

# **Analysis of Professional Practice of Being an Indigenous Cultural Awareness Trainer**

A project submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Master of  
Arts

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March 2009

## ***Declaration***

Title: Analysis of Professional Practice of Being an  
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Declaration by the  
candidate

I certify that:

This thesis is entirely my own work, and due acknowledgement have been made where appropriate. The work has not been submitted previously, in whole or in part, to qualify for any other academic award. The content of the thesis is the result of work which has been carried out since the official commencement date of the approved research program. Any editorial work, paid or unpaid, carried out by a third party has been acknowledged.

**Candidate's signature:**

## ***Abstract***

The purpose of this research project has been to gain a deeper awareness of the practice of Cultural Awareness Training and to develop resources that will support other practitioners in the field.

My hope in undertaking this project is to make the wider community more aware of what it means to be Aboriginal, at a time when jail is replacing initiation for many young Indigenous people. I want to engender a greater understanding about social, cultural and political issues in the Aboriginal community, by building bridges of awareness between Indigenous and Western cultures.

My research question is: How does my approach to Cultural Awareness Training deal with uninformed and racist attitudes towards Aboriginal people in ways that effect positive, constructive change?

In the documentation of my professional practice, I have examined critical incidents that have shaped my responses to uninformed and racially stereotyped attitudes within an educational context. This includes stories of overt racism in the classroom experience.

In undertaking critical reflection about my professional practice as a Cultural Awareness Trainer, I have aimed to provide insights, as well as practical resources, to support the professional practice of others in this field.

**Note to readers:** A CD containing my stories and didgeridoo performances accompanies this exegesis.

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## ***INTRODUCTION***

### ***1. Overview of Project***

#### **Content of Cultural Awareness Workshops**

The cultural awareness work that I do contributes towards developing an understanding of the Aboriginal community (also see Rose 2003 who examines issues of pedagogy in Aboriginal culture). I undertake my work in prisons, in schools, universities, government and non-government institutions, as well as for corporates at public forums and at festivals. I work with both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people.

In my work, I find that a lot of non-Aboriginal school teachers have limited awareness about Aboriginal history and culture. I have also found that many of the Aboriginal kids, with whom I work, are not aware of some of the famous Aboriginal people that I talk about – people like Sir Douglas Nicholls, Reg Saunders, Sir Harold Blair, and David Unaipon who is on the fifty dollar note.

In cultural awareness workshops, we explore issues of opportunity and exclusion. Why didn't David Unaipon make any money out of his invention? Why is his family living in poverty in South Australia? I say to Aboriginal kids that they've got it easy these days in respect to getting an education, and getting into places, and being classified as Australians. If we look at Elders' lives, we can recognize that we have got it easy compared to them.

In the past, we might have thought that Aboriginal cultural awareness needed to be directed at non-Aboriginal people. I now think that Aboriginal people need to have this knowledge too. Sometimes Aboriginal parents come up to me after workshops and thank me for passing on the stories to their children.

#### **Purpose of Cultural Awareness Training**

In my work, I aim to foster a sense of pride in Aboriginal people and to develop a sense of understanding and recognition of our history. I'm not really doing a lot of

things differently from the old people. They would have taught the same. They would have talked about the environment, the family and important people.

Pat Dodson talks about an Aboriginal concept called *Lijan ngarn* (Dodson 2004). It describes a time in your life that you reach when you're happy with yourself spiritually. It's about contentment, but reaching that state of contentment requires give and take. You reach that state if you have lived a good life without breaking laws. In the old days, many people used to reach that state. There was so much support within the community. If you lost a child or if you did something wrong, there were laws. There were people around or a spiritual Elder in the community who would help solve the problems.

It is different in contemporary culture. An understanding of the laws and the framework of support is no longer there for many people. Not many people reach the state of *Lijan ngarn* now. I hope that my work makes a contribution to increasing an understanding of our community and what living a good life might mean.

What I am trying to achieve in my work is to have people, both black and white, leave the cultural awareness sessions feeling proud of Aboriginal people. It means leaving behind the stereotypes of us as being drunk and lazy, and having a greater awareness about our lives and our culture. You can't blame the Aboriginal kids for not knowing their history. The schools aren't teaching it.

## **2. Methodology**

The project incorporates a methodology which combines the story-telling approach of Narrative Inquiry (Clandinin & Connelly 1999, Cavarero 2000, Torbert 2001), and the Indigenous methodology of Deep Listening or '*Dadirri*' (Atkinson, 2001). Narrative Inquiry as a field of study is an approach to understanding human behaviour and action (Clandinin & Connelly 1999). I have not used Narrative Inquiry as a method of analysis in my work, but rather, I have adopted story-telling as a mode of experience and as a particular form of Narrative Inquiry.

In this form of Narrative Inquiry, I use the approach of story-telling to explore the evolution of my own practice as a Cultural Awareness Trainer and to describe the range of strategies I have developed over the last ten years. I also incorporate the ways in which my work as a musician, story-teller, mediator, communicator and wood sculptor, have creatively enriched my practice.

Parts I, II and III of this exegesis are expressed in the same story-telling mode I use to tell my stories in my cultural awareness workshops. These sections are based on interviews between myself and staff within the Koori Cohort program at RMIT University where I am enrolled as a Masters student. The interviews were transcribed and edited for clarity, and are my own words. I have retained most of the spoken language because I did not want to sacrifice the tone and rhythm of my story-telling. My aim here was to faithfully reproduce my oral speech in textual form to honour the oral nature of the stories. As such it is not a 'traditional' thesis in terms of the way that it is written because I wanted to capture how the stories are spoken orally.

The other methodology adopted in my work is Deep Listening or *Dadirri* as it is known among Koori people. This methodology is a complex approach that can be difficult to explain to people because it is deeply philosophical. I have included below some words to offer a sense of what it is:

*What does Deep Listening really mean?  
Deep Listening happens on many levels  
I don't think you can answer it in one word or put it in a box  
It's in the context of what is said*

*For Aboriginal people Deep Listening comes naturally  
It's about walking on the land  
Softly, quietly  
And listening to the stories around the campfire*

*Listening to the Elders  
Listening to the teachers  
Respect for Elders and respect for all people.  
And giving everyone the time*

*Deep listening is about not judging people too quickly  
It's going to do a lot of people a lot of good  
Governments and Prime Ministers should learn it  
It's going to be great when Universities pick up on it*

*We've got to listen to the wind in the trees  
Listen to the birds  
It's the feeling of a gift  
A gift always comes back*

This might not capture the essence of what it is, but provides a starting point for thinking about Deep Listening. As a research methodology, Deep Listening offers an approach which facilitates cultural awareness of differences, as well as mutual concerns and interests. The process of Deep Listening enables respectful learning and cross-cultural exchange; we learn from and with each other through the stories and experiences shared. Carolyn Ellis writes: 'Stories are the way humans make

sense of their worlds' (2004: p. 32). Stories pave the way to new meanings, questions and avenues of inquiry (Bochner & Ellis 2002).

The use of *Dadirri* as a methodology has been justified in my work through an oral format in a video that will comprise part of my oral presentation for my Masters examination. In this video, I elaborate on and justify my use of *Dadirri* as a methodology. In the context of my work as a Cultural Awareness Trainer, *Dadirri* is essentially about building and strengthening indigenous communities.

The practice of deep and respectful listening inherent in *Dadirri* underpins my research. *Dadirri* is a central part of the community building that I facilitate in my cultural awareness workshops.

The concept *Dadirri* appears in many Aboriginal languages and describes a process of listening deeply in ways which build community. It describes a way of listening and learning from each other in new ways. Deep and respectful listening lies at the heart of this approach to research and story-telling. It is central to the process of building trust. Deep Listening provides an approach which facilitates a recognition of shared interests and concerns, as well as differences. The practice of Deep Listening opens up new ways to understand these differences. All my stories incorporate *Dadirri* as a concept and philosophy. My intention is to tell the stories to inspire listeners to learn from the questions raised and so gain new knowledge through that process. *Dadirri* is an approach to story-telling. For me, it is the strategies I use for how to get different people to listen and take what I say seriously.

### **Approaches in Cultural Awareness Workshops**

In the Cultural Awareness Workshops, I use an interactive approach with the workshop participants to let them experience Aboriginal culture, with a focus on music, art and Indigenous history.

I always begin by playing didgeridoo as a traditional welcome to bring good energy to the space. I then talk about how I make didgeridoos and raise some of the cultural issues around didgeridoo playing. I talk about my travels and give participants a sense of where music has taken me (New York at the Lincoln Center Festival and performing for the Queen and Mohammed Ali, for example).

I bring with me my collection of Aboriginal artefacts, such as my 100 year old kangaroo rug, stone tools, coolamons and shields. I also have a set of photos of significant places and trees from my tribal area. I talk about how Aboriginal history and how Aboriginal people used to live. I tell stories about how Aboriginal people continue to practice their traditions today, which raises some of the current issues important to Indigenous people.

It is important to talk about environmental issues as well in cultural awareness workshops. I talk about the Murray and Murrumbidgee Rivers and how I remember when they were clear. My grandfather used to take me fishing at night in the Murrumbidgee, and in those days, you could see the fish with his torch. I talk about my spiritual totems, the willy wagtail (Ritchirook) on my mother's side and the red tail black cockatoo (Wiran) on my father's side. I show the tail feather of Wiran and tell them that it's on the extinction list.

I often use the clock method to show participants in my workshops how long we have been here. The 60 minutes on the clock represent the 60,000 years we have been here. It works out that European people have been here about 12 seconds. In that 12 seconds how big have the changes been to the Aboriginal community? I tell them that in the sixty minutes, Aboriginal people didn't degrade the environment. It's up to the young ones to be aware of the importance of these environmental issues and to push for change. It's important to understand what we have been through in that time and how we have had to adapt.

I generally finish the sessions with a boomerang demonstration (I was Queensland Boomerang Champion in 1999) and give the participants an opportunity to throw

boomerangs themselves. As part of this activity, I talk about how I learned to make boomerangs the old way my grandfather taught me using red-gum roots and an ancient boomerang stone tool.

I tailor my discussions of Aboriginal history and the current issues to the age-group and needs of the different groups I work with.

### **Exemplars of Practice**

In my cultural awareness workshops, I use stories, music and artefacts. I work out which resources I'm going to use by being sensitive to the body language of the people in the room. I am inspired by many stories, some from Elders and others I have read in books (Campbell 1990, Clark 1966, Clarke 1995, Curr 1965, Eidelson 1997, Elder 1992, James 1996, St Leon 1993).

Statistics are important but stories are more alive. Recently, I co-presented with an academic who used a lot of statistics and who spoke for three quarters of an hour. When she had finished, there was a deadness in the room. It was like everybody was gutted. I felt terrible too even though I knew the information. It was so painful to hear it from a non-Aboriginal person. I was sitting next to an Elder, who had done the Welcome to Country. I leant across and said to him: 'I wasn't going to play the didgeridoo tonight but I think I need to get it out just to liven people up, and to get them back', and he said, 'Good idea.' So I sneaked out the back and got the didgeridoo and came back and went up on the stage, paid respect to the Wurundjeri people, and told them why I did that and why I had to. And then I played something on the didgeridoo that was really spiritual to start with and then I lifted it up.

After I played, I told stories about my upbringing. I spoke about my father's upbringing, and about how he worked on a property and how, when he and my mother first went there, they had lived in a tent, and my older sister, as a new-born baby, had slept in the bottom of a suitcase, because that was all they could afford. I didn't know it at the

time, but the man who owned that property happened to be in the audience that night. It was confronting for him to hear that story.

