Decolonising the Curriculum, Decolonising Ourselves: Experiences of Teaching in and from the 'Third Space'

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Ngaala kaaditj Wadjuk Nyoongar moort keyen kaadak nidja boodja.
In the spirit of Reconciliation, we pay our respects to the elders past, present and future of the Wadjuk people of the Nyoongar Nation, as the original custodians of this land on which we work and write. We strive to create a shared future together.

ABSTRACT

This paper presents a framework for practice and teaching and learning about becoming an Ally in working with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. Two social work educators reflect on their own personal and professional journeys towards becoming Allies and what they have used to construct a teaching and learning framework for use with social work students. Three main works contribute to this framework: Bishop's (2002) Becoming an Ally, Land's (2015) Decolonising Solidarity, and Singleton and Hays' (2008) "Courageous Conversations about Race". The paper firstly presents the argument for taking an Ally position in decolonising the curriculum, before describing the authors' own journeys towards being Allies. A critical examination follows in which a framework for Ally work is described and subsequently discussed through illustration of their experiences in the classroom. The paper concludes with some key reflections on the learnings from these processes which re-affirm the underpinning of ethical practice as being both self-rule and self-formation indicating that this work is founded on a critical awareness of self which is essential to the joint relational project of decolonisation.

INTRODUCTION

Ally work is, for us, a key component of working towards a decolonised environment in which, in Australia, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples are acknowledged as having the right to determine their own futures in the ways they choose, using the mechanisms they value. While we recognise that this future is some way off, it is our determination to try to establish our Ally practice inside and outside the classroom with social work students.

As a "settler" society (Wolfe, 2006) Australia has been party to the dispossession of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples resulting in entrenched disadvantage, discrimination and ongoing oppression (Eckermann et al., 2010). Latterly acknowledging this, as well as its own complicity in these outcomes, the Australian Association of Social Workers (AASW) now requires social work courses to address Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander content and materials in the curriculum and in practice (Australian Association of Social Work, 2012; Australian Association of Social Workers, 2013). Neither of these two documents refer explicitly to decolonisation, although the intent to redress a monocultural approach to knowledge and skills development is present. However, a guiding framework (Zubrzycki et al., 2014) for teaching and learning that the authors both use provides materials with the decolonising enterprise at its heart. As well as a project of decolonising the profession of social work, decolonisation of the academy including its educators is a fundamental principle of this framework. We have interpreted these directions to develop our understanding of how "Ally" work can contribute to decolonising the curriculum and subsequent practice.

Bishop's (2002) concept of Ally to articulate the relational responsibilities necessary for contemporary (and, we would argue, historical) work with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, is now well applied in many settings and has informed our reconceptualisation of our own work. However, as Bishop has articulated, this role is not without its challenges, and requires constant attention to issues of representation and, we would add, the often unspoken power to define, appropriate and give permission, all of which re-affirms power over rather than power with. Our experiences of working towards being an Ally recognises that we are aiming at occupying that 'middle ground' originally articulated by Bhabha (1994) as the Third Space referring to the emerging cultural identities in and of the postcolonial, but widely adapted now to refer to working within the interstitial cultural spaces where "intercultural communication takes place and succeeds from time to time" (Ikas & Wagner, 2008, p.2). In the work that we do in this area, we work with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander colleagues. They are not present in this writing, even though they have given us their permission to do this, as we are reflecting on what we need to do to decolonise ourselves and not expect others to do this for us. As Land (2015, p. 5) has found, "the work of educating those who are giving you headaches is debilitating—non-Aboriginal people should be helping Aboriginal people out by educating each other, taking responsibility for each other". Land's work articulates the challenges but also the opportunities for solidarity work in what she names the "struggles" in which Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples are engaged.

The third work which contributes to our understanding of Ally work is from Singleton and Hays (2008), in their descriptions of how to engage in the courageous conversations about

race that are so often lacking in Australia. Productive relationships cannot be fostered until, and unless, there is an honest understanding of, and engagement with, the complexities of racial experiences which disempower and dispossess.

We have arrived, for now, at a position which includes learnings from Bishop, Land and Singleton and Hays and may be described as Ally work incorporating the ethics of responsibility, relationship and action. We next recount our personal and professional journeys towards this position.

