Editors' Choice

Centring Aboriginal Epistemologies: Development of a 3D Simulation for Social Work Education

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ABSTRACT

This paper derives from a presentation delivered at the 2018 ANZSWWER Symposium *New Technology: Disrupting Social Work Practice and Perceptions.* The authors discuss the experiences and challenges of developing a 3D simulation involving an Aboriginal client presenting with suicidal ideation and indicators of self-harm. When completed, the 3D simulation will be used as a key teaching tool in the social work program at the University of South Australia (UniSA). Based on relationships with the Centre for Child Protection at the University of Kent, the simulation evolved into this context for Australian-based social work education and the need to prepare practitioners to develop the knowledge, values and skills for culturally responsive practice when working with Aboriginal Australians. An opportunity presented itself to develop a simulation for teaching that would allow for the development of knowledge and competencies in a digital environment. This simulated environment will afford a safe space within which students will explore themselves in relation to Aboriginal epistemologies and provide opportunities to contextualise that knowledge to fields of practice. The development of this teaching tool has presented a range of unforeseen considerations concerning the politics of representation when utilising new technologies in Aboriginal contexts, which the authors reflect on in this paper.

Keywords: *Aboriginal knowledges; Social work education; Teaching and learning: Digital learning; Intentional self-harm*

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INTRODUCTION

Australian social work education and practice predominantly operates from Western, Eurocentric worldviews and perpetuates the colonisation of Aboriginal Knowledges and Peoples (Joseph, 2015; Midgley, 2008; Pease, 2010). The need to disrupt existing approaches to social work teaching and learning, and move towards new ways that centre Aboriginal Knowledges, Aboriginal epistemologies and representation, has been more than sufficiently argued (Dudgeon & Fielder, 2006; Martin, 2003; Moreton-Robinson, 2004; Watson, 2014). Throughout the paper, we will use the terms *Aboriginal* and *Torres Strait Islander* interchangeably with *Indigenous Australian*, to reflect the nomenclatures familiar to most readers. In addition to this, the people involved in the project that will be discussed in this paper represent both Aboriginal and Torres Strait Island Nations therefore it is appropriate to name as both. The term *Aboriginal* is also used to respect the decision of local Aboriginal people whom we work with, who request the term Aboriginal be used in this context. The authors not only appreciate, but live the experience of the diversity of Indigenous people in Australia, and acknowledge that the language used in this paper cannot do justice to that diversity. Limiting our language use also ensures confidentiality which is an important consideration underpinning the development of the project.

Within Australia, the imperatives for a nuanced understanding of Aboriginal worldviews is underscored by the over-representation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in social and health statistics including those related to suicide and intentional self-harm. Despite constituting only 3% of Australia's total population, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people are disproportionately overrepresented within national statistics of deaths where suicide is attributed, along with reported incidences of intentional self-harm. The Australian Bureau of Statistics indicates that in the period 2011–2015, intentional self-harm was the leading cause of death among Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in the 15–24 year age group. In 2017, suicide remained the leading cause of death for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children aged between the ages of 5 and 17 years, with suicide accounting for 40% of all Indigenous child deaths (Australian Bureau of Statistics [ABS], 2017). Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people aged between 15 and 24 years old are over five times more likely to take their lives compared to non-Indigenous peers (Dudgeon, Calma, & Holland, 2017). This equates to 9.3 per 100,000 deaths compared to 1.8 per 100,000 deaths for non-Indigenous persons (Australian Bureau of Statistics [ABS], 2017). Research studies have suggested that available statistics underestimate the actual numbers of suicides amongst the Indigenous population (passim: Elliott-Farrelly, 2004; McHugh, Campbell, Chapman, & Balaratnasingam, 2016). Among other reasons, this might be due to under-reporting of suicide as a cause of death, inadequate data covering all cases of suicide attempts and

self-harming behaviours, and inaccurate details of Indigenous status on death certificates (Elliott-Farrelly, 2004).

