Analysis of Professional Practice:
Sista Girl: An Indigenous Woman’s Perspective on Being a Producer / Director / Curator / Creative manager in the Koori Community

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

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Overview of Research

Story-telling is central to the work I do. I use various forms of media to document stories from within our Indigenous community including film/video, audio-recordings, digital stories, art, sound scapes and on-line journals.

My research question was: In what ways can multi-media enrich the telling of stories from an Indigenous point of view?

Other important examinations of this research are:

- Analysis of the process of previous projects, and the effect these have had on participants—why have past approaches not been effective? How can this project learn from those mistakes?
- How can a researcher facilitate consultation and create community engagement within Aboriginal communities?
- What are the outcomes of ‘Pitcha This”? How can a community utilize the outcomes of the project?

Within the Indigenous language there is an adaptation to the English language, this language is not recognised as a dialect but I am writing this exegesis with the colloquial idiom commonly used in speech within my mob, meaning my Indigenous community. This particularly applies to the language used to describe the process I adopted for the Pitcha This project.
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### APPENDIX 1:

Content produced: 34  
   - Digital Stories from the *Pitcha This*  
   - A selection of five Digital Stories on DVD

### APPENDIX 2:

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1. Background
The Victorian Health Promotion Foundation (VicHealth), in collaboration with the VicHealth Indigenous advisory group, identified the importance of promoting positive and realistic images and stories of Victorian Indigenous communities as a way of promoting the emotional and spiritual wellbeing of Indigenous communities.

I developed the Imaging project described in this exegesis as part of a body of work to promote Indigenous leadership. It aimed to engage Indigenous young people, elders and their communities in a process of identifying and producing positive, realistic images to reflect the strengths and participation of community members in everyday life.

2. The Tender Brief

Knowing that three other filmmakers were going for the tender, I thought about it and realized that too often, unless the film is health promotion with a direct audience, most of the films and DVD's that are made are a one-off production. They always end up on a shelf, collecting dust, and are never accessible by the community. I thought about the contemporary context with availability of the web and new technologies, and thought maybe I could produce an online element to the project, which would be accessible to everybody.

Having an arts background “working in community and with community”, I have always felt it important to share the skills we have. So, I decided to combine these media.

Through my company Sista Girl Productions, I called for Expressions of Interest from Indigenous communities.

I started the process by going into each community that had responded with an expression of interest. By talking to that community, I identified a project leader. I sat with them to see how the project would work in their community. We considered what things we could access in the community and how their organisation could support this, with for example, transport, food or venue. We considered anything that would help move the project along while still allowing us room to move within the budget.

In the expressions of interest, I asked potential participants to respond to the question: “how will you support the development of the project at the local level?” It was important to see how we could make the project work within the confines of the budget.
Some responses to expressions of Interest
Boondy Walsh from the Sunraysia Institute TAFE Swan Hill Campus Koorie Unit said:

The ‘invisibility’ of the local Indigenous people leaves room for many misconceptions about the nature and make-up of this community, both within the Koori community and the wider community. For example, the 2000 “Indigenous Employment Barriers – Swan Hill” report by Central Murray Area Consultative Committee Inc., identified stereotyping of Indigenous people as a significant issue, and the “most common response from Indigenous students when asked about social issues.”

This project would provide a positive opportunity for local Koori people to document a more accurate view of who they are, their connections and relationships, where they work, live and so on, which will strengthen the community’s sense of identity while also providing a useful picture for local government, health and education providers and so on.

Daryl Rose Winda Mara Aboriginal Cooperative Heywood outlined the potential benefits to the community:

We see this as an extension for current participants and a way to encourage others. ... the project would build on our youth suicide prevention activities such as our song writing camp, cultural exchange, dance camp, adventure leadership ... as well as to utilise our oral history tapes for stories ... and work with our soon to be revived history program. ... The project will provide support in recording our leadership program ... and record our communities activities in our future endeavours.

Trevor Pearce Mullum Mullum Indigenous Gathering Place Croydon

This would provide an exciting opportunity to capture the stories, knowledge and experience of our Indigenous people as individuals, mothers, fathers, young people, children, aunties and uncles and to be able to promote this within the Indigenous and wider community.

We would welcome the opportunity to participate in the Imaging project as many Indigenous people are suffering from low self esteem and facing racism on many fronts in the wider community as this has been the case for many years.

Rumbalara Football Netball club (RFNC)

Rumbalara plays a significant role in leadership for its community, the Pitcha This – Indigenous Imaging Project” would capture community members of all ages through the strong cultural and social connections to the sporting arena in many interesting and positive ways to our community. Our club and its community members are ready to tell these stories, and would contribute to the Goulburn Valley’s social, economic and cultural welfare.
Jade Colgan - The Victorian Indigenous Youth Advisory Council (VIYAC)

*The Pitcha This project fits in nicely with VIYAC’s objectives, to be a “Strong Voice for Indigenous Youth” in reference to digital storytelling - the two main aims of the project being to identify and promote strong and positive images of an Indigenous community that reflects its strengths and community spirit and secondly to build skills and capacity of individuals who participate.*

*The VIYAC members agreed on the most important things to them; Culture, Identity and Racism. There may be some scope to take those issues further in this project and develop those ideas into images and a digital storytelling piece.*

### 3. The Indigenous Imaging Project

Trading as Sista Girl Productions, I was contracted by VicHealth to implement the aptly titled *Pitcha This* Project.

I then selected six Indigenous communities to participate in the project.

These communities were:
- The Victorian Indigenous Youth Advisory Council (VIYAC)
- Sunraysia Institute TAFE Swan Hill Campus Koori Unit
- Mullum Mullum Indigenous Gathering Place Croydon
- Winda Mara Aboriginal Cooperative Heywood,
- Bairnsdale /Lakes Entrance Community

I had to put all my plans into action, working with six communities across the state was going to be a big job.

Appointing project managers in each community was the thing that was going to help bring the project together because otherwise, I would have needed to go from one side of Victoria to the other (in a short time), to keep the project continually flowing.

Liaising with each Community Project Officer to discuss the consultation process and a suitable time for the implementation of the commencement phase of the project was a huge task. But once it was in place, I was able to give each community their project outlines, including dates.
4. The Consultation Process

One of the things that commonly happens in community, is that people from outside come in with big ideas for projects or sourcing information from community and then they leave, never to be seen again.

The consultation process is very important to the project. The way I approach it is to go into the community, to sit with the mob and explain who I am, where I’m from and what it is that I do.

Now, I’m not originally from Victoria but have been living and working here in community for over twenty years. And even though I have worked in these communities over the years, I have found that I still need to do the same drill every time. My background doesn’t mean that I can just create a project and expect that community will want to participate.

You need to get to know the mob, the ones who are going to participate. You need to earn their trust. My experience is that a common response in approaching the communities is “No. No mobs going to come in here and tell us what to do, get what they want and leave…”.

