (Docker, 1995, p. 410) that support our belief that our sense of identity and culture is multiple, layered, contextual and contingent or ‘liquid’ (Dervin, 2011, 2013). As a teacher and researcher my privileged present carries the dormant seeds of a Celtic diaspora, lost connection with land and people,

and more recently, migration as a settler. As artist, researcher and teacher, and as a proud Kamilleroi woman, the seeds Donna carries are not dormant but active and regenerative of worlds shattered by genocidal colonisation. They are not metaphorical but real: her doctoral study involves the documentation, seed-capture and planting and sharing of traditional medicinal knowledges gathered from elders. Our talk and our writing carry us back and forth across the boundaries between assimilation and acculturation: the experience of our different cultures embodies anger and misunderstandings. As we work together a growing sense of trust affords more nuanced conversations to emerge – and for colonising ideas to be revealed and scrutinised.

For Donna, yarning is a method of teaching, a means of problem solving, reconciling difference, or acknowledging the irreconcilable - and of making sense of and revealing the world beyond the literal and external. Nicole has a vivid recall of Donna's embedding of a work of art as a metaphor for ways of seeing, two months after the day:

...looking down at the land and looking up at the sky but also looking straight on at the same time, rather than looking at the side, looking at it from a different perspective.

For me as a non-Indigenous Australian researcher to speak and write with integrity about the ways of knowing of Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander peoples and to discover Indigenous research methodologies has brought the joy of using story, song and painting as means of exploring slippery concepts of culture and belonging. Our discussions in interviews, have allowed stories to become a form of discourse by which we test our understandings of what lies beyond and within the everyday, and behind the seeming patterns of lived experience. Donna has taught me to look with different eyes. Nicole has taught me of the importance of quiet spaces for conversations between learner and teacher, and for me to listen with great care to the wisdom of students who inhabit a world quite different from the one I know. As lead author, I thank them both, and hope that this chapter honours and privileges their voices equally to my own. The following section begins our stories of the day, captured from the transcripts and interwoven into a 'yarn'.

Yarning...a day of learning

24.5.2011: Early morning on a chilly and damp Autumn day in the Southern hemisphere. Pre-service teachers and two lecturers gather in the

sports centre foyer, waiting to board a rather rickety old minibus for our day trip to three sites as we learn about the history and peoples of this land. Our guides for the day are Donna Moodie an artist and educator of Kamillaroi background, and Ben, her adult son. Ben is carrying a didgeridu. He waits in silence while Donna speaks. Donna has sought permission from the custodians of the land for our predominantly female group to visit the Gumingurru site (Ross & Ulm, 2009; Ross et al., 2013). Stone tools have been found at the site, and analysed, indicating that they were carried there from different places by tribal groups who converged on their way to the triennial Bunya Nut Feast. The route they took included camps for women and men, near water and food sources. In the last decade, a building has been placed to one side of the site: the new learning centre continues the tradition of learning.

Acknowledging country: Artwork as cultural key - Dinawan Dreaming

Donna quietly speaks of the beauty of the land, naming its traditional owners and caretakers, giving respect to the elders past and present. Then she introduces her painting *Dinawan Dreaming* (Fig 5-2). On the large canvas pinpricks of white and black stretch into infinity: a night sky – the Milky Way. Below the clouded stars a layer of deep red marks the earth. Donna explains that to ‘read’ Central Desert artists’ dot paintings we need use a perspective that is different from the viewpoint of looking straight at the art work. At that moment none of us realises that behind this physical modelling of ways of reading and understanding her painting, Donna is using Indigenous teaching methods (Fig 5-1) as she has thought for many hours about how she can help frame our understandings of the day ahead. Donna tilts the painting flat, holding it horizontally - at waist height, like a table. She begins to speak, to shape our understandings of the day to come:



Figure 5-2: Dinawan Dreaming by Donna Moodie

Imagine we're standing in the centre of the painting. First we look flat around us - through the lines and dots. Those spirals and lines are the shapes of the earth, places near and far; next, we rise up through the painting to look down. We see through the stars onto the earth, from the viewpoint of a bird. Looking down on the lines and patterns of the earth we see tracks made by human feet, and marks showing places of importance. This is a kind of map. Finally, we sink down under the earth like the earthworm, looking up at the stars and their patterns to know the time and seasons of the sky above.