Becoming Allies

M's journey towards being an Ally

My journey started with the realisation, some two decades after the event which propelled it, of my own personal complicity, as separate from the complicity of my profession, in the Stolen Generations. As a very young and relatively new English migrant to Australia, I had worked in an education hostel for Aboriginal children in the north of WA. Children would spend their school terms in the hostel as their families lived too far from the nearest school for them to attend daily. At the beginning of one school year, two children were delivered by the headmaster. They were a brother and sister, six and five years old respectively. As they were from a community the furthest away from the town before reaching the Northern Territory, their only opportunity of seeing their families and community again before the end of the school year was if, by chance, one of the community members happened to travel to the town, as the headmaster did not return the children home at the end of term.

These two children were from a distant community, their primary language was not that of most of the children in the hostel. They did not belong to any of the local tribal groups. I imagine they spoke to each other during the first year, but I never heard them nor saw them speak to anyone. In an attempt to make them feel more included, we allocated one of the cleaning staff to spend some hours after school and before dinner with them, but of course they came from different language and tribal groups. Questioning the "rightness" of providing an education in this way to people who had not so long previously been denied it was not, then, part of my awareness.

It was only after I had undertaken Anthropology at university some 10 years later and been exposed to Whiteness studies another 10 years after that, that I started to reflect on that time and my role in it. The Anthropology of the 1980s had started to be more overtly "political" (Marcus, 1986) and engaged in what was to become the "reflexive turn," allowing an introspection as well as social action. Through this learning I was able to understand more about the diverse cultural landscape of North Western Australia and started to identify what had puzzled me about "Aboriginal Australia." I accepted that I could, and should, do something about the inequities and disadvantages I had witnessed, even while this might be welcomed by some and repulsed by others. Importantly I grasped the fact of culture as living not static realities and that people had the right to define themselves without our white intervention.

Whiteness studies started to appear in Australia towards the end of the 1990s and their application to the Australian setting, particularly Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander

Australia (Moreton-Robinson, 1999), repositioned the prevalent anti-racist thinking into considerations of what white people needed to reflect on rather than what we should do for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, or what black, or people of colour, themselves could do. Together, these scholarly but also practical undertakings enabled me to make sense of my experiences with the two small and potentially traumatised children two decades earlier.

Rejecting as unproductive two common responses, guilt and shame, I was able to search for a way of being that acknowledged the theory, analysis and practice capabilities of Critical Whiteness that describes a position (how privilege is raced and invisible), articulates a critique (a method of unsettling this privilege) and realises its potential resistive properties (providing guidance for more inclusive and respectful human relationships) (Young & Zubrzycki, 2011). The theoretical framework this provided invoked an explanation and the possibilities for intervention (Young, McKenzie, Omre, Schjelderup, & Walker, 2014) in Indigenous spaces. For a social work educator, frameworks for education are just as important as the frameworks for practice we encourage students to develop for their professional roles. So the teaching and learning framework developed by the *Getting it Right* team (Zubrzycki et al., 2014) supplies an appropriate site for educators within which to locate critical whiteness theorising as well introducing students to a cultural responsiveness framework from which to undertake the work.

All these frameworks may be summed up for my own development as an educator and social work practitioner in the Indigenous arena, specifically in Australia with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples as well as in Aotearoa New Zealand where colleagues have responded positively to the notion of Ally work, as "Becoming an Ally" (Bishop, 2002). Hence the journey towards decolonising the social work curriculum and decolonising ourselves is a necessary ongoing project. We examine what this means in practice in the body of this article after S's description of the journey towards becoming an Ally.

S's journey towards being an Ally
I remember the first time attention to my non-biological Aboriginal sister's race was thrust in my face. It was at primary school and a white boy called my sister a "boong." Fortunately, this overt racism was one of very few incidents. Our differences never occurred to me as a child and on reflection I now wonder if much of the positive attention paid to my sister, by members of our small country town, was in relation to constructions of the beautiful black girl, the exotic "other" who was afforded a "better" opportunity through living with a white family. I recall fondly a childhood filled with happiness and love with the family of my sister which embedded my connection to their community. Much later in my life, and no longer living under the same roof as my sister, the levels of racism in and around my communities (social, work, education) became stark and shamefully apparent. I often reflect on our happy childhood, as though it was the same for both of us, yet my life journey was, and is, different. My whiteness afforded(s) privileges, with no road blocks, and a comparatively easy passage through life.