The causes associated with the disproportionate representation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in suicide statistics are multi-layered, complex and interconnected. A comprehensive understanding of these causes should consider the underlying historical, cultural and socio-economic factors; how these factors interact, structure and cumulatively impact on the lived experiences of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people; the specific vulnerabilities and risk factors at the individual level; as well as the availability and accessibility of prevention and intervention services (Dudgeon, Calma, & Holland, 2017; Hunter & Milroy, 2006; Tatz, 2001; Westerman, 2004).

The capacity for social work graduates to work effectively with Indigenous people in a range of contexts across social work continually poses as a challenge (Bennett, Zubrzycki, & Bacon, 2011; Cleland, 2010; Cleland, Fredericks, & Watson, 2012; Green & Baldry, 2008; Harms et al., 2011). Within social work education, there have been numerous attempts directed towards finding innovative and effective ways of foregrounding Aboriginal epistemologies with a particular focus on curriculum development and field placements (Bennett, Redfern, & Zubrzycki, 2018; Duthie, King, & Mays, 2013; Hendrick, 2015). Significant questions remain on how universities can better engage learners and prepare social work students for the work they will be doing with the First Nations of Australia (Cleland, 2015). Given the depth and complexity of health and social disadvantages experienced by Aboriginal Australians, and the nature of colonialism largely unaddressed in the country, there is much work to be done. Disruption to the present ways of teaching and learning is crucial (Dumbrill & Green, 2008; Fejo-King & Briskman, 2009) as is innovation. The Australian Association of Social Workers (AASW) have established positive foundations for the types of curriculum development needed across the discipline and the modes through which that education is delivered have immense scope. Through the education and accreditation standards for preparing practitioners in Australia, and the ethical code that guides practice (AASW, 2010, 2012), educators can engage with the perspectives of Aboriginal practitioners to inform developments in their teaching and learning.

This paper discusses the authors' experiences and challenges of developing an innovative virtual 3D simulation involving an Aboriginal client presenting with suicidal ideation and indicators of self-harm. The paper illuminates the specific ways in which methodologies and processes for developing 3D virtual simulations can be adapted in ways that foreground Aboriginal epistemologies, world views, and practice wisdom thus providing a unique innovative teaching and learning tool. We reflect on the journey undertaken in developing this simulation paying attention to the unforeseen range of considerations encountered. In particular, the politics of representations when utilising new technologies in Aboriginal contexts. The approach in this paper is to reflect upon the *why* and *how* we have done this process in order to centre Aboriginal epistemologies. Over the course of developing the project, there have been learnings that could inform the ways in which others might engage with this technology. Virtual simulations present a range of possibilities that positively disrupt both the research and teaching and learning spaces in relation to Aboriginal content.

PRESENT TEACHING OF ABORIGINAL CONTENT IN SOCIAL WORK EDUCATION

The teaching and research work surrounding Aboriginal content in the social work programs at the authors' university, has centred around the question of what is needed to prepare practitioners to work effectively with Indigenous Australian people (Cleland, 2015). Models of cultural competency development are presently used as they are translated in real life terms when contextualised for working with Indigenous People of Australia. The social work courses are informed by Aboriginal literature, lived experience and practice wisdom. Yet the main components of Aboriginal content are not so much learning *about* Aboriginal Peoples cultures and cultural practices, but about understanding *self* and the social work profession *in relation to* Indigenous Australian people. Students start their lifelong journeys of learning in that space which operates chiefly from that understanding. The teaching is aimed at a predominantly non-Indigenous cohort of students yet is inclusive of ensuring the cultural safety of Indigenous students. The development of this simulation builds upon the existing approach to teaching Aboriginal epistemologies in the social work programs at the authors' university, in both content and pedagogy, yet within a new platform of interactive engagement.

SIMULATIONS IN SOCIAL WORK TEACHING AND LEARNING

A simulation can be defined as a pedagogic tool that uses "a real world problem in a realistic environment to promote critical thinking, problem solving, and learning" (Nimmagadda & Murphy, 2014, p. 540). Social work has a long history of using simulated practice environments as teaching and learning tools. This is evidenced by the widespread use of paper-based case studies, role plays (Kane, 2003; Moss, 2000), standardised actors (Koprowska, 2003; Logie, Bogo, Regehr, & Regehr, 2013; Mole, Scarlett, Campbell, & Themessl-Huber, 2006; Petracchi & Collins, 2006; Robins et al., 2008; Sunarich & Rowan, 2017) and skills laboratories (Dodds, Heslop, & Meredith, 2018; Zufferey & King, 2016).

