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Using videoed stories to convey Indigenous 'Voices' in Indigenous Studies

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Research Article

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Abstract

Australian higher education policy espouses the need to expose students to Indigenous knowledges, cultures and pedagogies by embedding appropriate content into the curriculum. One way to overcome the challenges of guest speakers, lack of capacity and a crowded curriculum is to use digital materials regularly during lectures and tutorials. Videos have been shown to create empathy and emotional connection between students and the storyteller. The *Voices* project consisted of 12 semi-structured conversations with local Indigenous people covering a range of topics, each of which was edited for particular topics and courses to avoid student resistance to difficult material and avoid homogenous representations of Indigenous peoples. The edited video clips were shown in class and evaluated. This research reports on formal anonymous student feedback on teaching, questionnaire responses from 115 students and 10 in-depth interviews. Findings include the authenticity, emotional connection and empathy the storytellers provide, and the need for cultural courage to reflect on one's own positionality and privilege. We argue that digital storytelling is an effective pedagogy that also engages the community and helps further the higher education agenda for culturally inclusive knowledges and perspectives.

Introduction

Universities Australia's (UA) *Indigenous Strategy 2017–2020* calls for culturally inclusive curriculum renewal '…developed in partnership with local communities [that] will give all Australian university graduates in the future the chance to develop their capabilities to work with and for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and communities' (UA, 2017, p. 30). The aim of the UA Strategy is for all universities to 'have processes that ensure all students will encounter and engage with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultural content as integral parts of their course of study, by 2020' (2017, p. 14). On current indications this seems extremely unlikely, even allowing for the minimal exposure to Indigenous content that some universities have adopted through a short on-line cultural competency programme, which does not comply with the aim of an integral, well-scaffolded component (presumably with the compulsory assessment) that is implied in the UA Strategy.

The Strategy further envisages that:

> Through interactions with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander classmates and staff, and understanding more about our history and its continuing legacies in Indigenous communities, the skills and capabilities of the nation's future service providers, planners and professionals can be strengthened. (UA, 2017, p. 19)

For many, perhaps most, non-Indigenous students and staff, there are currently no Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander classmates and staff. This may be partly because some self-identifying Indigenous students choose not to publicly announce their Indigeneity (Carter *et al.*, 2018). Even in universities that have done comparatively better at recruiting and retaining Indigenous staff, expecting those staff to carry the burden of enabling and mentoring their non-Indigenous colleagues, or delivering the content themselves would be totally onerous, and a form of racial taxation (Joseph and Hirshfield, 2011). Consequently, all universities will need to develop systemic approaches to the production and delivery of Indigenous knowledge and perspectives across their curricula that are practical and effective given the realities of very low numbers of Indigenous staff concentrated in a small number of disciplines and professional programmes.

Many courses use Indigenous guest lecturers to compensate for the lack of continuing Indigenous staff, but this fails to meet the responsibility to embed Indigenous content as a core business for Australian universities (Butler, 2016). The same concern of marginality is noted in relation to having a RAP (Reconciliation Action Plan) or specific Indigenous Strategy as an alternative to, rather than complement, central policy documents (UA, 2017,

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p. 28). Recognizing the industrial, moral and career implications of expecting Indigenous staff to carry the load on embedding Indigenous content in the curriculum, UA states:

> Universities are encouraged to develop the skills of non-Indigenous staff to enable them to effectively share the extra workload currently delegated to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff. (UA, 2017, p. 29)

A major impetus for whole-of-university cultural competence and curriculum renewal was the 2009 *Indigenous Cultural Competency in Australian universities project*, led by UA in collaboration with the Indigenous Higher Education Advisory Council, with funding from the (former) Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations (DEEWR). Project outcomes included the *National Best Practice Framework* (UA, 2011*a*) and *Guiding Principles* (UA, 2011*b*). The *Best Practice Framework* concluded that:

> Embedding Indigenous cultural competence requires commitment to a whole of institution approach, including increasing the University's engagement with Indigenous communities, Indigenisation of the curriculum, pro-active provision of services and support to Indigenous students, capacity building of Indigenous staff, professional development of non-Indigenous staff and the inclusion of Indigenous cultures and knowledges as a visual and valued aspect of University life, governance and decision-making. (UA, 2011*a*, p. 48)

Individual universities are expected to tailor these recommendations to suit their own situations and philosophies. While the principles of the UA framework are laudable, they are often rejected by staff who have an overcrowded curriculum and cannot bring in an additional course (Aberdeen *et al.*, 2013). Additionally, there is resistance from the staff who do not see the relevance of the content to their particular programme.