Tertiary education opened my eyes to the injustice of these differences. I recall my first year at university. It was in Anthropology and the lecture was on the Western Australian

Aborigines Act 1905 (WA). An Aboriginal girl sat close by. I was shocked to hear, for the first time, about this policy and its impact upon Aboriginal people—my sister and family. The Aboriginal girl sitting next to me was hearing this for the first time too. The shock. The disbelief. The grief. The silences.

In my mid-teens and then again in my early 30s I welcomed two more sisters to our family. From different family groups, this has privileged me in a different way: not only the joys of having these two wonderful people as sisters, but by having extended families that now reach as far afield as Papua New Guinea, to the northern-most lands of Western Australia, and down into the heart of the south-west of Western Australia. I see in my sisters a fight each day that I myself never have to give attention to, if I choose not to.

Fast-forward a number of years, and I find myself a well-educated white academic with qualifications I know my sisters could (should) hold, given their intellect and academic achievements in primary school. But, I'm white. The structural barriers that separate us are clearer to me now. My privilege has served, and continues to serve, me well; a sad realisation that my skin colour and English heritage affords me privileges at the same time as subtle and not-so-subtle discouragements for my sisters and other family members. I studied my Bachelor of Social Work during the period of "reconciliation" which has been described as having five dimensions and includes, among others, the values of trust and respect to foster relationships which can work together for equality and unity. Trust is "a necessary starting point for working together" (Land, 2015, p. 132) and therefore a central and necessary component of developing relationships. Trust is a feature of personal and professional relationships to be earned, and many of the past actions of mainstream Australia has left many Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people distrustful of us, as representatives of the mainstream. Evidently, we as colonisers had much to learn and it was in the profession of social work and the following academic position that offered me a platform for decolonising dominant discourses, starting with our social work education within the academic system.

These experiences have led to our search for ways to assist social work students to consider how they may undertake Ally work, as we believe the process of decolonisation at one and the same time to be necessary at institutional, personal, relational and professional levels. We now turn to the framework we have devised to assist us in this endeavour by locating it firstly in the required curriculum content of the standards for social work education (Australian Association of Social Work, 2012).

Contributing to students' journeys of becoming Allies

Some students come into the course already on their own journeys towards being Allies, even while they may not call it this, while for others this area is quite new. Much of current student social work learning about working with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples is guided by the Australian Association of Social Workers (AASW) Australian Social Work Education and Accreditation Standards (ASWEAS) (Australian Association of Social Work, 2012) which issued a set of guidelines for core curriculum content. One of these requirements is Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander curriculum content (Guideline 1.1) which directly addresses content from an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander perspective of *Ways of Knowing, Ways of Being* and *Ways of Doing* from Karen Martin's (Martin & Mirraboopa, 2003) research in which

she provided a blueprint for engagement with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples (Martin 2003 in Australian Association of Social Work, 2012). This content is intended to honour how Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples reflect a holistic interaction with their world and models for educators a way of producing curricula and syllabi. The *Getting it Right* team used the Standards and accompanying guidelines from which to produce the teaching and learning materials (Zubrzycki et al., 2014) that are intended to assist educators to design materials and teaching and learning processes in social work qualifying courses. Some universities use these materials and some have added their own materials in the teaching and learning environment to contribute to students' need for culturally responsive knowledges and practices. While the Guidelines summarise the principles underpinning the aim for culturally responsive practice, what actually happens in the classroom and outside, and how, are largely matters left to the educators and their knowledge, understanding and confidence in working in these arenas. We have found, and the Getting it Right team also reported (Bessarab et al., 2016), that, while there was a willingness and, indeed, enthusiasm for learning and doing more to increase Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander materials in the curriculum, there was also a hesitation as many schools did not believe they had sufficient skills and knowledge to do this competently. The team concluded that "rather than necessarily *more*, the view is the need for *different* materials and curricula" (Bessarab et al., 2016, p. 137), emphases in original).

