

A Subjective Academic Narrative: Practice-Led Research and Indigenous postgraduate opportunities

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ABSTRACT

The methodology of this paper continues the work I have done writing the 'subjective academic narrative' for publication within refereed academic journals. Storytelling is a basic human activity and the academy since the mid 20th century has begun to see its value rather than use it as the non-academic side of the dichotomy between thought and reason and feeling and emotion that the Enlightenment left as its residue of academic thought and knowledge. I use this methodology to enter into the privileged academic discussion and to add to it regarding the relationship of Indigenous knowledge to the academy that remains a challenge in Australian Universities in this postmodern and postcolonial moment. This paper recognizes the need to open discussion about how Indigenous people might be facilitated within the academy to bring their knowledge-models into the university and its traditional dominant knowledge systems. This paper looks at Practice Led Research (PLR) as a possible pathway for supporting the transition of Indigenous community scholars into university postgraduate courses. It explores how PLR contributes to an appropriate entry point into postgraduate studies for some Indigenous students who have significant life experiences and narratives and/or productions of artefacts that act to replace the breadth of undergraduate credentials. This paper identifies and explicates a nexus between Practice Led Research and Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) and Recognition of Current Competencies (RCC). In doing so, it provides a reference point for University protocols and practices regarding RPL and RCC.

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1. INTRODUCTION

In accepting and acting upon the concept that traditional forms of knowledge are extended by non-traditional Indigenous forms of knowledge, we enrich the scholarly conversation about how alternative forms of knowledge can add dynamism to the academy. PLR in PhD candidatures, for example, gives us an opportunity to increase the Indigenous educational opportunities of postgraduate teaching and learning by accepting individual and quite possibly uncredentialed entry points as leading to accredited exit points.

A very real problem exists in that First Nations people are under-represented in all professional and academic fields in Australia as elsewhere. It is increasingly recognized that for many Indigenous students there is neither intrinsic nor extrinsic motivation to learn the overwhelming white, middle-class content or to engage in the types of learning activities found in mainstream postsecondary programs [1].

This paper makes a significant contribution to problem-solving in this area by relating practice-led research to Indigenous academic credentialing within postgraduate studies. The development of a relatively new academic postgraduate methodology, Practice Led Research, has acted to recognise that an intrinsic aspect of lifelong learning comes about through personal narratives that lead the research. I propose that this is relevant for Indigenous peoples because they have for so long been the subject of research and have practised unrecognised a dialogic and narrative knowledge base that has long been a part of their separation from the dominant cultural metanarratives. Such isolation from and rejection by the dominant cultural paradigms is not, of course, only in the academy: it is general.

For generations, authority over Indigenous peoples not only in the U.S. but in Australia, New Zealand and Canada has rested with non-Indigenous governments, which have seldom been held accountable to the Indigenous peoples they have governed. This divorce between those with the authority to make decisions and those bearing the consequences of those decisions has resulted in an extraordinary and continuing record of central government policy failure in all four countries [2].

Indeed, the struggle against such a cultural metanarrative has been nowhere more explicit than in the academy, wherein knowledge paradigms have excluded indigenous knowledge status, dialogic methodologies, content, experience and explication except as an object of study via eurowestern methodologies. Extending the dialogue between western and Indigenous knowledge-production provides us with a fertile ground for enabling Indigenous practitioners to enter the academy through practice led research (PLR). More importantly, it is both a fertile and a dynamic contribution to knowledge itself as it opens up new ways to utilise dialogic learning and also recognises new knowledge practices and paradigms not formerly available for recognition in the academy.

The PhD model of PLR consists of an artefact (creative practice) and an exegesis (academic insight/reflection). There are varying balances between the weighting that might be accorded to the artefact and to the exegesis, but the examiners generally follow the Australian Association of Writing discussions that recommend seeing the 2 elements as a whole. At Swinburne, as an example of most, the 'Guidelines for examination of a PhD by artefact and exegesis' (available on the home page) state that the exegesis: is a written document of between 20,000 and 30,000 words, which documents the provenance (history and context) of the work, and the praxis /theory and process) which provides insights into the work which a reading or viewing of the work cannot provide.

This exegesis exists because of the artefact, and 'talks to' the artefact: it does not act to justify it in academic terms. The same Swinburne guidelines say of the artefact: The artefact can be a publicly available creative work (for example a body of artistic work, a film, a novel, or any other literary form), a commissioned report, an invention, or other product and may be presented through, for example, performance, exhibition, a publishable written document, and may be on CD-ROM or other multimedia technology. I propose that such a postgraduate qualification could enable Indigenous Australians to 'walk in both worlds' [1].

The methodology I practise in this paper, in keeping with feminist, postmodernist and postcolonial ways of thinking, is qualitative methodology that arises from how non-fiction narratives have challenged traditional ideologies adopted by the academy. In this paper I continue to work with a methodology that I have called the subjective academic narrative so as to bring my story of dynamic knowledge practices into the academy [3]. This challenges dichotomies and renders them unnecessary. The dichotomies that have been part of the qualitative/quantitative divide include what Lauraine Leblanc (1997) cites as 'reason/emotion, strength/weakness, hero/victim, objectivity/subjectivity, public/private, active/passive...' [4].

