

Cultural Responsiveness in Action: Co-Constructing Social Work Curriculum Resources with Aboriginal Communities

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Abstract

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander ways of knowing, being and doing have recently become core social work curriculum in Australian social work degrees and are regarded as central to decolonising Australian social work education and producing culturally responsive social work practitioners. Effectively teaching these knowledges, values and skills requires multiple strategies including the development of new curriculum resources which demonstrate the integration of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander ways of knowing, being and doing in practice. This article presents the theory and practice of co-constructing two filmed case studies with Aboriginal stakeholders which address a range of student learning needs. These powerful case studies are informed by Aboriginal knowledges and demonstrate the skills and values that the community state they want and need from social workers. Engaging in a community-led process provides social work educators with opportunities to build relationships with the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities, thus modelling cultural responsiveness in action.

Keywords: Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander, social work education

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Background

Australian social work education is currently undergoing an important transformation. In 2012, the Australian Association of Social Workers (AASW), the accrediting body for all Australian social work degrees,

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released new curriculum guidelines (AASW, 2012) which stipulate that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander ways of knowing, being and doing need to be taught in all qualifying social work degrees. This aligns with the AASW initiative to include Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander perspectives in the AASW *Code of Ethics* (2010) and the AASW *Practice Standards* (2013). These developments reflect a growing international emphasis on the need to ensure that social work students graduate with the capacity to be culturally competent and responsive (Small *et al.*, 2016).

The Australian requirement that social work students are exposed to and informed by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander knowledges, values and skills in particular reflect the outcome of the Behrendt review of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Higher Education, undertaken in 2012 by the Australian government (Behrendt *et al.*, 2012). This seminal review set the scene for the endorsement of curriculum reform and development of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander content within Australian higher education. It made clear links between the inclusion of content on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander knowledge in the academy, the participation and engagement of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples in higher education and an increased capacity for non-Indigenous graduates to work respectfully with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples (Behrendt *et al.*, 2012).

However, while the rationale to integrate Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander ways of knowing, being and doing across the Australian social work curriculum and in key practice guidelines is clear, achieving this objective raises critical pedagogical and epistemological challenges. Many of these stem from a colonised context in which Western knowledge systems and practices have long dominated Australian social work (Bennett, 2015; Green and Baldry, 2008; Walter *et al.*, 2011). For example, social workers were involved in the removal of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children from their families (Bilson *et al.*, 2015). While the exact number is uncertain, some estimates indicate that, between 1788 and 1997, up to 50,000 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children were placed in institutions or foster homes (Bennett, 2013). According to Bennett (2013, p. 20), the enactment of these and other assimilationist and protectionist policies have led to 'a level of distrust and suspicion of social workers within many Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities, families and individuals'.

In turn, social work students and graduates often feel ill-prepared and anxious about their abilities to work collaboratively and respectfully with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples (Bennett *et al.*, 2011; Bennett, 2013). Gair's (2016, p. 1) research, for example, indicates that, even though an anti-racist stance is core to Australian social work practice, in the area of working with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, students are 'hesitant to commit to action for social

justice for reasons including a lack of confidence, and a lack of time and information'. [Gair \(2016\)](#) concludes that it is pivotal to facilitate the development of student confidence and increase their skills in demonstrating critical empathy. This form of empathy incorporates a capacity to understand the links between empathy, racism and everyday activism, and therefore encompasses a political understanding of the damaging consequences of personal and structural racism.

Establishing sustainable and collaborative working relationships with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander colleagues and services is also regarded by social work graduates as challenging, daunting and complex ([Bennett et al., 2011](#); [Wilson et al., 2015](#)) and low levels of trust and confidence exist between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal workers and services ([Taylor et al., 2013](#)).

In 2012, national data ([Zubrzycki et al., 2014](#)) indicated that Australian social work educators share these levels of uncertainty with many feeling tentative about embedding Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander perspectives into their curriculum. These educators regard their own lack of social work practice experience of working with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people as a barrier in their ability to respond to these new curriculum requirements. The research data also reveal that, while the Australian social work curriculum generally incorporates knowledge about the history and impacts of colonisation, it does not provide students with guidance about how to apply Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander ways of knowing, being and doing into practice ([Zubrzycki et al., 2014](#)). These findings are concerning given the general assertion that the major responsibility for preparing students to engage in culturally responsive practice lies with educators ([Bender et al., as cited in Gair, 2016](#)).