An illustration of this is the experience I had in Heywood as part of the Pitcha This project. I knew they were setting up touch screen information at the front of the cultural centre and I thought ‘perfect’. These stories would be able to just slot in to that information about stories about people from this area. It’s about looking at the bigger picture to work out how this project could work in that community, whether it’s about photography or digital stories. I thought training up people with photography would be great. I thought would empower people and enable them to directly contribute to projects around health and wellbeing.

In my experience I have found that I could drive four hours hoping to have a meeting and then found that I had driven all that way for nothing. I then had to turn around and drive four hours back. But at other times, to my surprise I was overwhelmed with the response. That is all part and parcel of working with community. Until you have earned their trust, you are just not sure if the project is going to work.

It’s about persistence and hanging in there, because you believe in the project, and you know the community is going to get something out of it.

An important part of the process is explaining the project, making sure that in the process it is always about the community or participants involved, so that right from the very start the community has a sense of ownership.

My approach with community was to show a power point presentation and just outline what we were going to do within the project. I would talk about myself, and even being a filmmaker, I would never give the community the full breadth
of what I do, because I didn’t want to intimidate them or get them scared about taking photographs or making films. So I would just give them a brief overview of what I do and some of the community projects I had worked on in the past. By showing other community participation in projects, and their outcomes it was easier to keep the mob engaged, as they could relate to community.

While I did have questions I was seeking to explore through the project (my central research question upfront among them), with this project it wasn’t about what I was going to get out of it, it was about the participants.

As an ethnographic project, the process was to go into the community and to seek to understand it from the point of view of how the community sees it.

I see myself as a facilitator of ideas and processes. I want to open doors and give community members another view of how people from different media backgrounds can work collaboratively with them to produce high quality work.
5. Rationale
Story-telling is crucial to our individual, communal and cultural identity. Story is learning, celebrating, healing and remembering. It can mark life, enrich individual emotional and cultural development and assist in making sense of our world.

It is very important for Indigenous people to tell their stories. Our people have many scars. The scars are layered like in a scar tree. The scars are emotional, physical and even traditional. There is a thread of scars through my work.

Stories open wounds that allow the process of the healing to begin. It’s like going to see a counsellor but we do it through media and cultural activity that feels natural to us, such as story-telling and art-making.

Within our community there are a lot of literacy problems reading and writing skills are a big concern but I find that multi-media is a non-threatening way to introduce the mob to this new technology. Also in bringing the communities up to date with new technology, we have a chance to skill our people up.

As a practicing filmmaker, I think it’s a great way of communicating how important it is for Indigenous people to tell their own stories. That is something we have been fighting hard for in our film industry for many years. Aboriginal stories told by Aboriginal people; our mob have great imaginations and are known for being storytellers.

One of the particular benefits to our communities is that it helps in the handing down of knowledge and documents our history and culture. This is achieved through oral histories – the journeys and memories of our elders – those who gave us our identities, our culture and made a path for us to follow in, our aunties, uncles, grandmothers and grandfathers, who are very reluctant to talk about the past and past injustices.

As explained below, as a researcher, my practice must be informed by a theoretical investigation. Through a process of cultural activity frameworks through which engagement and understanding have been developed. These frameworks, or the relationship of the practice and this document are that this exegesis describes
a) a process,
b) a series of research questions reflecting on this process,
c) outcomes which have resulted in empowerment of Aboriginal communities and momentum for further such projects.
6. Methodology

I aimed to give voice to our community through forms of New Media. The concept of Dadirri ‘deep and respectful listening which builds community’ forms the basis of my research methodology.\(^1\) Stories are very important in my work. My research project borrows elements from ethnography and the storytelling approach of Narrative Inquiry, but draws more heavily on ethnography.

Ethnography is defined as the process when the researcher goes into community and seeks to understand it as the community sees it. Or as Marshall has referred it the act of observing directly the behavior of a social group and producing a description there of.\(^2\)

The purpose of this ethnographic study is to document the lives and experiences of Aboriginal people, and to facilitate this through the telling of their own stories. This will be important knowledge for the communities themselves, and Australian society more broadly. The research hopes to investigate how multimedia can help Aboriginal people to better understand and record their own histories and culture.

As Marshall has observed, an ethnographic approach traditionally involves immersion by the Ethnographer into a social group, culture or environment over an extended period.\(^3\) In this project I act as an ethnographer by going into the communities, engaging with them, teaching and participating with them and then observing them.

With my projects “Deep Listening” is the main ingredient. I listen to the community to learn about their needs. This informs me as to how to manage the project to a final product, which the community will own. I also am able to make them aware of potential ways in which this product can be used to further benefit the community. In this way we both learn together.

Deep Listening has a history in psychology and behaviors sciences, but the way in which it was used in the project is outlined in the definitions of deep listening below.

Some see Deep Listening as something we have to learn, but for us mob it is just our way of life. We live and breathe it every day. It doesn’t matter if I am practitioner or a student or even if I was a doctor, its all about ‘respect and listening’. It doesn’t matter what your involvement with a community is, you need to respect the land/country of where you are and acknowledge the mob of that area.

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\(^2\) See Marshall quoted in Nick Agafonoff, ‘Adapting ethnographic research methods to ad hoc commercial market research’, *Qualitative Market Research: International Journal*, vol.9, no.2, p.117

\(^3\) Ibid.
Deep Listening is based on stories, silences and the spaces that lie between. When applied as a research method, it means taking the time to develop relationships and to listen respectfully and responsibly.  

Deep Listening describes the way of learning, working and being together. It is informed by the concepts of community and reciprocity. It means listening with a sense of responsibility to the stories being told. It also means listening and observing the self as well.  

Deep Listening in its simplest form is a group of people coming together and yarning, discussing issues, telling happenings, or relating stories. In a more structured form, Deep Listening can be a social means of putting across ideas and issues; sharing experiences through dialogue and discussion; sharing views and opinions or relating happenings of the past to the present to indicate a possible venture into the future. Deep Listening is about sitting down without any inhibitions, with no restrictions and rules, and allowing a natural unfolding of the discussion process.

The Yarning Circle
This process becomes a natural thing it is part of the way we are, we always create this circular environment so that everybody is comfortable and we can interact with each other. Once we start yarning or talking, there’s just a sense that everybody is included in the conversation. Even if you don’t have anything to say, it doesn’t matter, because you’re still part of this circle. However, some maybe feel shame and therefore take some time to speak up, but then they approach me afterwards to talk about their idea.

Circle of Story- as I explained in the story of our initiation into this work, the forebears of traditions of the story of circle are indeed ancient, they source back to root traditions in every one of our cultures. They of course remain vital in the root cultures that survive to this day, most certainly in the living traditions of our Native peoples and their ceremony.

What we know is that “when you gather people in a room, and listen, deeply listen to what they are saying, and by example alone encourage others to listen, magic happens”.  

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5 See Atkinson op cit.
Project Development and implementation

My aims with this research, and which continue in my work, are to foster a sense of pride in my people and their respective communities; to facilitate their understanding of the importance of fully owning and recognising the importance of their own stories; and to allow each participant to dispel any fear of new media and new technology.

The work involved capturing the stories and images of the communities in a culturally appropriate, sensitive and respectful way.