2. RECOGNISING VARIOUS FORMS OF KNOWLEDGE WITHIN THE ACADEMY THROUGH PRACTICE LED RESEARCH

Obviously, such a PhD program differs significantly from traditional forms of knowledge, and permits multiple texts to enter the academy through many forms of representation. PLR, then, acts to recognise that many practices that contribute to creative and cultural knowledge can become academic forms of knowledge. The placing of practices within a research model that shows them as leading the research rather than being an object of the research enables such recognition. At the same time it draws the practices into the current academic debates and discourses so as to add significant new knowledge to the Academy. I think that this is particularly appropriate for recognising and developing Indigenous storytelling as Indigenous and academic knowledge.

Moreover, my experience in the Writing Discipline at Swinburne University of Technology has indicated that skills-enhancement in PLR acts to bridge the culture gap between non-credentialed but able students and the dominant Western academic culture, giving access both ways to enrich the academic community. Situating students' work within a PLR model enables students from non-traditional backgrounds to contribute new and substantial knowledge to the Academy. This is particularly apposite for many Indigenous Australians, recognised as learned within their own culture and with experience in cultural representation at many levels, who could enter academic learning at the postgraduate level. Such Indigenous Australians have important stories to tell that develop social knowledge, but may not have undergraduate qualifications.

It is essential that we have a rich dialogue about how to facilitate the introduction of a broader demographic representation of Indigenous students into postgraduate courses. I propose that PLR provides a model to enable under-represented demographics to build on their strengths and to bring their personal/cultural backgrounds into mainstream academic courses. The limited engagement of Indigenous Australians with education remains one of this country's most perplexing and intractable problems.' [5].

This also addresses the question of access and equity in the third cycle of educational opportunities as identified by the Bologna Cycle. Whilst articulating ideal educational entrance/transition qualifications based on the

'Dublin Descriptors' [6], the Bologna cycle also states that: 'In a fast-changing environment, it is essential to maintain flexibility in admissions to doctoral programs, and full institutional autonomy: diversity of institutional missions and context, and the growing importance of lifelong learning mean that there are good reasons for different access requirements in different institutions and for different programmes provided fairness, transparency and objectivity is ensured...Higher education institutions need to pay greater attention to the social dimensions of the third cycle. Equality of access to the third cycle is a major concern, whether inequality derives from gender, ethnicity, social or other disadvantage [7]. Lifelong learning that is not, of course, all credentialled. This paper offers some insights into how a University might address the question of RPL and RCC so that 'ways of knowing' different from traditional academic pathways can be acknowledged and accepted as an entry point for postgraduate studies. In doing so, it identifies PLR as a point of entry for people with uncredentialled learning.

In common with much colonial and postcolonial practice both in Australia and elsewhere, the relationship of Indigenous knowledge to the academy has been almost entirely one-way with such knowledge being the object of academic research and discourse. Indigenous people are facilitated in bringing their knowledge-models into the university and the academy when we act upon being inclusive rather than exclusive regarding the explication and definition of knowledge within the academy [8],[9],[10].

3. PLR AS CONTRIBUTING TO SOCIOECONOMIC WELL BEING OF INDIGENOUS AUSTRALIANS

This paper is of importance in developing further understanding as to the personal, cultural, academic and socioeconomic significance of the recognition of Indigenous dialogic learning to the socioeconomic well-being of Australian Indigenous scholars, their culture, and the broader Australian and global cultures. Bolatti and Falk (2002)...argue that the amount as well as the particular qualities of social capital are primary factors in maximizing the impact of socioeconomic well-being. The theory is that through the development of trust, networks, and shared values, people's and organizations' learning are of benefit to them and to the wider community [11].

Social capital is severely under-represented when it arises from Indigenous knowledge structures being acknowledged and represented in postgraduate qualifications. This is despite all Universities stating their desire to improve both Indigenous and low socio-economic status (SES) student representations, being signatories to The Australian Qualifications Framework, and having opportunities through their own Recognition of Current Competencies and Recognition of Prior Learning regulations.

Elizabeth Mackinley (2001) states that '...part of the process of decolonising minds and classrooms necessarily involves active resistance to furthering the spectacle of the 'exotic Aboriginal' and existing representations, by avoiding one dimensional identity politics and, instead, accepting the diversity of people's lives and experiences [12]. As a result, it seems that she sees much promise in a postmodernist dispersal of certainties arising from the dominant western cultural metanarratives. She sees her indigenous women's dancing classes as most importantly a place wherein '...an attempt is made for the performers to gain agency and power in a space which has traditionally employed acts of exclusion, silencing and othering.' My own work at Swinburne has emphasised the necessity for Indigenous representation and inclusion in the curriculum, for example, and the University has acted upon this.

4. THE CANADIAN FIRST NATIONS CONNECTION

There is no attempt to propose that the 2 countries are the same [2]. However, Canadian First Nation people represent a similar percentage (2.5%) of the total population as Australian Indigenous peoples [1]. They have other commonalities that this paper proposes. Stephen Cornell states that 'they are among the world's wealthiest nations. It is an often noted irony –and an occasional source of embarrassment to the governments of these countries–that the Indigenous peoples within their borders are in each case among their poorest citizens.' He goes on to note that the British settlement of nations such as Australia and Canada 'has entailed enormous Indigenous resource losses, the eventual destruction of Indigenous economies and a good deal of social organization, precipitous population declines, and subjection to tutelary and assimilationist policies antagonistic to Indigenous cultures.' A relationship between Indigenous Australians with First Nation Canadians has been established at Swinburne University through Indigenous scholars and myself with frequent visits to Saskatoon Saskatchewan and a PhD in PLR candidate from there.