Video learning materials as effective pedagogy

One way to overcome the challenges of guest speakers, capacity building of non-Indigenous staff and a crowded curriculum is to use digital materials regularly during lectures and tutorials. There are several studies on the effectiveness of digital materials, including videos, in Indigenous Studies pedagogy. Nash *et al.* (2006) outline their experience embedding Indigenous perspectives within the nursing curriculum at QUT including the extensive use of videotaped scenarios containing clinical interviews with Indigenous clientele and their families, which can be used for making assessments and decisions about health care. Hook (2012) uses a feature film to effectively introduce whiteness theory in secondary schools, although for many higher education contexts an 85-min length format is impractical. Jackson *et al.* provide an account of a postgraduate intensive workshop as an 'emotionally and culturally safe space within which students were allowed to confront and explore difficult truths', using personal narratives and digital sources (Jackson et al., 2013, p. 105). While many aspects of the workshop were highlighted, perhaps the most powerful factor was the role of four Indigenous academics as a teaching team.

Videos can provide a visual but also an emotional connection in the cross-cultural classroom. Gay argues:

> Stories … are powerful means for people to establish bridges over other factors that separate them (such as race, culture, gender, and social class), penetrate barriers to understanding, and create feelings of kindredness …. In other words, stories educate us about ourselves and others; they capture our attention at a very personal level; and entice us to see, know, desire, imagine, construct, and become more than what we currently are. (Gay, 2010, p. 2–3)

A significant digital initiative is the *Creating cultural empathy and changing attitudes through Indigenous narratives* project funded by the OLT and led by Edith Cowan University (Rudd *et al.*, 2013) that aimed:

- to positively influence the health and wellbeing of Australian Indigenous people by improving the education of health professionals, and
- to engage students with authentic stories of Indigenous people's experience of healthcare, both positive and negative, in order to enhance the development of deep and lasting empathy.

That project recorded 18 story providers whose narratives were edited into short (around 3–5 min) video clips, and recorded four scripted health scenarios. The 41 short video clips with transcripts and four scenarios are available at: http://altc-betterhealth.ecu.edu.au along with facilitation guides for their use. Another useful example, with extensive community consultation, is two scenarios of social work practice with Aboriginal service-users and their families (Bennett *et al.*, 2018).

Implementing the strategy at the University of the Sunshine Coast

The University of the Sunshine Coast (USC), with leadership from its Indigenous Advisory Committee, drafted a series of RAPs that included commitments to increase Indigenous content and perspectives across the curriculum. Key initiatives included the development in 2010 of an Indigenous Studies undergraduate minor, which consisted of:

> SCS130 Introduction to Indigenous Australia
> EGL206 Reading Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Writing
> SCS210 Indigenous Australia and the state
> SCS251 Working Effectively with Aboriginal people and
> GEO310 Indigenous peoples and the Environment.

The foundation course SCS130 is compulsory within 12 programmes across all faculties, often to meet industry requirements for Indigenous competency. Some other programmes including Health Sciences, Nursing and Education have their own compulsory courses that comply with professional accreditation standards, for example, SCS203 *Introduction to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education.* Other programmes have or are developing elective courses but these do not meet the sector expectations of genuine integration within programme curriculum. Many programmes currently have no Indigenous content (Hollinsworth, 2016*b*).

The staff delivering most of the standalone Indigenous studies courses have been conducting research in student experiences and responses. Starting with a small internal grant looking at the foundation course SCS130, this work documented significant shifts in knowledge and attitudes amongst most students as well as a belief such courses should be compulsory across all programmes (Aberdeen *et al.*, 2013). The same research identified institutional barriers to the intended impact of such courses, as well as resistance from some students to the apparently confronting and (for many of them) new information.

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Resistance to engaging with Australian racism towards Indigenous Australians among students has been well documented (Aveling, 2002; Hollinsworth, 2016*a*) partly in response to media misrepresentation alleging special treatment (Pedersen *et al.*, 2006). Such resistance is more intense when students are required to reflect on white privilege or white supremacy rather than Indigenous disadvantage (Aveling, 2006; Hollinsworth, 2016*a*; DiAngelo, 2018). Some classroom behaviours such as silence, passivity and deflection to other forms of inequality here or overseas are usually read as resistance or microaggressions (DiAngelo, 2012; Thurber and DiAngelo, 2018). This is often justified but we need to acknowledge the significant cognitive and emotional dissonance such new knowledge and understandings provoke, and need time and effective pedagogy to process especially for those many students with no or limited prior knowledge.