I thought about the youth a lot. They are equipped with mobile telephones these days, and this means they have a tool to archive quite high quality images. I looked at Facebook and the web, where I can see within the last few years that this has become like a community gallery where everyone’s clicking into everybody’s page and checking out photographs. This has become a way of the mobs keeping in touch with each other, like new Koori Grapevine that enables the mob (family) living in Melbourne to have contact with the mob in Echuca, Warrnambool or even interstate as well.

The project commenced with community consultation to identify the themes and issues that impact on the health and well being of each particular community. I built trust by ‘Deep Listening’ I visited and took the time to gauge where each community was at, and to understand their perceptions of people coming in from outside of their communities. Following on from that, I then presented to them in their own communities and in their own ‘speak’, the aims of the project, which was about showing them the cameras and eliciting their ideas about what they wanted to document. The communities then came back to me with images and ideas about their communities, which then resulted in a consultative approach to fostering POSITIVE IMAGES for each of their individual communities.

So in each area the themes across the board were quite common in the community. For example, common themes include: The Stolen Generation, Women’s Business, Men’s reflection of Urban men (men’s business roles), Through our elders eyes, Youth – two worlds, Meeting places, Family, Families – the mixed make up of the community, Women’s group – growth, Foster parents, Art & Crafts, Missions, Church – Salvation Army, Youth – Woora Collage – before/after, Education, Dancers, Entertainers, Police, Cultural Values, Loss, Identity, Funerals, Artists, Our music people, NAIDOC.

The process of the Indigenous community selecting and presenting relevant themes, empowers the community through giving them ownership, a voice and a method to express their issues, for example around land, youth etcetera (as above). For example, the issue of the elder’s knowledge being lost was a problem; the establishment of stories around this encouraged elders to participate and facilitated cross-generational engagement.
The next stage was to work on each theme by collecting stories as photographs. This would then form the basis for the next stage, which was to select particular themes and stories for building into Digital Storytelling.

My work in the film industry has led me to undertake research into archival material and I have frequently found that a lot of the photographs I look at are very posed. They are not taken by Indigenous people, and you can see in the photographs the awkwardness of dressing in a dress or a suit as opposed to being wrapped in a possum skin cloak. I’ve always looked at those photographs and thought, “where in those photographs has the mob had ownership of that photograph?”

A journalist from The Miami Herald observed that Aboriginals are one of the globe’s invisible people. Most know them only from tourist ads, in which they appear almost as totems, evoking outback exotica. A smaller number know some of their art, the colorful dot paintings of a strange, sunburned landscape. Yet there are few images that convey the humanity of Australia’s struggling Aboriginal population, who […] can seem invisible even at home. But that may be starting to change, thanks to the movies.\(^7\)

I was working in a sensitive area. Some of the women were reticent about having their photograph taken because of their experiences of growing up on Lake Tyers. A woman told me of her earliest memories of being photographed as a child by tourist, who would gather the Aboriginal children by throwing coins in the water or lollies on the ground to get their happy snaps of the Aborigines. She has never liked her photograph being taken ever since.

Another woman told me of her negative experiences with promises in the past where people had come and she had been interviewed and photographed for books, she had never received the photographs they had promised, or copies of the publications. Most of these elders had only ever seen these photographs many years later in collections and archives, where they recognised themselves in the pictures.

Pitcha This was implemented in three stages;

Stage 1: Stills Photography
Using ‘the yarning circle’ I worked with Wayne Quilliam and the participants to identify issues and themes that then were used to produce and promote realistic and positive images that reflect the strengths and achievements of our Victorian Indigenous communities.

Having Indigenous artists working with the community helped to break down any fears or barriers that the participants might have had in working with non-Indigenous personnel, and also in the learning process of not feeling shame if they didn't know or understand something.

I collaborated with Wayne Quilliam who is an Indigenous Australian photographer working on the international scene. His work is a fusion of traditional spirituality and contemporary photographic processes. Each image represents an interpretation of his culture in the modern world. It is his dream to exhibit his work in every country of the world to share the beauty of his culture. Quilliam ran two photography workshops per community.

Stage 2: Pitcha This Photo Voice Project
Working along side Wayne Quilliam, participants were asked to identify a photo voice subject. The obvious stereotypes of Indigenous peoples are elite sports people or famous artists. Participants were asked to explore achievements of many others who have achieved through careers in health, community work, education, law, business, government and welfare as well.

It is not possible to look at imaging without dealing with the bigger issues of colonisation, dispossession, oppression, disconnection, stolen generation, native title, racism and mental health. These subjects were brought up for discussion.

I then worked at encouraging the community to take ownership of the ideas from their perspective. For example, with the Gippsland Elders, project leaders organised the community event, described what was going to happen and held a free barbeque. They organised it all and then we came and joined them. The result of that event was the taking portraits of over thirty elders; most had never previously had their photographs taken.

Stage 3: Digital Story Telling
The central premise of this digital storytelling project is to ensure people tell their own personal stories using the powerful media of their voice and the rich familiar archive of image and memory that contribute to their lives.

Building on stage one and two of this project, Sista Girl in partnership with ACMI (Australian Centre for the Moving Image), delivered this section.
The Australian Centre for the Moving Image

ACMI describe themselves in information to the public as world leading and state-of-the-art. ACMI is Australia’s premier engine for screen and digital culture industries. From a century of cinema, to television, computer games and interactive media arts, ACMI presents a unique program of exhibitions, film programs, talks, forums, education programs, production workshops, community activities and lending services. Visitors to ACMI can explore all about the moving image, engage with the industry and get hands-on experience by making their own moving image stories. In presenting these programs, ACMI celebrates the convergence of art and technology, and fosters innovation in Australia's dynamic screen industries. 

ACMI had previously undertaken a workshop in an Indigenous community, and recognised the importance of using an Indigenous facilitator in working with ‘the mob’. So when I approached them with this project they said “even better you run it and we will support you”; ACMI’s Screen Events Manager, Helen Simondson described it this way:

ACMI recognises Sista Girl Productions strong media based work and digital storytelling work with Indigenous communities. On the strength and quality of the work Kimba has produced with these communities, ACMI invited Kimba to present her work at the First Person International Digital Storytelling conference in February 2006. Digital Storytelling and community facilitated film forms provide communities with the opportunity to tell their own stories and share and articulate their own sense of self through stories and images. ACMI is excited about the opportunity to partner with Sista Girl Productions to assist in the delivery of the Indigenous Imaging project proposal.

ACMI provided the use of a travelling kit consisting of scanners, printer and computers, which allowed the project delivery for ten to twelve participants at a time in each community over four days.

To be able to supply this equipment and to hold the workshops at each community, organisation helped the process and delivery of this project because the mob were comfortable within in their own environments, other community members and family and could come in and participate.

Creating a safe place for members of the community to be able to explore and express issues and the stories was critical to success. For past projects I have worked in situations where I have had to get the mob to come to places like the local library or TAFE institute. These venues are much less successful because they don’t have the same community feel.

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Accessed 21/5/09.

9 Source: VicHealth Indigenous imaging project support letter 26/4/06
The traditional digital storytelling workshop was three days. We chose to incorporate an extra day for travel, set up and introduction so that we could fully focus on the three workdays, knowing that we may have hurdles to jump in the process.