One of the most challenging workshops I have ever done was in Loddon Prison with non-Aboriginal prisoners. They were feeling that Aboriginal people were getting special treatment in the prisons, and to them, it would have looked like it. The Aboriginal people could go into another cell with another Aboriginal person. They had special visiting rights.

A man walked into the workshop carrying a Pauline Hanson mug. I knew that he would be the most difficult person in the room to reach, so I designed the session and chose my stories to try and reach him. The session went for two hours and at the end of the session when he walked out, he threw the mug in the bin. I knew I had done my job.

### **Learning Through Stories**

Stories lie at the core of my work as a Cultural Awareness Trainer. A Manual I have developed as part of my work groups the stories into different categories. These categories include: Indigenous Traditions, Relational Culture, Self-determination, Political and Cultural History, Victorian and National Indigenous Arts and Cultural Expression, and Cultural Resource History (further information on the Manual is included in Appendix 1).

I start my stories with history, and how Aboriginal people lived before Europeans came here (see Module 1 below which forms part of the resources I have developed in the Manual for my work. Also refer to Appendix 2: Readings to Support Training Material). I will include stories about the cultural beliefs during the pre-occupation period (Flood 1980, Troy 1993, Woolmington 1973). There are a lot of good stories from the post-occupation period too (James 1996, Massola 1968, Morrison 1971, O'Connor 1994). I will tell true stories from my area (Jenkin 1985) and I also talk about the way language developed, such as 'jumbun' for sheep, 'bulliman' for policeman and 'gubbar' for a

white man coming from the government or 'gubberment'. I bring in humour sometimes too. Our cultural beliefs can still affect Aboriginal people in today's society. Stories are a powerful educational tool.

A key outcome of the Module I have developed is to engender a greater understanding about social, cultural and political issues in the Aboriginal community. I have found that many of the Aboriginal people with whom I work, are not aware of some of the famous Aboriginal people that I talk about – people like Sir Douglas Nicholls, Reg Saunders, Sir Harold Blair, and David Unaipon who is on the fifty dollar note.

Within the Module we explore issues of opportunity and exclusion. Why didn't David Unaipon make any money out of his invention? Why is his family living in poverty in South Australia?

Within the Module, I also draw on a collection of Aboriginal artefacts I have developed over many years, such as my 100 year old kangaroo rug, stone tools, coolmons and shields. I also have a set of photos of significance places and trees from my tribal area. I talk about how Aboriginal history and how Aboriginal people used to live. I tell stories about how Aboriginal people continue to practice their traditions today, which raises some of the current issues important to Indigenous people.

It is important to talk about environmental issues as well. I talk about the Murray and Murrumbidgee Rivers and how I remember when they were clear. My grandfather used to take me fishing at night in the Murrumbidgee, and in those days, you could see the fish with his torch. I talk about my spiritual totems, the willy wagtail (Ritchirook) on my mother's side and the red tail black cockatoo (Wiran) on my father's side. I show the tail feather of Wiran and tell them that it's on the extinction list.

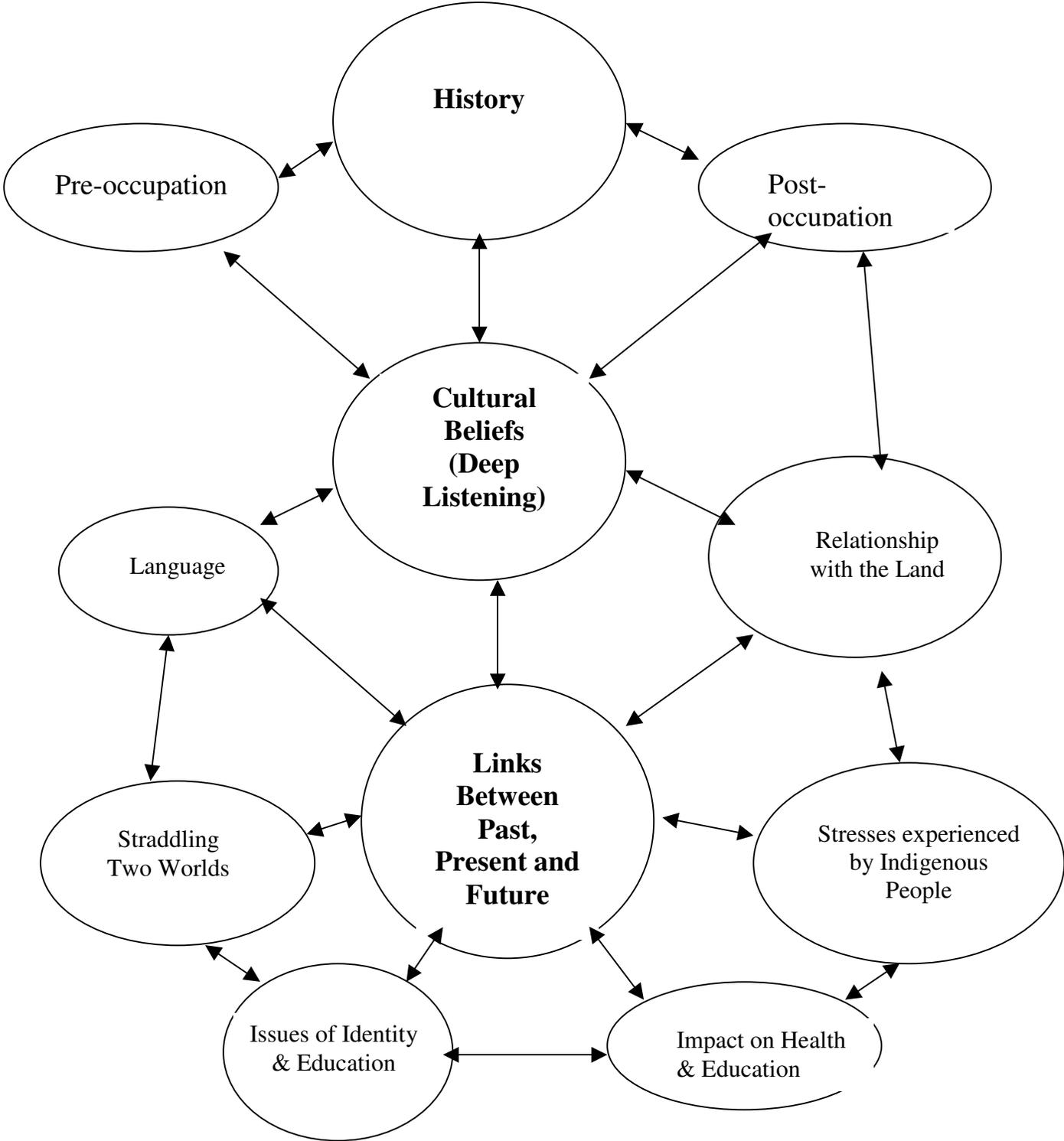
I often use the clock method to show participants in my workshops how long we have been here. The 60 minutes on the clock represent the 60,000 years we have been here. It works out that European people have been here about 12 seconds. In that 12

seconds how big have the changes been to the Aboriginal community? I tell them that in the sixty minutes, Aboriginal people didn't degrade the environment. It's up to the young ones to be aware of the importance of these environmental issues and to push for change. It's important to understand what we have been through in that time and how we have had to adapt.

### **Module One: Indigenous Cultures in Australia**

The following diagram represents the themes that I draw upon in my work as a Cultural Awareness Trainer. These themes cover all the topics I discuss in my workshops. I have included this section in my exegesis to provide a visual representation of the key issues of significance to me in my work as a trainer and as a Koori person. It demonstrates that each topic is informed by history or cultural beliefs, and shows that the past, present and future has implications on many of the topics I discuss. In this exegesis, I have chosen to emphasise three of these themes, including Deep Listening (refer to Part 1 of exegesis), Education (Part II) and Straddling Two Worlds (Part III).

**Module One Diagram: Indigenous Cultures in Australia**



## **The Significance of Stories**

When I work with long term unemployed people I tell lots of stories. I tell stories about Elders that I knew and how they found it tough. Stories are important to the people I work with. Two of the young kids that I've been teaching have tried to hang themselves. One of them was my number one student. I found out that this young Aboriginal, had had a stillborn child on this date two years ago. When he came into my class the following week, you could see that he was ashamed. He told me about visiting his daughter's grave and about her funeral and how cockatoos had circled over her grave on both occasions. I'll make sure that I let him know that I have remembered that story.

Stories lie at the core of how I do my work and they also form the basis of my research. I listen to Elders tell their stories and when I hear one that I think would be helpful in my sessions, I ask them permission to use the story. Stories can be so powerful.

### **3. Ron Murray's Stories**

This section includes five of the stories I tell in my workshops. The stories stem from my history and experiences I have had over the years. I have included these stories in my exegesis because they are the most significant stories to me. I have told and retold them in my work as a trainer. Each story is connected to people I know as a family member or friend. The stories are also linked to the three themes I highlight in this exegesis: Deep Listening (story four), Education (story two, three and five) and Straddling Two Worlds (story one).

#### **Story Number One**

My name's Ron Murray and I'm from a little place called Balranald in New South Wales, just over the border from Swan Hill, Muthi Muthi country.

Lake Boga is my traditional area, Wamba Wamba country, and where my Scottish and Aboriginal ancestry come from. My totem is the red-tail black cockatoo, known as Wirran in the local language.

Balranald is the land of Mungo man and Mungo woman, the oldest discovered remains in the world. That's how long our history is.

I went to school in town and I worked out on the station, living there with both white and black people. I learned both sides.

I lived on the station with my family, Mum and Dad, my five sisters, and my grandfather. My grandfather taught me all about the bush.

My Dad was a horse breaker for the station and a horse legend in the town. He has worked for fifty-eight years straight.

## Story Number Two

I am a musician, story-teller, mediator, communicator and wood sculptor. I work in prisons, in schools, at public forums and at festivals. I work with both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people.

I want to make the wider community more aware of what it means to be Aboriginal, at a time when jail is replacing initiation for many young Indigenous people. I want to build bridges of awareness between Indigenous and Western cultures.

I find it easy to tell stories. It's important to keep the art of story-telling alive. I use stories when I'm talking to non-Aboriginal people. Many people have heard a lot of negative things about Aboriginal people. There aren't a lot of people out there telling the positives. So that's what I do. I've seen the difference it makes.

In my work, I aim to foster a sense of pride in Aboriginal people and to develop a sense of understanding and recognition of our history. I'm not really doing a lot of things differently from the old people. They would have taught the same way. They would have talked about the environment, the family and the elders and their stories.

Stories are powerful things. If you look at our old storytellers, they were our educators. They made the links with the past. They sat around camp fires and told stories. If you listen to the creation story of my mother's people, it goes for an hour and a half, and the more I listen to it, the more lessons I hear in it.

There can be thousands of layers to a story.

### **Story Number Three**

In my teaching, I talk about my Mum's experience in the middle of the night in South Australia when she was only four years of age.

My grandmother and grandfather put her into a horse and cart because the local doctor told my grandmother, who was the cleaner at his surgery, that the next day the welfare were coming to take some of the kids.

They took off from South Australia in a little horse and cart. It was a twelve month trip, right through to Swan Hill from Border Town in South Australia. The story has positives too.

If it wasn't for their white friends they wouldn't have kept the kids together. It was their white friends that hid them, on their farms, out-houses and barns along the way.

When they removed the Aboriginal children, it was government policy, but there were lots of white Australians who were horrified by what was happening.

## **Story Number Four**

The practice of deep and respectful listening within the concept of Dadirri underpins my work.

Two of the young kids that I've been teaching recently have tried to hang themselves. One of them was my number one student. I found out that he had had a stillborn child on this date two years ago.