While the Australian social work profession is marred by the legacies of colonial injustices, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples are nevertheless joining the profession and are in strong demand from their communities. However, graduate numbers remain low and the Eurocentric social work education curriculum is regarded as one of the barriers to completion ([Gair, 2016](#)). Developing a curriculum which is informed by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander perspectives is a critical step in decolonising social work education.

Common to all social work courses therefore is the need to ensure that educators and students have access to appropriate curriculum resources which can facilitate the achievement of this goal. The objective is for Australian social work students to graduate with an ability to demonstrate cultural responsiveness in their practice with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples ([AASW, 2015](#)). Cultural responsiveness refers to:

... the capacity of social workers to develop collaborative and respectful relationships with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples in order to respond to the issues and needs of communities in ways that promote social justice and human rights (Zubrzycki *et al.*, 2014, p. 21).

This article outlines the processes undertaken to develop social work curriculum resources to address these learning needs. Two filmed case studies and companion learning and teaching guides were co-constructed by an Aboriginal filmmaker and production company and a team of Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal social work academic staff at one Australian university. Underpinned by a culturally responsive pedagogy, particular emphasis was given to how the co-construction process, involving a range of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander and non-Indigenous stakeholders, informed the production of the final case studies. It concludes with discussion about the potential implications of adopting these processes of curriculum development in Australian social work education and outlines areas for future research and scholarship. Given the growing international focus on anti-oppressive, anti-racist and culturally competent social work approaches in countries such as Britain, Canada and the USA (Baskin, 2011; Mlcek, 2014; Gair, 2016), we believe that the insights presented about the application of culturally responsive pedagogy will also resonate in a range of international contexts.

In this article, the following language conventions have been adopted. The full term 'Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander' is used when referring generally to these population groups and their cultures and worldviews. At times, the term 'Aboriginal' is used when referring to Aboriginal specific culture and worldviews.

The case study development project

The project was conducted in the Discipline of Social Work at the Australian Catholic University (ACU). Two qualifying social work degrees are offered at ACU: the Bachelor of Social Work (BSW) and the Master of Social Work (MSW). Each course is informed by a national curriculum delivered to approximately 800 students across three metropolitan campuses located in Sydney, New South Wales (NSW), Canberra in the Australian Capital Territory (ACT) and Brisbane in Queensland (Qld).

Funded by an ACU teaching and learning grant, two filmed case studies, each presenting a story of an Aboriginal person, their family, cultural context and their interactions with a social worker, were produced. The medium of film was chosen because of the potential to provide a rich narrative about Aboriginal people and their interactions with the social work profession. According to Gay:

Stories give life to characters, concepts and ideas, conveying new experiences and possibilities, they help make the abstract more concrete and arouse interest in learning as students become engrossed not only in the story itself but in the culture or social context in which it is told (Gay, 2010, p. 3).

Each case study portrays different challenges, aspirations, contexts, lived experiences, histories and social work knowledge, skills and values. They present to social work students a number of key areas of learning including: the history and lived experiences of colonisation, transgenerational trauma, the role of cultural supervision (Bessarab, 2013) as well as the skills, values and knowledge that encompass culturally responsive social work. Particular evidence-based challenges that non-Indigenous social workers experience in practice when engaging with Aboriginal people, presented earlier in the paper, have been highlighted (Bennett *et al.*, 2011; Herring *et al.*, 2013; Gair, 2016).

Over a three-month period, the process of developing the scenarios was undertaken in collaboration with a number of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander and non-Indigenous community members, service providers, social workers, academics and students. The Aboriginal social work academic's cultural guidance ensured that the curriculum development project was focused on demonstrating the application of Aboriginal knowledges in practice. The need to ensure that Aboriginal ways of knowing, being and doing occupied a central place in shaping each case study was a pivotal objective.