The sports centre fades as we try to shift our mode of knowing from looking at, to becoming part of the painting's layered world, mapping ourselves within and between the patterns of the earth and the skies. It is not easy to see from three perspectives, to resist the pull of the ways we know that draw us back outside the painting, blindly looking in.

“Can you see the Emu, Dinawan?” Donna asks.

I look at the patterns of light dots, uncertain. Then I point to a small group of stars that seem to make a shape.

“Yes, I think so.”

“Look between the stars,” Donna smiles.

Suddenly, the darkness of the painting comes together. Between the stars is the long shape of an emu, its neck stretching upward and to the right.

“When Dinawan appears in the night sky, our people know it is time to gather emu eggs.”

Donna’s painting, and her quiet revelation of another way of seeing becomes a way for our small group of travellers to re-frame our understandings of the day’s experiences. It provides a way for us to talk of our growing sense that we inhabit multiple spaces and intersections determined by our background and education. For each of us, that knowledge brings a sense that the present is fragile evolving around and with us; that we are part of the mesh of slow-moving stars; that our feet walk on and across pathways made by own and others’ ancestors, on the same earth, the same dust. Without knowing it, in 2011 we anticipated the 8ways approach to making meaning (Regional Aboriginal Education Team - Western New South Wales, 2013). Yarning, picture making and symbolic language were established from the outset as ways of engaging with spirit, culture, community, self and the earth.

In the middle of the painting: Stories of the land

Mid morning of the same day. Light spilling over hills and onto ploughed farmland. Plastic litter discarded from cars is caught in the damp grass at our feet. We stop en route to Gummingurru as people must have done for centuries. Janice tells her story:

Donna has pulled in on the grass verge on this broad plain. She is talking quietly, as if to herself. We gather close, listening as her words peel back the skin of the world so we see it anew. The sound of traffic fades. We forget the tarmac behind us, the fences, the ploughed fields and homesteads. Ancient volcanoes, their shoulders curved in the morning light become warrior giants, beheaded in battle. They rise out of the plain, protecting the curved side of a huge sleeping woman, her belly pregnant with life. Dormant, the warriors wait for a signal to rise, to protect her. The long hill that forms the woman’s side is dark against the sky, and far below her we stand, a small cluster of dots, on the broad brown earth with its criss-crossing lines. Are we in the middle of the painting, or looking from the side? I am no longer sure. Five generations ago, forest stretched to the edge of the sky. Now, roads, fields, fences divide the land.

Donna describes her thinking at that moment, as guide and as an educator:

“It is not about looking ‘at’ but ‘being in’ the land. My role is as artist: eye-opener, deconstructor, interpreter. Today is about experiencing art as a way of thinking, and about understanding our being with and in the land, so it is not about distance, but about connectedness with the earth. A moment to stop. Living in event time, rather than clock time. Part of the work that I’ve done with the Jarowair traditional owners was to gather stories around what some of the old people (including the non-Indigenous people) remembered were the stories that the Aboriginal peoples told.

I was trying to ask everybody to look at (the Gowrie mountain area) from above, from below and at it again like we looked at the painting. It wasn’t quite happening for some people at that stage, they were sort of going, “Oh, I can see the people lying down, oh... the ancient warriors were they protecting the pregnant one that was lying down?” Well, yeah... you’re gonna make those sort of decisions for yourself because we can all only come from the world view that we have. To move out of that, we usually try and avoid it as it becomes uncomfortable which is why a lot of Indigenous people aren’t really comfortable with white ways and the white world.

Donna’s story is told from personal knowledge of the history of the site, and her relationship with Brian Tobane.