When he came into my class the following week, you could see that he was ashamed. He told me about visiting his daughter's grave and about her funeral and how cockatoos had circled over her grave on both occasions.

I'll make sure that I let him know that I have remembered that story.

## Story Number Five

Pat Dodson talks about an Aboriginal concept called Lijan ngarn. It describes a time in your life that you reach when you're happy with yourself spiritually.

You reach that state if you have lived a good life without breaking laws. In the old days, many people used to reach that state.

There was so much support within the community. If you lost a child or if you did something wrong, there were laws. There were people around or a spiritual man in the community who would help solve the problems.

It is different in contemporary culture. An understanding of the laws and the framework of support is no longer there for many people. Not many people reach the state of Lijan ngarn now.

I hope that my work makes a contribution to increasing an understanding of our community and what living a good life might mean.

What I am trying to achieve in my work is to have people, both black and white, feeling proud of Aboriginal people.

I tell stories from my own practice. I also retell narratives from my own family, which reveal the experience of straddling different worlds and the complexities of reconciliation. The following section is divided in three parts and represents some of the stories that I tell in my work as a Cultural Awareness Trainer. These parts are an elaboration of the stories I have represented in the previous section, and also include reflections on my story-telling. The parts show how the themes of Deep Listening, Education and Straddling Two Worlds occur in practice, using evidence from my story-telling.

## **Part I. DEEP LISTENING**

### **Dadirri as Methodology**

The reflections that follow highlight the different ways that *Dadirri* plays out in my story-telling.

### ***What it Means to be Aboriginal***

My name's Ron Murray and I'm from a little place called Balranald in New South Wales, just over the border from Swan Hill. A little place called Lake Boga is my traditional area, and where my Scottish and Aboriginal ancestry come from. So often if I was introducing myself to, whether it be non-Aboriginal or an Aboriginal audience, if I'm doing a presentation whether it's a school, young kids, or performing at a venue with my wife Sarah, doing our music, I often bring out this feather and show people. I talk about what it means to be Aboriginal, to be from the Wamba Wamba people and have this totem of the red-tail black cockatoo.

That's special for me. I try and weave this bird into bridging the gaps between the Aboriginal community and the wider community by saying that the red-tail black cockatoo was also used for the Commonwealth Games mascot, and ask questions to people in the audience, "Why was it used?" And see if they can guess that it was used because there's only a thousand of these birds left in Victoria and they're on the extinction list. So, then I try and get the audience to feel how I might feel about having

my totem, which you learn, from when you're a young child, from the elders you can't eat this totem, you can't kill it and you can't marry another girl from that totem.

I find too, when I'm doing talks on culture and Aboriginal affairs, or Aboriginal rights, or whether it's about Aboriginal people in general, it's such a serious and such a controversial subject, that for me, without bringing a bit of humour into it, into my stories, and getting people to be at ease and laugh, do I finally feel 'em relax and start taking in what I am telling 'em. So often I tell the story about me being an artist and making a red gum bowl for Cathy Freeman, and then giving it to an elder from the Wurrunjeri people, Aunty Joy Murphy, to present this bowl that I made to Cathy Freeman, at a function at Federation Square.

In the bowl I put two clap sticks, similar to this, and to one clap stick I tied the red tail black cockie's feather, I put it in the bowl, and on the other one I put for Aunty Joy Murphy to put her totem feather, which was Banjul the Eagle. Then when Cathy looked in that bowl she got visibly upset because I didn't know that her totem was the red tail black cockatoo same as me. So when I tell people the story I say, well, when I heard that news I was visibly upset because that means I can't marry Cathy Freeman! So, if I bring that humour in and people start laughing, you break the ice and...you have a bit of fun with it, yeah...

Not 'til, all these years, that I really realised you can talk to thousands of kids in a year doing schools sometimes, and one of the kids said to me, "yeah that bird's the Aboriginal flag." I hadn't even looked at it like that. The yellow, the red, and the black. Some little child just come out in the open...it's amazing what you learn from children, when you do cultural awareness, or cultural stories even with kids, what you learn from them as well...

### ***The Art of Story-telling***

I find it easy to tell stories, and I bring my old teachings back, where our law and stories were handed down through stories. So for me, to go into any group, whether it be little children, business directors or corporates, I still use the art of story-telling. For me that is a dying art in our community. Even like, looking at Uncle Herb (Gunai elder)

with his gumleaf playing it's something that's dying and there's not too many people that are keeping that alive. I think when I was child my nan, Carpe, Aunty Emily Carpe she was a great story teller and a great holder of the wisdom of the Gnuninjeri people. So I was lucky that I heard her tell them stories, and I thought if that's what worked for me, why can't that work when I'm talking to non-Aboriginal people, by telling positive stories. And because they've heard a lot of the negatives, there's not a lot of people out there telling the positives. I think in a way I seen a difference with them positive stories, to children, even young ones up to older ones, I probably prefer doing the ones who are gonna be more young adults rather than the little children. Even though they're important, your more dreamtime stories, but when you get into the older children you can use things like ask them how many Aboriginal people have been knighted in the country. Then I bring out books to them. A set of books for me is really important, and I'm a book collector. So I often say well ask them, do they know people like Sir Douglas Nicholls, and I tell them about growing up with this guy and knowing him. My Uncle Stuart, my dad's brother, marrying his daughter. My mother's sister marrying his son. Saying that this is what we should be learning about: positive role models. Sir Douglas Nicholls, how amazing, governor of South Australia, playing over fifty games for Fitzroy, playing for Victoria, going to Carlton and getting kicked out of their club rooms, because they wouldn't touch him 'cause he was black. You know, tell them stories and the young ones go, "Wow, you know, just 'cause he was black they wouldn't touch him." So he leaves Carlton and goes and finally goes to Fitzroy. So they enjoyed him, they enjoyed this man, this legend to go and play...

We celebrate wars in this country, but when it comes to ANZAC day I actually feel physically sick, because I watch all these programs on television and there's no mention of the Aboriginal people the positive stuff that they did. The thousands of Aboriginal soldiers that went and fought for the country...Captain Red Saunders the highest ranking Aboriginal in the Army, another positive role model. Reading these books really take me on journeys sometimes. When I read this one, the second chapter is called misfits, that's him talking about us – probably in the fifties, forties or fifties - but we were seen as misfits in our own country. He says that the only two Aboriginals in his life that he knew that could walk in the white man's world and the

black man's world successfully were Sir Doug Nicholls and Harold Blair, the opera singer. So for me them books then become a set. Three little autobiographies. If you get people interested in schools to read them three books they'll experience how tough it was for these elders and that's what inspires me, 'cause if it was tough for them its a bit easier for me, and the kids growing up now, hopefully it will be a little bit easier but in some cases it's not. But when you tell the stories of the old people you see the young Aboriginal kids get filled with pride rather than being in the class room hearing about nothing to do with them. We gotta learn the right history in our schools.

### ***Aboriginal History***

John Howard's talking about re-writing Australian history. I'd love to be involved in helping re-write it. Often I talk about me learning about Matthew Flinders at school, and I loved it! But nowhere did they tell me that there was an Aboriginal man on his boat. King Bungaree. An amazing guy, used to wear captain's outfits, and captain's hats, and sailor's pants and no shoes. Even the school teachers don't know. You tell them that there was more lithographs done of King Bungaree than any governors of the time. And why? You know we learn about his black and white cat, for Christ's sake! His black and white cat, everyone knows about his black and white cat, but no-one knows that there was an Aboriginal man on all his voyages. Without him Matthew Flinders would have been murdered. It was his job to be put on the shore and make friends. So, that's our history. It's happened since Captain Cook. That should be taught in our schools. That's a big thing for me, is pushing, every time I go to a school I tell the school teachers these positive stories so when I go away they'll feel more comfortable about teaching about our people. So I suppose that sort of thing, them stories, can change people, but often you want to tease out of them too. You can't just go in and expect them to listen to you, you've gotta confront some of their issues. The first important thing going into a group is getting them to like me. So through funny stories, and positive stories, and people I've met that's how I get 'em in first.

I suppose anybody that's going to be out there teaching for me is important. That can be from a kindergarten child, if they can hold a story and be able to tell people later

on, I feel that you've done your job. Like with school teachers, if I did a forum for school teachers, I'd ask them what they know and which Aboriginal people they know, then often I'd pull out...I've got an amazing experience with a multicultural week and the ANZ bank. It had been running for five or six years, every year, in the ANZ bank in Melbourne, and they decided, "Multicultural week: Maybe we should invite the Aboriginal people along?" On the fifth year. So, I got invited to do twenty minutes talk, Aunty Joy Murphy was to do a welcoming, Steve Bracks was to come and do a talk and another guy was talking about diversity in the work place. So, I played didgeridoo as people were walking and then when it was my turn to speak I pulled out a fifty dollar note and asked anyone did they know who was on that fifty dollar note. There probably a hundred and fifty people, two hundred people, lining the stairs, thirty odd different cultures represented there, and not one of them, not even the ANZ state manager, could tell me who the man on the fifty dollar note was. So I told them a story, it was David Unaipon from my mother's people in South Australia. I heard stories about this man when I was kid. About him inventing the shears and how he did it, putting white man's science and black man's science into that little device and he took us from shearing with a big pair of scissors to shearing with shears. Inventing it from the boomerang... So here was a man practicing reconciliation way back, whatever year he invented the shears, and often one of the criticism when I was going to school that white kids used to say, "Oh, you Aboriginal people, if we didn't bring you out of dark ages." I'd often feel like saying to 'em, "Yeah, but if you stayed back in horse and carts, you'd be the same. We've evolved with you guys, we've gone from using spears to guns like you 'cause it's easier. If it wasn't for Aboriginal man inventing the shears you'd still be cutting wool with a big pair of scissors." You know his invention went on to the printing presses, newspapers, the farmer's header! Especially when I hear farmers saying racist things about Aboriginal people, I say, "Well without an Aboriginal man inventing the shears and the header coming out of it, you'd be doing it pretty tough. So we've evolved with you, we've got smart people out there. We're not all of low intelligence and can't learn, like I had drummed into by non-Aboriginals when I grew up.

So I tell all them stories, positives, like David Unaipon and Sir Doug Nicholls, and Harold Blair, and you know, tight rope walkers. Aboriginal people that have done amazing things and go right back through history and talk about them working for half wages and for nothing at one stage and not being allowed into cinemas and swimming pools. Aboriginal returned servicemen not allowed into RSL clubs and not ever receiving soldier settlement block like everyone else. That would have been their little gold mine their little start in life, if they hadn't been kept back... Telling stories about my dad being evicted out of school after third grade, you know, not being allowed to go to school and having to travel 80 miles away to go to another school in Victoria where they'd teach them. A lot of the other Aboriginal people from his home town didn't get an education, 'cause they didn't want to send their kids away from home. I talk about my mum's experience in the middle of the night in South Australia when she was only four years of age, my grandmother and grandfather put her into a horse and cart because the local doctor told my grandmother, who was the cleaner at his surgery, he warned her that the next day the welfare were coming to take some of the kids. But in that story there's positives, even though they took off from South Australia in a little horse and cart, a twelve month trip, right through to Swan Hill from Border Town South Australia. If it wasn't for their white friends they wouldn't have kept the kids together, 'cause it's their white friends that hid them, on their farms, and out-houses, and barns along the way. So, if you can get the message across too that just because these policies were on Aboriginal people and bad things happened to them, it wasn't all white Australia that agreed with it. It was government policy that had a white Australia policy, not all Australians believed that. When they removed the Aboriginal children, it was government policy, there was lots of white Australians that are horrified by what happened. So, when you tell 'em a positive story about how the white community helped my community you see a different attitude in them. Especially when I used to do the Victoria Police, that's one story I used to tell the recruits about their journey and me mum losing her little sister along the way... And when they finally reached Swan Hill and got over the border they camped on the river, and other Aboriginal people started to camp there and they become an eyesore to the highway, it's a pretty common story with a lot of Aboriginal communities or anybody that lived along the road. They shifted 'em and put them over onto Wamba Wamba mission.