Advances in gaming technologies are enabling the development of cost-effective, immersive, virtual, social work simulations which offer higher levels of fidelity, authenticity and interactivity. For instance, an immersive 2D virtual simulation (Rosie 2) has been developed by the University of Kent's Centre for Child Protection to simulate a child protection environment and provides opportunities to undertake a virtual home visit to a family where there are significant concerns in relation to child neglect (Reeves, Drew, Shemmings, & Ferguson, 2015). There is emerging evidence of how *Second Life,* an open-access platform which enables users to create their own virtual worlds where they can interact with other users, can be used to create 3D simulations. Wilson, Brown, Wood, and Farkas (2013) discuss how the development of a virtual 3D simulation of a home visit in *Second Life* enhanced the capacity within an MSW program to teach and learn practice skills. Tandy, Vernon, and Lynch (2017) report how students were able to interact with a virtual client on *Second Life* as part of exercises aimed at developing interviewing skills. In the area of mental health, a virtual simulation has been developed which enables students to undertake an assessment of a virtual patient and is reported to be improving students' clinical interviewing skills and diagnostic accuracy (Washburn, Bordnick, & Rizzo, 2016).

The use of 2D and 3D simulations in teaching and learning social work is underpinned by learning theories. For adults, learning is most meaningful when it takes place in contexts that provide opportunities for concrete experience, reflective observation, abstract conceptualisation, and active experimentation—people learn best by doing, reflecting, thinking, and re-doing (Kolb, 1984). Within 2D and 3D simulations, students are provided with authentic practice tasks which require them to translate their knowledge, theories and skills into practice. As they simulate the real world of social work practice, 2D and 3D simulations provide a number of new opportunities to teaching and learning social work. They are immersive due to the engaging storylines of the simulations. Students can actually see themselves as part of the story and being involved in the conversations taking place. This can evoke strong emotions from students (Tandy et al., 2017). They are interactive and provide students with opportunities to take control of how the storyline develops and students can make decisions without harming anyone. As such, students can take risks to see how different decisions play out. Simulations also offer opportunities for students to pause and reflect on their practice, and can re-practise and try different styles of communication, for example, resulting in different outcomes. In this sense, simulations provide students with opportunities for experiential learning which can help to integrate theory and practice in an applied way.

Within Australia, there is very little evidence of a widespread use of immersive, virtual simulations in teaching and learning social work. It is also noteworthy that the immersive 2D and 3D simulations that have been discussed thus far focus on mainstream clients with little or no attention on Aboriginal client groups, yet this is a particularly challenging area of practice. Our project sought to represent part of this neglected practice context and its unique challenges.

KIRRA: A 3D SUICIDE RISK SIMULATION

Kirra is a 3D simulation in the final stages of development. It was funded by an internal teaching and learning grant from the authors' university as well as significant in-kind support from an IT industry partner. The simulation is centred on the main character, Kirra, who is a 14-year-old girl identified as Aboriginal. She has come from a remote Aboriginal community to board and study at a private school in a metropolitan city. She has prior known episodes of intentional self-harm and is presenting particular concerning factors that suggest she is again at risk of suicide. The simulation therefore aims to present this case in a range of ways that students need to detect and note. There are physical aspects about Kirra, words she says, and other peripheral factors to assess including reports written about Kirra, referral notes, et cetera. The main focus of the simulation that has derived from its development are the critical reflection and learning points for students to discuss what the simulation brings up for them and their knowledge and social positioning, their own values and beliefs in relation to Aboriginal people and so-called "issues". The simulation draws on gaming conventions but is strongly underpinned by Aboriginal knowledges and worldviews, extensive research, social work theories and practice wisdom derived from an interprofessional steering group of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. In later sections, we reflect on how we sought to centre Aboriginal epistemologies and worldviews in relation to the design and process of developing the simulation.