Making Digital Stories
The Yarning Circle process, described in the methodology section was important in the process at this point.

Identifying story and script writing
Participants were asked to do a draft story only (roughly around 300-350 words). They were then asked to bring 30-40 photographs related to their story (matching two photographs to each sentence).

To put their story down on paper gave them confidence to express themselves in writing... in some instances we had to start them off by typing their words, and then have them take over once they were inspired enough to take ownership and do it themselves.

The crafting of the story
After the draft of a story is read out in the yarning circle participants, I then facilitate a process of giving and receiving feedback to each other. Based on this feedback, we then continue on to the final draft. In this process I got the participants to read out aloud for practice to check they haven’t approached the story in a linear, or formal way, which may not be engaging. I ask the following key questions:

- Can you sum up the story in one sentence?
- Are you clear who you are writing the story for?
- Have you considered your own style of writing?

Voice-over
Once participants were happy with their scripted story and we had a few read throughs, it was then time to start recording each individual’s story.

Basic computer skills
The photographs were scanned or imported using photosh. The digital format was a successful way for people to gather a whole lot of photographs from different places together and preserve them outside the albums and mantle piece frames. In the process, new meanings were applied to the images e.g. newspaper photographs or war photographs were given a new context. A number of elders had really old photographs, some painted portraits of relatives and so on. This part of the process was a new world for many people, having options to zoom in on aspects of the image or treat it graphically in a different way.
One example is that a photograph that had been kept under glass by an uncle became accessible to the whole extended family. In this way the family history, which was vulnerable to being lost through decay or just through the passage of time, is now in a permanent form and accessible to every member of the family.

**Assembling Stories**
Once the participants had their photographs scanned and in files and their voice-over to their story had been recorded, it was time to assemble the story. Participants were then introduced to the editing programming (Final Cut Pro). Once a basic assemble was happening, we then asked them to choose music for their story. ACMI had a music library we were able to access, leaving us free of any copyright issues. But in most cases the participant or even a family member, had a music background so this was also a popular choice.

**Signing off on final edit**
By the end of the project, individuals get back a DVD of their own stories. That was my promise to them at the beginning of the process. They then took ownership of their stories.

**Looking ahead**
With each participant, we drew up a contract that identifies the level of public exposure to these stories. With their permission, I will leave a compilation of their stories in each community organisation. My intention is to also get the stories archived in the Oral History Unit of Koorie Heritage Trust and the ACMI Memory Grid.

In addition, and again with their permission, I will arrange to have their stories incorporated into the Victorian Cultural Broadband Network which streams into educational institutions and libraries, cultural organizations, museums and government departments.

**Building of Relationships and Trust**
It’s very important to have fun during the process. It can be very emotional creating a personal story. From my experience, however, it is very rewarding and people leave with a sense of having produced something significant for themselves and their family. For me, this is a new generation documenting their own oral histories.

The key to building trust, especially being of Indigenous background myself, is to understand and acknowledge the barriers erected in the past by Indigenous communities. I need to understand the characteristics of each community I work with, for example:

- Literacy levels
- Communication methods and means
• Preference for visual and verbal storytelling versus theoretical and written forms
• Community and family politics.

When working with the mob, I need to keep them engaged in their own visions and in taking full ownership of their own stories. Why I need to adjust to each of the communities. It’s handy having people (ACMI staff) who are used to dealing with other communities and schools, because they are able to recognise that their own methodology may not have worked with these community groups. Through this project, these other workers have been able to appreciate the different methods I have used in the process.

Being able to travel and deliver the workshops in community settings worked really well. On a practical level it meant that the participants had a range of creative options using photography and video and shooting locations relevant to where they live now or might have grown up, including the missions. This stands out in the *Pitcha This* series. The look and sound of the landscape runs through many of the stories. Family and connections with family were also a really popular focus in many of the stories. People spoke about who they are, where they were from and what key events happened in their families. A lot of the mob chose to speak directly to a member of their family in their stories or dedicate it to someone they loved or respected.

As Marcia Langton has observed, “Kinship and familial relations underpin much of Aboriginal sociality, and as in any human society, it is in this social domain more than any other that Aboriginal women find their life experiences that inform their artistic, literary, religious and aesthetic visions. The complexity of Aboriginal social organisation, both in the more traditional societies and in those with a history of intimate contact with settler society, provides a rich storehouse of story, legend and narrative based in life histories and the distinctive Aboriginal mythological traditions.”

The recording of an experience, the acknowledgement of a lost loved one or the detailing of a place and what occurred there had transformative and beneficial effects for many of the storytellers. Participants often chose to make stories about people who had passed, or about those that had helped raise them, and I think many also found digital storytelling a great tool to acknowledge and pay respect.

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The stories behind
Swan Hill
A young man in the group who was strong but had nothing to say – I let him go the first day then asked if we could have a one on one (figuring he was a little shy). After him observing me, he asked if I could drive him up the road. We stopped at a grave site and he asked if he could tell his daughter's story. She had passed at the age of three having suffered from a rare medical condition. So the story was a father's dedication to the memory of his little girl. The relief on his face after completing the story was beautiful. He had started the healing process …. grieving.

Elder Aunty had brought in an audio tape of her Dad, a country and western singer in his time. A dedication to him and his life as a singer. We were able in the process to digitise the tape and give it back on a CD. A priceless moment.

Gippsland
A young boy who was approached through the juvenile justice system to do the project, wanted to tell story but didn’t want to cop any more flack from community mates. Using the first line from his film he said to me “some of the mob call me coconut but I don’t let that get to me” he was able to express himself and be proud of what he was achieving. ‘Why do they call me Rambo?’ This is what being an army cadet means to him.

Heywood
A uncle arrives at the door with three large photo albums, and I said, “Oh look out, he’s got a story to tell”, and he starts opening them and looking through them, and because there were a lot of elders in that group. There was a lot of reminiscing going on, which helped with the process of getting these stories down.

Then a beautiful little Aunty arrived and she had a green garbage bag in which she had four pieces of weaving; a finished basket and a couple of coils at different stages. She also pulled out three black and white photographs. Aunty said to me “I don’t know what I am doing, I travelled 40 minutes to get here. so I didn’t know what I had to bring. I just put these photographs into a bag and this is my weaving”. And I said “okay, we can work with that”.

We sat and talked about her weaving and how she’d learnt to weave from Aunty Connie Hart who was a famous basket weaver in that area, and in the process she said, ‘I didn’t really know my culture. I grew up in a children’s home. She showed me the three photographs and they’re beautiful black and white photographs of her as a child and one of her sister and she continued to say, I seen my sister when she went into hospital and I never seen her again. We talked a little more and she said I never met my mother …At that point Uncle’s voice (the uncle with albums), comes from behind and says “here Gracie I have a photo of your mum, here you go! She was a beautiful woman”. And the look on her face of disbelief. In the film titled ‘Early
Memories’, Grace remembers her early years and the importance of culture to her.