Wamba Wamba mission just at Swan Hill is where my great grandparents were the first, with my mother, to live on that mission.

Then they started to go to school back in Swan Hill. One night one of the families was hysterical because their kids didn't come home from the school. So my grandfather pulled mum and all the brothers and sister out of school. He wasn't bringing them all the way from South Australia to have 'em taken out of school in Swan Hill. So, then I follow on with stories about how then me and my five sisters taught my mum how to read and write. Coming home from school doing our homework. I think if you can blend the two together and don't blame anyone I suppose....'cause people don't like getting blamed for things.

I've sat back too and I've heard a lot of good ones stories. I've heard my Uncle Stuart, I've heard Doug Nicholls, I've heard people like Marcia Langton, I've heard people like Richard Frankland, Uncle Herb, Aunty Joy Murphy, Aunty Carolyn Briggs, Alf Bamblett, my dad. I reckon I've taken probably all the things out of their teachings and put them into mine. I think that'd be good to use. I don't like to offend. I suppose, 'cause once you go and start offending people they won't listen. That's number one. You got to get them to like you.

So, when I did the Victoria Police the first thing I did was took them out throwing boomerangs for forty minutes on the oval. Come back in and they were on cloud nine. But then I bring them down. I'd say to them, "Tell me what you know about indigenous people in the world? How many Native American Indian tribes do you know?" They could name 13. "How many Native American Indian chiefs do you know?" They could name 10. "How many Aboriginal tribes do you know?" They could name one: Yorta Yorta people usually. 'Cause they are trouble makers. Them fellas are trying to claim land back up in Echuca. They're all over the papers, they're making trouble. "How many Aboriginal Elders do you know?" We didn't have chiefs, and they always get one: Trigganinni. How come they get Trigganinni? They must have got the same twenty minutes history I got in school. So I know where to start then, I know to give them the whole lot. So then I'll move in...Once you make them feel a bit guilty that they don't know anything, or the things that they do know are all negative, then that's

the starting point for me. Even sometimes you might listen to little kids. I remember a little kid saying, "Why do Aboriginal people fight with us?" He was maybe 10. I said to him, "Do you fight with Aboriginal people?" And he goes, "Yes." I said, "Who?" But he couldn't tell me who! That's stories he's heard from his parents, he didn't even know an Aboriginal kid, there's none that went to his school.

That was a hard one to answer, when a young kid says that. You could pass it over, or do you tackle it? How do you do that to a ten year old? So yeah, you gotta develop strategies, and as I said all the time take a deep breath, otherwise you could say the wrong thing. Say one wrong thing and you've lost them, lost them. So, it's got to be positives, it's got to be humorous. Touch on things in a round about way. If it's controversial you got to take a round journey into it, "Did you know this?" or, "How do you think Aboriginal people would think about that?" So put their feet in their shoes. As an Educator.

## **Part II. EDUCATION**

### **Links Between Story-telling and Education**

A story is a powerful thing. If you look at our old storytellers, they were our educators. They made the links with the past. They sat around camp fires, and told stories. If you listen to the creation story of my mother's people, it goes for an hour and a half, and the more I listen to it, the more lessons I hear in it. There are many lessons for children in it.

There can be thousands of layers to a story. If you tell non-Aboriginal people about the stories of past treatment, and how Aboriginals survived that, it amazes them. When they hear that I was under the Flora and Fauna Act when I was seven years old, that's an amazing story. Sometimes I show people a kangaroo rug that I've got which is 100 years old. Three of the kangaroos out of the six that were used to make the rug are now extinct. That's a powerful story. I sometimes show people an old boomerang stone that my grandfather left me. I tell them that the only reason I got it, was that out of all his grandsons I was the one that sat down, and looked, and listened, and was interested to learn the stories. I was the one that had the opportunity with him.

The stories I need to tell just jump at me. The stories come at me and I say, well think about it this way. I try and put them in someone else's shoes. I ask them to think about what it must be like to be in a situation where you are the only Aboriginal person. Most of the time, Aboriginal people are outnumbered. I ask them to think about what that might feel like in their own country.

Stories are a powerful educational tool. I illustrate the theme of education in the following stories.

## ***Young People***

Yeah, gee it's funny when you work with them they become your kids, in a funny way. I've got a daughter who's 23, she's an ambulance officer, and I'm really close to her and that age. I suppose I'm lucky 'cause I've always been a young immature person at heart. I think a lot of Aboriginal people are, that's why we don't grow up quick enough I think. You read that about Aboriginal people, a lot of descriptions of them: they're child-like. I believe that, we're all child-like, and that helps us feel younger I suppose...

When you do them young kids, and as I say I do become attached to them, and some of them, say if they come in, even the...I've got two young white kids there that I've worked with for probably over five years that have been in and out of my programs over the years – and they're in the paper a lot lately they raped and murdered a grandmother. But even though, look, I sort of feel connected to them boys in a funny way even though the crime was so bad. And the young Aboriginal boys, when they come in you look at them go, "Yep, you'll probably only come in one or two times that'll be it, you'll be a kid that will make it." And then they don't. After years later, you think, "Gee, they're starting to slip away." Then all of the sudden they're out at Malmsbury, they do some time out 'ere. And then all of the sudden they're in Port Phillip, or they're in Loddon prison up here. I had this amazing experience where I did this cultural awareness training for a group called....they were doing it for the Department of Justice anyway, going all round the state...ah Replay.

I had to go down to Gippsland to Orbost to do cultural awareness training to Department of Justice workers. I told them in the training that I work with young kids in the prisons, and this, first smoko break, and this lady come up, she would've been late fifties, and she goes, "Oh Ron I heard you talking about your work in Parkville, you'd have to know so and so wouldn't ya?" This young Aboriginal boy. "Yeah oh gosh, little Ali, yeah he's my favourite." "Yeah he's my favourite too, isn't he a handsome young man, blue eyes, long sandy coloured hair, very solid." I said, "What's his story? 'Cause you know that he's out in Port Phillip now..." "Yeah, yeah, well he was on train platform hanging onto the stroller of his little toddler sister and his mother jumped in

front a train in front of him at four years of age.” Then that went bang! A little switch went off, “That’s why. That’s his problem, he hasn’t dealt with that.” And that same young kid, he tried to commit suicide in Parkville there once. I came in I was that upset, I was crying saying “Why did you do this? Why’d you nearly waste your life?” And he sat there and he said, “Unc....” - They call me Uncle Ron in there, which makes me feel really honoured too, I don’t see myself as an Elder – “But Uncle Ron, I had a little baby once and he only lived for a short amount of time, and we buried him...” And he told me all about the funeral, and at the funeral how these cockatoos came down, these black cockies came to the funeral. What it was it was the anniversary of his son been buried, a still born. So I said to the staff, “Now you should have that date on your computer every year. When that date’s coming up you gotta be watching him, be on suicide alert.”

The work is really good there at Parkville, Marmsbury....They then took him for a visit back home to his home town and visit his son’s grave. That’s all he needed to heal him, that little visit.

Another young guy there, I look on him like a son I suppose. I give him me number and say, “When you’re depressed you boys don’t do anything silly, you ring me, I don’t care what time of the night it is. It won’t worry me. If you’re having problems you ring me.” That’s the reason why I give me phone number. A lot of people say I’m stupid. A lot of the authorities say it’s illegal, and Sarah says sometimes should you be doing this. I said, “Look it doesn’t matter they’re not going to hurt me, they respect me.” Anyway I got this phone call and I wasn’t home but young (name) leaves a message on the phone, “Uncle Ron I’m out, and da da da, and having a good time...” And a couple of days later I get a phone call from the police from down that way, from Morwell... “Ron your number has come up on this stolen phone.” I couldn’t lie, ‘cause in that job ya can’t lie. I could’ve maybe tried to cover up for him somehow... I said, “Yeah, yeah it is young so and so...” I said, “Gee he’s a nice young guy isn’t he?” And the police officer nearly choked on the phone, “Nice?” They’re the ones that lock ‘em up see... and he’s dealt with him. He thieves cars, he breaks into houses, whatever he’s doing. He’s a nightmare to the police.

They have a rest when they get him locked up I suppose. I had to then explain the police officer, "Look I'm not just some Aboriginal fella that just goes and works with them, I used to be the Aboriginal advisor to the Victoria Police. You know I work for you guys and da da da da...and now I work with these young boys and da da da da ...." And I said, "But when I see them in there, they're great. I don't see them like you guys, when they're chromed up or stoned and give you a hard time." So we had this whole conversation and he understood where I was coming from and in the end I understood where he was coming from, he was trying to get him for the stolen phone. One thing I said to him at the end, "Look please, you've got enough evidence without mentioning my name haven't ya?" He said, "Yeah look we won't mention your name...."

So the same lady told me his history. She knew him well. His mother was a heroin addict and lives in Bendigo somewhere and his father died when he was 33 from drinking. So he has been passed around all his uncles. So once I know that, there's a story, and I've got a reason and I can work with them different. I often say to him everytime, "He's not gonna come back. What about this? Have you thought about this? And are you gonna work when you get out, you start off little steps and work yourself up."

### ***Teaching Cultural Knowledge***

The curriculum development project that I did for VCA...It was an honour to be asked for a start. I was recommended by Aunty Joy Murphy that's to teach all these Aboriginal people that are going to go away and be Arts managers. There was a two day cultural part for them. Now, this is to Aboriginal people, and they invited me in to do it and so I took in all my artefacts, and books and stuff and did a whole two days. One of the young men in there Yannawirri (name?) he was an expert. You know like, he'd grown up in the Kimberleys. He knew three or four different dialects from his mother's people. So for me to teach Aboriginal history and culture it's a real juggling act. I find a lot of our own people don't know a lot of our stories. Not European stories, more to do with books and positive role models and stuff, so I used a lot of that with

them, all through the two days...And again humor, I say, "Really think about it, the contributions Aboriginal people have done to our society today." And I go through the possum skins, I talk about an Australian possum that lives in New Zealand. I talk about the rules and laws and how my grandfather was arrested for having a possum skin cloak on this bed. He had to burn it....And how we put charcoal and made a ball. We had a game called marngrook, and I'd tell them how Australian rules come out of our game marngrook. The word for catch the ball in marngrook is "mark" same with Australian Rules. People ask why Aboriginal people are so good at Australian Rules, well we've been playing marngrook for thousands of years. And that's just recent....Often with a different audience I might go, "Yeah and we used possum skins as underpants! Nice and warm!" We could even say that Aboriginal people invented the g-string!

### ***Teaching Tradition***

Going through a lot of my old stones and saying where they come from, showing 'em on a map that even though they were found in my area in Balranald, they come from Broken Hill. Over two hundred miles away. By putting on the real ochre, and just telling them that we still use these in our art work. And I crush up all me ochre and I mix this with bee's wax. Then I mix crushed shell, can be fresh water or sea shell, and sap off the yellow wattle trees, crush that melt it into tins. Then that way I make up my beautiful home made bee's wax mouth pieces. So I'm still using traditional...For me when I use that tool I'm looking at probably three hundred years since it was last used, how many hands have touched this? What a beautiful stone this one here. When you show this one this rock, how many uses has it had. So it looks like a grinder and there's a top. Now very unusual to find one with a grip, a lot of them see the handles.