Many students of SCS130 surveyed about their reactions to studying the course asked to see more positive stories rather than the often very depressing statistics and analyses (Aberdeen *et al.*, 2013). While this response itself is partly a form of resistance, students often comment on the value of web links and media stories provided via Blackboard (blended learning platform).

Extensive use is made of videos in the University's Indigenous studies courses but much commercial material is long (50 min or more) and therefore difficult to integrate into our teaching sessions. Longer videos also can result in a passive response although student feedback is generally favourable about their content. Having the ability to edit for shorter, 'punchy' lengths allows much greater dispersal of visual material across teaching sessions and on-line platforms, and increases active engagement.

The *Voices* Project was developed to address both issues of resistance and the need for positive stories in ways that encourage student engagement and reflection without triggering negative responses. The *Voices* materials were designed to address common curriculum problems of generic representations of Indigeneity and the practical issues of relying on Indigenous guest lecturers to deliver Indigenous curriculum content. Strong, empathetic input from a diversity of local Indigenous people was expected to enhance positive learning outcomes and give students/graduates confidence in working effectively with Indigenous people. The lead author is an Aboriginal woman who conducted the evaluative research with students, while the second and third non-Indigenous authors conducted and edited the digital storytelling videos, and used them in their teaching.

Localism and community partnerships

The UA Best Practice Framework (2011*a*) was structured around five themes: governance, teaching and learning, research, human resources and community engagement. There is an intersection between themes 2 and 5 in that strong community engagement is underpinned by localised curriculum and partnerships with local people and community organisations. In line with Indigenous cultural protocols, the emphasis is placed on the acknowledgement of traditional owners and on local/regional histories rather than a homogenised national story (Grote, 2008). Harrison and Greenfield (2011) argue that ongoing collaboration between schools and local Aboriginal communities is crucial in embedding knowledges and perspectives.

> Aboriginal knowledge is told and relived in that community and hence the learning is local, it is produced in context and place. When this knowledge is packaged in a book and read in other places, it can be understood as an objectified narrative, which is alienated from the place of its production. (Harrison and Greenfield, 2011, p. 74)

SCS130 *Introduction to Indigenous Australia* is focused around Queensland history through a selection of required readings and assessment tasks. Most Indigenous research has concentrated on remote, supposedly 'authentic' Indigenous people and neglected of urban or regional residents (Carter and Hollinsworth, 2009; Pyett *et al.*, 2009). USC's Indigenous Studies minor aims to combat this bias and to engage graduates with the full range of Indigenous people they will be working with, in particular, in this region. The *Voices* project directly addresses this relative lack of regional material in line with the intent of the UA Indigenous Cultural Competency agenda.

A fundamental component of our Indigenous Studies courses is recognition of the great diversity of perspectives, situations, lifestyles, politics and values within Australia's Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities (Gorringe *et al.*, 2011). This diversity is documented in Census data, but also foregrounded in terms of intersectionality with gender, age, religion, sexuality, geographical location, socio-economic status, dis/ability and so on. Students are required to be aware of this diversity (and are penalised for generic or universalistic declarations in assignments) and to demonstrate an understanding of its implications for professional practice.

A major weakness in engaging with Indigenous people has often been the tendency in academic literature and curriculum for stereotyping and essentializing Indigenous culture and histories (Carey and Prince, 2015; Hollinsworth, 2016*b*). Every effort is made to set texts and required readings by Indigenous authors although this remains a challenge for some topics. In order to maximise input from Indigenous people, extensive use is made in lectures of video and other digital sources. However, there are copyright issues with some digital materials and many excellent programmes are in long-form formats that make their use within class problematic. Each weekly lecture has links on Blackboard to video clips, audio recordings and websites, with all courses developed for on-line or blended learning.