Johnny Lovett the country and western singer, I was going through his story with him, and he was saying "I had this great guitar in those great old days", and I said "it would be great if we had some photographs from back then", and that same uncle with the photo album comes over and says, "here you are with that guitar".

These magic moments were just happening, the uncle with the albums handed him a photograph and he said, “Wow that was my first guitar”, and it was him forty years before, "that guitar that he was just talking about". In the work titled ‘Country is my Life’, a Gunditjmara man traces his love for Country and Western music.

And that same day, in that process, another uncle was talking about himself in a particular time of his life as a young boy growing up in that town, and this same uncle with the photo albums came up and had a photo of him around that particular time. In the work ‘These things I still Question’, Kenny reflects on his life and ponders life’s inconsistencies.

Quietly within that process, there were quite a few unexplainable moments. When I realised that I had gotten everyone settled into telling their stories, except for the one with the photo albums. I couldn’t quite grab him and then, I realised he had a literacy problem, which I identified when I went home, and I said to the two ACMI workers, with this particular uncle, I know you don’t do it usually, but we might just need to take him straight in to voiceover. I explained that this would allow him tell his story, and he might just be comfortable with his grandson there with him, and that’s how we’re going to get him to tell his story. And we did.

Coincidently, the Heywood phase of the Pitcha This project took place the week after the historic Gunditjmara land claim success. Morale was extremely high, and there was a real sense of connection to land which carried over to the Pitcha This project.
7. Outcomes: Empowering Community Through Skills and Ownership

Over all, there were sixty active participants and around twenty other participants, including artists and community members involved in the planning and delivery of the project.

Images created in this project created the basis for an innovative and cutting edge view of Indigenous imagery that celebrated our being, identity, culture and land.

Community organisations were encouraged to support the participants by helping with travel and accommodation to attend the openings in Melbourne.

I see myself as a facilitator of ideas and processes, someone who has helped with opening doors. Wayne and I, people from ACMI – big shots not; giving them another view of how people from different media backgrounds do work collaboratively to produce other types of media, e.g. publications or films. I thought it was a good thing, to bring in Wayne because we need role models within our communities and to see how a simple thing like picking up a camera can lead to a career in photography and art. Once he told them, ‘you must pick up Deadly Vibe; well I take pictures for them’ or ‘You must pick up this one; well I take photographs for them’, or ‘I take photographs for Richmond Football Club’ and some of those young ones were fans of the football club, so there was that ‘true’ feeling you could see their minds ticking over.

NAIDOC week seemed the perfect time to celebrate this exhibition. NAIDOC originally stood for 'National Aborigines and Islanders Day Observance Committee’. This committee was once responsible for organising national activities during NAIDOC Week and its acronym has since become the name of the week itself.

NAIDOC Week celebrations are held across Australia each July to celebrate the history, culture and achievements of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.

ACMI SCREENING
A special screening of twenty-two of the digital stories were selected for a screening at ACMI in Melbourne, to a wider audience. This inspired the participants to think ‘big picture’ and realize that, contrary to what they thought, there is a wider audience out there interested in hearing their stories.

KOORI HERITAGE TRUST EXHIBITION
Pitcha This, the exhibition, showcased at the Koori Heritage Trust, for the month of July celebrating NAIDOC week. Over two hundred photographs and the screening of forty-four digital stories were presented.
The Koori Heritage Trust expressed their commitment to supporting and promoting ‘community grassroots projects’ like this in future. Jason Eades Chief Executive Officer Koorie Heritage Trust said:

Exhibitions of these kinds coming from communities are important for a number of reasons. Firstly they provide a positive reinforcement of community and allow a sense of pride in one’s culture and identity to be expressed and shared with a wider audience. So they impact directly on the community involved with the project but also the wider Aboriginal community by providing the much need positive images about community and family. They also show the broader community the positive aspects of the community when there is so much negativity about Aboriginal people in the popular press.

As an institution the Trust sees these kinds of exhibitions as important linkages with the community. It ensures that we don’t become about things from our past but rather provide a vibrant contemporary space for the celebration of our past, present and future. It draws the threads of our work together and makes it relevant to the community.

In the future we want to have more of these kinds of exhibitions and also look at how we ensure that what is contained in our collections is not locked away but taken back to the people.11

Although there was an exhibition and screening held in Melbourne to coincide with NAIDOC week celebrations, each community then celebrated by presenting their individual projects to their own local community, for example:

- Mullum Mullum worked with a local gallery and council to have a small space to exhibit to celebrate NAIDOC with the wider community.
- Swan Hill Community had a public screening of their digital stories and photographs at the Swan Hill Aboriginal Health Service, where over 60 people attended.
- Young people used these stories to tackle ‘identity’ issues – VIYAC took their digital stories to be shown at the 19th World Conference on Health Promotion and Education in Canada. They were also shown at the National Indigenous Leadership 2nd Annual Conference in Brisbane.
- Shepparton community photographs were exhibited and a special screen of the ASHE Students digital stories were part of Rumbalara Football Club’s tenth anniversary celebrations.
- Gippsland Community followed Swan Hill’s example and later held a photographic exhibition to celebrate their Community Elders. This was

11 Jason Eades, Chief Executive Officer, Koorie Heritage Trust opening Speech 10/7/07.
held in partnership with the East Gippsland Aboriginal Art Gallery.

- Heywood Community held a screening of their digital stories at the Winda Mara Aboriginal Cooperative. They are also researching ways that these digital stories can be permanently displayed (eg. Via 'Connection to Country' touch screens) in their proposed multi-media centre.

‘Daryl Rose, Chairperson of the local Aboriginal Education Consultative Committee’ observed that

Our communities participation in the Pitcha This project has led to three new developments. The first is that a number of young boys have made a short film called “Warran Yarkeen” [Young Men Dreaming] that is to be shown at this weeks Tarerer Festival.

Secondly, older members want to re-create our oral history program. While on a final note community members want to write another book along the lines of Memories Last Forever, which we wrote in 1988.

The inspiration from the process, and the great story outcomes, have led to this new wave of enthusiasm. Thanks and please consider our community for any other projects.\(^\text{12}\)

8. Flow on outcomes and learning:

Pitcha This as the inspiration for further projects

Swan Hill Community saw the benefits of this program and applied for additional funding to run their own ’Come Have a Look at Yourself’ exhibition which further document the strengths of their community.

This additional funding allowed me to go back and work with that community over the next six months and mentor all the participants in exhibition management.

The project was designed to positively display the strengths and presence of the local community by visually acknowledging the diversity. The project highlighted the interrelationships and cultural ties within families, tribes, clans and language groups.

The ‘Come and have a Look at Yourself’ project, was delivered by the students from the Designing Indigenous Business Group of the Sunraysia Institute of TAFE, Swan Hill Campus. Marion Beeton, Patty Donaczy, Daniel Edwards, John Mott, Linda Ford, Ramptha Edwards, Judith Rigney, Tony

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\(^{12}\) Daryl Rose, Chairperson of the local Aboriginal Education Consultative Committee, Feedback letter 8/11/07.
Kirby, Anna Williams, Rayna Egan, and Nitkita Moore. Most of all who participated in the *Pitcha This* project.