First Nations' people have knowledge methodologies that contrast with Western ways of knowing. Their cultural transmissions, like those of Australian Indigenous peoples, have been replaced and diminished by cultural as well as geographic colonisation. Glen Aikenhead (2001) sees cross-cultural education as being what he describes as a movement that is a 'cultural border-crossing for students' in this journey, teachers 'facilitate those border crossings by playing the role of tour guide, travel agent, or culture broker, while sustaining the validity of students' own

culturally constructed ways of knowing.’ [13]. This project illuminates the double nature of such a ‘border crossing’. It is the scholarly conversation about this delicate balance and tension that this project identifies and enters into, showing that students can both enter Western knowledge systems and retain their own cultural modes of developing knowledge within them through Practice Led Research (PLR).

Jessica Ball states that: ‘many First Nations in Canada are actively moving towards a vision of improved community health and social and economic development that includes a substantial measure of control over health, education, and social services. Strengthening the capacity to mount and operate accessible, safe, culturally consistent care for children and youth in their communities is a priority of the larger social agendas of many First Nations. They are engaged in multifaceted efforts to revitalize their cultures, assert the legitimacy of their culturally-based values and practices as integral to the fabric of Canadian society as a whole, and foster among First Nations children positive identities with their Indigenous cultures of origin. Indeed, throughout the world Indigenous groups are seeking ways to use education, training, and other capacity-building tools in order to maintain, revitalize, and re- envision cultural knowledge and ways of life’.

In discussing the depressingly familiar colonisation of Indigenous First Nations, Aikenhead states that ‘In the 19th and 20th centuries, attempts (such as residential schools) at assimilating First Nation students into North American culture only succeeded in extinguishing the students’ own culture and failed to provide an alternative cultural support system...consequently, First Nations peoples are the most disadvantaged minority in North American education...apart from abject poverty, the main issue is *control* over education’ It is this element of control that PLR facilitates in the 21st century as it provides a two-way bridge over educational ‘border crossing’ for postgraduate students. Aikenhead describes this as ‘autonomous acculturation’ which he defines as: ‘a process of intercultural borrowing or adaptation in which one borrows or adapts attractive content or aspects of another culture and incorporates (assimilates) it into one’s indigenous culture.’ [13]. This projects identifies another mode of ‘autonomous acculturation’ in which western knowledge systems borrow from Indigenous storytelling as a mode of producing knowledge within the academy. Aikenhead (2001) in his discussions of Indigenous science curricula for First Nations people describes ‘an emerging paradigm of research and practice.’ that draws together the students’ life world cultures and worldview with the knowledge content. PLR takes another view on this by beginning with life world practicum and drawing from that to research based upon that practice. Examples of this 2-way ‘border crossing’ will be investigated in this project.

Jessica Ball describes how many First Nations in Canada...have made repeated attempts to strengthen community capacity through education and training. However, they most often have found neither cultural relevance in training curricula nor cultural safety on “mainstream” campuses with one-size-fits-all curricula or with European-heritage instructors’ [1].

This paper looks at how PLR could develop a model that enables such students to bring together cultural practices with research so as to increase the knowledge of the academy. Ball suggest strongly that : Researchers and practitioners need to become aware and appreciative of the many effective or promising practices in human services and education that reflect the diversity of human experience, individual and collective goals, and social ecologies rather than searching for “best practices” with universal applicability [1].

She describes a project undertaken to provide educational resources based upon culture but also giving Eurowestern qualifications; that is, one that would enable First Nations people to ‘walk in both worlds’. This paper pursues that goal too. Ball describes this as a ‘biculturally respectful stance (that) has created a safe and supportive context for communities of learners to become engaged in co-constructing culturally grounded training curricula that combines two knowledge “traditions” [1].

Such a pedagogical model combines reflection and dialogue with traditional academic knowledge. This paper looks at how PLR postgraduate degrees can facilitate this further. Ball describes how: ‘The First Nations Programs embody a postmodernist valuing of multiple voices and insistence upon situating alternative constructions of experiences with reference to the historical, cultural, political and personal contexts in which these constructions have been generated...This approach illustrates how Eurowestern self-assertive thinking and values can exist in creative dialogue with the more integrative thinking and values that are characteristic of many Indigenous cultures, resulting in positive transformations for all individuals, institutions, and communities involved.’ [1].

5. DIALOGIC/NARRATIVE KNOWLEDGE CONSTRUCTION

If Indigenous people can feel that they are actually being heard and that their own ways of knowing are valued, then the learning communities will become active rather than inert recipients of postcolonial spin. Jerry Schwab and Dale Sutherland emphasise the need for Indigenous scholarship to develop the educational opportunities for Indigenous Australians beyond their present poor education representation across all levels. In discussing the importance of learning communities, they define them as ‘a life-long process linking families, schools and communities (including business and government) working together to identify and deploy resources to address

community needs. 'For them, Indigenous learning communities present powerful ways forward for educational opportunities, and family and socioeconomic well being [5]. They concentrate upon school-based models, but their findings are important for us. For example, they describe alienation from educational processes that are significant in postgraduate courses that have no insights into Indigenous storytelling, practicum or other knowledges. They identify 'systematic inertia' that may also be a term applied to the recognition of indigenous knowledge structures in academe. They see 'compensatory education' (pp6) as continuing the disempowerment of indigenous learning even whilst structures are put in place that the political and educational rhetoric see as empowering. Furthermore, such bureaucratic and even research ignorance may well see proposed 'empowerment' being in fact 'disempowerment'. They suggest that this should be addressed by 'a focus on the meaningful occurrences in daily life, the qualitative, ...to replace the obsession with the qualitative' [5].