A culturally responsive pedagogical framework

According to Burgess (2004), the philosophical approaches to curriculum development and design in higher education that are adopted (explicitly or implicitly) by academic teaching teams relate closely to:

... how knowledge is viewed and defined, the process of learning, the roles of teachers and students, how learning goals are expressed, how content is chosen and organised, the role and form of assessment and the kinds of resources and infrastructure needed (Burgess, 2004, p. 165).

This project adopted a culturally responsive pedagogical framework. The concept of culturally responsive pedagogy is not new but has generally been applied within school-based educational contexts. Gay (2010, p. 26) defines culturally responsive pedagogy as teaching 'to and through [students'] personal and cultural strengths, their intellectual capabilities, and their prior accomplishments'. A culturally responsive pedagogy in social work education aims to transform a student's understanding of themselves, their relationships with others, encourage the development of an understanding of the interrelationships between power and the structures of race, class and gender, and lead to an 'envisioning of

alternative approaches and possibilities for social justice' (Mackinlay and Barney, 2014, p. 65).

A critical element of a culturally responsive pedagogy is recognition that knowledge is situated within and informed by historical, cultural and social contexts (Burgess, 2004, p. 165). In this project, locating Aboriginal knowledge as core and located discursively in a range of cultural contexts was a critical consideration. The concept of the 3rd Space (Dudgeon *et al.*, 2006) was one way of conceptualising the process of constructing a collaborative space in which Aboriginal and non-Indigenous people engage in meaningful and collaborative engagement in order that 'new knowledge, insights and understandings about identity and positioning emerge' (Zubrzycki *et al.*, 2014, p. 19). This is particularly important when seeking to assert the epistemological equality of Aboriginal knowledges.

Applying and implementing epistemological equality means shifting from a position of optional and choice in the integration of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander curriculum to one that is essential and integral to social work theory and practice (Bessarab, 2015). Asserting the epistemological equality of Aboriginal knowledges 'resists the practices of including Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander knowledges as alternate and therefore, marginal' (Zubrzycki *et al.*, 2014, p. 17). Mlcek (2014, p. 1989) argues that 'there has to be a place where Indigenous knowledges are always challenging dominant knowledges, whilst fully legitimated as actual knowledges in their own right'.

According to McLaughlin (2013, p. 253), pedagogical shifts such as these are however 'only possible when educators recognise and respect Indigenous epistemologies and ontologies'. These fundamental changes require institutional support that acknowledges Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander expertise (McLaughlin, 2013). This is particularly critical given the colonised contexts in which Australian social work education and practice are situated. In order for social work students to make room for new ways of knowing, being and doing in their practice, they need to make critical ontological, epistemological and political shifts in their understandings of themselves and their practice contexts. This requires embracing the power of not knowing, of sitting with uncertainty and being willing to be challenged and shaped by these 'different' ways of knowing.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander knowing, being and doing and social work practice

Martin's (2003) seminal framework of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander ways of knowing, doing and being has been adopted by the AASW core curriculum guidelines (2012) which inform the curriculum of all accredited Australian social work programmes. Ways of knowing

for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, according to [Martin \(2003\)](#), refer to ontological processes which are social, political, historical and spatial, and which are taught and learnt in certain ways, contexts and times ([Martin, 2003](#)). Knowledge is situated in Entities of Land, Animals, Plants, Waterways, Skies, Climate and Spiritual systems: 'Knowledge about ontology and Entities is learned and reproduced through processes of: listening, sensing, viewing, reviewing, reading, watching, waiting, observing, exchanging, sharing, conceptualising, assessing, modelling, engaging and applying' ([Martin, 2003](#), p. 209).

It is through ways of knowing that identities emerge and unfold. According to this framework, ways of knowing are also shared within networks, groups and relationships with no one person able to be completely knowledgeable. Some examples of the application of these ways of knowing in social work practice include recognition of the central Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander concepts of Country and kinship. This is reflected in professional educational standards which require students to learn about the diversity and importance of Aboriginal world-views ([AASW, 2012](#)).