The exhibition displayed over two hundred and fifty photographs in black and white and was held in partnership with the Swan Hill Regional Art Gallery. These photographs are now permanently displayed at the Swan Hill Aboriginal Health Service.

These communities became like my extended family. When they had asked for me to come and be an artist in residence, to bring this project together, I was so excited. I could see how the *Pitcha This* project had opened their eyes to bigger things. For instance at the local community level, Indigenous families and communities have been strengthened through the sharing of stories between young people and elders and the celebration of the images and stories through community exhibitions.

At the broader community, regional and state wide levels, mainstream communities have had the opportunity to gain a more accurate and positive understanding of Indigenous people. The promotion of the positive images and stories will also help to address the issue of discrimination (media) Struggles around representation – self representation the politics and the empowerment of this.

An example of the struggle around representation can be seen in the work of Tracey Moffatt. She has observed of her series *Some lads*, that

> The concept behind this series of studio portraits of black male dancers came about in reaction to images of black Australian people I was continually seeing presented around me by photographers in books, magazines and galleries. These images tended to always fit into the realist documentary mode usually reserved for the ‘ethnographic subject’.

Such examples of this style of representation of indigenous groups exist in all European-colonised countries, e.g. North America, Brazil, etc. Thus this ‘record them now before they die out’ mentality has never been exclusive to Australia. *Some lads* takes the utmost example of such a preoccupation- begin the mid-nineteenth century scientific studio studies of Aborigines by the early pioneer photographers- but changes the intentions.\(^\text{13}\)

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The following quote from Boondy Walsh, Koori Liaison Officer, from Swan Hill TAFE 2007, which was one of the participating communities summarises the achievements of the *Pitcha This* project:

The benefits to the Indigenous and mainstream communities cannot be understated, such as strengthening the community’s sense of identity and providing an opportunity for Koorie people to document a more accurate view of who they are, their connections and relationships, where they work and live. Through this mainstream communities will gain a more accurate and positive imagery of Indigenous communities overall, the project will strengthen and demonstrate to the local Koorie people and the broader community that they are an important part of the wider community. It will also increase employment opportunities for Koorie people by providing skills development in project management, planning and community leadership. It will be an affirmation of identity, pride and connectedness that the whole community can be proud of.¹⁴

**Other outcomes**

Indigenous communities frequently attribute past failures of other programs and projects, to non-Indigenous professionals coming into the communities, often with paternalistic attitudes and negative perceptions of indigenous people in the first place.

In contrast, my Masters project has had a significant impact. The process of ‘Trust Building’ undertaken by the *Pitcha This* project has been tentatively touted by other organizations, who are looking at adopting the model as key to gaining successful buy-in when dealing with the Indigenous communities. For example:

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¹⁴ Boondy Walsh, Koori Liaison Officer, Swan Hill TAFE, feedback letter 17/08/07
RMIT's Koori Cohort have been looking to provide this model to participants in their Master of Arts Program who are looking to engage the Indigenous Communities as part of their research.

Mensline Australia approached me after hearing about Pitcha This to run a digital story-telling workshop for Indigenous men from around Australia as a means to facilitating more effective communication between their Indigenous clients and workers.

Secretariat of National Aboriginal and Islander Child Care (SNAICC) organisation, which was initiated by a participant from the VIYAC group, (who also worked for SNAICC), with a view to adapting the Pitcha This model to document stories about Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander child rearing practices. This will be done on a national level.

The TAFE Koori Unit and Melbourne University incorporated elements of the project into their respective assessment processes by giving students the opportunity to use the project to gain credits in their core subjects, For example script writing contributes to literacy; digital story-telling contributes to computer skills; photography speaks for itself, and so on.

The Academy of Sport and Recreation in Shepparton (A.S.H.E) are seeking to incorporate digital story-telling into their Educational curriculum, and have asked to participate in future Pitcha This projects.

In addition, the photographs from Pitcha This have been creatively used:

- For the cover of The Long Walk 2007 Women’s Luncheon Menu
- Throughout the Vic Health report 2008
- As the Web banner for Leadership Network Victoria web site : www.ilnv.com.au

The impact of the Pitcha This project was recognised in 2007 when it won a VicHealth ‘Outstanding Achievement Award in Health Promotion (Mental Health & Well Being)’.

In late 2008 through the Community Arts Participation Scheme Vic Health supported part two of Pitcha This.

The project Fitzroy’s Aboriginal History, Sista Girl Productions working in partnership with the Yarra Aboriginal Advisory Group who have representatives from local Fitzroy Aboriginal community organisations to identify Elders who would represent stories of importance, like meeting places and organisations such as the Victorian Aboriginal Health Service, these
organisations and the people (community members who helped establish them) represent our Aboriginal history of Fitzroy.

Partnering up with the Melbourne Aboriginal Youth, Sport and Recreation (MAYSAR) and tying in with the youth connections at the Gym, the focus would be on up-skilling Koori youth in digital story-telling, empowering them to capture, record and produce the stories and experiences of the local Elders.

Since introducing in the digital story process to my work, I have facilitated over 100 community stories. This now, forming a new archive of oral histories allowing community access on lots of levels.

In addition to this document, content from the *Pitcha This* project can be accessed at the following locations:

9. What I have learned

I categorise my learning into three groups

1. The Process of creating Digital media Stories in Indigenous communities
   I learned that:
   - The initial consultation with each community was critical to the success to the project.
   - Listening to what the community wants was essential
   - The community must want to engage in the project and
   - The project must be delivered within the budget
   - The appointment of a project manager is essential
   - Technology must be flexible enough to adapt to the needs of the project
   - For example script writing is not necessary with illiterate participants
   - In most cases the process opens up old wounds and scars; grieving is common in these stories. As a facilitator, I more often felt like a counsellor.

2. The value of digital media technology to documenting the history of Indigenous people
   I learned that:
   - The new media allows community members to revisit and retrieve the history and stories of both their own and other communities
   - There are online technologies such as the ACMI and the Victorian Broad band Network which gives access to the broader community to the stories of Indigenous people
   - The multi media can build on the archived oral history tapes that are not easily accessed from institutions such as the National Archives and State Museums
   - Individuals, communities, teachers, students, businesses, storytellers, policy makers, and artists alike may benefit from this means of storytelling.
3. The value of Digital Media technology to the Indigenous communities
I learned that:

- The use of this technology can accurately portray and reflect the true strengths and spirit of the community
- The live stories and personal experiences are much more interesting than reading a third party’s account and perception of a community
- This technology follows the tradition of Indigenous storytelling it is both auditory and visual learning
- The technology allows the story tellers to show a positive strong spirit on film.

Conclusion

My hope is that the multi-media projects I have undertaken within my Master of Arts degree have had an impact on the emotional and spiritual wellbeing at individual and community levels.

I also hope that engagement in these projects will enhance community members’ skills and self-image. Establishing and prioritising themes for the photography and photo-voice projects enhances a sense of community and capacity to work together. The process of the Indigenous community selecting and presenting relevant ideas, experiences and themes, empowers the community. An empowered community with a strengthened self-image is more able to articulate a community response and action plan to issues such as mental health and wellbeing.