Social work teaching for practice emphasises students needing to practise from a well-founded framework which helps them to provide good explanations for the choices of practice models they use in their day-to day-work. Some of these models are chosen for them by agencies who have already selected preferred ways of working with their client group and this is particularly true of working with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. Nevertheless, graduates are not thereby relieved of the obligation of having frameworks which assist them to understand the world in which they work and its inhabitants, the issues they need to address, and the strategies which they employ to bring about change. The challenge for many non-Indigenous workers, and specifically in Australia, who are not Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people themselves, working with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples is how to design their practice framework so that it incorporates appropriate and responsive approaches that are not those only from their own frame of reference. That is, their cultural domain does not provide necessary cues for engaging and working with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. These have to be learned, and part of the responsibility for educators is to assist students to formulate frameworks for practice that reflect both the needs of the social work task (who needs to be worked with and how) and the students' own persona (their professional selves).

In putting forward examples of working frameworks developed by others for the intercultural work of non-Indigenous people working with Indigenous people, amongst all available, we have found three to be particularly useful in informing the authors' own practice frameworks. Anne Bishop (2002) first wrote in 1994 about her own quest to become an Ally. Significantly she does not present a specifically race-focused framework, rather addressing all oppression to deliberately demonstrate her view that "each form of oppression is part of a single complex, interrelated, self-perpetuating system. The whole thing rests on a world-view that says we must constantly strive to be better than someone else" (Bishop, 2002, p. 19). Bishop's

determination to be an Ally in face of these competing interests and often consequently severed relationships underpins a commitment for justice for all—not justice for some at the expense of loss and disadvantage for some. This principle of justice for all is not always accepted without reservation, particularly when groups feel and believe they are not being served well and others are benefiting at their expense. Maintaining generosity in the face of injustice sometimes demands more than is able to be given. But we are mindful of the reflections of Māori educators deciding to move from a bi-cultural perspective in their teaching to one of diversity because of the divisions and resistances from, particularly, Pākehā students (Walker, 2012). While bi-culturalism has served Māori in Aotearoa New Zealand well in many respects compared to other countries with Indigenous populations, these social work educators have explored and used alternate means of providing their students with materials and mechanisms they may learn and practise. These educators believe that encouraging students to identify and name their frustrations, biases and resentments in safe environments where they will not be punished for speaking their minds is not only productive in changing attitudes, it is also necessary.

Introducing Bishop's and others' interests of Ally work to the field of social work, Gibson (2014) provides a pedagogical model in which she helpfully connects Ally work to cultural competence in multicultural practice in recognition of the intersections of oppression. The long-accepted dimensions of attending to the cultural work of knowing, feeling and doing, or knowledge, attitudes and behaviour have here been linked to the characteristics of an Ally to provide a guide for educators to work with social work students using a social justice perspective. Gibson does not accept Ally work uncritically and identifies challenges and limitations of the Ally model, particularly in relation to its tendency of suggesting a binary focus (which Bishop however, rejects), the possibility of students becoming anxious about their complicity in wielding privilege, the real opportunities for students to practise Ally work and the difficulties of finding a starting point out from all the characteristics described in the literature. While not ignoring these limitations, Gibson nevertheless offers strategies she has found useful in the classroom to encourage students to take the opportunities for learning to become an Ally.

The second significant work, especially for Australia, is Land's (2015) work in *Decolonizing Solidarity* in which, like Bishop, she reflects on her journey towards decolonising her own position as a supporter of Indigenous struggles. For both Bishop and Land, a prime characteristic of, and necessity for, undertaking this Ally work is developing self-understanding which requires being a worker in your own liberation, thus reflecting Lilla Watson's statement:

If you have come to help me you are wasting your time. But if your emancipation is tied to mine then let us work together (acknowledged as having various locational attribution in Young, 2004, p. 118)

Both works are detailed and offer practical strategies for people who occupy privileged positions and who are working in cultural milieux that differ from their own.

The third influence is from Glen Singleton's "Courageous Conversations about Race" (Singleton & Hays, 2008) for which he has trained facilitators in Australia to run

workshops which we have had the benefit of attending. The trained facilitators are regularly invited to present a workshop as part of orientation to beginning social work students in M's university which sets the scene for their engagement with working with diversity as social workers. So adept are they at making the really strong statements yet providing a safe place for students that one year a group of about 60 students felt so safe that many of them disclosed things about themselves that they may otherwise remain hesitant to divulge to strangers.