Ways of being outline the conditions that define how to be respectful, responsible and accountable ([Martin, 2003](#)) to yourself and to those around you. In social work, this encompasses recognition of the importance of mutual respect and responsibility in the building of relationships with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. It also acknowledges the complex and changing nature of contexts and experiences ([AASW, 2012](#)).

Ways of doing are the living expression of ways of knowing and being and are expressed through language, art, imagery, technology, traditions and ceremonies, social organisation and social control ([Martin, 2003](#)). In social work practice, this can be applied through the use of cultural supervision ([Bessarab, 2013](#)) to reflect critically on practice with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. It also encompasses the importance of establishing rapport and empathy with Aboriginal and Torres Strait clients and using the skills of deep listening, yarning and storytelling ([AASW, 2012](#)).

[Martin's \(2003\)](#) framework and its translation into a number of core social work practices informed the development of each draft script.

Initial script development

The team worked collaboratively with an Aboriginal filmmaker and script writer in the production of the resources including the initial process of script development. The focus of each case study was determined by a range of factors including identifying which BSW and MSW units would benefit from these resources.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander ways of knowing, being and doing have been embedded throughout these courses. In the four-year BSW curriculum in particular, year-specific learning outcomes ensure that student learning is scaffolded, starting in Year 1 with building foundational knowledge and awareness of the impact of colonisation, to understanding Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander ways of knowing, being and doing in the second year to students being able to demonstrate their knowledge and skills of cultural responsiveness and engagement with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander colleagues, agencies and communities in the third and final year of the programme. However, while the articulation of these cumulative learning outcomes was clear, new curriculum resources were needed to enable the vertical integration of learning objectives. Further discussion of how the new resources facilitate vertical integration is addressed in the latter half of the paper.

Working within these initial parameters, the team developed two draft scripts which presented the stories of Harrison and Kelly. It is these draft scripts that were used as the basis of the community consultations.

Community engagement and consultation

Aboriginal social work is not about reaching down to help, but rather joining together to work in a common cause (Lilla Watson, as cited by Zubrzycki and Crawford, 2013, p. 195).

Given the colonised context in which Australian social work education is located, it is important when embarking on a consultation process that careful consideration is given to how the social work profession engages with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities. Protocols that inform Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander filmmaking projects (Janke, 2009) and the ethical principles articulated in the AASW Code of Ethics (2010) reinforce that trust and integrity need to be the foundation of any engagement and relationship-building process (Bailey and Hunt, 2012; Hunt, 2013).

The team's goal was to put these cultural protocols into practice and a local approach to the engagement of a number of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities was undertaken. In Canberra, the non-Aboriginal team member followed the local protocol of engaging first with the Elder's Council before approaching any other Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisation. The Aboriginal team member, based in Sydney, decided to speak with local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander colleagues who could vouch for her with various groups and organisations that she may not have known personally. Vouching sends a message to the community that this person is not harmful, that they are safe and have good qualities. According to Zubrzycki and Crawford

(2013, p. 197), 'Being positively vouched for is a privilege, which workers and services need to continuously earn and never take for granted'.

The university's Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Higher Education Units, staffed by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander employees, were also engaged in the case study consultation process. Based on each campus, these units play an integral role in providing support to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students and provide critical links between the university and local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities. These community relationships needed to be respected and acknowledged.

The Aboriginal team member carried a particularly high level of responsibility in the project. As an Aboriginal woman, she was accountable to all of the communities and this meant at times feeling vulnerable about the potential for any community criticism that might arise regarding the appropriateness of the consultation processes and the cultural integrity of the new curriculum resources. The Aboriginal team member was also the cultural mentor to her non-Indigenous colleagues on the project team, providing critical guidance about their engagement with various cultural protocols.

Developing collaborative relationships and processes within the project team was informed by, as stated earlier, recognition of the importance of creating and working within the 3rd Space (Dudgeon *et al.*, 2006). This is a collaborative space in which Aboriginal and non-Indigenous people bring together diverse perspectives, cultural histories and worldviews in order to develop new knowledges and insights. The project team recognised early on that time and work pressures coupled with institutional requirements to conform to certain project requirements had the potential to challenge the development of sustainable collaborative processes. In addition, each team member was geographically separated from each other and brought to the project different levels of knowledge, skills and confidence in working with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. Despite these challenges, the team established a range of collaborative processes that facilitated knowledge building, addressed power imbalances, and were characterised by open dialogue, trust and mutual respect.