Guest lecturers

It is also usual for one or more Indigenous people to be invited as guest lecturers for each course to enhance the learning experience for students. Often these guests are graduates of the USC who can readily relate their studies and professional experience to our students, especially Indigenous students. Where guests are academic staff, this can be very onerous (Joseph and Hirshfield, 2011). There are challenges in effectively incorporating the contributions of Indigenous guest speakers. These include the considerable pressure on some people who are heavily called upon for such work and for cultural awareness training and have many other cultural, family and professional duties. They may not be available at suitable times when lectures are timetabled from 8am to 9pm. Given the health challenges and responsibilities of many Indigenous people, guests sometimes have to cancel. Guest speakers may be unfamiliar with course content and where the session comes within the learning schedule. On occasion, guest lectures are personal stories that may be appreciated by most students, but lack direct relevance to the specific topics or assignment material. Rodriques (2004, p. 181) found that staff were more negative about guest speakers than students.

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Ranzijn *et al.* (2008, p. 134) caution that Indigenous guest lecturers 'should not be allowed to be seen as tokenistic or objects. To avoid this, they need to be well briefed in their role'. Negotiating with Indigenous speakers the various purposes and constraints of learning and teaching, and interviewing and recording them in a safe environment with repeated opportunities to edit their presentations significantly reduce both tokenism and inappropriate representation.

There is also the difficulty of demonstrating the diversity of views within Indigenous communities given the impossibility of providing many speakers. Frequently students cite guests as authoritatively putting a universal Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander position. The UA National Best Practice draft document suggested:

> Planning for guest speakers should include arrangements to ensure cultural safety. One way of doing this is to organise panel discussions. At the very least, organisers must make certain that an Indigenous colleague (or more) can be present to provide support for the guest speakers. … Planning should also involve preparing students beforehand so that potential reactions are well managed and to avoid students feeling 'guilt, self-blame or sentimental pity' which can be demeaning and counterproductive. (Nolan, 2011, p. 110)

There have been occasional incidents where students were aggressive or at least took a tone with an Aboriginal guest speaker that might have been appropriate with an academic but was seen by other students and/or the guest as racist or demeaning. Such incidents need careful intervention from teaching staff (Thurber and DiAngelo, 2018) but can result in a refusal to contribute again as a guest lecturer.

The *Voices* project was designed to address these concerns by creating a digital bank of Indigenous curriculum content capturing the diverse voices and perspectives of Indigenous people while allowing maximum flexibility to academic staff to edit and combine extracts tailored to specific weekly topics, and connected to required readings and other lecture material.

Method

The *Voices* project consisted of 12 semi-structured conversations between invited Indigenous storytellers and Indigenous studies teaching staff conducted in the University studio and recorded using two cameras against a Chroma key (green) screen. This enabled good production values and capacity to insert a background relevant to each interviewee as well as specific images to illustrate the content. Storytellers were approached by research team members with whom they had long-term connections. Storytellers signed both standard release forms for use in teaching and other purposes, and a specific consent form guaranteeing them editorial control. Storytellers viewed their edited recording and could request sections be reshot or deleted. Storytellers received a lecturing rate payment and a recording of their conversation.

The recordings were analysed to produce a running sheet of content that related to specific aspects of learning materials for different Indigenous studies courses; some extracts were used for more than one topic in more than one course. This research reports on anonymous Student Feedback on Teaching (SFTs) required by the university. Additional questions about the *Voices* project were added to the standard anonymous SFT evaluations asking: 'How did video clips of Aboriginal people shown in class enhance your learning?'

The lead author conducted subsequent research to evaluate the most effective pedagogical strategies and materials in advanced Indigenous Studies courses, including digital recordings. This research used a mixed-methods approach (Creswell and Plano Clark, 2007), in a sequential explanatory research design (Ivankova, 2013). The first quantitative phase collected and analysed questionnaire data, followed by the qualitative phase that collected and analysed interview data. A total of 115 students from three courses (GEO310, SCS251 and SCS701) participated in the survey in week 12 tutorials over two semesters. The quantitative data explored the relative effectiveness of the various teaching/learning methods including lectures, lecture notes, required readings, classroom discussions, weekly reflective journal entries, guest lecturers and digital presentations from the *Voices* project. Survey data were analysed using SPSS. Ten students responded to an email invitation for in-depth interviews, conducted in weeks 15 and 16 to explore key themes identified in the survey. Interviews were analysed using NVivo, following a Critical Realist approach (Tashakkori and Teddlie, 2009).