Sophoclean dialectic is a well known model for teaching and learning within the Western tradition, and is foundational to much of the discourse around the importance of interactive speech and discussion in the teaching and learning process. More contemporaneously, Mikhail Bakhtin (1981) conceptualises the importance of discourse-based research. His idea of the importance of heteroglossia reflects the Indigenous students' loss of 'voice' in their original language through the imposition of colonial metalanguage: it also provides a space in which a multiplicity of voices can be accepted within the research community. This is the space that this application occupies. Bakhtin's 'addressivity' relates how ideology resides in the conveyance of the conduct of the utterance which reveals the speaker's inner self. In this way, the dialogic is a recognition that the researcher is intimately implicated in the research: there is no anterior position [14].

Today, there is much discussion about dialogue/narrative (and other PLR methodologies) as academic data. For example, enquiry is formulated based upon discourse rather than more detached methodologies. Julie Hamston (2006) claims of her studies of the dialogic in the classroom that her students' '...active involvement in dialogue ensures that threads of their discursive struggle will appear in the future conversations in which they will participate.' She says of the dialogic: '...dialogue is a process of building and consciousness-raising that increases the individual's awareness of the varied discourses available in society and, ultimately through self-reflection, the discourses she chooses to speak through' [15]. Recognising that discourse is a field of contestation for Indigenous Australians in the discourses that underpin Indigenous knowledge differ from those that have traditional Western recognition. Narrative non-fiction, narratology and autoethnographic method, for example, are becoming a more acceptable part of academic discourse. These methodologies are already an important element of Indigenous dialogic knowledge structures and can be built upon in the exegetical process.

This accords with Gregory Ulmer's idea of a 'mystory' (1985) identifies a 'mystorical' approach to thinking and research. A 'mystory' puts under erasure all claims to fact/authenticity in writing. It shows all writing to be both personal and mysterious (my story and mystery) whatever its claims to authenticity and depersonalisation. It reveals the academic text to be sewn together as a compilation of the scholarly, the anecdotal or popular, and the autobiographical. It questions the dominant analytic-referential model of knowledge [16]. Jane Gallop (2002) proposes that 'anecdotal theory' is a feminist activity that enables non-patriarchal ways of thinking and doing academic work. It aims to 'tie theorizing to lived experience...anecdotal theory must be...the juncture where theory finds itself compelled -against its will, against its projects- to think where it has been forced to think.' [17].

In discussing the 'cultural competency model', Michelle Carey (2008) addresses the value of '...indigenisation of curriculum processes at Curtin University'. Looking back over 10 years of indigenous inclusion in the curriculum, she believes that '...the legitimate place of Indigenous knowledges in the academy is not resolved'. Indigenous knowledge content in our view should not be confused with Indigenous knowledge structures and dialogic learning methods. Discussions about such structures come about because of tensions involved in acknowledging different ways of knowing within the academy and further tensions that arise when such debates are within traditional knowledge structures within the academy if they are to be recognised and actioned there. Carey is aware that the '...classic post-colonial paradigm maintains the centred position of power relationships as they are informed by colonialist ideologies, whilst asking what marginalised voices, speaking from the periphery, have to say that will impact upon the legitimacy of that power.' This paper aims to open up further that debate about the capacity for Indigenous knowledge to be accepted as itself within the power paradigms of academe and through recognition of practicum underpinning research in PLR [18].

I have formulated the idea of 'the subjective academic narrative' (an understanding of how the personal nature of all 'stories', whatever genre or structure has impacted upon all forms of knowledge) as underpinning academic knowledge. It seems to me to be particularly relevant for Indigenous Australians in that it provides a solid basis for understanding academic transitions for Indigenous practitioners in postgraduate studies.

Julie Cruickshank emphasises the importance of storytelling as a dialogic method of both knowledge transference and construction in her article about the Yukon International Storytelling Festival. She states that: 'once an oppositional model, the idea that indigenous peoples should represent themselves (rather than be represented by others such as anthropologists) now meets widespread commonsense approval' [19]. This may be

true of storytelling in such festivals, but this project takes storytelling into the domain of accepted academic knowledge. However, we can learn from her observations about the different epistemologies that such storytelling reveals, and the importance of attention to dialogue.

Dialogic learning involves developing learning strategies that recognise and build upon cultural backgrounds: in this case Australian Indigenous peoples from the pre-colonial nations. Rather than looking at assimilation and acculturation, recognising such learning and knowledge models that are not apparent in the Eurowestern cultural tradition both enriches the academy and brings a diverse group of students into it from backgrounds that are not always acknowledged as bringing dynamic learning models with them. They are also a demographic that, because of this, is all too often 'locked out' of University postgraduate courses.

In her working paper 'Critical explorations in understanding communication, culture and diversity', Snageeta Bagga-Gupta sees acculturation and assimilation as faulty underpinnings: Schools, I argue, are sites where we privilege certain understandings *viv-a-vis* language, culture and diversity and repress other understandings. Schools are also settings that are normatively understood as being the locations where learning occurs. A shift in understandings where schools can be seen as one of many sites or locations where children are socialized into their primary languages-i.e. ways with words- and primary cultures-ie. Ways of being-allows us to understand the problems inherent with more narrow selective processes *vis-à-vis* learning.