The community consultation process was undertaken over a three-month period. The goal was to achieve maximum participation, but also to give community members a choice as to whether and to what extent they wanted to be involved in the process. The team was particularly focused on gaining community feedback and direction about what was regarded as important for social work students to learn and demonstrate in their social work practice with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.

Another critical consideration was the need to be clear about what was being requested from the community and how they would benefit

from the resources that were finally produced. Once it was established that the project was of mutual interest and benefit, it was important to maintain with community members respectful and courteous lines of communication. A range of written material was developed and disseminated via mail, e-mail, twitter, Facebook and shared during face-to-face meetings.

Some people (such as Elders) were followed up with at least one phone call or personal visit. It was important that communication and meeting processes were respectful, open, and demonstrated reciprocity and a willingness to listen. Gifts, cards, certificates and food were provided during initial meetings. The key was not to rush any consultation. Often, full days were put aside to meet with individuals or groups of people to discuss the case studies. Repeat visits were also undertaken if community members needed more time to consider the material or if initial visits had been disrupted due to other more urgent community needs. In order for trust to develop, some community members required several face-to-face visits before they were prepared to discuss the project. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students were also asked to comment about the potential usefulness of the video for their learning. Following the completion of the project, each participant was invited to view the resource.

In total, 122 individuals and organisations participated in the project consultations. These included Aboriginal Elders, social workers, community members, students and academics. Non-Indigenous academic colleagues, social workers and students also provided input into the design of the resources.

Community feedback

The feedback presented by the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander participants provide a clear snapshot of community concerns about social work practice and highlight their aspirations for the profession. At the beginning of the project, the following feedback from an Aboriginal participant stressed the need to ensure that stories were not tokenistic or superficial: 'The advice I would offer is to ensure the case studies are strongly and clearly aligned with the goals for teaching and learning outcomes so they don't merely become vignettes without contexts, or worse, induce voyeurism' (Personal communication).

With this advice in mind, the team focused on developing stories that did not perpetuate stereotypes and myths about Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. The following section presents a brief synopsis of Harrison (Case Study One) and Kelly (Case Study Two) and the community feedback that shaped each story.

Case Study One

This case study tells the story of Harrison, who is a sixteen-year-old Aboriginal boy living in an urban context. Harrison is exploring his Aboriginal identity. He has been moving between living with his father and his Nan (grandmother). Harrison's relationship with his father is complex. When they argue, Harrison prefers to stay with his Nan, who tells him stories about her childhood growing up in a children's home. Harrison is affected by these stories and his family's history in ways that he is struggling to understand. While Harrison has great affection for his Nan and likes spending time with her, he also does not want to be a burden, as he knows that she is struggling financially. Harrison decides to visit a youth centre, where he meets a social worker, Rob. Harrison is looking for something from the agency but it takes a while for him to trust Rob. Rob is also not confident about engaging with Harrison but displays a willingness to try. In the final sequence of the film, Rob seeks cultural supervision from a cultural supervisor—an Aboriginal social work colleague who provides him with support and guidance about how to work with Harrison in ways that are culturally responsive.

Community feedback on the Harrison case study focused on the following areas of knowing, doing and being.

Aboriginal ways of knowing, doing and being in the Harrison case study

A central theme running through the Harrison story is the impact of the history of the Stolen Generation on survivors and their families. Inter-generational trauma can manifest as uncertainty about identity, mental health issues, drug and alcohol dependency, a lack of trust of welfare authorities and fractured family relationships (Atkinson, 2002). Harrison's uncertainty about Aboriginality is a manifestation of inter-generational trauma.

Community consultation feedback reinforced the need to tell students about the complex ways in which the history of the Stolen Generation can impact on families and individuals. Therefore, given Nan's distress, it was important to present Nan's childhood story as including one of the institutional contexts which many members of the Stolen Generation experienced. The relationship between Nan and Harrison needed to demonstrate Nan's care for Harrison as well as his empathy and concerns for her well-being. This portrayal reinforced the strength and resilience of kinship networks.