Overall pedagogical implications

Our research across the Indigenous Studies minor confirmed some core principles established by UA (2011*a*, 2011*b*). These include recognition that students cannot gain a well-rounded knowledge and understanding of Indigenous Studies in a single one-semester course (Sonn, 2008; Carey and Prince 2015). Students enrolled in their third or fourth Indigenous Studies course were able to engage with the full breadth of content required in the UA *Best Practice Framework*, that is: curriculum on cultures generally; Indigenous cultures and histories; demography and statistics; contemporary issues of concern and their implications for various professions and disciplines; values, attitudes and false beliefs about Indigenous people; critical reflection on identity, whiteness, white privilege; and studies of racism and anti-racist strategies (UA, 2011*a*, p. 71–72). Student comments particularly noted their in-depth learning, for example:

> I've found they've added to the material, like an extension that puts theories and concepts into reality where it has been lived and experienced.

In contrast, students in the introductory course SCS130 gained knowledge but not necessarily deeper understanding, especially of their own position as settler/non-Indigenous people (Aberdeen *et al.*, 2013).

All the different teaching and learning formats and approaches were regarded as effective and useful by students, but digital materials and guest lecturers were particularly effective in bringing an authenticity and lived reality compared with the more abstract information in readers and lectures. This paper focuses in particular on the short digital recordings (*Voices* project) used in lectures and tutorials, and guest speakers. All students (100%) believed the digital recordings assisted their professional practice, emotional learning and their ability to comprehend topics. A high percentage of international students (67%) specifically noted that the concepts of racism and whiteness in the digital recordings were particularly effective in their learning.

When asked 'what parts of the digital recordings were most effective in understanding key concepts' and how they compared with other pedagogical tools, the most common response out of a list of 10 options was that the recordings provided a 'real' life experience from diverse perspectives (28%). One student wrote

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on the open-ended part of the questionnaire that the lived reality is contemporary rather than 'in the past':

> The clips helped me understand the on-ground real concerns. I think we forget whilst studying that these issues we are learning about are occurring right here and now.

When asked how the lecturer prepared the students to watch the digital recordings and to reflect on them, many students (34%) commented on the scaffolding provided by the lecturer who backgrounded the storyteller and explained the concepts each was delivering. A student gives an example of this scaffolding by the lecturer who:

> …always introduced the person on the recording and gave us a background story before playing the recording. Afterwards he would ask us what stuck out to us or if we had any questions before elaborating or summarizing.

In particular, the specific findings around the diversity of local Aboriginal people, the emotional impact and connection of the digital recordings, and the empathy they generated were profound results. Cultural courage was not specifically explored in the questionnaires or SFTs, but emerged from the interviews as another profound finding. We elaborate further on these key findings below.

Diversity of Indigenous voices

Our intention to reinforce the critical need to recognise diversity across the entire Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander population was greatly assisted by the use of the video recordings because of the capacity to juxtapose short extracts from different storytellers around the same issue or concept, and to remind students how autobiographical specifics impact on the views of different storytellers (Gorringe *et al.*, 2011; Hollinsworth, 2013). Nearly half (43%) of the questionnaire respondents appreciated the diverse opinions present in the digital recordings and a typical response on the open-ended question was:

> Having someone who has lived it, as well as hearing from particular Aboriginal cultures gave it an individuality, uniqueness and interest.

In particular, the conversational tone of each storyteller elicits active engagement much more than long didactic videos as Brown (in McLellan, 2007, p. 69) states:

> [S]tories have always been a kind of dialectic or conversation between the storyteller and the listeners. … In the past, I tended to think of narratives as being basically linear, but they aren't necessarily … part of the power of a narrative is its rhetorical structure which brings listeners into active participation with the narrative, either explicitly or by getting them to pose certain questions to themselves.

Another interviewee stated the recordings revealed diversity in powerful ways:

> I think it adds an important element. You don't really understand diversity between and within Aboriginal communities until you see something/someone violate what you thought was universal. Can't understand 'dumping' without seeing the frustration and story from the dumped person.