IMPORTANT ACKNOWLEDGMENTS WHEN EXPLORING ABORIGINAL EPISTEMOLOGIES

In the Australian context, there are a number of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander scholars who have taken up the responsibility and challenge of translating the terrain between non-Aboriginal and Indigenous or Aboriginal Knowledges (Foley, 2003; Martin, 2008; Nakata, 1998; Watson, 1998). Attempts to educate others about Aboriginal epistemologies are complex and the limitations of any attempts to do so are highlighted in the literature—there are important acknowledgements to be made here and how this discussion relates to this project.

Foley (2003) discusses the paradigm of the late Professor Japanangka errol West. West describes the foundations of epistemology as a branch of philosophy that investigates the origin, nature, methods and limits of human knowledge (p. 47) and that, whilst Aboriginal Australians know the origin, nature, methods and limits of their knowledge systems they are all equally diverse. This is reflected in the multiplicity of First Nations in Australia and is explored in the literature, but this is also just a common understanding amongst Aboriginal people generally. The academics referred to earlier, and others, have carved the space to preserve and develop our respective Indigenous epistemological positions (Foley, 2003, p. 50) yet the diversity of those positions is often the challenge for Western engagement, or at the interface, with Indigenous Knowledges (Nakata, 1998). It is the aim, with this simulation then, to reflect those diverse epistemological understandings of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people directly involved in the project with a focus on the knowledge areas related to social work and welfare education. This project subscribes to the understanding of the complexities and limitations and the position we take is well described by Marie Battiste and James Youngblood Henderson:

> We are not creating a grand theory or a universal conceptualisation of Indigenous knowledge or heritage. We are intimately aware that each Indigenous regime is characteristic of the creative adaptation of a people to an ecological order. Given the ecological diversity, a corresponding diversity of Indigenous languages, knowledge, and heritage exists. For any research to seek to give a comprehensive definition of Indigenous knowledge and heritage in any language system would be a massive undertaking, which would probably be misleading. (Battiste & Youngblood Henderson, 2000, pp. 40–41)

There are limits to how far Aboriginal epistemologies can be comprehended from a Eurocentric point of view (Battiste, 1998) including points of view derived through the use of the English language. The ways this project reflects understanding of this is engaging with the structures underlying Aboriginal epistemologies with respect to how knowledge is transmitted; through Aboriginal languages, oral and symbolic, through modelling, experience and practice.

Therefore, what this simulation ultimately intends to do is start the conversation amongst Aboriginal people about the ability (or otherwise) to transfer and represent Aboriginal epistemologies in new technologies. It is not intended to be, and cannot be representative of, an all-encompassing Aboriginal world view nor of privileging one Nation's Knowledges

over another. Are there safe ways of conveying Aboriginality using new technologies? What can we discuss? What can't we discuss?

What has evolved from starting this conversation, and probably most importantly, was the significance of drawing in opportunities for students to analyse the range of perspectives and experiences that *non-Aboriginal* people bring to conversations about Aboriginality, and ways to explore any misconceptions about Aboriginal epistemologies. We have done this through the methodology deployed, and the methods used, both of which have ultimately enabled the design of the simulation to reflect content that is relevant and considered vital for a predominantly non-Aboriginal audience.

METHODOLOGY

The narrative that accompanies the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander statistics maintains that, whilst young Indigenous Australians are more likely than non-Indigenous young people to suicide and self-harm, we know very little from research and literature about Aboriginal understandings of suicide, intervention and treatment (Elliott-Farrelly, 2004) although the tide is changing (Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Suicide Prevention Evaluation Project, 2016; Westerman, 2010). This project acknowledges this and, in its design, has consciously acted to articulate and convey the practice wisdom and lived experience of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people who are leading this simulation. This has enabled the simulation to become representative of the known experiences of suicide and intentional self-harm, not contextually specific, and will be presented as such in the final product. It is not intended to be, or reflect, an exhaustive representation of Aboriginal suicidology across Australia, as that is an impossibility given the specificity of experiences according to regions and localities that are reflected in the literature, and as outlined in the preceding section in relation to epistemologies. This simulation intended to start an exploration amongst technology and Aboriginal places and spaces. The process of doing this, however, has understandably raised the need to examine our responsibilities regarding representation and questions about the compatibility of technology with Aboriginality.