As an Indigenous artist, I work collaboratively with communities. In all of my work I am aiming to interpret, express, and celebrate our culture. Through my projects, artistic products are collaboratively created which express community values and aspirations. They contribute to community strengthening, harnessing community partnerships and building leadership skills and creative capacity. They are an artistic response to social justice issues.
My work in recording and exhibiting the life stories of indigenous people has been successful. This success is demonstrated in

1. Direct take up of the technology in the various indigenous communities. After I taught these communities how to use the technology they became empowered and independently created their own projects. One example of this is Swan Hill (see p. 24).

2. Indirect take up of the technology by communities that were not part of my original project. After exhibitions of my works such as Pitch a This communities approached and asked to be trained in the process so that they could apply it to their own ideas and stories. One example of this is SNAICC (see p. 26).

3. Positive effect on the mental health and wellbeing of communities engaged in digital media story telling. This is demonstrated in the award of VIC HEALTH which was selected by an independent panel (see p. 27).

What I have learnt about the professional experience of the practice of working across the six communities is documented in this exegesis, the key ideas about this practice are that although the communities vary, my approach to each has similar features. These include consultation, listening to community, engaging the community, facilitating access to the technology and allowing them to own the project.

Finally, my adaptation of the ethnographic approach to understanding and empowering communities is now being sought by several government and non-government organisations. These organisations have goals of delivering solutions to perceived problems without methodologies or tools that are known to deliver positive outcomes. I have been asked to consult to develop specific programs based on my experience and learning’s. In this way my project will have broader ramifications than I originally envisaged.
REFERENCES


WEB SITES


• ACMI Web Digital Stories or The Memory Grid at ACMI http://www.acmi.net.au/video_community_people.htm

APPENDIX 1:
Content produced from the *Pitcha This* project included an exhibition screening compile of over 40 digital stories

**Ngi Bali, Hello Welcome**  
Jade Colgan  
A proud indigenous woman’s talks about her appreciation of the little things in life and their importance in her own search for life's true meaning.

**I Love My Family**  
Amy Dowd  
12 year old Amy introduces us to her family.

**A yarn with Uncle Gordon**  
Gordon Day  
Uncle Gordon reflects on aspects of his life.

**My Little Angel**  
Chris Mansfield  
Chris talks about his family tree so that his ‘soon-to-be-born’ baby will know his/her roots.

**About Oskie**  
Norman Terrick  
Norman pays tribute to his father and discusses how the positive life values, instilled at an early age by his dad, have guided him throughout his own life.

**Goanna**  
Anna Williams  
A Musical Biography - Anna talks about her musical inspirations.

**The Walker Women**  
Kalimna Andy  
Kalimna pays tribute to the women who molded her, and her love for them as the role models in her life.

**These things I still Question**  
Kenny Saunders  
Kenny reflects on his life and ponders life’s inconsistencies.

**Why Do They Call Me Rambo**  
Bindie Jack  
What being an army cadet means to Bindie Jack.

**Listen up my Cherubs**  
Karen Milward  
Karen lets her children know aspects of her life, and tries to get them to understand her passion for her work.

**I Love Soccer**  
Brian Beckhurst  
Brian is interviewed about his experiences at the Minneapolis Special Olympics 1991, where he represented Australia at soccer.

**My Tribe**  
Judith Rigney  
A Proud Mother and Grandmother talks about the joy that her family gives her.

**The Music Box**  
Barbara Tilley  
A mother’s journey and the symbolism attached to an aging music box.
My Island Home  
Lionel espouses the philosophy that “if you touch base with 'country' every once in a while, you can cope anything that life throws at you”.

Life Story  
Joel talks about his upbringing, his family, and his career aspirations.

The Great Cod Fisher Woman  
Ramptha Edwards  
Ramptha acknowledges her mum's 'cod fishing' prowess as the basis for her own artistic works today.

My People  
Linda talks about her love for, and pride in, the people that molded her into the woman that she is today.

Home the old place Little Dunmore  
Eileen Alberts  
A poetic reflection of her childhood

Skittles  
Daniel McCrimmon  
Daniel talks about life as a teenager in Shepparton, and his career aspirations.

Between Generations  
Rebecca Phillips  
Rebecca embraces her ‘multicultural’ identity; talks about obstacles encountered because of her Aboriginality; and ponders her future role in taking care of her country

Little Dolly  
Daniel Edwards  
A Father's dedication to the memory of his little girl.

Early Memories  
Grace Sailor  
Grace remembers her early years and the importance of culture to her.

To my dearest son Mileak  
Natasha Craig  
A mother talks to her son about some of the obstacles she had to encounter in bringing him into this world, and also discusses her aspirations for their future.

All About Me  
Ben Yarram  
Ben talks about his family, and the things that make him happy.

Home Country  
Julie Mongta/Saunders  
Julie talks about her life, and ‘coming home to country’.

My Grandfather TL  
Simone Andy  
Simone's memories of her 'war veteran' grandfather, and her own journey in searching through army service records to try to piece together more about his life.

My Nan  
Tammy-Lee Atkinson  
Tammy's tribute to her grandmother
The Cape Barren Boy
Marion Beeton
Marion remembers her father and his love of Country and Western Music.

Cousins
Helen Atkinson
In paying tribute to her Aunty, Helen acknowledges the sisterly bond that exists between her and her favourite cousin

When Does Work End
Daphne Yarram
A day in the life of a Community Liaison Officer

My Nan
Teialah Mason
Teialah stands tall as an Indigenous woman, and pays tribute to her grandmother for instilling in her a sense of pride in her identity.

They Were Good Times
Tom Day
Tom reminisces about his childhood.

Mum and Dad
Patty Donaczy
Patty talks about her own parents so that her kids and grandkids will also remember them.

A Tribute to my Mother
Misty Briggs
Misty discusses her mother’s journey and acknowledges the sacrifices her mother made in molding her into the woman that she is today.

Going Forward
Laura Bell
Laura talks about her achievements and embraces any challenges life may choose to throw at her in future.

My Life With Noel
Bess Yarram
A journey through life with a caring and selfless man.

Where She Belongs
Nikki Butler
Nikki embraces her Nan’s teachings about living off the land, and welcomes the opportunity to be with her Nan in the next phase of her Nan’s search for her family.

Always Thinking of Home
Troy Lovett
A general look at his life thus far.

My Favorite Place
Emily Yarram
Emily shares her favorite hangout.

Country is my Life
Johnny Lovett
A Gunditjmara man traces his love for Country and Western music.
APPENDIX 2:

Richard Greenhalgh (ACMI Digital Storytelling Facilitator)

No two workshops were the same, we had to adapt the Digital Storytelling template at each location. In Heywood we had to take into account that the workshop was with elders and we had to deal with literacy issues and a understandable fear of the technology, but mostly we had to get our heads around the huge abundance of stories each of the participant had to tell. In Bairnsdale and Swan Hill we had to work around the participants busy schedules, in Shepparton we had to work with younger members of the community and spent a great deal of time convincing them that they did indeed have interesting stories to tell. (The stories from this workshop are evidence enough that this was the case.)