Undergraduate students commented on feedback forms that the videos also presented the diverse lived context of the storytellers:

> added context and also promoted understanding diversity within Indigenous peoples.
>
> were helpful to gain a greater understanding of the diversity that exists within Aboriginal people.
>
> I enjoyed watching the videos. I feel it somehow gives strength to the need to be open to diversity. Reality is seen as fluid through the unique experiences, faces and voices.
>
> helped me to understand the diversity between Aboriginal people and to highlight the difference between pervasive dominant discourses and individual voices that violate those discourses. (2014 SFT SCS251)

Recognition of this diversity powerfully debunks such dominant discourses and essentialised narratives about Aboriginality (Gorringe *et al.*, 2011; Fforde *et al.*, 2013). These responses were common across different courses in the minor (taught by different staff), for example, when asked 'What did you most appreciate about this course?' responses included:

> The digital recordings within the lectures of different Aboriginal people and their experiences were helpful in my learning and understanding of some aspects of the course material. (2014 SFT GEO310)

Emotional impact and connection

Reynolds (2000) intertwined his own journey of discovery with the commonplace lament of many of our Indigenous studies students in his text, *Why weren't we told?* Several teachers have emphasised the confronting and (hopefully) transformative nature of studying Indigenous Australian history (Aveling, 2006; Mackinlay and Barney, 2010). Such learning challenges (many) students' identities and their unacknowledged privilege, causing significant discomfort (Sonn, 2008). When asked 'What did you find most challenging about this course?' responses included:

> Navigating the emotional responses some of the content brought out. (2014 SFT GEO310)

Following Leibowitz *et al.* (2010), we argue that such discomfort is often the gateway to critical reflection, understanding and empathy in our students when managed well in class and in feedback on assignments. Students need to be supported in wrestling with their white privilege within Indigenous Studies learnings (see cultural courage below) so that their journey can be facilitated and they avoid being 'frozen' in their resistance (Hollinsworth, 2016*a*).

Many students commented on feedback forms that the digital recordings related to the lived experiences of Indigenous people and this created 'realness' on seeing the emotion of the storytellers. Questionnaire respondents were asked to choose one option comparing pedagogical tools and most students commented on the emotion felt when watching digital recordings compared with lectures and reading materials (27%) and guest speakers (17%). A typical response was:

> It made the information more personal and emotional. It was more effective.

Similarly, those interviewed frequently stated that the importance of emotional connectedness with storytellers helped them to better engage with the often-disturbing nature of readings and lecture content. One interviewee commented on the emotional impact:

> Nothing compares to getting info straight from the horse's mouth. You can also pick up on non-verbal indicators which tell more about the

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> story, i.e. see pain, frustration and pride…It differs because it makes it more real. It brings emotion and students are learning in a more engaged way. It becomes more personal and captures the audience.

Many students recognised the value of emotions in creating 'extra layers' of deeper connection with the course learning that assisted them to build personal meaning. One described it as follows:

> You can see that this person has really been affected by this…you could feel the heartbreak that they felt and you can empathise with the heartbreak they felt. (Catherine, SCS251, 2015)

Many students were deeply transformed when confronting the 'raw emotion' of another human. For example:

> Having them actually in front of you, that is raw emotion right there. You can still see it in the digital recordings and obviously feel that emotion but it's different when you just read about it or it's on social media. (Rachael, Indigenous student SCS251, 2015)

Deeper learning also highlights the implications for professional practice and career directions. An Indigenous student explained that seeing the digital stories convinced her about future job choices:

> I'm an emotional person and I couldn't deal with that kind of stuff…especially now that I've got my child that's just something that I couldn't do… It's emotional taking a child from their parent that's why I couldn't do a placement [at Child Safety] because I couldn't imagine taking someone's kid off them, no way. (Rachael, SCS251, 2015)

While *all* students spoke emotionally and empathetically about the guest speakers and the digital recordings, Kendall elaborated on the importance of the visual presentation of emotion in her learning,

> You can see the emotions on their face and you're sort of in a mirror and create your own emotions from what you are getting from them so I think that is important. (SCS251, 2015)

Similarly, a postgraduate student commented in SFTs 'I always find visual imagery more powerful' 2014 SFT SCS701 (Master's equivalent of SCS251), and an undergraduate student commented:

> Video clips of Aboriginal people were beneficial in presenting real life examples and applying the knowledge and concepts that were being taught. They put faces to issues. Knowledge about problems were no longer just knowledge, they became areas in need of solutions. These examples made it easier to understand where key concepts could possibly be seen in my future career and started a thought process to develop how I will approach such issues. (2014 SFT SCS251)

Linking the issues of emotional connection with a reconstruction of practice aligns with Brown's (quoted in McLellan, 2007, p. 71) analysis:

> stories talk to the gut, while information talks to the mind … There has to be an emotional component in what you are doing. That is to say, you use a connotative component (what the thing means) rather than a denotative component (what it represents). First, you grab them in the gut and then you start to construct (or reconstruct) a mental model. If you try to do this in an intellectual or abstract way, you find that it's very hard … It doesn't seem to work if you just try to tell them what to think. They have to internalize it. They have to own it.