6. PRACTICE LED RESEARCH AS A MODEL FOR INDIGENOUS INCLUSIVENESS IN POSTGRADUATE STUDIES.

Placing 'the creative industries' within an artefact/exegesis PhD framework means that we are enabled to look beyond performativity as an end in itself and see it as leading to new research and valuable insights [9],[10]. Traditional narrow problem-setting and rigid methodological requirements do not suffice for PLR, as the major milestones of PLR are derived from the practice led researchers self-reflections upon their practice. This differs significantly from the gate-keeping model of evidence based research that in the Natural Sciences is also replicable. Considering postmodernist and feminist theories, Sarah Wall states that their goal 'is not to eliminate the traditional scientific method but to question its dominance and to demonstrate that it is possible to gain and share knowledge in many ways.' [20].

Unlike traditional research protocols and traditional thetic demands practice LEADS the research, hence the exegesis articulates the research 'question' in an emergent way so that trajectories develop provisionally and indeterminacy is permissible. Ellis and Bochner (2000) refer to: 'personal narratives...lived experiences, critical autobiography...reflexive ethnography ...ethnographic autobiography ...autobiographical ethnography, personal sociology...autoanthropology.' [21].

Storytelling is the most ancient of human arts. The Australian Indigenous nations (see <http://www.aitsis.gov.au/>) had certain specified land areas that belonged to the people and to which they also belonged. These had quite specific borders. You did not travel on another nation's land without diplomatic permission. Each nation had its own quite distinct language, most of which are now lost forever, and its own quite distinct cultural practices. The nations often came together for diplomatic discussions, dances, interchanges (etc) often displayed as corroborees. The Indigenous Australians shared a deep religious belief about their places in time and space which we call '*The Dreamtime*' and the Indigenous people call '*The Dreaming*' [22]. Basic to this belief was a great ancestor who created the land in a way which is always on-going. The past is the present is the future is the past. Today we might call this in Western physics the 'Theory of Parallel Universes' which some physics experts are calling 'The Theory of Everything' [23]. Aikenhead acknowledges similar differences for First Nations people. He sees Western scientific knowledge as 'characterized by being essentially mechanistic, materialistic...by comparison, Aboriginal knowledge of nature tends to be thematic, holistic, empirical, rational, contextualized, specific, communal, ideological, spiritual, inclusive, cooperative, coexistent, personal, and peaceful'. So, for Aikenhead, Western science and its methodologies are seen by comparison with knowledge structures of First Nations as 'a hegemonic icon of cultural imperialism' [13]. David Rose proposes a very different traditional practice of the Law as establishing egalitarianism in which 'the ideal relationship between communities and peers is one of equality. The act of initiation and betrothal is crucial for maintaining this social principle, creating a sacrosanct and indivisible bond between distant families, maximising the opportunities for peaceful cooperative exploitation of resources and coordinated (re)production and transmission of culture' [22]. The implications of this for the flow of discourse and the interactions of knowing as well as the establishment of knowledge show a dialogic and interactive dialectic in contrast to eurowestern knowledge models. Rose says that '...adult discourse is characterised by the use of interpersonal metaphors for proposals that deflect modal responsibility from the speaker or addressee, and open up the negotiability of the proposal'. He says that the Pitjantjatjara allow play with reality through language interactions where the person speaking is not the dominant information-giver but interacts with the audience as co-speakers [22].

Such traditional means of storytelling as these Pitjantjatjara models are from an Indigenous group with relatively recent contact with Europeans and communities retaining some traditional elements. Faye Ginsberg (1993) reminds us that 'Aboriginal work in film and video is as diverse as the Aboriginal producers who make it, from traditional bush-living people to urban dwellers whose history of contact with Euro-Australian culture may go back as far as two hundred years' [24]. Many such stories are told on the Tanami network, Yuendumu and Imparja T.V.

For Indigenous people there are 'Dreamings' everywhere: '...the Aborigines evolved a close relationship with the whole natural world...they are the only culture which has no myth of alienation from Nature, such as the expulsion from Eden of the Judeo-Christian tradition. On the contrary they believe that through their Great Ancestors they too are co-creators of the natural world [25]. Thus they practised 'sustainable development' long before it became a catchcry in western culture. These 'dreamings' are basic to Indigenous storytelling. Indigenous Australians' '...legends of the Dreaming emphasized...humanizing and integrating natural phenomena with tribal institutions and customs" [25]. There is an understanding that the 'dreamings' and the geographic areas under a certain nation's control are bounded by 'songlines'. These are the rights to the stories of that area of land and those people who are on, in and part of it [26].

Within each nation of Indigenous Australians there is an understanding that certain stories 'belong' to certain people. 'Australian Aboriginal societies have a highly elaborated formulation of the distinction between different classes of rights holders, including separation of use, rights of knowledge, rights of divulgence of that knowledge, and rights of ownership' [27]. Such people are initiated men or women who are evaluated by the elders as being worthy of such knowledge. Ownership of stories is looked upon very seriously by the Indigenous people now as in the past. Such stories are very secret and should not be shared.