These influences have been incorporated into a framework for our own practice, to describe what we aim to do, why and how. It is less a prescription and more of a guide or reminder in the complexities of working in colonised spaces with colonised peoples that much still needs to be done, that one way of working may work one day and not the next, that different circustances will require specific attention, and many more. It is a recognition that in the offering to be an Ally, not all people will respond positively or immediately. As Bishop (2002) notes, not all people who are experiencing oppression will value the offer to be an Ally, or be kind in their refusal, but at the same time this does not mean that rejected Allies have to inhabit selves that they consider "bad" because they are one of the oppressors. Such a view is a step beyond the original notion found in Freire (1972), Fanon (1967) and Memni (1990), that there are only two "sides": the oppressed and the oppressors, useful though these works are in understanding the processes and effects of colonisation, in Freire's case the practices of conscientisation, and Fanon's framework of decolonisation. Bishop, Land and Singleton help us to understand that there are positions, perhaps temporary, in which we can occupy that middle ground of assisting what Land calls the "struggles" and in which Bishop maintains we have an important role to play of helping members of our own group understand oppression and to make the connecting, but not hierarchical, links between oppressions.

Over the years, since our starting points and through our various experiences as social workers and social work educators in the field of race relations, the concept of ethics, or *what ought to be*, has infused the whole of social work. We take this concept too, to guide practice. Ethics as self-rule (Foucault in Bay, 2014, p. 40) and a process of self-formation (Critchley in Bay, 2014, p. 41) then inform one of the key principles identified by all three of our influences described earlier, and that is investigating and understanding who we are. Hence we frame our thinking from the position of *what ought to be* in relation to the three key dimensions for our practice in this realm as aiming to be Allies. The diagram which follows portrays this thinking.
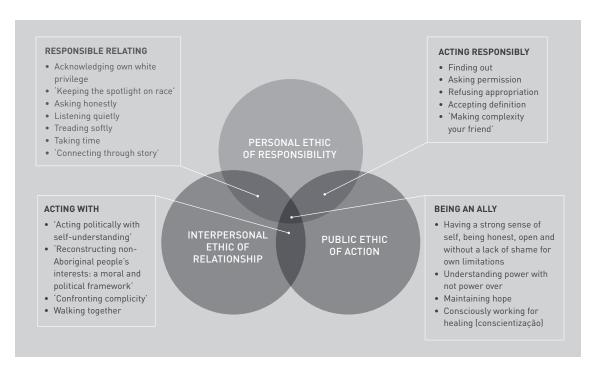
RESPONSIBLE RELATING
- Acknowledging own white privilege
- 'Keeping the spotlight on race'
- Asking honestly
- Listening quietly
- Treading softly
- Taking time
- 'Connecting through story'

ACTING RESPONSIBLY
- Finding out
- Asking permission
- Refusing appropriation
- Accepting definition
- 'Making complexity your friend'

ACTING WITH
- 'Acting politically with self-understanding'
- 'Reconstructing non-Aboriginal people's interests: a moral and political framework'
- 'Confronting complicity'
- Walking together

BEING AN ALLY
- Having a strong sense of self, being honest, open and without a lack of shame for own limitations
- Understanding power with not power over
- Maintaining hope
- Consciously working for healing (conscientização)

PERSONAL ETHIC OF RESPONSIBILITY

INTERPERSONAL ETHIC OF RELATIONSHIP

PUBLIC ETHIC OF ACTION

Figure 1. A Practice Framework for being an Ally

In this work we are each and all, individuals working from our own selves with our own strengths and inadequacies; relational beings for whom the *other* is to whom we have a responsibility (Levinas, 1998) and societal beings whose actions are affected by, and affect, the public sphere. Hence a *Personal Ethic of Responsibility* intersects with an *Interpersonal Ethic of Relationship* and *a Public Ethic of Action*, bringing together the principles informing the individal self, the recognition of connection and that the work that is done in this space is public. The intersections between these positions are further articulated as actions or imperatives for our behaviour. So, the intersection of the *Personal Ethic of Responsibility* and the *Interpersonal Ethic of Relationship* leads to a "Responsible Relating" in which our behaviour aspires to acknowledge our own white privilege, "keep the spotlight on race" (Singleton & Hays, 2008), and so on, incorporating behaviours we hope will enable us to respect and productively work with the protocols and interests of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. Similarly, the intersection of an *Interpersonal Ethic of Relationship* and the *Public Ethic of Action* involves "Acting With" and reflects Land's (2015) injunctions to 'act politically with self-understanding, reconstruct non-Aboriginal people's interests' and so on. "Acting Responsibly" brings together the *Personal Ethic of Responsibility* and the *Public Ethic of Action*. Here there are many actions which are needed in order to behave responsibly, some of which are described in more detail in Young's (2008) work concerning the often unthinking practices of definition and appropriation and the common courtesy of asking permission before doing any of this work. Singleton and Hays (2008) sum up much of this work as needing to remain mindful of working with complexity.