Development of the Steering Group

The aim of this project was to explore the role of simulations in social work education in Australia particularly, utilising the 3D interface in an Aboriginal context. Aboriginal research requires a research design that allows for time to invest in relationships, ownership of Aboriginal peoples in the design and production of the research, and flexibility in the ways that research grants are administered (AIATSIS, 2012; Brady, 1992; Smith, 1999). These are not investments that mainstream research traditionally allows for, however, they have been pertinent in the conduct of this research.

For the process and intent of the simulation, it was vital that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people were central to the research team and were a majority representation in the project overall. There are five Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people on the research team and three non-Aboriginal people. The Steering Group advises on all aspects of the content development, story and characters, and would reach any consensus required with respect to final decisions about the simulation. This would ensure that Aboriginal

epistemologies were at the centre of everything that was done within the simulation. The Steering Group is made up of senior practitioners with experience in Aboriginal mental health work, who also hold Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander identities. The Steering Group is the place where all consultation about the simulation occurred and key decisions were made in relation to the key components of the simulation such the identification of its learning outcomes, intent, script development, the client/avatar, the workplace environment, and the approach to the client. Discussions with the Steering Group brought about the practice wisdom to inform the composite character and "case" that is being presented in the simulation, as well as ideas about *how* to show Aboriginal epistemologies in the simulation. The Steering Group allowed the rhetoric to become reality for articulating what are Aboriginal epistemologies that are relevant to non-Aboriginal practitioners.

Representing the misrepresented

In developing a 3D representation of a young Aboriginal person and two Aboriginal practitioners, a realistic appraisal of the stereotypes that exist about Aboriginal people was needed. Uncomfortable as this conversation may be for some, it is essential in being able to ascertain and more importantly, avoid perpetuating misrepresentations of Aboriginal people. While the research team consists of members who reflect both light- and dark-skinned people, the conversation about likeness in the simulation continues to be a sensitive yet powerful discussion and raises questions about authenticity in the digital learning environment. Upon reflection, however, this conversation flowed quite easily for Aboriginal members of the research team yet it may be a consideration for others who want to embark on this work.

The simulation required development of a number of Aboriginal avatars; the figures that would represent the people in the simulation. Firstly, that of "the client", a 14-year-old Aboriginal girl, along with two Aboriginal mental health practitioners, both male, both middle aged. Conversations about the nomenclatures and appropriate terms of reference for Indigenous Australian people were needed, which required exploration of the diversity of Indigenous Australian peoples and what we were specifically trying to represent in this simulation. Again, in not wanting to represent cases from specific places and times, the simulation is designed to be representative of the cumulative factors and experiences that the research team have encountered in their areas of practice. This intends to ensure anonymity in the simulation but also authenticity.

Challenges: conveying Aboriginality in technology

When working across disciplines and across fields with varying degrees of cultural knowledge and competencies working with Aboriginal people, the challenges are quite surmountable. With the addition of exploring new technologies, the challenges again multiply. This is said in the context of experience, in working with an interface that appears incompatible with Aboriginal existence. An interface of both people and technology that is challenged to grasp what an Aboriginal person looks like and what an Aboriginal person sounds like, and what an Aboriginal person experiences in life; individually and collectively. The project was to create people and places that would not be offensive, and people and places that could not be identified discretely, yet have a likeness. How does one do this particularly in circumstances where technical partners have very little knowledge about Aboriginal people and have no experience working with Aboriginal people?

What we found quickly is that the presently available technology does not provide for Aboriginal avatars. Further to that, technical partners bring a myriad of their own pre-conceived notions about Aboriginal people. This was detected early in the development of this simulation and a challenge that needed to be addressed at every step of the project. For example, if the scenario was one of a non-Aboriginal client, there exists a wide-ranging scope of available avatars with depictions across gender and age groups that can be selected. In the Aboriginal context, there were none. We had to invent our own. Technical partners need to be invested from initial iterations through to a final product and two years on, we are only now finalising the composite characters. We have found that, even our advanced drafts of the characters still produced stereotypes, and even failed entirely to reflect reality for example, dark skin colours. This raises the question of technology's compatibility with Aboriginality itself; the focus for another project entirely.