While most students applauded the authenticity and honesty portrayed in the interviews, not everyone endorsed the narrative tone with some perhaps wanting even more emotional or dramatic staging:

> I think people's stories are important and fascinating but for some reason, the format of the videos were a little boring to me. I like vibrant videos with personality and love and laughter and feeling. I'm fascinated by their personal stories with humanistic qualities about relationships but they lose me a bit with the monotone 'I worked here for 10 years, and there for 5 years and then I went here and did this'. I'd rather hear about the times they fell in love, the times they really FELT something. Then I'm riveted.
>
> I would have preferred more about how their stories really made them feel so I could gain more of an understanding about the true impact of how colonization affected the people in the stories. (2014 SFT SCS251)

Empathy

One key issue in evaluating the effectiveness of much Indigenous studies teaching identifies serious lack of capacity to empathise with Indigenous suffering or students' use of various devices to minimise the impact on them as learners and as future practitioners. Ranzijn and McConnochie (2013) found most non-Indigenous psychology students strongly reacted against claims made by an Aboriginal psychologist (Joyleen Koolmatrie) that non-Indigenous professionals cannot relate to and work with Aboriginal people. Their analysis argues that while emotional discomfort can be an important learning tool if handled appropriately, non-Indigenous discomfort can lead to deflection and focusing back to non-Indigenous concerns, if not handled well. They urge educators to develop effective strategies to deal with emotional reaction and allow sufficient class time for students to debrief and critically reflect on their feelings.

One strategy is to ensure that Indigenous content does not pathologise Indigenous people or cultures as a 'problem' or deficit (Fforde, *et al.*, 2013). McKee (1997) called for banal or mundane representations of Aboriginality as more accurate but also to avoid 'othering'. Uncritical inclusion of Indigenous examples (especially in Problem Based Learning) is likely to reinforce such othering and the tendency to see Aboriginality as itself the cause of disadvantage or problem not, for example, systemic racism or historical abuses (Ewen and Hollinsworth, 2016).

In a series of important studies on teaching cross-cultural empathy to social work students, Gair (2008, 2013, 2017) found a significant lack of empathy for stories of Indigenous discrimination and suffering. In contrast, our research found significant levels of student empathy, specifically in relation to the digital recordings of Indigenous storytellers. Empathy was especially strong amongst those who had done one or more previous Indigenous studies courses. Many students commented on the empathy they felt when Indigenous people were telling their stories and how the empathic process assisted in a deeper learning process. For example, Jane directly related her learning to her own role as a mother:

> You know people can tell a story but it is the ones that position you as a human, you know, especially with the Stolen Generations what it would be like as a mother, like me as a mother to have your children taken away and not know where they were and the whole family ripped apart…. (Jane, SCS251, 2014)

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Interviewees emphasised the impact of the content being delivered through Indigenous people telling their own stories, rather than just reading it from a textbook:

> It's taking people's experience out of words, it's not taking them from textbooks or journals and it's actually someone's story so hearing it from that person and being able to see and hear add all those extra layers that just made you realise the significance of what has happened. (Ashley, SCS701, 2015)

Moving beyond commonplace observations about 'shared humanity' and the barriers caused by very different life circumstances, Gair highlights the threat posed by notions of white privilege and (for most Australians) 'our' implicated identities in the oppression of Indigenous peoples (and other groups). An undergraduate student commented:

> The lived experiences of Aboriginal people assisted me in grasping a fuller picture of the barriers faced every day by many Aboriginal people. (2014 SFT SCS251)

An international Masters student commented:

> The video clips were very helpful. It gives all the information and we can feel the pain from the face of Aboriginal people about stolen generations [sic] and colonisation. (2014 SFT SCS701)

Cultural courage

Bennett *et al.* (2011) argue the necessity for both non-Indigenous and Indigenous social workers to have 'cultural courage' to critically reflect on their own positionality and (for most) their unearned privileges. Most interviewees discussed their anxieties and hopes in this regard. For example, one spoke of her self-doubt:

> Yes it's definitely fear. I think because I have never actually worked alongside Aboriginal people in my life. I volunteer for an organization…and we go out on the street to a lot of homeless people and there are a significant number of Aboriginal people on the streets and I feel they find it very hard to build that trust, so it makes me wonder if I'll gain that trust and how do I go about it. (Sally, SCS251, 2015)

Another saw the course as teaching that mistakes are 'learning opportunities':

> I think there is a lot of anxiety going into the course that you are going to say the wrong thing. I know for me there was, even though I've had two Aboriginal partners but it's in an academic context that I am going to say something that I think is politically correct but is actually incredibly racist. You know like colour blindness and that kind of stuff. It's the fear of not knowing…I feel a lot more grounded but there would still be that fear of knowing that I'm going to make mistakes. That's the learning isn't it? To be open enough to make those mistakes to learn. (Catherine, SCS251, 2015)

Aboriginal students also noted their need for cultural courage despite the presumption that their identity positioned them as knowledgeable and capable (Bennett *et al.*, 2011; UA, 2011*a*). While non-Indigenous students spoke of fears of being racist and 'not knowing', Aboriginal students noted their fears of being seen as the cultural 'expert'. One stated:

> I think the biggest thing was actually recognizing my own privilege and the fact that I have access to resources and if I'm working with another Aboriginal person I don't want to look like I am superior or the expert. (Rachael, SCS251, 2015)

Another Aboriginal student commented:

> I don't want to be seen as the know it all or portray myself as a know it all. (Katrina, SCS251, 2015)

While the need for and practice of critical reflection permeates all the pedagogy and learning materials of these courses, several of the digital stories devote considerable time to reinforcing the need to 'own' one's positionality, to be culturally courageous, and have greatly assisted all students to commit to honest, open and genuine relationships both personally and professionally.

Conclusion

Our research confirms that the learning trajectory can be mapped as increasingly moving (for the vast majority of students) from a focus on the Indigenous 'other' to an interrogation of the racialised self and Eurocentric knowledges largely taken for granted by us, and our professions. This requires considered sequencing and scaffolding of embedded content across whole programmes, preferably with a capstone course of placement/professional implications as per the framework suggested by Universities Australia (2011*a*, p. 74).

As the UA Strategy (2017) states, this task requires whole-of-institution action and critically, commitment and staff development by most non-Indigenous teaching staff. While Indigenous staff and professional colleagues should lead these processes, they cannot relieve non-Indigenous peers from their responsibilities. On the basis of our research, Indigenous guest speakers offer very valuable complementary input, but cannot substitute for comprehensive curriculum review and renewal in terms of Indigenous knowledges and perspectives (Nakata *et al.*, 2014).

To some extent, the challenge is equivalent to the efforts to provide gender-neutral curriculum inclusive of feminist standpoints in higher education. Management needs to provide leadership and effective policy architecture, as well as resources and recognition of the work involved by all staff. Some equivalent teaching and learning strategies have been well tested in other contexts, such as Communities of Practice, prioritizing of related training, research funding, and conference leave, use of 'champions' or sponsors within each school, and including performance within all re/accreditation at both course and programme levels. Perhaps the best example of a professional or discipline network to enhance Indigenous teaching is the Leaders in Indigenous Medical Education or LIMENetwork (http://www.limenetwork.net.au).

Our main finding was the highly effective learning through the strategic inclusion of short digital clips of various Indigenous storytellers across a range of Indigenous studies courses. This approach maximised the utility and impact of Indigenous voices while minimizing the burden on storytellers who retained total editorial control. While the costs of digital productions can vary immensely, the *Voices* project cost very little because of considerable in-kind support from the USC Digital Services Media Officer, and the research team. Each school and certainly every faculty would have more than enough resources to develop a suite of

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stories that could be used by all teaching staff to embed Indigenous curriculum content over time.

These clips were highly valued by students and provided greater emotional impact and connection than lectures or reading materials. The clips were almost universally regarded as providing authentic, 'real-life' experiences that demonstrate the huge diversity within Indigenous populations. They further worked to foster empathy and emotional connection to a greater extent than has been found in much of the literature. Exposure to the *Voices* encouraged students to be culturally courageous in working with Indigenous people and aware of their own positionality and (relative) privilege. We argue that digital storytelling is an effective pedagogy that also engages the community and helps further the higher education agenda for inclusive knowledges and perspectives.

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