So I say well my tribe, we knew about RSI, so instead of having this one we put a handle on it, so we can do this. So when I talk about the quandong seeds, and explain that it comes on in August and you chew off the skin, and inside there is a seed that you need to get at. And if you want to get at that you can't chew it. It's like a golf ball. So by putting it in that little groove, and taking that top and cracking it, inside one of these little nuts is like eating a dozen oranges. So, you just got to take the

brown off, now these here you can just eat them straight away. You can eat that brown it's still good for ya, tastes better when you don't. But if I wanted to take that brown off....put him on there and then squash him and grind him. Now if we grind that up and then mix it with egg, swan egg, emu egg...hmmmm beautiful....

So for me to know that that's been used, I wonder who used it, I wonder where he was. I wonder what his name was. Or her, probably her. I've still got my grandfather's boomerang rock. That's probably the most important thing I've got besides this kangaroo rug. When I show that - one hundred years old, six different varieties, three of them possibly extinct on that rug, spear marks in it - the kids are horrified. So if I've just educated thirty kids about the environment...But using this, this stone, I talk about boomerangs and how delicate they were. You know out from the banks of the river. This stone is still used today for putting in the twist and hardening the boomerang, to make it hard, like my grandfather showed me. Not a lot of people do this anymore. Now to get that twist in it I have to heat it up over the fire, and wet it and then twist it down. I talk about games that Aboriginal people played, about throwing, within this dance called the Snake Dance, like the Chinese dragon. First it gets thrown in and the boomerang comes round and hits someone and they gotta go and sit down. But they did it with a really small one. So I talk about all the boomerangs and just taking these two boomerangs off a root. Where the root goes out of the bank, goes down looking for the water, you always take one off that side, one off that side, tie them together, and soak them in the water to get the saps out. That root has to be looked after it has to be mudded up. Bark has to be tied over it. When the string rots, and the bark falls off, and mud falls off, the roots heal.

Them boomerangs then, are buried under a fire where the moisture draws out, and over a period of time you make the boomerang decide whether they're left handed or right handed. Then if I was to trade them two boomerangs you can't trade them separately, they have to be traded as a brother and sister. So if they didn't even split their brothers and sisters of boomerangs up, imagine what they thought about their children being taken away. It's a really knitting story that one, of the returning boomerang. Then go to the bigger ones the killer booms to tell them how diverse the boomerang was. Look at this, the killer boomerang, what where they used for? Music;

turning the fish over; scraping the coals out; whacking naughty kids; lighting fires! How would you light a fire with a boomerang? Well, you take this old boomerang and you take a nice piece of pine softwood. I haven't got one here, but say if we had this, and we had the grass wrapped around the stick, and rub this boomerang back and forwards through a V on a piece of Murray pine and the next minute you got friction, fire, boom!

The other one is when they got married, groups of men stood there with their boomerangs up like that and the wife and husband walk through under the boomerangs. But gee, that looks like to me a door in a church, the arches... So, I think we are more related, closer than we think. 'Cause I often use things where language is very similar. I tell them stories about fishing competitions in my mother's people. And Lake Alexandrina in South Australia, where you had spear three fish and at the end if you did spear these three fish, the yellow valley bream and Murray Cod, people stood up in their boats and applauded and all yelled out, "Kay hay, kay hay." And I think how close is that to "Hooray". Kayhay, hooray same word. We're closer than we think, we shouldn't have the differences that we've got nowadays I reckon. We're all people underneath, we've all got red blood. That's what people forget. We might have different coloured skin, but what difference is that? People getting discriminated 'cause of skin colour, that's just stupid. Your sex, or your choice of partner, male or female... we want to grow up as people I reckon.

Shields often...you know we have this beautiful old shield that's been handed down to my family with all the markings on it that have been lost, what do these marks mean? A spear mark there, it's actually been used. Then I teach the boys, I show them something like this, and they can make something of their own. This is one I made with the boys in there, we chipped it all out, haven't done the design yet. But the boys feel really proud inside when they make one of these. Baby's dishes.... Beautifully made, I found this one in an antique shop, so skillfully made. This one here...I think even purposefully a lot of times they're made out of a fork of a tree so it actually fits around there when they carry it. They were smart people. This rock knowledge that we don't know about, the medicines that were used in the bush. So, stories about how smart they were. Especially for young Aboriginal kids to learn how smart I thought they

were makes them feel honoured... 'Cause without my Aboriginal heritage, I would never have got to where I got. A lot of the jobs I've had late in life: the Aboriginal Advisory Unit; Victoria Police; Aboriginal Legal Service; and Aboriginal community justice panels. It's all 'cause of my Aboriginal heritage, so I'm lucky. I've seen a way to use my Aboriginal heritage as a positive. But it's hard 'cause you're going to school and people put you down all the time and they say your people are a race of people of low intelligence...you start believing it as a kid! You believe adults a lot of the time. You know you go home and try and scrub the black off, 'cause it gives you so much trouble, at school on the footy field, ya mate's parents, girlfriend's parents...Now I love it. I wish I was blacker! Yeah...

### ***Contemporary Issues***

Through the '70s and '80s and '90s, we had a political ways, getting out in the street yelling and screaming and getting a focus and getting us noticed, can good in some ways and we needed that. But I think now in 2000's things have changed, we've gotta do things in a different way....And there's a fair few, a lot of Aboriginal people out there doing positive work...I suppose I look at some of them Aboriginal educators as the olives of the trunks, and the roots and we become the branches and the more people we educate they become the leaves and it can spread out in that direction. That's what keeps me going. The more people I can educate the easier it's going to be for our younger ones.

Music can be a really powerful way of getting to people because for one, when you're up on stage you're playing music but everybody's gotta listen to ya. So, you've got an audience for a start. Probably one of the most powerful ones that we did, me and Sarah played, and we play for some pretty different audiences too, but this one we did was for RSL presidents in our home town of Balranald and my dad was there in the audience. So, half way through the concert I was gonna play my solo piece on the didgeridoo, the fiddle and didgeridoo we'd already done some of them, and I said, "This one's gonna be a solo piece and I'm gonna dedicate this to all the soldiers that have never come home." And I've got 150 RSL presidents from all over New South

Wales, so I've got them they're all listening with intent, and I said, "And especially for the Aboriginal soldiers that didn't come back." And I said, "Can anyone tell me how many Indigenous soldiers served in the First and Second World Wars?" You would have thought RSL presidents they'd know their stuff but not one could answer. So, I pointed in the audience, I said, "Look, even in this town that you guys have come to visit my home town my dad's brother fought in the Second World War," then I said, "He even fought with Bruce Ruxton." So I had their attention again, my Uncle Stuart fought with Bruce Ruxton and I say, "and they fought like cat and dog." And so they all laughed, because Bruce Ruxton was known as bit of a... My uncle was very much the same as Bruce Ruxton, could be very stubborn at times, you didn't want to cross him. So they were similar in a lot of ways. So then I said, "When they come back they weren't allowed into places like this. Like the RSL." But I said it in a nice, rather than a negative way. So after it a lot of them RSL presidents came up and thanked me saying, "Gee, you know, that was really good to hear."

Now you look at, just recently, Noel Pearson, came out with an article in the Herald Sun saying he feels physically sick on ANZAC day. Saying that his people aren't recognised, the same thing that I've been saying. So now the dawn service in Gallipoli, they've got a didgeridoo player, William Bartnett has been playing there for the last two years. They are now talking about the didgeridoo into the RSL for the dawn service. So that's a step forward, and they're gonna do more on the Aboriginal servicemen. I often tell the story about me Uncle Stuart putting up a war memorial on the banks of Lake Boga to commemorate all the Aboriginal soldier that fought from the Lake Boga area, and the first night it was there somebody went out and towed it over. A war memorial! With all the Aboriginal names on it! But he went and put it back up and he put a fence around it. It's still there. Why that would upset some people? I suppose times have changed...

### ***Songlines***

It's amazing like when we go to different concerts too, Sarah will go "Should we sing this song?" Most of our songs are Irish and Scottish, and we've started now singing a

few Australian ones that mainly we learnt because we went to an Aboriginal Country and Western concert a couple of months ago. So we have learnt, "A Home Amongst the Gum Trees" and a few of them! Just to...it's good for kids too to hear Australian songs. But mainly it's Irish and Scottish but we got a song called, "Guinevere in Fire" that we heard a woman called Penelope Swayles sing at the Melbourne Festival. It's a true story about a white family up in Nowra in 1920. She has seven kids, mother and father. Ironically, Nowra was a place where my Uncle Ron, who I was named after who bred Cousin Craig Charles, yeah he lived there for a while. The mother kept warning these little white kids, "Don't go down near the black fellas camp down the bottom of the property 'cause with ya white skin and ya blue eyes they might snatch you and take ya. And they sing and they dance and they drink all the time." But then one night her husband goes into town and he gets on the grog and he doesn't come home...And a spark flies out of the fire and catches onto her dress and burns her. The little kids are too frightened to go for help because the black fella's camp is down the bottom of their property. So they wait till daylight and eventually they run for help and they come back and she dies. The kids get sent off all over Australia, different capital cities. But at the funeral when they buried this woman this old Aboriginal lady steps out from behind a bush and says to this young girl, "Why didn't you come to us? We have salves and plants that could have healed the pain and she'd be still alive."

But that song...you've gotta be careful where you play it. We played it at a function in New South Wales, at a private function, and we had this lady, this non-Aboriginal lady come up and said, "Look could you please not sing any of them songs like that anymore." I said, "Well it's the only one we know." I wouldn't call it radical neither. If we played it in Melbourne people wouldn't blink an eye, but up there when you mention the white fellas and the black fellas camp, and "don't go near the black fellas," there's a bit of a verse in there, but some people still aren't ready. But to an Aboriginal audience you wouldn't think, and we often play for Aboriginal audiences in communities, and that song we wouldn't even think twice about singing.

I suppose the real connection for us to is to sing a song like "Danny Boy" how many audiences you can touch. You can touch the Aboriginal community with that song, you can touch the wider community 'cause Danny Boy's are real funeral in Ireland. So while I've got them on that I'll say to 'em, "In the Aboriginal community

we've got a song called The Old Rugged Cross." It's an old Christian song that was taught to the Aboriginal people on the missions. If you go to an Aboriginal funeral you'll more than likely hear The Old Rugged Cross. So it's a little bit of information they get. All of the sudden you've got them at an Aboriginal funeral and what it's like. Now you talk about Aboriginal funerals being a celebration of life, rather than sadness. They're very much different. When you go to an Aboriginal funeral you have people standing up and saying....you know if it was say Seamus, they'd be saying what a good bloke he is, and everybody would be talking happy stories they had with him, "Oh one night we went on a barbeque and this happened to him..." 'Cause they don't know. The wider community have no idea about how the Aboriginal people live. They only hear the stereotypes. So I take them on a journey. I try and take them on a journey of our people, and how beautiful they are, and how caring they are...

If you are asking about how music can effect and different cultures... When we went over to Jordan this year to Amman. We went over there to perform this concert for Interfaith. It was a Phillip Glass piece that we did back in 2001, for didgeridoo and organ, and that was written by Phillip Glass, for the opening of the Melbourne town organ after they spent three and half million dollars on it. Calvin Bayman was one of the organ players and Mark Atkins is one of the best didgeridoo players in the world. He's one of my mentors as a player that I look up to. To go and play with Mark is an honour. Aunty Joy Murphy is the narrator of the story that goes with it, it's a four piece movement. We did it at the Melbourne Town Hall to a packed crowd. It's a creation story for Melbourne that Phillip Glass picked from the other side of the world when he wrote this piece with Mark Atkins, he then said it needs a narration to go with it. So they put out a prospectus to artists and poets and storytellers in Victoria to see if there was an Aboriginal word or story or poem that would go with it. So from the other side of the world Phillip Glass picks Aunty Joy telling the creation story for Victoria telling the creation story about the Banjul the Eagle. So that was pretty special.