It is important for anyone embarking on work in the 3D space to not compromise on any limitations imposed by technology or technical partners and to maintain emphasis on the discipline knowledge being depicted with authenticity. The authors have needed to actively challenge each phase of developing the simulation to ensure the programmers are not only aware of, but also respect the sensitivities and complexities of Aboriginal representation and the content being presented. Their understanding and respect therefore, should be reflected in the products they create.

Despite these challenges, the project is pedagogically strategic through the design of the avatars, particularly of Kirra and, upon reflection, the absence of existing Aboriginal avatars enabled this project to explore the possibilities. The development of Kirra as a character in both story and in appearance is designed to spark discussion about how the students engage with notions of Aboriginality, what constitutes an Aboriginal person, and to explore their own beliefs, values and attitudes about Aboriginal people. This is the dialogue that is encouraged through the design of the avatar relative to skin colour, facial features, hairstyle and overall presentation, including clothing. Through the avatar and the composite case and characters, there are a number of opportunities to teach students about various aspects that are relevant to working with young Aboriginal people and Aboriginal practitioners in relation to suicide.

What this simulation aims to teach

It is impossible to know all things about all people and, with the diversity amongst Aboriginal people and communities, educating in such a way would be inept. How are Aboriginal epistemologies being defined? What aspects of Aboriginal ways of knowing, being and doing (Martin, 2003) could be reflected in this simulation? The work of the Steering Group has been the means of providing answers to those questions and it is their expertise and practice wisdom that has guided the storyline, actions of the client, Kirra, and the processes of the mental health practitioners who receive Kirra's referral. The Steering Group has allowed the composite characters and story to reflect real-life experiences of living and working amongst the epidemic of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander suicide. By depicting this, the simulation aims to teach students about those lived experiences and furthermore, the aspects they need to explore in preparing them for the work they might do in this context.

Through the contextual background of the scenario, through Kirra's story and the development of the practitioner's journey in the case, the simulation aims to teach and explore a number of themes and specific content. The design of this simulation intends to evoke the same types of issues that come up for students in the current ways that the course is taught; presently face-to-face and online modes structured around weekly lectures and workshops, which bring up questions for students about how they view and respond to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. The question is, how can we do that in ways that are respectful and do not perpetuate or generate new stereotypes and misrepresentations about Aboriginal people? Our interactions with the technology through dialogue, visuals and interactions attempt to approach these issues sensitively and, as mentioned earlier, to purposely draw out discussion for students about representation.

The topic areas that this simulation addresses include historical and contemporary contexts across a variety of themes. Historically, the simulation exposes students to colonialism and some of the legislation and practices of Assimilation, Segregation and Protection. This knowledge is brought in through the story of Kirra's home community in the present day with a description of how it was a church-operated mission as part of the practices of colonialism. The simulation does not, however, identify a particular community in real life and instead is a composite of a number of remote Aboriginal communities.

The simulation addresses how education has been used to assimilate Aboriginal people into white Australian values, ideals and practices and to explore Kirra's experience in contemporary times as an extension of those ideas and practices. Students can see the pressures on young Aboriginal people of living between and amongst two worlds, Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal worlds, and how this impacts on Kirra as she is away from her community at the boarding school (Mattingley, 1998). Kirra's home community provides her with a solid basis of family, kinship, community, culture and country. The simulation situates Kirra in a private boarding school in a metropolitan city, reflecting a common experience for young Aboriginal people, and one which forms the basis of other learnings about the factors impacting on Kirra's presenting factors that are of concern including isolation, racism and discrimination.