In the Harrison story, the Aboriginal ways of being are evident in the different verbal and non-verbal communication styles that are demonstrated by Harrison and the social worker. As a social worker, Rob's

understanding of helping is to reach out actively to Harrison, while Harrison wants to be understood first before he accepts any form of assistance. This reinforces the importance of dialogue, accountability, mutual respect and responsibility in the relationship-building process.

Community consultation feedback recognised the need to present these common misunderstandings between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and the helping professions. Non-Indigenous social workers in particular often respond with a sense of urgency and haste to what can appear to be immediate and complex needs. This can compromise the need to take time to build rapport and relationships based on trust and mutual respect.

In terms of the Aboriginal ways of doing, a critical focus in the Harrison story is the presentation of critical reflection and cultural supervision. In the brief dialogue between Rob and his cultural supervisor, barriers to effective communication are identified and aspects of the cultural context clarified. The need to establish rapport and to demonstrate empathy with a focus on listening and not questioning are reinforced.

Community consultation and feedback indicated strong support in presenting the role of cultural supervision in practice (Bessarab, 2013). The need to focus on a male social worker was also regarded as an opportunity to highlight the contributions of men in practice. The use of language was considered in some detail. The Aboriginal English spoken by Harrison reflected common words spoken across different Aboriginal countries. This reinforced the need to minimise any alienation of local communities in the presentation of the story. It was also important that the social worker's uncertainty about working with Harrison demonstrated humility and a commitment to ongoing learning.

Case Study Two

The second case study presents the story of an Aboriginal university student Kelly who is studying nursing. Kelly has relocated her family to the city so that she can attend university. A mother with young children, Kelly is motivated to change the health experiences of her rural-based family and community. In her first year at a university, Kelly starts to experience stress and family pressures. She begins to see the university counsellor, a non-Indigenous social worker, Rosemary, for support. Increased contact with Kelly's father reveals that her grandfather's health is failing. Kelly's father is keen for Kelly to return home to visit her grandfather. However, Kelly's family live in a small rural community several hours' drive from the city. Torn between pressing study commitments and family needs, Kelly returns to see whether Rosemary would be willing to talk with her father. The social worker in this story has already established a trusting relationship with Kelly, but is grappling to

understand the family pressures that she is encountering and is uncertain about the most effective way of engaging Kelly's father. Rosemary demonstrates elements of culturally responsive practice by undertaking her own reading about cultural protocols and Aboriginal family relationships. Rosemary then tries to apply this knowledge in her interactions with Kelly and her father.

In Kelly's story, ways of knowing included knowledge of the structure and governance of Aboriginal families and communities as well as Aboriginal worldviews, terms of reference and meaning. Despite Kelly's move to the city and her study commitments, she retains strong relationships, obligations and commitments to her family and her identity is linked to these relationships. In order to demonstrate cultural responsiveness, the social worker needs to understand the differences between Aboriginal and Western perspectives of identity and individuality.

Community consultation feedback reinforced the importance of presenting Kelly's ambitions to become a nurse as based on her desire to help her community. Kelly needed to be a mature-aged student with children in order to reflect some of the common experiences that Aboriginal university students might encounter. The family pressures on Kelly focused on Kelly's obligations to her family and her community. It was also important that the social worker understand Kelly's obligations during *Sorry Business*, the period of community mourning following the death of a family and community member. Community consultation feedback indicated the need for the social worker to be portrayed as a reflective and critical thinker who takes the initiative to locate appropriate information and resources. This acknowledges the reality that it is not always possible for workers to access cultural supervision.

The Kelly story demonstrated the importance of dialogue, accountability, mutual respect and responsibility in building understanding and relationship. Acknowledging these ways of being, Kelly's social worker, Rosemary, is not rushing to problem solve prematurely for, or with, Kelly. Instead, Rosemary puts emphasis on strengthening the relationship and building her knowledge of Kelly's cultural context.