Taken together and at the heart of Ethics practices are the behaviours associated with *Being an Ally*. Bishop (2002) has formulated these into her own framework which may be summarised as: having a strong sense of self; being honest, open and with a lack of shame for own limitations; understanding power with not power over; maintaining hope; and consciously working for healing (conscientização).

These components of our framework are not the only necessary considerations and actions, but they summarise, for us, what is important in this work, and we are adding to these daily through our work and interactions with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. It is a process that does not end, and, in one year or even before this, and definitely in the longer term, this framework will be different in several respects. But, for now, in our thinking about our teaching, this gives us a guide for talking with students about their developing frameworks for practice in the work they will do with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.

The personal and professional selves come together in our teaching and learning, and we next present a dialogue examining some of the ways we deal with the challenges presented in teaching and learning about Ally work.

A dialogue

M: Being able to use academic learning to make sense of experiences has been important for me. The key has been the encouragement to critically reflect on my own position, values, beliefs and past to see the active agent in my own development that I could become, as stimulated by Lilla Watson's statement, quoted above.

I heard this at around the same time as I was exploring Whiteness Studies and it made me realise that it was not others I should be aiming to "save" – it was myself. This now is what I aim to convey in the classroom. So I focus a lot on exploring how White privilege manifests and its largely unseen nature. This is not always welcomed by students, but in examining these processes in non-judgemental and non-blaming ways, ultimately it is valued by students as exhibited in their own practice frameworks at the end of the course, which, for most of them, includes how they have learned about their own unearned privileges and the strategies they use to counter them.

S: It is tricky and delicate to approach this topic of race in the classroom. Initially, I found my interactions came from a place and feeling of anger which of course was tempered in my responses but none-the-less experienced by some students as me labelling them racist. I've since learned to share my own sense of privilege and that it's difficult for me to say that I myself am not racist as my whiteness often renders me blind to, and perpetuating, systems that continually privilege my everyday being. Students look shocked when I share this as I've already introduced myself as having Aboriginal sisters and family. I often turn to Peggy McIntosh's (1995) questions, at this point in the teaching, which offers students ways to consider their everyday, often taken-for-granted access to mainstream services, supports and systems to which minority groups are denied. I'm also getting much better at facilitating dialogue amongst students so they can share their views, no matter how different or confrontational. Listening to their peers' views is often a powerful learning experience too.

M: There is still some resistance when race and racism are mentioned. I remember one student from South Africa, whom I'll call "P", becoming really upset and walking out of a class given by an Aboriginal guest lecturer. Later P said s/he'd felt the lecturer had called P a racist. This hadn't happened, but the implication of what the lecturer had said about people from White countries being the beneficiaries of racist systems was taken personally. I have found the same when I've talked about White Privilege and frequent comments about white people being

disadvantaged too, how sometimes they feel they are being discriminated against by Aboriginal people—'isn't that racism?' they ask, and 'what about women, people with disabilities, members of the LGBTIQ communities, don't they suffer discrimination too?' How do you deal with that in the classroom?

S: Often, I too, hear similar questions from students and the added one of "Australia is a multicultural society. Why focus only on Aboriginal peoples?" My experience is that many students are not familiar with the history of this nation and it's only when they cover this in about week five, in the first year common core unit I teach, is its significance realised. Facts about terra nullius and Aboriginal peoples classified as flora and fauna, and that the impact of the Stolen Generation on living family members is often expressed with disbelief and shock by many students in their reflective assessments. By the end of the unit, some students have completely shifted and begin to speak about actively pursuing work in this area on completion of their degrees; an ambition earlier not considered.

M: It sounds as though starting with the self and allowing some of that to be exposed in a critical but reflective way is a useful way to begin. But there is still sometimes the resistance to the focus on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and questions about other disadvantaged groups. It's almost as though we are seen as privileging them over others. How do you deal with these sometimes entrenched societal views?