Two months after our visit, Nicole Hobson pauses as she searches for words to express her recollection of looking at, upon, and through the landscape of the hills and plane at Gowrie Junction. Her description breaks past the skin of the physical and familiar world to reveal an-other way of knowing. Nicole describes her awareness of co-existing worlds and ways of knowing the earth:

We looked at the mountains and... you could see body shapes, and they were like warriors guarding a pregnant woman. That’s really the one I really remembered, and yeah...(pause). (Looking) across the field and....like you knew that there were houses around but they didn’t really see them like you saw everything else because you’re looking past it to see all the mountains and the hills. It was an intrusion the fact that there was a road there with the cars going on. It still felt like (pause) like you weren’t... it wasn’t really (pause) it wasn’t in the middle of nowhere but it felt like it was to me.

From the sky looking down: Gummungirru

As we arrive at Gummungirru Donna goes ahead to confirm with the caretakers that we can enter. As we pull in on the dirt track, a family of kangaroos rise above the long grass, ears pricked. Unhurried, the big male lopes away, leading his family to watch from a distance. Donna and Ben

take us into the education centre. It feels temporary. Flimsy. Inside, Donna shows us cases of stones, and important artefacts gathered at the site and in nearby water ways where women used grinding stones to prepare a kind of damper. Donna yarns about Gummingurru to our group. Her story is not voiced as research, but as lived experience:

The story of the Gummigurru site is probably the greatest story of hope that I've come across. The German settlers actually came into this area in the 1840s or fifties and a gentleman by the name of Ben Gilbert's great grandfather, Benjamin Jinks squatted on that area as that's what you had to do in those days. You had to squat and part of that was clearing the land and putting up fences and then you could make a claim over that area which Ben Gilbert's great grandfather did. The land changed hands a few times but in the end Ben Gilbert ended up with that tract of land and basically didn't know this 5 hectares of stone arrangement was there until he found his daughter - she is now a 56 year old woman - at the age of 5, he couldn't find her in the afternoon and he'd say to her around the dinner table,

"Where have you been?" And Jean would say,

"Oh I've been playing in the fairy's room daddy"

"Oh isn't she quaint?" mum and dad would say.

But then one day, he went down there and found that she was actually playing in a stone circle. These rocks were placed in a circle and she was playing her fairy games in the middle of this circle. And he realised then that this was not a natural thing, that this had been put there and so being quite an educated man, he realised that it must have been something to do with the Aboriginal people that had been there so he went on a life-long quest...(to protect and learn more about the site).

From there, we enter a modern cabin that serves as an education centre. I recognise a slight disappointment of my hopes that we would walk around the site, being shown the patterns of rocks. But Donna explains that as the grass has not been cut, snakes will be basking on the rocks trying to find warmth, and that brings a risk for us walking around. My sense is that also Donna is protecting culture. We are visitors, non-Indigenous, and most of our group is female. I sense a strong desire to protect. Boundaries are not always as clearly marked as those of cultures where wire and wood denote ownership of the land. There are invisible boundaries – that cannot be spoken of, but must be learned through what is not disclosed as much as what is shared. I recall the planning visit where Donna took me to the site and where she introduced me to Brian Tobane who was quietly courteous in his welcome. I sensed my own strangeness.

Story of the bird

We have been standing for some thirty minutes as Donna explains the history of the site, showing us photographs, artefacts, stones, shields and spears. Jackets are slipped off as the sun begins to warm the room. Undergraduates shift from one foot to the other, trying to attend and understand as Donna talks, but drifting in the soporific warmth. Ben stands patient, arms folded, by the sliding glass door. Then the moment breaks. A Willie Wagtail lands on the handle of a lawnmower, inches away from Ben's side, on the other side of the glass. It flips and turns, its tail flicking black-white-black. I smile, charmed at the strange closeness of the bird – the darting movement – I begin to make a comment about how pretty it is, and how fearless. Then I stop, seeing Donna's face. Ben's arms drop and his eyes flick from the bird, to those of his mother. Donna stops speaking mid-sentence. We all look at the bird, then back to Donna and Ben.