The community reinforced the importance of this approach, while stressing the need for Kelly to remain pro-active in her willingness to engage the social worker. Presenting Kelly as resourceful was an opportunity to highlight the skills and capacities of Aboriginal women.

The story of Kelly was also an opportunity to reinforce a number of ways of doing that can inform culturally responsive social work practices. These include recognising the diversity within cultural contexts and how these can impact on well-being. In Kelly's story, her father is caring, empathic but also concerned that Kelly remains mindful of her cultural obligations. He wants to support Kelly to succeed but also requires her to fulfil her commitments to her family and community. The social worker's skills in trying to establish contact with Kelly's father include

the need to clarify her role, the purpose of the contact and the limits of Rosemary's confidentiality (AASW, 2010).

Community consultation feedback supported the need to present a positive relationship between Kelly and her father, recognising the importance of countering negative stereotypes about Aboriginal families and men in particular. The social worker's tentative, yet respectful, engagement with Kelly's father needed to be clearly scripted so that it demonstrated the father being cautious but not resistant to the social worker's contact.

Final production phase

Following the collation of the community feedback, the project team and the film maker revised each script and finalised the production details. Actors were recruited to play the role of each character. This phase also included the development of companion learning guides for each case study. The guides focus on the importance of developing cultural safety in the classroom with strategies presented which encourage students to critically reflect on their responses to each case study and to analyse any areas of resistance. Demonstrating respect for individual student responses requires the educator to role model values and practices that do not condone racist remarks or attitudes. Given the nature of the material being presented, it may not be uncommon for students to respond in ways that reflect resistance, paralysis, guilt or/and discomfort (Mlcek, 2014; Zubrzycki *et al.*, 2014). As Gair (2016, p. 3) asserts, 'learning about racism and social injustice can be unsettling for white students (and educators) who may need to work against the grain of their own socialisation'.

For Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students, including those students who may not identify as such, the stories of Harrison and Kelly can also expose these students to a deeply personal history that is likely to have in some ways impacted on their lives as well as the lives of family and community. There may also be aspects of the history of colonisation which may be unfamiliar. It is critical that these Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students are not placed in a position where they need to make comments or speak about their knowledge or experiences of this history or to defend any aspects of the history (Zubrzycki *et al.*, 2014).

The learning guides also outline how each case study can be utilised within different units of study in order to facilitate the vertical integration of a range of learning outcomes. For example, in the BSW, the Harrison case study is intended to be used in Year 1, where the focus is on developing student's awareness of the impact of colonisation. In Years 2 and 3, Harrison's story prompts learning about what aspects of Aboriginal ways of knowing, being and doing inform students' understanding of Harrison whilst also drawing on and being informed by

knowledge of the historical antecedents. In the final years of study, the second case study encourages the application of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander ways of knowing being and doing in culturally responsive social work practice with Kelly and her family.

Conclusion and areas for future research and scholarship

The aim of this project was to engage in the development of innovative curriculum resources in ways that reflect the culturally responsive social work practices which Australian social work students are now required to learn and demonstrate. Co-constructing curriculum with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities is one way of demonstrating cultural responsiveness in action and contributes to the goal of decolonising social work. Developing genuine and sustainable university and community relationships has the potential to inform a range of professional practices. However, these relationships require a significant amount of time and resources to maintain and sustain. Organisational support and leadership are pivotal to achieving any positive outcomes.

One of the critical factors in the success of a project like this is the pivotal role of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander team members who provide the project team with strong cultural guidance and support. While this support was essential, leadership should also be shared in ways that are collaborative and respectful. Being culturally responsive requires demonstrating respect for each other and for the people we have engaged with: a willingness to learn, to make mistakes and to demonstrate openness to new ways of knowing, being and doing. Fundamentally, it requires a willingness to be truly guided by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander stakeholders.

The next steps for this project team include undertaking a formal evaluation process of the curriculum resources. Gathering data from students regarding their responses to Harrison and Kelly is in progress. Building evidence about the impact on student learning is a critical aspect of understanding how transformative learning is experienced and how it informs future social work practices. Follow-up contact with various community members and Elders is ongoing.

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