7. STORIES AND/AS SOCIAL CAPITAL

For social capital to be developed, Schwab and Sutherland state that: 'a focus on the meaningful occurrences in everyday life, the qualitative, needs to replace the obsession with the quantitative' [5]. They go on to argue that such social capital development resides in the empowerment '...by which participants feel valued and equal-feel that they are being heard and can make a difference. This is the most central and critical aspect of engaging Indigenous people with education' Despite knowledge about preferred ways of Indigenous learning and accumulating and sharing knowledge, very little about these dialogic and alternative ways on knowing has been absorbed into the academy. This is reflected in the number of Indigenous academics and scholars being much lower than the demographic Indigenous representation in the Australian community. Schwab and Sutherland ascribe this to 'historical legacy, systematic inertia, the hidden assumptions of policy rhetoric, and the complexities of empowerment to perpetuate the continuing disadvantage of Indigenous people in relation to educational participation and outcomes [5]. Their discussion looks to 'identify models or approaches that re-empower Indigenous people and communities.' This project contributes to that goal.

Differences in cultural backgrounds make what Aikenhead calls 'border crossings' dangerous and even 'perilous for many students' [13]. This replicates the dangerous nature of colonisation itself and its postcolonial heritage. Today Indigenous people are very guarded about their stories. They want to maintain their ownership of the dreamings and songlines. They are very aware that non-indigenous people can use their knowledge for academic and financial gain. In a discussion with a medical doctor from the area, I was told that the Pitjantjatjara people of central Australia are only one or two generations away from traditional per-European tribal life. To this day, girls and women belonging to these ancient Pitjantjatjara people practise a multi-layered textuality and discourse that they call 'mani-mani'. This is a process used for gossip, everyday talk and also for storytelling rituals. The group sits in a circle on the sand and, with their hands, clear a spot about one metre in diameter very carefully until it's quite flat and receptive to marks. Using a bent stick, they beat the sand in a musical tapping to accompany their story. The rhythms of the tapping are a part of the development of the story and vary as the story unfolds. They indicate moments of tension, quiet, reflection, talk and so on. The sticks are also used to draw elements of the story such as animal tracks, places where people met or other aspects such as food, people and places. Moreover, a certain 3 dimensionality is added through the use of twigs, stones and leaves to represent the building of a mia-mia hut or the man that is involved. This mani-mani can be seen as a mnemonic, but it's also a form of inscription: a pre-syllabic writing. It's not a pictograph, but it is a written representation of words and their meanings inscribed in symbols arising from the pictorial. This project looks at how it is quite possible to relate such cultural practices as this, not yet lost to the Pitjanjatjari people of Central Australia, to the cultural compatability of PLR itself at postgraduate level of study. Aikenhead says that 'The American Association for the Advancement of Science 'claimed that the prime obstacle to First Nation's people's participation in science was science's lack of relevance to their everyday lives and to their cultural survival.' [13]. This paper addresses these concerns about the nature of PLR and/as storytelling.

Consider, for example, another similar three dimensional ‘writing’ game that is done by the Pitjantjatjara women and children using string woven from human hair in another women’s business ritual. This string is woven in patterns with the fingers of both hands rather like the British game called ‘cat’s cradle’ which is also very ancient in origin. Whilst the string is being manipulated in patterns known to all, stories are told that are of mythic significance. This is again a kind of mnemonic, but it’s also a pre-syllabic representation of writing. In the Canadian First Nation Generative Curriculum model described by Ball ‘the Elders usually model ways of storytelling, listening, encouraging, sharing, and facilitating the elaboration of ideas and action plans that are themselves expressions of Indigenous cultures’ [1].

There is another language play used by teenage girls and young Pitjantjatjara women that illustrates the use of various ways of telling story. Anne Langlois (2006) describes such secret and peer related wordplay as being called ‘short-way language’ or ‘special’ language by the teenage girls who have ‘...developed a language that allows them secrecy in their private conversation’. Furthermore, ‘it is important to note the extreme opacity of the ‘short-way language’. To understand it, context is essential...even with contextual information, it can be very ambiguous’. Langlois also refers to as ‘secret code’ called ‘rabbit talk’ used by older people: ‘it was once used to tell stories to children, for fun or telling jokes’. On a positive and hopeful note, she concludes by saying: ‘In a time when many Aboriginal languages are under threat, this instance of wordplay could be a sign of the good health of the Pitjantjatjara language [28].

Understanding and respecting such multiple ways of knowing encourage diversity, lead to equity, and acknowledge culturally appropriate methodologies. Storytelling through words or other artefacts bridges the false dichotomy that has developed in Western academic knowledge imperatives. In doing so it adds to knowledge deeper insights into how narrativity articulates the intricacies of complex ideas that reside outside traditional academic discourse. This exclusion has not strengthened academic knowledge by narrowing it, for narrative practices provide windows on to who we are, what we experience, and how we come to understand ourselves and others. In doing so, they provide a space for empowering, for example, the once-colonised Indigenous peoples, practitioners who develop artefacts, artists, performers, and those excluded from traditional learning centres.

Cruikshank describes storytelling at the Yukon Festival wherein one Indigenous storyteller used a copper artefact to ‘pass that story on. Everyone will need it...don’t die with that story’. He was ‘making the point that history inscribed on ceremonial objects is always present, not inscribed in books’ [19]. Like Australian Indigenous storytelling as described above, the past, present and future is enabled through rituals related to storytelling as well as encompassed within the stories themselves. Such storytelling encourages dialogue rather than monologue. Moreover, Cruikshank reminds us that there is ‘a long ethnographic tradition that pays increasing attention to dialogue’ [19]. This paper suggests that such an ethnographic tradition arising from Eurowestern knowledge systems may be one of the ways in which cultural crossings backwards and forwards can occur for Indigenous knowledge construction and traditional academic models.