Then they needed another didgeridoo player to go with that, so I put me name, I didn't think I'd get it, and I got it. My rhythms actually fitted with her story. We sat down and went to the Melbourne Town Hall with a conductor from Sydney. Tyrone Randell came down and he said, "how do we do this?" 'Cause the other piece was

already written with didgeridoo and organ, the story had to go and the music had to be put with it. So, Aunty Joy Murphy said, "Look I'll read the story and let Ron play from the heart." I shut me eyes and I listened to the story and I played. At the end this composer, Tyrone, said, "That's beautiful." How do we re-do it? How do we remember that?" I said, "I don't know. I probably wouldn't be able to play it again, because most of our tunes are by memory. But that I just played from the heart." And he said, "Rightio. Well, tell me how you did the first rhythm." So I sort of shut me eyes and I said, "Oh, it sounded like this: don-don-derrrrr, don-don-derrr, don-don-derrr (didgeridoo playing)....." So, he went up to the white board and he wrote: don don derrr X 5. I said, "Oh, that's easy. All I gotta do is watch that five times...(didgeridoo playing.)" He said, "So, what's the second rhythm you did?" I said, "Well that was don don derr, but the derr was with a growl." So its don-don- growling derr, don-don-growling derr (didgeridoo playing). He said, "Oh that's easy, don-don-derr X5 with growl." So I thought, "Right." He kept writing it. All of a sudden over two days we wrote the whole lot. Might have been one of the first time didgeridoo probably been written. So we did it and we pulled it off in the Melbourne Town Hall to a packed audience.

Then about three weeks later I got a phone call in the middle of the night with this American accent, this guy from New York, he said he was from the Lincoln Centre, I thought it was one of me mates playing a prank on me at three in the morning, I wasn't too impressed. Then he said, "Oh look we've heard about this piece that you played in Melbourne with Phillip Glass and Mark Atkins and Aunty Joy Murphy, would you be interested in coming to New York and doing it?" He said, "For a start we'll fly you over, pay for your flights, pay for your accommodation, give you a US\$100 spending a day, and US\$2000 to play it. Do you need time to think about it? I can ring you back." I said, "Nah, nah, I don't need any time I'll be there, I'll have to tell me boss but I'm pretty sure I'll be there." So, I went to work the next day and told me boss, and he said, "Oh yeah, ya mad if ya don't go." It was five days I think, might have been a bit longer. The reason why...each July, in New York, every July they have a tribute to an American composer, it just happened that in 2001 it was a tribute to Phillip Glass. He was actually living, a lot of times they're deceased composers.

So we went over, and we all met up as Australians over there I suppose. But when we finally got to this concert and we played it, on the other side of the world, and

the moment we finished the audience all stood up and we could hear this, "Cooooooooooooo!" A coooooooooo in the audience in America, and I thought, "Unbelievable." That nearly made me cry. I thought, "We got Aussies out there come to watch us in America." So that was pretty special. But then that piece sat there and never ever got recorded. It's a most amazing- especially with Mark and Calvin, Mark being the best didgeridoo player in the world- it was the most complex and unbelievable music I've ever heard and our's going with it really fitted.

We were then invited to, just recently, to Jordan, to go and play it in Amman in church. The first night we landed there they took me to the markets. The really good thing about it, the young guy that I hung around with, we stopped with Australian people from the Australian consulate, in their house they put us up. So, the kids could speak their language. So walking around you know they could do the bartering for us or buying of clothes. They took us to the market and I met this guy and he had a book store, me being book mad I wanted to buy some books for Rody and he was into monsters at the time so I found these two books about the grufallos, this monster. I got talking to him, and he goes, "What are you doing here?" And I said, "Oh I'm here to play the didgeridoo." And, "What is it." And, "Oh, it's an instrument da da da, and I'm gonna play it in the church...." And he was a Christian. You're either Muslim or Christian there. I said, "Look I'll go and get this instrument out of the car." So I went and got the didgeridoo out of the car and brought it back and showed him, I played it for him. He goes, "Oh gee, there's a stage in the market, you gotta go and see them and see if you can play there."

So, he took me up and introduced me to this guy and all of the sudden I'm going to do this performance. The lady that was with us from the consulate she raced off and got all our promotion posters. So, I started playing there and it was like the pied piper. This mystical place with big mosques. I wasn't allowed to play at first because the chanting was still on, the prayer time, and they said, "Oh, wait till 5 or 6 o'clock when this finishes then you can play." So I got up on the stage and played for about five minutes and people just didn't walk past. It was the intersection of this market where there was a big Turkish coffee stand, where there was a lot people sitting probably fifty people, and then people walking pass they just didn't go any

further, they just stopped. Then after I finished all these young Jordanians, kids, 18-19 year olds come up, young men, "You come from Australia." "Yeah," "You got the king brown snake." You know they're used to kings and queens and that, "Oh yeah he's a king he sits up on the tree, and wears a crown." I was having a bit of joke with them. "You got the tiger snake." Like it was some big leopard. So, you know they're thinking of us must be amazing. A tiger snake and a king brown snake, all fitted with their culture.

So all of the sudden the boys wanted to take me out on the town! All these 18 year olds. These people at the people from the consulate weren't going to let me go because it was the very next night that we had to play and they weren't going to let me out of their sight. I was pretty keen to do it too, I would've got over jet lag. What an amazing trip, to go around and see nightlife with young 18-19 year old Jordanian boys. But I didn't go 'cause I was still a bit jet lagged.

Yeah it was an amazing experience. We met this guy that night, and we couldn't even pronounce his name. It was some King, ah Hussein.... You know they had these real long names, so for short they called him the Duke. He was like one of the most powerful men in Amman. He invited us for dinner the day before the concert. The day of the concert we go around to his house, it's 600 years old, and it's amazing. His whole life now, he's so rich this guy, he owns property all over Jordan, he'd be in his 70s, 70-79, and the Duke his name was. He put on this amazing spread of dinner for us, and then he said, "Rightio, you'd better get going to the rehearsal." As we leave, there's not enough cars... Sorry before we go left me and Mark got the didgeridoos out and played in this beautiful marble room, in his mansion, and it just echoed, he was so moved.

When we went out to get in the cars to go and there's not enough room, he goes, "It's alright, I'll get my bus." He opens up his roller doors and he's got a mini bus in there, "I take the rest, youse go." So we took off to the rehearsal and we got there and the sound engineering people didn't turn up. It really reminded me of Koories, you know like they're so casual, "Oh no they decided not to come." We're sitting there we're gonna be in big strife. There's people running around like chooks with heads cut off saying, "What are we gonna do?" This old man, the old Duke, said, "Give me the

number of these people.” They gave him the number, he gets on his mobile phone, he goes, “Hello, it’s...” You know so and so Hussein, whatever his name was, “You supposed to be here at 3.30” and they go, “Yeah, but we’re not coming.” “Well, I tell you this concert starts at 8.30, youse be here at 7.30,” and hung up. That was the power he had. These people were there at 7.30 with all this music gear and speakers running everywhere setting it all up. We didn’t even have time to do a rehearsal. They were still running around taping down wires and hooking up the organ. So it really reminded me of Aboriginal people in a funny way. You know a real care-free, “Oh nah we won’t go and do it. They won’t miss us.”

But when that old man, he was like an elder, got on the phone and snapped his fingers people just run left, right and centre. Yeah, it was good for me to see.

### ***Stereotypes***

The main message that I’m trying to deliver is: Don’t stereotype us. Yeah, we’ve got some people that don’t give us a good name but them same people have got a story to tell. I’d say that in the white or black community. You see the old bad lady on the streets in Melbourne, she’s got a story. The homeless people wouldn’t be out there on the streets homeless if they didn’t have a story. The Aboriginal people that drink in the park if you had the time to go and sit down with them you’d probably be in tears listening to their stories. So, the same message, put your feet in someone else’s shoes before you criticize them. If a negative story comes up you can’t ignore them, you have to take them in. So, if its drinking, and I’ll give the...not that I like doing it...statistics, I hate statistics ‘cause sometimes they can be distorted...But yeah look we’ve got some drinkers, but there’s more drinkers in the white community.

But in our community we do things about it. If we’ve got a problem... ah some of our communities have been made dry around Australia. Can you say any white communities that have been made dry? So you try and, for me, I jump back and forward all the time. And I can do it without even realizing. One minute I’m talking on my Scottish side then I jump back on the Aboriginal side. It’s a great tool to use.

One of my five sisters, she's an amazing nurse, a healing woman, she can't do cultural training. She says she gets too frustrated, too angry, and it is hard, there's no worries about that. If I heard someone use the word "Abo", or "the niggers down here", or "I had this black fella yeah... next door neighbour," I've gotta take a deep breath and go, "Calm down Ron." In me own mind I know to do it. I suppose 'cause as a kid when you called names at school your first reaction is to whack 'em you know? You get old and think that's not the way to do it. That's why they all learn how to fight and... fought for everything. Same with... Irishmen did the same, Chinese did it, red-headed people did it but especially Aboriginal people had to learn to fight. As you get older you think, there's gotta be another but I think you're right that is one of our biggest...for Aboriginal people dying twenty years younger I think a lot is stress. Stress of having to listen to what's said about them. All the negatives. Yeah, all the negative things said about the community you gotta sit down and listen to it.

A lot of cases, some people can blend into a party, they're Aboriginal and they don't look Aboriginal, how do you think they feel when all these things... "Oh, they're always getting government handouts and they get new cars and they wreck 'em, or get new houses." You gotta actually sit there and you gotta try and tell them a story to educate them, but yeah it hurts...There's no worries about that. It rips my heart out sometimes. When I hear something that's said that's so stupid and untrue. That hurts you.

Racism is probably one of the most hurtful things for Aboriginal people. A lot of the young kids I work with in Parkville and Malmsbury, especially violent related things. You get on a train and someone calls them a name and they have a punch-up or get in an argument. A lot of them get expelled from school when I was going to school. It's all through racism. So it can be hurtful, it's a powerful thing. So you've gotta turn it around and use that in a different direction. Channel your energy, and very calmly say back - 'cause the moment you get aggressive or start raising your voice, in a funny way, it's a sign of weakness, or you're wrong. So you gotta keep your balance, or tell them a positive, "Oh do you know so and so..." Just throw in a positive story, and try and get 'em going, "Oh right, yeah..." Or, I'll often switch it back and tell a story about... you know they talk about an Aboriginal criminal. I'll talk about, you know,

what's his name...Skase or one of them, how much they've ripped off, or some of our leaders of this country, some of the parliamentarians. Try and put it back on them.

I think it's a friendship, or a knowing of each other. When you look at anything, like if you looked at the refugee status of this country. We really don't know how refugees live, how they feel, until you go and live their life and learn about them coming over in these old boats with 30 or 40 people in fishing clothes underneath these boats. What are we frightened of? They could be terrorists, they could bring new sicknesses, they could be criminals, and they're coming in without asking. I have a lot of white friends say that to me and I say but yeah look have you thought of it this way.