Donna: When we were in the learning and teaching centre, there was something quite significant happened. We were looking at the grinding stone and there was a double window behind us, a double door and I was in mid-sentence when a willy-wagtail landed... and started jumping around and carrying on like a bloody pork chop. I looked straight at my son who was doing the didge work for us on the day. We both just became quiet straight away because the willy-wagtail for us is a sign that somebody has died and that we've got some sorry business to attend to. And I think it was a bit of a shock.

Donna asks Janice "What do you remember of that?"

Janice: One minute you were talking to the students about rocks and the stones and about the grinding stone and suddenly... oh I can see the little bird land there. It started jumping around really vigorously right at hip height, just outside the door, next to Ben. I thought, "Ah...funny little thing!"

But what caught me was that suddenly, you and Ben just stilled. The conversation stopped and then you explained to us all there the real meaning of what you were seeing. And I think that was quite confronting because (doing) that was peeling back the surface of the everyday to honestly deal with the meaning of signs that come to you. It was both very natural and very confronting because it's not what western people do any more. They did at one time. My grandmother did. My mother less so. I have a natural feeling that a bird singing at night, or an owl appearing near you is (in the Celtic tradition) a sign that someone you know has died.

Donna: I think my words were "Ben, we have a funeral to go to."

And we, at that stage didn't know who it was but within the week we had a funeral to go to.

Nicole: When (Donna) was talking about the bird, they sort of both trailed off and just look at the bird and said "For us this is an omen of a death: you know something bad has happened. So we'll prepare for the worst and within the next couple of days, we will get the news. You held your breath. It almost felt like you're intruding on this moment, a moment of great significance and importance. We just go (swaying her left hand), oh yeah...it's a bird...oh it's pretty... and come back to what we were doing - whereas for them it was a very important moment. From the western perspective, you know, we see and hear lots of little omens and you know that this is the sign of bad luck...but we all just laugh about it: a black cat, or a crow or a raven or whatever. All these symbols at one point would have been a really strong and (now) we just (think) it's something silly.

But, it is almost like - if you give it power, it will have life. If you give it power - it will be true.

Where cultural experiences present different ways of knowing from those that align with empirical and rational understandings, these present challenges for future educators whose work may require them to cross seeming boundaries between the 'real' and 'imagined' worlds. Donna is acutely aware of a rejection of the uncomfortable and different by some of the pre-service teachers whose body language suggests that the challenge is simply too great. She notes that several students avoid eye contact, appearing uncomfortable and perhaps even threatened by an 'other' way of experiencing and making meaning. Donna imagines their inner voices:

I'm going to avoid their eye contact, I'm going to avoid even talking about it. Just get me out of this head space, get me out of here. Get me away from that bird. Get me away from this thing that I don't want to know about.

That's what I felt from some of the students but - some of the others- I thought...Ah no, you've taken that on, you're really sad.

However, Donna and I both know that some of those young Australian pre-service teachers may have already encountered loss and grief. We recognise that politeness and respect may mean that they look away not because they wish to deny the possibility of loss, but so as to allow a moment's privacy as the news is absorbed.

A move outside – we touch the earth - feel the sun on our faces

Ben plays the didge as we sit in the sun, listening to his song and the sounds of the earth: his playing is beautiful and powerful. Then a colleague, Stephen Hughes talks us through a guided meditation, and some students report that this is a perfect bringing together of different ways of thinking, being and knowing place and self. For me, it is an interruption between my hearing and feeling - my touching the earth. However, each of us recognises different qualities in this way of being and learning.

Donna: Where Steve asked us to close our eyes and feel the wind and listen to the trees and, listen to the earth - I thought he got the mood of the place and was able to verbalise it so that we could understand - we could relax. It had been a busy morning and none of us had stopped.