8. THEN, NOW & TOMORROW: INDIGENOUS HERITAGE, THE PRESENT & FUTURE

Much that we have recorded about Australian Indigenous peoples, and now see as historically validated information has been interpretations made by non-Indigenous writers. Henry Reynolds (1999) asks this question as title of his book: ‘*Why weren’t we told?*’ [29]. Consequently, Australia entered into an acrimonious debate between historians Macintyre, S. & Clark, A. (2003) featured even on the front pages of popular newspapers that came to be called by the then Liberal Party conservative Prime Minister John Howard ‘the black armband view of history’. Jan Larbalestier indicates the eurocentred nature of this view when she says: ‘...Western knowledge claims went hand in hand with processes of imperialism, conquest and colonialism. Consequently western knowledge claims are embedded in relations of domination- of conflict between imperialists and imperialised- between the conquerors and the conquered- between the colonists and the colonised [30].

Intrinsic to this battle is the commonly accepted point of view that the Indigenous people of Australia have disappeared along with their Nations and languages and that where they do survive it’s only a matter of time before they are totally assimilated. That is, that there is no postcolonial moment for Australian Indigenous people at all. This view is flawed as more and more Indigenous people and groups lay claim to more and more of their heritage both in real land terms and in realisable cultural terms. They claim this heritage not only to fix the past, but also to enable them to go forward so as to demonstrate that Australian Indigenous people exist today and into the future as well as historically. This is articulated in the aptly named ‘Our Culture: Our Heritage’ report that defines heritage.

Heritage consists of the intangible and tangible aspects of the whole body of cultural practices, resources and knowledge systems developed, nurtured and refined by Indigenous people and passed on by them as part of expressing their cultural identity’ [31].

In her 1990’s visit back to the mission where she was brought up, Ruby Langford Ginibi (1994) drives through the vast precolonial Nation of her Bundjalung people. As she sits viewing the mission she has a fearsome

insight that causes her to ask: Where have all my people gone? Where have our family clans gone! It felt like our tribal heritage had gone too. All the people's rules and laws gone! Our traditions gone! Our corroborees gone! Our warriors gone! Torn apart and lost in the white man's power, greed and gain! [32].

The stories of those people are part of all of our history: but their stories, the ramifications of them, and the abilities and concepts that they unlock are as much a part of the present and future as of the past. Ginibi has no hesitation in reminding us that postcolonial Indigenous people have a claim upon that when she is met on her travels by a white MA student who tells Ruby that she wants to teach aboriginal history. She tells the student that Aboriginal teachers should do that and also that Indigenous matters have been taken over by non-Indigenous people for far too long: Especially with academics, and big-shot writers who hear about a good story or a massacre, and help themselves to our resources, often through government funded institutes and then go away and write big books and make big bucks. But they are our stories and our history and we should be the only ones responsible for defining ourselves. I wonder if the roles were reversed would white Australians let Aborigines write about white history... [32].

The term 'post-colonial' indicates a movement forward from something [33]. In this case, it shows that colonialism as such is over and the Indigenous Australian must now operate within new paradigms that disallow any return to their pre-colonial position. Australia became an independent nation at the expense of the Indigenous past, present and future. Shohat describes the importance of dominance to the acceptance or rejection of ways of knowing, and indicates that setting aside challenges to dominant cultural metanarratives is no easy task and has led to Indigenous Australians' stories being largely locked out and/or not finding 'recognized and authentic spaces' within the contemporary Australian culture: Challenges to dominant ways of thinking may be set aside and or demeaned simply because they are challenges. Further, some forms of knowledge are considered to be more reliably attained, and because of their reliability are more valued as revealing of truth. ..Indigenous Australians were abjectly interpellated in Western discourses and interpretations of British colonialism were entirely one-sided [33].

Shohat describes how the Indigenous stories owned and represented publicly in the report '*Bringing Them Home*' showed the despicable and destructive influences of the cultural metanarratives and historical views [33]. Such widely-held eurocentred views support 'the pioneer legend' and present a more palatable alternative to what John Howard called 'the black armband view of history' [34]. As Shohat says: 'Imagining Australia as a *settler* colony is reassuring for non-indigenous Australians. It is comforting for many people to assume that it is possible to colonise a country peacefully...' [33].

Such colonisation is cultural as well as geographic, of course. Intrinsic to such colonisation is the demeaning of the ways of knowing espoused by the colonised. Nowhere can this be seen more clearly than in responses to the report 'Bringing Them Home' that accuses it of being based upon individuals' stories rather than objective evidence. That is, on Indigenous ways of knowing rather than eurowestern knowledge models. Shohat responds that 'neither claims of 'intellectual rigour', nor attempts to defend one's 'intellectual credibility' are sufficient guarantees of producing narratives that are above criticism, or assured of finding agreement on the use of specific terms. Nor will such claims ensure a safe and assured space of authentic knowing.' [33].

9. THE SELF AS DATA

In the context of this paper, of course, I am arguing that stories are as important a way of knowing as any other and that PLR supports such knowledge models becoming part of a more diffuse and multi-representational way of producing knowledge within the academy. As Shohat says: Academics have happily managed to incorporate verbal accounts (informants' stories) into their research and indeed, in both Anthropology and Sociology, such first hand accounts have formed the basis of their research.' [33].