I think the project was important in another aspect. It is important that positive images of the communities we worked with are shown to the greater public, who often only get to see negative stories of the Koori Community. I think anyone watching the stories will be struck by the breadth of the subject manner, the warmth of the voiceovers and will learn a great deal about the authors of the stories. I know I learnt heaps during the workshops and am grateful that I had the opportunity to spend time with all the participants.

Liz Langslow (ACMI Worker)

Working on Pircha This was a really positive experience, both as a process driven project for and by community and now in reflecting on the collection of creative and powerful finished stories. As a facilitator who has delivered digital story telling workshops with a range of groups in Melbourne and regionally, Pircha This stands out. It achieved core goals, empowering individuals and communities with digital tools to say what they choose. Below are some of my thoughts on the significance of the digital storytelling process and the 6-7 weeks on Pircha This.

It was an objective of the project that the kinds of stories that were produced and/or themes covered were dependent upon the decisions of individual participants. The focus was on participant expression and the freedom to explore the placement of emphasis and frame. The workshop design did include practical direction in terms of facilitating participants in the use of script writing, design and video software, voice over and camera operation. Importantly though, the methods used encouraged stories to be controlled by the participants not us.

Pircha This was really well managed and the participants reaped the benefits of Kimba’s continually open minded and positive approach. She has solid and long standing relationships with many people that we were meeting for the
first time and I think this goes a really long way in creating a positive and workable workspace.

The more formalised classroom based tutorials in software worked better with young people. Older generations were generally (though not always!) more focused on narrative concerns than software. The project was flexible enough to adjust accordingly. Hopefully most enjoyed the tutorials, Mixed age groups also made a great atmosphere. A note too that it is really important that the contact in each community is committed to getting people on board and briefed adequately on what to expect before we arrive. This makes the push in collecting images and formulating story ideas easier if participants have had some lead-time on this.

Community authored media can positively effect the way a community remembers and what it chooses to emphasise- both fundamental to its identity. This project allowed people the freedom to express elements of themselves with autonomy. Tales of triumph, humour, heartbreak, or personal ambition all had space in Pitcha This. The collection of voices offers audiences raw, immediate and honest insights and messages. As a member of the team I learnt a lot and met a great mob of people. Final recognition goes to all the participants for their trust and openness in working with us and telling their stories.

**Jade Colgan (VIYAC worker /participant)**

VIYAC is thrilled that we were lucky enough to be chosen to do the Pitcha This Project. I think seeing we, as Indigenous people are storytellers from way back, this new modern way of telling stories suits us really well, especially youth as technology is right up our alley.

For VIYAC the issue of Identity and positive role models has come up a lot, you know many of us, including myself deal with having to justify or prove our aboriginality because we maybe don’t look the way some people expect us to, I guess that’s due to many of the images put out there by the media and other sources. So I think that by creating projects like these which promote positive imagery and allow our people to express themselves on their own terms and with their own images are amazing, wouldn’t it be wonderful if this whole exhibition was taken into all schools and communities to show the amazing culture and dynamic nature of Indigenous Victoria.

The VIYAC got so much enjoyment and quality learning’s from this project, not only did we learn how to take deadly photographs which is a skill that will be invaluable to the VIYAC, but we also now know the processes behind digital storytelling and we cant wait to make more and take our stories from young Indigenous people out to the public. In fact we have shown some of our
digital stories already at different conferences, meetings and forums and they have been so popular and all the feedback has been more than positive.

With our photographs we decided to focus on positive imagery of or for Indigenous young people, and our digital stories focused on the VIYAC expressing their personal stories and identities.

A couple of quotes for you from the VIYAC themselves on their experience of the Picture this project.

*Keira Martin* - "what I loved most about the training was Wayne and Kimba, they made it seem so easy and possible for anyone to grasp the basic concepts of Photography...the workshop was so informative, but we had such a blast doing it!"

*Joleen Ryan* – “It was a great two days and I learnt a lot. I think that I got a lot out of it. Kimba showed examples of the digital story telling and I was amazed at how well structured and thought out it was! I learnt a lot about the people in the examples and was impressed with the use of music, the visual and sound effects and the whole production of the digital stories. Overall: It was great!!!”

*Rebecca Phillips* – I found it to be a wonderful tool to engage people, basically you can tell so much about a person in just 3 minutes. And who can say no to just 3 minutes. I absolutely loved the whole experience.

**Phillip Guthrie (ASHE)**
The chance for students to explore even a small part of their history or hopes for the future in such a creative and engaging form was ideal from our point of view.

The Students found it enormously rewarding, especially the chance to take away their own little story to share with family, friends and in one case an unborn child.

All students were highly excited to receive the final DVD of the stories and we will take great pride at showing a number of the stories at our end of year ASHE celebration in December.

**Daryl Rose - Winda Mara Aboriginal Cooperative**
On behalf of the community in Heywood I would like to thank you, Wayne, ACMI and the funding body for allowing us to be involved in the *Pitcha This Project*.

On the night of the presentation, the room was visibly moved by the stories that were shown. Congratulations were handed around and a sense of
privilege to have being able to share, such touching, and educational stories. It will leave a legacy for this community to share into the future.

Our communities participation in the Pitcha This Project has led to three new developments.

The first is that a number of young boys have made a short film called “Warran Yarkeen” [Young Men Dreaming] that is to be shown at the Tarerer Festival.

Secondly, older members want to re-create our oral history program.

While on a final note community members want to write another book along the lines of Memories Last Forever, which we wrote in 1988.

The inspiration from the process, and the great story outcomes, have led to this new wave of enthusiasm.

Boondy Walsh (Koori Liaison Officer Swan Hill TAFE –Campus)

Marion Beeton originally from Tasmania commented on the,” …..number of phone calls from relatives in Tassie saying they were very happy and proud of what she had done”, and…. “how can they get something like it in Tassie for them”.

The documenting of the local Indigenous community in this format was one of skills development and capacity building for the local Koori community, a sense of healing, strengthening community ties, and an appreciation for the power of storytelling. Which was very evident in Patty Donasczy story, who remarked after the Premiere that,… “it was great to tell her family story”.

This project has provided a positive opportunity for the local Koori people to document a more accurate view of who they are, their connections and relationships, and Judith Rigney with pride says,…… “her kids were so happy with what she had done”.

The discussions between elders, Koori organisations, stakeholders and service providers who have noticed over the years the under representation of Indigenous people in general community life i.e. local media, working in shops, playing on the sporting arena, in public positions and so on,…… “highlight the importance of these programs and similar projects in lifting the profile of Koori people in a positive manner”, Sandra Stewart, Manager of Koori programs at Sunraysia Institute of TAFE further stated.

There have been numerous enquiries to the TAFE Koori Unit asking if there will be a similar program being delivered in the future. The Swan Hill Koori TAFE Unit will be vigorously seeking opportunities to deliver a program that is similar to “Pitcha This” in the hope that it will achieve the same results and outcomes that has been experienced with the “Pitcha This” project in Swan Hill.