S: Imposing what I know and believe on others is not acceptable and not helpful. I'm honest and upfront about my views, beliefs and what shapes these but it's counterproductive (and inappropriate) to use my educative role to enforce these upon others. I consider my role as a "facilitator of learning," rather than "teacher," and frame the learning space in this way. I too, have much to learn from students. I encourage students to think critically, ask reflective questions, embolden them to speak about issues that are in their hearts and connect with what they understand and have experienced. They work collectively to support one another but are also urged to respectfully challenge each other. It's only in our connections with others (trust, reciprocity) that we can have dialogue that is transformative.

Change is only going to happen when Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples are no longer prevented from taking their place within the hierarchies and executive systems across all sectors (Zubrzycki et al., 2014), and then, perhaps, these entrenched views may be reduced. This, importantly, of course, includes non-Aboriginal peoples learning to unlearn and relearn other ways of doing, knowing and being—in reciprocity ("a condition that shapes relationships, which also includes, inclusivity, trustworthiness and adaptability" (Wright, O'Connell, Jones, Walley, & Roarty, 2015, p. 50). The third space is important here too, to design the learning and teaching environment where the interstitial cultural spaces can be explored and worked through with visiting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander guest speakers in trusting and inclusive ways. Students respond well to these encounters.

A further observation I have is how students will come to learn at their own pace and when it is relevant to their own life experiences. I mean, students may display a shift, no matter how slight, and this can be significant given where they are at in terms of their own understandings, education, experiences and so on. I remember one student who firmly believed

that Aboriginal people get "stuff for nothing and that's not fair." This perception and view supported this student's feelings of unequal treatment; having to "work hard to get where s/he is." By the end of the unit this student had started to speak about how s/he could see opportunities were needed for Aboriginal and Torres Strait peoples given "their" history of oppression and special circumstances that were needed for "them", and this was a small, yet significant, shift. The language of othering had not yet moved. Further educational experiences are needed to build on learnings as there are layers of complexity.

M: Yes, colleagues would also question whether we were paying too much attention to Aboriginal matters and that all the other disadvantages deserved equal treatment. It's why I was so taken with Singleton's "keep the spotlight on race." A really powerful exercise which the equity and diversity officer who was accredited to run the Courageous Conversations programme used was a Colour Line in which students position themselves according to some specific experiences the facilitator lists. It always results in a very evident colour line and makes visible the effects of being "black." After that, while complexity and intersections of disadvantage are discussed and honestly examined, there is really no questioning of the importance of race in the lived experience of people who are not white. So that's one of the aims for me, is to try and provide safe spaces for dealing with the questions, the challenges, the difficult conversations that do run over into racism and bigotry—because that's what needs to be addressed. If it's kept secret there's no possibility of dealing with it. But always we bring it back to working with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, because, in this country, no matter how much other groups experience oppression and discrimination, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples are always a group most offended against, not least of the offences being the dispossession of this as their country. And this is a challenge, to have students hear and understand this message without imposing guilt or shame, but to encourage them to become Allies in this work.

I recall when I first started teaching, many students questioned why they needed to know about Aboriginal affairs of any sort, often accompanied with the statement "I'm not going to work with Aboriginal people, so I don't need to know this." I was surprised because I knew that most of the clients that they would be working with were going to be Aboriginal. And even at that very early and novice stage of my teaching career, I knew I had to challenge those perceptions for the students and work with the staff to include more Aboriginal content in the curriculum.

S: When students state "we don't need to know about working with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples because we won't be working with them," I say "you might work alongside an Aboriginal person as your colleague." That really gets them thinking.

M: It still startles me, that in this century, that people have not had the opportunity to know about or explore these matters. I teach a class with an Aboriginal colleague mainly to school principals, who express surprise and dismay at the fact they don't know a lot of the history and circumstances and especially the effects of the policies on this current generation of children in their schools. One of the assignments they do is to design a change strategy for their schools and, because we spend a lot of time on Reconciliation Action Plans (RAPs), which is also new to some of them, they design processes for working with local Aboriginal

people towards RAPs. Some of them are quite brilliant. It is so encouraging to see people respond so positively to the challenge of reconstructing interests.

What assignments have you found that work?