There has been a considerable growth of understanding the postmodernist position that qualitative methodologies based upon singular experiences contribute in a scholarly way to knowledge itself. For example, Sarah Wall states that: 'autoethnography is an emerging qualitative research method that allows the author to write in a highly personalised style, drawing on his or her experience to extend understanding...the intent of autoethnography is to acknowledge the inextricable link between the personal and the cultural and to make room for non-traditional forms of enquiry and expression.' [20]. Writing about my own experiences and the insights that they offer, then, becomes a qualitative methodology that reside readily within the autoethnographic frame. Nicholas Holt (2003) sees this as '...a genre of writing and research that connects the personal to the cultural, placing the elf within a social context.' [35]. For him, an academic article is a 'writing story' that challenges traditional academic claims of verification and disinterestedness.

Carolyn Ellis speaks of 'the first person voice, the vulnerability of the observer, the performative voice...that blurs the line between researcher and participant, writer and reader' [36]. Shohat says that : ...discussion and debate about understanding, representing and describing certain aspects of Australia's past is also about racialised privilege and the political shaping of knowledge production. Whiteness, as a metaphor for relations

of domination, as a normative framework for comprehending the world is clearly pervasive... non-indigenous narratives dominate the framing of Australian stories [33].

She relates this to Bordieu's notion of 'habitus' [37]. Habitus is embodied in our every gesture, walk, talk, interaction and so on [38]. As such, it is not a conscious action but one which requires no thought to enact. Consequently, such embodied habitus cannot be consciously recognised much less consciously enacted or challenged and possibly even changed. At the same time Bordieu states that they are much more influential upon our conscious view of the world than we can know. These influential habits of being arise from the cultural metanarratives in which we are formed and by which we are informed. One of the tasks of postmodernism was to recognise and act against these highly influential cultural metanarratives.

Traditional Indigenous 'habitus' have been disrupted, rejected and culturally demeaned by white imperialism, yet Indigenous people attest that they have not disappeared from the Indigenous habits of mind and ways of knowledge. Moreover, Indigenous people do not want them to disappear. The task for non-indigenous people is to respect such different 'habitus' as we are describing in this paper through paying attention to Indigenous knowledge models. 'Indigenous Australians did not agree to be colonised. Their lands were taken (an act of violence in itself) and in doing so the colonists deprived them of their independence, including control over the means of production and reproduction of their conditions of existence.' [33].

The self as data has become a more recognised and accepted methodology in academe, even though there is still vigorous debate about its academic veracity and standing [39],[40],[41],[42],[43]. This is extremely important when we are talking about the self-representation of Indigenous Australians today. As well as being a pre-colonial cultural 'habitus', it remains an essential ingredient of post-colonial Indigenous knowledge formations. It may be that one's identity emerges from interactions with the world one inhabits [41]. And it is further true that stories are everywhere the basis of that self-formation as each cultural event and personal interaction has a story arising from it or imbued within it.

Of her autobiographical narrative performances, Tammy Spry says: For me, performing autoethnography has been a vehicle of emancipation from cultural and familial identity scripts that have structured my identity personally and professionally. Performing autoethnography has encouraged me dialogically to look back upon myself as other, generating critical agency in the stories of my life... [40].

She bases this upon her judgement that this enables her to at least highlight and at best overcome the rigid nature of cultural metanarratives: 'Autoethnographers argue that self-reflexive critique upon one's positionality as researcher inspires readers to reflect critically upon their own life experience, their constructions of self, and their interactions with others within sociohistorical contexts' [40]. Her caveat is important: 'Good autoethnography is not simply a confessional tale of self-renewal; it is a provocative weave of story and theory' [40]. Brian Richardson reassures us about the academic and importance of narrative: 'The study of narrative continues to grow more nuanced, capacious and extensive as it is applied to an ever greater range of fields and disciplines, appearing more prominently in areas from philosophy and law to studies of performance art and hypertexts' [43]. He draws our attention to the influence of the apparent master narrative of postmodernism/structuralism that Caputo calls the 'postparadigmatic diaspora' and in doing so highlights tensions within critical and cultural theories that define themselves even as they resist meta definitions. For Richardson, then, 'the history of modern narrative theory is more accurately depicted as a cluster of contiguous histories rather than a single, comprehensive narrative' [43].

10. CONCLUSION: RESULTS AND ANALYSES

My analyses in this paper of the problem of credentialing Indigenous knowledge within academic structures, then, has shown from experiential evidence and from an exhaustive literature analysis that this challenge cannot be met by present regulations concerning knowledge structures within the academy. It may, however, be addressed by the use of praxis between practicum and theory as in Practice-Led Research. This is in accord with Antonio Gramsci's notion of the 'organic intellectual' as one of theoretically oriented action: that is, praxis. Gramsci sees the embodiment of the ideology as a necessary element of any thinking/action. In this way the metanarrative might be influenced to and/or be open to change by actions that embody the singular and self-reflexive. Thus he sets up a space apposite to this discussion to study the complexity of the relationship between ideology and the hegemony [44]. In relationship to the influences of state interactions upon Indigenous determination, this becomes of central importance:

'There is a significant mismatch between the ambitions of the Indigenous peoples and the responses of the state. States generally have been more willing to engage with socio-economic issues of equity and access than the political issues of self-determination and difference that often have mattered more to Indigenous peoples [2].

The intransigent nature of the barriers of traditional academic hegemony and Indigenous knowledge systems as identified and addressed in this paper can be ameliorated by opening up the academic regulations within a framework that is enabling rather than excluding. In doing so, this paper itself employs a methodology that acts in some ways to exemplify alternative ways of knowledge production within the academy that challenge Enlightenment dominated methodologies and brings a new dynamism to the academy [9].

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