You know 218 years ago we had boats come into Sydney Harbour. They came here without permission, they brought sicknesses that wiped out three quarters of my population, lots of them were criminals and they had no permission. How do you think we felt? So you put the shoe on the other foot, and they go, "Oh gosh. I hadn't thought of it that way." Let 'em in! Don't lock them in fences, don't take their kids away. We've done it. Look at all us Aboriginal kids with problems now 'cause you split their families up. We've got a big country here we should be able to share it and live in harmony. I suppose when Asian people first coming in to Australia, that sort of took the heat of the Aboriginal people. I thought at least they're picking on them now. Now they're saying things about them, "They're drug dealers," or "They all live in one spot, why do they all live in one spot out at Dandenong for?" Maybe 'cause they're too frightened to live amongst you people. You know? It's like us, we all live in communities, we stick up for each other! A lot people say... oh you hear the stories about, "Yeah I went to Alice Springs and I was too frightened to walk pass this group of Aboriginies, they were drinking in the park."

How do you think I feel when I walk into an RSL club or somewhere to get a meal in a strange town, I walk in three or four of me cousins that are black. Go back twenty years ago, you knew that you were going to get racially abused or something. We were always scared. Scared in our own country. But we're not taking off in boats we don't have to leave this country 'cause it's ours.

## ***Intercultural Understanding***

Last night I was at the Melbourne Town Hall playing for a Lebanese, for Lebanon...and I said to them when I played, "Look I will play music but I don't know enough about your politics, it's not political is it?" They said, "No, it's not political. It's by the Red Cross. We're actually just making aware of all the people that have been killed and children that have been bombed and you know..." So I think there's an area that too, I think we could help the Muslims, the Muslim community with their troubles. You look at the riots in Sydney. They don't just happen. If I looked at them young guys that they're blaming the rapes by the Muslim men on them young women, look at why they're doing that silly stuff. They're mixing with people on the streets, there's no work for them, no jobs, depression, all them things. There's answers for everything. If there's a riot there, there's a reason for it. If we could set up camps for them young boys and mix 'em with the Aboriginal people...And if they learnt the history of us, that people suffered here, even though they suffered in their own countries...I think we'd have good connection with a lot on these different cultures that are coming in that have suffered (for particular references on Aboriginal history see Barlow 1991, Broome 2005, Cameron-Bonney 1999, Coombes 2005, Culvener 1992, Poad and Miller 1984). Iraqis and Sudan and all these different places that have come in yeah... We've all suffered in some way.

They've just got to put a stop to in somewhere. Like there's a connection with the Jewish community and the Aboriginal community going right back to 1937 when some Aboriginal elders marched from Fitzroy into Melbourne with a protest letter to the Nazi government condemning the treatment of Jewish people. There's a connection there now. I went to a function at the Jewish Holocaust Museum where they thanked the Aboriginal people and I played the didgeridoo there at that function. So whenever I meet Jewish people now the first thing I say to them, if the moment's right, I'll say look sorry for what happened to your people. I remember meeting Joseph Gutnick once at a function and I said that to him, and he looked at me in the eye and said, "And I'm sorry for what happened to your people Ron." He said, "It's up to us not to let it happen again." He was right, he was right. So I think there's connections there for sure, we've had with the Jewish people over all them years.

### ***Stopping the Cycle***

But, us Aboriginal people I suppose, I think at times why do so many of us live in poverty. I know the reasons why. But maybe that's something we could learn from the Jewish people how to make more business. 'Cause the Aboriginal people are so used to sharing their assets, caring. Our lifestyle - if you're looking at western lifestyle about saving money, having a house, having assets – Aboriginal people don't think about tomorrow usually. I reckon probably 80% of Aboriginal people, live in the bottom 10% of the poorest people in this country. They're talking about – papers lately – breaking the poverty cycle, no mention of the Aboriginal people. We're the biggest poverty cycle in this country. That's hard for people, that's hard for Aboriginal people, especially young ones that have got on...for me I suppose building a house and having a car's a big thing. That was the only two things I wanted to do as a kid: get a car and house. 'Cause no other Aboriginal person in my community had one. So once I did that, a house and a car, having a happy family and doing a job that you love doing. You're lucky if you're doing that. So I'm blessed.

But yeah, it is hard to go home and drive in with my second hand, 300,000 km, Land Drover Discovery. It looks flash but its worth about 5 grand. But in my community people look at it and think I'm rich. So it's hard to walk in the two world sometimes, you don't like leaving your people behind. Michael Stuart always said, "Never forget the people that you leave behind, always put a hand back and help them up if you can." I suppose for me, the work I do with the young boys at Parkville does that. That's my payback. You can payback in a lot of ways, you can payback in art.

### ***Intergenerational Cultural Knowledge Transference***

I don't teach my art out in workshops out in the wider community, because there's too many going on with...you know a lot of Aboriginal people get ripped off for their art and stuff. But in there I teach them everything, them young boys, my every little secret to them. The mixtures that I use to fix up a hole, my wooden mouth pieces, cleaning the ends out to give it a better sound, the way that I burn, my style of burning. I teach them exactly it, 'cause for me if I see a piece of art that looks like mine, I feel proud that that young kid has learnt from me. I tell them, "That's my style but you'll develop

your own style. But that'll make me proud if you do my stuff." Whereas, a lot of other Aboriginal people hide their stuff, "don't show so and so my stuff, they'll pinch my style..." I think that's the wrong way to go, we hand things down. If I can hand something down that Uncle Sam Kirby taught me, he was one of the greatest emu egg carvers around. His eggs are in Buckingham Palace...and I seen his life. Sitting around watching him in Swan Hill.

My dad and my grandfather teaching me how to make boomerangs, where you give the boomerang to your grandfather, he wouldn't say a word the whole night, listening to nature around the camp fire at the Murrumbidgee River and hear the birds the mopoke owls. The boomerang had to be perfect, and he was a perfectionist. So for me when I make a didgeridoo, I put in my grandfather's teaching, and I go, "Right, this is going to be the best one that I've ever made." And I won't be, but if somewhere close, I make a mistake; like I can look in there I can see a mistake. Maybe 'cause I got tired and the line didn't go straight, but it's unique then....it's unique, there's not one that will be the same. So I say to the boys, they'll show it to me and I'll look at it and it will have scratches on it. I'll say, "Righto, you do another hour, add on twenty dollars." 'Cause you put more work into it. So by the time you finish it will be so beautiful, people will look at it and go, gee I'll give \$400 for that. But if you finish it where it is now, it's only worth \$300. The more work and effort you put in to that instrument...and it's your own, you sit there do it by hand, sand it up and back and down, you're putting your soul into it. So, my didgeridoos then become like my children.

Sometimes when I go to sell them after putting forty hours of work into 'em, you get really attached to 'em. That's why I like playing them, like this one here now, I'll probably play this for another month, then I'll have to hand it over. This one's going to a Papua New Guinean, a chief, as a present from a Victorian Police officer. So, when they go to special places, that's special, to make sure they go to a good home, rather than just be sold in a shop where you don't know where they're going.

So I try to teach the boys all that. And I tell them the prices I get. I try and say to them, "Recycle." Get an old piece of timber out the bush and we planed it off and get it all flat and underneath might be a beautiful piece of fiddle back redgum. And say to

them. "Now if we burn two turtles on there, and then we varnish it and we hang by a piece of beautiful chrome chain, get \$350 bucks there! It's worth it!" Even just putting each hour, say \$10 an hour, and you do thirty hours, that's \$300. So think of it that way maybe... If you can teach 'em to do some of those recycled timbers that even makes me feel prouder 'cause building our whole house out of recycled timbers, and our studio...I think in Australia we waste too much. So that's important for me to teach them boys that.

Sometimes I might get the boys in and a woman staff member might come in....So mines called 'Koori Culture' but it's wood work mainly. But I've had times when boys have been swearing in front of a female staff member, so I stop them and I say, "Boys, I grew up with five sisters and me nan and mum, and very strong women presence, and my dad never let us swear in front of them. So, when you swear in front of these female staff you actually offend me. You're offending *me*." Now I know it's not the right thing to say, I should be straight out, "That's the wrong thing to do in front of a woman." But, by them offending me, I'm the Elder, she's the young female carer, they won't swear in front of her. Then I say, "But listen boys, at the end of it, imagine if that's your sister there, would you like these boys all swearing and carrying on in front of her. What happens if it's your mother?" "Yeah, nah I wouldn't let that happen..." "What happens if it's your grandmother? Would you let anyone swear?" "No way I'd smash him." "Well let's pretend that that woman there is part of your family. It's degrading to her to swear in front of her." So that's the way you can teach them to learn really about respect of Elders first, then respect for women.

Whenever I come across positive things that Elders have done. Things out in the community. I always take videos in and show them or tell them where I've been. I tell them, "Yeah, well last night I played at Melbourne Town Hall and you boys missed out, you should've seen all the spunky young women there! All your age. You're locked up in here, what's going on? You're in the prime of your life you boys, you should be out there!" So I try and make 'em feel bad through funny stories, "You're missing out boys, you should be out fishin'." One of the shocks for me...I picked up a young boy, I was working for the Aboriginal legal service and I had to pick up this young guy (name) from Old Torana, I took up to Warikoo Station. On the way we ran out of petrol, or

nearly did, at boundary bend, so we had to camp on the river. So, when I put the swags out and threw the lines in and got the fires going, this little (name), we lay back on our swags waiting for a fish to bite we got nothing, and he looked up to the sky and he said, "Unbelievable. I haven't seen the stars for two years." You been locked up every night in this cement building. It blew me away. I thought, "I couldn't do that. I could not go without seeing the stars for two years." It's too close to my spiritual side. The open skies around the camp fire.

Then eventually... we slept the night and had a lot good fun and there was some birds singing out that frightened him... and I got him up there, and never heard from him for years later, and I was invited to a NAIDOC function at Port Phillip prison, the night before we went out there, there was an Aboriginal man hung himself in the cell. And when they told me who it was, it was (name). This young kid that I'd spent time with... You know, so I felt really down. And we went in there, there was all these Elders and we got to Port Phillip and the security, they had us in this freezing cold area and we stayed there, like all the Elders were freezing, and we stayed there out of respect for them boys. Otherwise, there's no way, it was so cold.... The following year everything changed. They all of the sudden turned from treating us like criminals, till we had it in the library, we were treated like kings. Must have been a complaint put in about our treatment, of the Elders, having them in freezing cold condition, the night after an Aboriginal man had been hung in one of the cells... and all the Aboriginal people are saying, "Yeah, that cell, it's gotta be smoked out. Don't you put any other Aboriginal people in that cell until that spirit's let free." So, it's hard when you come across... there's always some connection with tragedy for Aboriginal people on a daily basis. Like two weeks ago, all my friends got killed in the bad car accident down at Donald. All from my home community, two little children and young Danny Kelly who was born beside my house. Yeah, it's amazing how they keep going, Aboriginal families, with the tragedies they've been through. I know some families who've lost their husband, and mother, and brother all within a three month period and things like that. So, you talk about suffering, then all the causes from... I do blame, every reason behind an Aboriginal tragedy is a white man's problem.