Janice: From above we are dots on a golden background, at the edge of an immense mapping of stones: a snake stretches and twists across the earth to our right, invisible to us. Totem animals - a turtle, dugong, emu and eggs, kangaroo, crow and catfish map the stories of many tribal groups, their journeys, and their patterns mimic the stars above.

We are dots here on this broad brown map where time and human meaning making, celebration and initiation some centuries old connect our small shapes. Other marks, stone totems and star maps have been formed here as recently as the late 19th century (Ross, 2008, p. 93) in a physical meaning making – storytelling where stones become stars, symbols, totems. We are comets, falling - our histories trailing behind us as we burn, stretching back in time and across the lands of our birthplaces. And, for a moment in that falling, Ben's song connects us. We are captured in this stillness.

Nicole: You just became aware of what was around you. Rather than just walking through it, or walking around it and, taking that moment you sat down and felt the ground. You could feel the wind and you could feel the sun. You were just in that moment, hearing and feeling and listening rather than just walking through.

From below, looking up – the gaps between stars and star paths

It takes a long time for us to find a space to talk. Life gets in the way. Some months later (January 2012) Donna and Janice yarn about the struggle to learn, to understand their respective places on the broad brown map of history, and to generate knowledge and understanding that express

their different ways of knowing, telling and writing the world. For Donna, her art works constitute a powerful means of knowledge transmission for Indigenous and non-Indigenous communities. She acknowledges that for herself and other researchers using narrative and autoethnographic methods, knowledge of self and culture is often partial, fragmented and incomplete (Clandinin, 2012) but that the gaps in our knowledge invite creative interventions – offering places for inquiry. For Indigenous scholars in particular the gathering of knowledge about and from culture is made difficult by the loss of unique languages and histories, and by broken connections with family and the land. For Donna, education has become critically important in her own and others’ processes of reclaiming and re-connecting self and people, culture and land (Fig. 1).

Through her art and teaching Donna shares:

...what I can see and part of what was taught to me, from my grandma and the Indigenous side of my family, the old people... also a lot of desktop research and a lot of searching other people’s information to see if any of it has any relevance to me and my mum and my family because we’re probably as affected as the stolen generation. I wouldn’t call it the lost generation but there’s a whole heap of people who didn’t know their past and those kids are now trying to find that out, here in 2012. So what I’m trying to say, what I’m trying to paint is...the gaps.

For Janice and for undergraduate pre-service teachers this requires a reviewing of our seeming, and a readiness to question the evidence of our eyes:

Looking at the painting again and seeing not a void but another presence in the gap, in the between space, my mind turned around and I thought, “Aaah...you can see things in a different way”, and for me that was a really exciting moment, emotionally, physically, and visually. But, it made me realise that as an Indigenous person and non-Indigenous person, we’re actually seeing the world and understanding it in different ways. That’s something that keeps happening in our friendship as we work through and we talk through our ways of seeing the world and ways of working. So, this is a gradual and gentle education.

The lesson is over – so the drawing doesn’t mean anything anymore

During our day trip Donna noted some anxiety amongst participants concerning the unknown nature of what they would be experiencing and what it might mean.

Donna notes that at those moments where we appear to be doing nothing we are actually at our most open to learning:

...sitting and listening to the digde in the middle of almost nowhere, in this gap, in this silent space...when we stopped and listened, there was not one thing silent about that place. It was heavy with sound, it was pregnant with spirit...it was... it was full.

Indigenous methods of teaching and learning are profoundly spiritual, relational, situated, contextual and connected to the moment, contrasting powerfully with externally developed curricula and processes of schooling and university education where time is structured and filled. Donna points to this difference between the transitory and the fixed. This brings to mind my very early experience of research during in Canada, during a one year job exchange. With my daughter, I attended a conference where we were fascinated to be introduced to the teachings of Elders from Canadian First Nations. Fortunately, the requirement to produce a report on that teaching exchange to Canada meant that I kept that report, which although it is an early work with moments of clumsiness, provides rich insights into my first encounters with Indigenous ways of knowing.