The simulation provides students with resources to understand the diversity of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in order to comprehend that cultural competencies are required across a diverse range of Nation groups, regions and localities. It is intended that students will explore the diverse terms of reference used in Indigenous contexts and how the naming of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples as "Indigenous", as "Aboriginal" et cetera, have been imposed identities through the processes of colonialism. Without identifying a particular Nation group in terms of Kirra's identity, using background reading and other resources to spark visual cues, students will gain the knowledge required to apply in real-life situations and will be able to understand the research and lines of enquiry they are expected to undertake each and every time they work with a new Aboriginal people or community. Practitioners who do so are better able to identify the appropriate terminology, culture, historical and contemporary experiences of clients they will encounter and will avoid some common mistakes that are seen in practice settings.

The simulation aims to provide a space to challenge stereotypes about Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people; young people and practitioners. Again, being pedagogically strategic, the composite of Kirra herself is designed to challenge pre-conceived ideas about young Aboriginal people that the Steering Group collectively knows exist. Therefore, Kirra's skin colour, the way she dresses, the fact that she is a high-performing student according to mainstream definitions, and is well spoken, aims to challenge any pre-conceived notions students might bring to the idea of an "Aboriginal young person". The intent behind this discussion has been developed by honest discussions about how Aboriginal young people experience prejudice, essentialism, racism and discrimination and the need to address this amongst non-Aboriginal people who are training for social work.

The simulation loosely addresses gender considerations as they relate to both mainstream and Aboriginal practice ideas; loosely, in that the need to avoid stereotypes became evident and also to avoid appropriation of Aboriginal Knowledge. Kirra is a young Aboriginal girl from a remote Aboriginal community and the two mental health practitioners are both male and Aboriginal. This discussion is designed to spark thinking about gender and practice, and to open students' understanding of the complexities. However, it is not intended to teach students about Aboriginal cultural practices pertaining to gender that are not to be shared with non-Aboriginal people. It is a matter of being aware of them. Students will explore gender through both a culturally specific and social work lens which will enable students to understand what they, as professionals, may need to consider in practice.

Through the immersive and engaging storyline of the simulation, Aboriginal relationality and ways of working are depicted. The experiences of practitioners engaging young Aboriginal people in talking about mental health, from their positions as Aboriginal people, is perhaps being recorded for the first time in this simulation and are discussed as vital in a process described by Westerman (2010). For example, in the script when the worker meets Kirra, he connects himself through kinship by talking about his identity and discusses his knowledge of Kirra's home community. The worker talks about the importance of the country on which he is meeting with Kirra, inviting her into the local community networks that are available to her and that are missing since she is living away from her home community—an understood fundamental to Aboriginal health and wellbeing. There are differences in the ways that Aboriginal practitioners can and cannot engage young Aboriginal people compared to non-Aboriginal practitioners. There is a need to record and further understand, furthermore respect, what those differences are. The idea of who is best placed to work with Aboriginal people is an ongoing discussion and we draw upon Joyleen Koolmatrie's honest assessment of this idea (Koolmatrie & Williams, 2000).

CONCLUSION

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children are increasingly facing circumstances that ultimately lead to lives lost. The need to explore any and all opportunities to address the statistics is crucial, particularly with regard to preparing practitioners to adequately respond. Social work has a role to play in improving responses to Aboriginal child suicide and self-harm and this project sought to explore the possibilities of representing Aboriginal epistemologies in new technology for teaching.

This paper reflects a work in progress on the development of a 3D, interactive simulation about Aboriginal suicide. The simulation is designed to be a teaching tool in the social work programs at the University of South Australia (UniSA) yet the applications are proving to be broader in scope. Embarking on the project, the process and challenges were undefined simply through the nature of its innovation and the desire to walk the talk when it comes to developing curriculum and teaching materials that relate to representing Aboriginal epistemologies.

The formulation of a Steering Group comprising only Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people who are practitioners with a history of research and practice with young Aboriginal people in mental health was not only necessary, it was essential. The Steering Group as the researchers brings authenticity to all facets of work in developing the simulation and, without it, would continue the reproduction of non-Aboriginal representations of Aboriginal Knowledges. When everything is in place, we hope this will be a template for others. We hope that the benefits of using new technologies in social work and welfare education are realised and visible, through actively engaging students in their studies.

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