So how do we do it? We've got to walk together. Two hands together, and say right how can we both fix this problem. We caused it their problem, they didn't invite us

here to take away their land and mess their whole lives up, we got to help them. We've never ever paid rent for the land or paid them for the land full stop. Somewhere along the line Aboriginal people have got to be paid back. It doesn't have to be in monetary terms, but if we can finally get a government that will go, "Let's fix this problem instead of just doing it for votes." Sir Doug Nicholls said in his book, "The problem with our people, for far too long, has been mismanaged by non-Aboriginals." He's right, it's still going on now. Living in third world conditions, leprosy, going blind, high sugar levels, heart conditions, it's all caused by white man's problems I don't deny that, but we can fix it. Yep, a lot of good people out there doing good work. There's just got to be more of it. Better understanding...and I reckon new Australians coming here if they can get on board too. If we can take a little bit of everybody's culture and put it together and make an Australian culture, we'll have a good country I reckon. 'Cause we haven't got one. It's a sad thing to say Australians haven't, what can we say? If you ask someone what it's like to be Australian, what are they gonna say? What are we proud of? That we stole the country? Or we had a whole race of people suffer because we come here? You got all the people trying to grab little bits of Irish and Scottish, and Aboriginal...but if we can get a little bit of everything and put the good bits in and make an Australian culture. If we look at what a lot of people are writing in what should be good questions asked for new refugees coming in and someone wrote, "Yeah, how many cartons of grog are you gonna need to watch a Grand Final with time-on?" And that pretty much explains Australian culture really. You know, watching sport and drinking grog! So, we gotta invent our own, make our own up. Bit of Muslim, bit of Buddhism, bit of Christian, bit of Aboriginal. The good bits from everything...we'll be right I reckon.

# Part III. STRADDLING TWO WORLDS

## The Black/White Divide

One of the hardest things to do these days is to walk in two worlds (see Harrison 1975, Gordon 1962 who also write about this issue). It's the most difficult thing for all Aboriginal people to do. My five years as Aboriginal Advisor to the Victoria Police typified this. I was confronted with this on a daily basis and had to draw on my creative strength to succeed at it. I try and explain to non-Aboriginals how hard it is for those Aboriginal kids, they've got to live in the Aboriginal community, and the non-Aboriginal community, and to walk those two worlds is very difficult.

When I work with Aboriginal people who are long term unemployed, I talk about the difficulties of living in the two worlds. I tell them that I was lucky, because my father taught me strategies to help me. With Aboriginal people, he taught me how to have my hands behind my back and avoid eye contact when I meet an Elder. With non-Indigenous people, to show respect in their culture, he taught me how to shake hands, squeeze the hand, and make eye contact. Many Aboriginal kids don't know that. In my experience working with the police, Koorie kids would often look down when talking to a police officer and have it misconstrued as disrespect of authority. The idea of Straddling Two Worlds occurs as a theme in the following stories.

### ***Bridging the Gap***

So Balranald in New South Wales, I often start off with saying that growing up outside my country in other Aboriginal people's country like the Mutti Mutti people of Balranald, right at the start I often say how old we are, because we often say Aboriginal people have been here for a couple of thousand years, or six thousand, or ten thousand, or thirty, or forty, or fifty, or sixty, whatever...So I often say growing up in Balranald is a land of the Mungo man and Mungo woman, the oldest discovered remains in the world and how unbelievable that was. To be able to tell people that, I

often say, them discovered remains, we believe, could be around sixty thousand years old and if you put 'em onto a clock and make each minute a thousand years, that means the Aboriginal people have been here for the whole clock. Then I try and get the audience to say well how long have we been here - and that's when I jump on the other side the Scottish side - how long have us white people been here and it works out about twelve and quarter seconds on that clock.

Generations are often brought up within Australia. "My family's been here for five, six generations, on this farm, I'm very much with my feet in the ground here." Then I tell them, well Aboriginal families have been here for, could have even been four thousand generations of people, so how do you think they feel? How do you think they feel having owned something for that long to have it taken from them? So you've gotta get them to feel the other side. To put their feet in your shoes, virtually, and I try and do that. For me that's a way of bridging the gaps..

I suppose why it was seemingly easy for me is cause I grew up in the white community and the black community, growing up in Balranald, in the little town I did. Going to school in town, working out on the station and living out there with white and black people, so I learnt both sides. I was lucky that my parents were always making us aware what troubles we could come across living the two worlds. I often say that, it's hard for Aboriginal people living in a white man's world and a black man's world in this country. I use my family's experiences, growing up on that big station. How I was blessed, with my grandfather, who taught me all about the bush. My dad, who was a horse legend in the town, and being a horse breaker for this station and working for fifty seven years straight. Mum and dad, and five sisters, and me grandfather, and how they never drank alcohol. So, while telling them stories it breaks down stereotypes for people that think we're all drunks and lazy and don't want to work and rely on the dole. So, I talk about all the positives, bring positive stories into my talks, so they live on our side as well. But I can jump from one to the other. I always jump on their side, and back on our side, and try and do that balancing act.

## ***Ancestral ties***

I suppose the Bedouins, the old goat herders, in a funny way reminded me - they were the original people of Jordan, they wander around with goats and live their whole lives simple, with the family goats, what an unbelievable thing - yeah that's great... New York was the same. Going there and meeting all the different nationalities, it just blew me away. 'Cause I'd never been interested in traveling, I always said, "Nup. I wanna see all of Australia first." Which I still haven't. I still gotta get to Uluru, Darwin, the Kimberleys I haven't gone there yet. But, now I've got that bug. After that the real special then for me was going over to Scotland, after that with Sarah to a wedding. What an experience to see, to go to a country and feel at home. Walking onto a burial site, the feelings that I get through my feet, of my ancestors over me, I had the same feeling when I went to stone circle sites around Enviness.

I thought that my great-great-grandfather, the late Rob Stuart, must have been watching down thinking how proud he was that his great-great-grandson had come home to Scotland. When I played the didgeridoo at the wedding, they introduced me in the most amazing way, they said, "This is Ron Murray. He's a Scottish Aboriginal." Yeah...and I thought, "That's such a true thing to say anyway." But yeah, when I finally went to this sacred site, when I went on, the man that I was with he was a historian, I took off me shoes and he said, "You won't walk in there." 'Cause it was like a midden site, this mound of dirt full of stinging nettles. I said, "I don't care, I won't walk on here with shoes." So, I took off me shoes, walked through the whole stinging nettles, never felt even a sting. I was there for two hours, I reckon, walking around the stone circle through the stinging nettles. Not till I got out, out of that site did my feet start stinging me! But I didn't feel it in there. So that was special. Very special...

I think a lot of Aboriginal people don't do that, "We're Aboriginal." But gee, we gotta be proud if there's a white side on ya. We're always looking back at our clans, but you gotta look at your white side too, if you have got white blood in ya. When I look at mine, Jackson Stuart's side served in the wars, captured by the Germans, there was a Cobb and Co. mailman he used to swim his horses across the Murray River to get the mail out. So, I'm proud of that side too. I'm lucky. I suppose for some Aboriginal family that might have been introduced, the white blood might have been introduced through

a rape, maybe, you know there's thousands of them stories out there, and that's not a very happy side to come into your family. But when it's mine, where it was a mutual marriage between a Scottish man and an Aboriginal woman, I'm lucky I suppose, I haven't them issues. So we've all got different stories. Different stories, and different journeys, we got a common theme under it all: the struggle, educating people.

In my work, I aim to foster a sense of pride in Aboriginal people and to develop a sense of understanding and recognition of our history. I'm not really doing a lot of things differently from the old people. They would have taught the same.

### ***Conclusion***

Stories effect change. The stories I tell provide evidence of this taking place within my practice as a Cultural Awareness Trainer. My stories have highlighted the ways that Western and Indigenous cultures have come together and how this has promoted change and cultural awareness. The stories about Philip Glass and the didgeridoo, and my grandmother's white doctor assisting her to get her children away to safety, are instances of Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal cultures coming together in positive ways. Other examples where my story-telling methodology has worked to effect change include the stories I told about the prisoner who binned the Pauline Hanson cup, the teenagers I have spoken to who became proud of their culture, and my grandmother's landlord who was unexpectedly in the audience one day when I was telling one of my stories. My aim in getting people to listen to my stories is to develop people's cultural awareness. *Dadirri* facilitates change. Through the process of deep listening to my stories, people change their perceptions and understandings of Indigenous culture. This has been the aim of my cultural awareness workshops. I believe my work has made the wider community more aware of what it means to be Aboriginal. It has engendered a wider understanding about social, cultural and political issues in the Aboriginal community by building bridges of awareness between Indigenous and Western worldviews.

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## ***APPENDIX 1:***

### ***Wilin Centre Curriculum Project***

#### **Module One 'Indigenous Cultures in Australia' within VCA Graduate Certificate in Indigenous Arts Management**

**Curriculum Developer: Ron Murray**

#### ***Overview of Curriculum Content***

The Curriculum for Module One '**Indigenous Cultures in Australia**' will have a strong narrative focus and will reflect the oral traditions of Indigenous cultures.

The curriculum will include:

- **An Overview of Course Content** in note form of Module One 'Indigenous Cultures in Australia' within the subject of 'Indigenous Arts and Cultural Identity'. The module will cover Indigenous Traditions, Relational Culture, Self-determination, Political and Cultural History, Victorian and National Indigenous Arts and Cultural Expression, Cultural Resource History.
- **A Set of Readings** (refer Appendix 2) for the 'Indigenous Cultures in Australia' Module drawn from chapters of predominantly secondary sources gathered over 15 years of Cultural Awareness Training
- **A Set of Learning Resources** comprised of a collection of original art and cultural artefacts
- **A Set of Key Questions and Learning Activities** drawn from the Readings and Cultural Stories

## **APPENDIX 2:**

### ***Readings to Support Training Materials***

**Barlow, A. 1991, *Tonanga: Albert Namatjira An Arrernte Man*, MacMillan Company, Victoria.**

**Broome, R. 2005, *Aboriginal Victorians: A history since 1800*, Allen and Unwin, New South Wales.**

This is a history of Victoria in the 1800s. It tells stories and contains many photographs of people living through assimilationist story. It is an excellent resource on mission life throughout Victoria.

**Cameron-Bonney, L. 1999, *John Bulmer's Recollections of Victorian Aboriginal Life*, Ron Vanderwal (Editor) 1855 – 1908, Museum, Victoria, Australia.**

John Bulmer's recollections reveal living conditions after white settlement in the mission life in Gippsland. It contains photographs of people who were living at the Lake Tyers Mission in East Gippsland.

**Campbell, A. 1990, *Out of the Dreaming*, Self-published, South Australia.**

In this book, the story of Lola Cameron-Bonney is told, revealing the cultural traditions and old stories of the Tattjara people in the early years after the invasion, of the Murray River in South East Australia.

**Clark, M. T. 1966, *Pastor Doug: The Story of an Aboriginal Elder*, Lansdowne Press, Sydney.**

A useful resource for learning about a positive role model in the Aboriginal community. Pastor Doug made a significant contribution to the welfare of the Aboriginal community. He was the only Aboriginal to receive a knighthood in Australia.

**Clarke, I. 1995, *Scars on the Landscape: A Register of Massacre Sites of Western Victoria*, AITSIS. Canberra, Australia.**

This book brings reality close to home. It describes massacres in Victoria in the early years of the invasion. This history is often ignored because of Terra Nullius beliefs and teachings in the schools.

**Coombs, K, 2005, *A Fortunate Accident: A boy from Balranald*, Australian Affairs Victoria, Melbourne, Australia.**

This book tells the story of another positive role model. Throughout his life, Kevin Coombs has been to be a tireless warrior, overcoming the odds of being an Aboriginal with a disability.

**Culvener, C.C. 1992, *The Boundaries of Mount Franklin Aboriginal Reserve*, Jim Crow Press, Victoria.**

This book talks about an Aboriginal Reserve and why it failed. It describes the conditions of living on an Aboriginal Reserve and the problems that arose when the surrounding farms encroached on it, making it unsustainable and finally forcing the Aboriginals to leave.

**Curr, E.M. 1965 (second edition) *Recollections of Squatting in Victoria: From 1941 – 1851*, Melbourne University Press, Victoria.**

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