S: Reflective assessments. Those questions that ask students to reflect on their own values, assumptions, beliefs and where these come from. Then asking them to consider how and where they see these expressed in our families, communities and broader society. Students often have difficulty reflecting on these things, as often it's the first time they've been asked to do so. One particular question that challenges them initially is "what is your culture?" as typically the response from white students is "I don't have one." Another topic that is significant to learning, as mentioned above, is when we cover past and current policies. Most students have not heard of past policies, except maybe the Stolen Generation, and are further surprised to learn about current policies that parallel earlier ones, for instance, the Northern Territory Intervention.

I'm also involved in a new and innovative learning and teaching project which aims to decolonise teaching and learning practices through embracing Aboriginal ways of doing, being and knowing (Wright et al., 2015). What is most powerful is when students hear lived experiences, stories from Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples themselves. Through yarning, or storying, between students, staff and Elders, many connections and differences are highlighted but importantly through relationship building students will hear stories from the lived experiences of the Elders. As a staff group, we, ourselves, stepped through a similar process that prompted a need for "unlearning," or questioning what we know and how we know what we know, to further "relearning" towards unsettling patriarchal and colonial (taken for granted) systems. The storying enables each participant to hear each other's experiences, and it highlights the importance of, and ways in which we can become Allies in this work. This is true of students too.

M: There are quite a lot of activities that we use and which work well. One is for students to compile a community profile of a particular area and present that to the rest of the class. In the time available it can only be a very preliminary description but it often gets the students realising the extent and depth of Aboriginal connection to land, the continuing cultural life that happens quite unnoticed by mainstream Australia, and, if they are very lucky, the beginnings of a relationship with Aboriginal people built on respect rather than as a client.

S: Overall, the aim in the classroom, and with colleagues too, is to mirror the journey I am on to becoming an Ally. There is a struggle and I can participate in that, but only if I acknowledge that this is informed by my own awareness of my roots and history and how it intersects with those with whom I am offering to be an Ally. I can contribute my understandings of process and change as well as other skills, of being able to support Indigenous-led alliances, of providing members of dominant groups with reasons to work for justice and many others.

These experiences illustrate both our learnings of becoming allies as well as trying to encourage students to undertake Ally work, however that might look for them. They have the experience of third space communication as well as other encounters with history, policy and practice

and above all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. We conclude by reflecting on this joint journey and our own learnings to progress how we may continue to become Allies.

Concluding thoughts on becoming an Ally

In this on-going journey for ourselves as Allies and encouraging social work students to start or continue the work of becoming Allies we reflect on our learning from this endeavour and though this writing. Among all of those valuable pointers and realisations offered by others such as Bishop (2002), Land (2015) and Singleton (Singleton & Hays, 2008), we settle on the following as being central to inform our practice. Being an Ally is to realise:

- the imperative of critical self-awareness and that without a clear articulation of our own values, beliefs, experiences and biases we will not be able to join with others as supporters in the struggles;

- the power of the relational self with others and that these relationships are characterised by honesty, humility, openness and, above all, with no expectations that these relational offerings will be accepted or welcomed;

- this is a joint struggle, but that in our engagement we are clear that it is not the equivalent to "helping." Allies are not "helpers" or wanting to "do good"; rather they are change agents, political actors who are also working to reconstruct their own interests which will lead to a differently positioned set of social relationships in which they are partners in designing a new landscape of interactions;

- that it is founded on an ethics of practice encompassing both self-rule and a process of self-formation, albeit acknowledging the value of codified and generalised ethics standards; and

- the journey towards being an Ally never ceases; there is no fixed end point.

CONCLUSION

The Third Space we have reflected on here is that set of communicative interactions between ourselves as social work educators and the students we hope will enter the field of practice with some tools and skills to assist in their work as Allies with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. While recognising the challenges still present in this colonised land of Australia, we continue this journey with a great deal of hope that the changes we have witnessed around us will deliver futures that reflect more accurately where Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples want to be, in all their diversity of being. We see the work of the students as contributing to these futures and, in some small way, hope that our offer of knowledge, skills and values assist them in this work. We have found the journeys we have made to be both challenging and rewarding, but most of all, unfinished, with new learnings just ahead. We have constructed the ethical framework for Ally practice to reflect our current being and knowing; but more importantly to encourage others to develop their own practices for being Allies, as Singleton's work from 1992, Bishop's which started in 1994, and Land journey of over 15 years all demonstrate this being an ongoing journey.

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