The report is beautifully illustrated with photographs, and the report is less scholarly than a searching for understanding: it touches me now to read that as a young woman (Janice Taylor) I was embarrassed at what must have appeared to be my 'cultural arrogance (because of) the assumptions which I must have made in approaching native peoples as a well-intentioned 'liberal minded' academic" (Taylor, 1993, p. 2). However, that younger self and novice researcher also reports with some sensitivity her understandings of Canadian First Nations' ways of knowing and understanding time, the land and self-within-family. My report refers to presentations by Peter O'Chiese, an Elder of Cree ancestry, during his presentation at the Wanusekewin Tenth Annual Elders' and Traditional People's Gathering at the University of Peterborough, Ontario (1993). In recalling O'Chiese's presentation I wrote that it was delivered in halting English, and that it was conceptually profound. O'Chiese's drawings on a flipchart replaced the sand-drawings of his traditional teaching. My notes fumble, but show a grasp of event time and the cyclic processes expressed in Medicine Wheel teachings:

Medicine wheel teachings are usually visual and interesting in a culture which did not invent the wheel for mechanical purposes. The wheel or circle is the most powerful image representing the sun, (so all sweat lodges where physical and spiritual cleansing take place are built in a circular

shape) and the circle is usually bisected to represent quarters representing the four winds, the seasons, the ages/stages of human life, the clans and the properties of plants and other elements. The Circle represents both microcosm (the individual spirit, mind and body) and the macrocosm (the forces of external flux.) (Taylor, 1993).

Donna and Janice agree that our shared experience of Gummingurru was powerful not despite, but *because of* the temporary and situated nature of our engagement there. Like the drawings of Peter O'Chiese, Donna cites sand drawings as teaching methods, commenting upon the

Impermanence of sand drawings...Rites of passage would include these magnificent drawings on the ground and whoever was meant for that lesson had the benefit of (those) dots or concentric circles and pathways in the sand. The people had to internalise that and take that into their own learning. When the lesson is over the drawing doesn't mean anything anymore. The wind can blow it away, the rain can rain on it because the lesson's been internalised. It doesn't have to be kept for posterity.

Through our yarning, the authors have come to an understanding of teaching and learning that is profound and lasting: it often has nothing to do with a pre-planned curriculum, but has everything to do with the relationships and interconnections between people, place, and time.

Conclusion

We carry our histories and their meanings in the same way that the earth, subject to our orderly planning, the plough, planting and harvesting, holds in various stages of dormancy the seeds of ancient species and the dust of our ancestors. Thus, while we are ever 'taught' we are also ready to experience learning through event time, through nature, and through our instinctive understandings of the symbology of the earth. For educators seeking to understand and embed Indigenous people's ways of knowing in their teaching, there is a need first to open the heart and mind to ways of meaning-making that exist in event time rather than chronological time. To support educators in this shift, we recommend yarning about experience. This involves testing our understandings of time, space and place, self-and-culture with those individuals and groups who move more comfortably between ways of thinking that embody First Nations and Indigenous people's ways of making meaning and teaching and the discourse and philosophy of clock time and the academy.

Nicole speaks:

The memories and the feelings that have been invested in this place, and all the stories that are linked to this specific place drive the need to go back to it. Because this place is where all the stories come from and all the memories come from.

Donna, through whom the voices of her ancestors find expression, has the last word in this chapter. Her words are a call to deep honesty, consistency – a single face in a complex world, and a challenge to be aware of the imprint of our footprints on this earth. Integrity means walking the talk of our teaching.

It's still about your world view, where you come from, who you are, how you teach your lesson, how you teach onwards in life. Because we are tomorrow's ancestors, we have an obligation to do the right thing, to hold yourself well in this place, walk your pathway with your history, knowing your history so that you know which pathway you're on. And that means you can't have one face for the day or for the work world or the back world, and have a different face at night.

Acknowledgements

The authors extend particular thanks to the traditional custodians of the Gummingurru site, and to Indigenous advisors whose cultural knowledge has supported the creation of this chapter.

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