Enhancing Indigenous content in arts curricula through service learning with Indigenous communities

Final Report 2014

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<www.firstpeoplesservicelearning.edu.au>

<www.facebook.com/CommunityServiceLearning?ref=tn_tnmn>
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Dedication

This work is dedicated to the lives of our collaborators who passed away during this OLT project: Kumanjayi Davey, Kumanjayi Johnson and Mrs Nixon. Your wisdom, generosity and influence will be felt for many years to come.
Acknowledgements

We would like to extend our warmest thanks to our community partners in this project: Barkly Regional Arts (Tennant Creek, NT); Winanjikari Music Centre (Tennant Creek, NT); Papulu Apparr-Kari (Tennant Creek, NT), Tennant Creek High School, Mungkarta School (Tennant Creek, NT), the Australian Literacy and Numeracy Foundation, Indigenous Community Education and Awareness (Perth, WA), Kart Koort Wieren (Perth, WA), Langford Aboriginal Association (Perth, WA) and Noongar Radio (Perth, WA). Likewise, we would like to thank the students who participated in each of the service learning projects, as well as staff and colleagues at who helped facilitate this work: Gavin Carfoot (Queensland Conservatorium Griffith University QCGU, and Queensland University of Technology); Michelle Johnston, Bonita Mason and Chris Thompson (Curtin); and Shirley Gilbert (University of Western Sydney UWS). We would also like to acknowledge the support and encouragement of our various Heads of School, and the guidance given by our various university learning and teaching support staff and management.

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Thank you to the Australian Government’s Office for Learning and Teaching (OLT) for generously supporting this important work. Our thanks also go to the staff of the OLT, in particular Geremy Crithary, who have provided constructive and encouraging feedback on our interim reports and always answered our queries with care and efficiency. We also thank the OLT’s external evaluator who reviewed this report and provided such positive and encouraging feedback.
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<th>Description</th>
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<tr>
<td>ABSL</td>
<td>Arts based service learning</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ALNF</td>
<td>Australian Literacy and Numeracy Foundation</td>
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<tr>
<td>ALTC</td>
<td>Australian Learning and Teaching Council (now OLT)</td>
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<td>ARC</td>
<td>Australian Research Council</td>
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<tr>
<td>BRA</td>
<td>Barkly Regional Arts</td>
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<td>FTV</td>
<td>Film and Television</td>
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<td>GU</td>
<td>Griffith University</td>
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<td>LAA</td>
<td>Langford Aboriginal Association</td>
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<td>NAISDA</td>
<td>National Aboriginal Islander Skills Development Association</td>
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<tr>
<td>OLT</td>
<td>Australian Government’s Office for Learning and Teaching</td>
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<tr>
<td>PAK</td>
<td>Papulu Apparr-Kari Language Centre</td>
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<tr>
<td>QCGU</td>
<td>Queensland Conservatorium Griffith University</td>
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<td>QUT</td>
<td>Queensland University of Technology</td>
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<tr>
<td>UQ</td>
<td>University of Queensland</td>
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<tr>
<td>UWS</td>
<td>University of Western Sydney</td>
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<tr>
<td>WIL</td>
<td>Work Integrated Learning</td>
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<td>WMC</td>
<td>Winanjjikari Music Centre</td>
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Notes on terminology

“Indigenous”

In the original proposal (and hence the title for this report) we used the term “Indigenous” to refer to both Australian Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. This was the terminology commonly used by our pilot program partners in Central Australia, along with everyday Aboriginal English terms such as “Blackfella” and “Whitefella” to describe broad aspects of Indigenous and non-Indigenous life and culture. “Indigenous” was also the term most commonly used in the literature we consulted for our original project proposal.

At our first Advisory Group meeting in February 2012 we re-visited the discussion about terminology, and while we recognised that the term “Indigenous” was commonly used across Australia and internationally, it also evoked a problematic “Pan-Indigenising” space. Soon after our Advisory Group meeting, the National Congress of Australia’s First Peoples also recommended new terminology for referring to Indigenous peoples in Australia. In particular the Congress recommended that organisations abandon the use of the terms “Indigenous” and “ATS1” in favour of “First Peoples”, “First Nations”, and “Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander”.

The Congress’s recommendation sparked further discussion amongst our Advisory Group and Project Team. In the end, members of our Advisory Group recommended that in our publications we should use the terms “Aboriginal” or “Torres Strait Islander” wherever possible and “First Peoples” when referring to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples together or Indigenous people internationally. All of the communities involved in this project were Aboriginal communities (the rather pragmatic reasons for this are detailed in the report). Likewise when referring to non-Aboriginal and non-Torres Strait Islander participants, we would use the term “non-Indigenous.”

We have tried to be consistent with our Advisory Group’s recommendation, but at times some slippage has inevitably occurred. Readers will notice that in many of the quotes from participants in this report, the term “Indigenous” is very commonly used. After all, this terminology still seems to evoke a contested space, where many still use the term “Indigenous.” As our Griffith University colleague Adrian Miller (Professor of Indigenous Research) also confessed in a recent workshop, he is still trying to figure out what term to use and finds he slips between terminologies depending on the context.

Engaging in this discussion was a fruitful process, because it challenged us to think about deeply philosophical and ethical questions about how we both conceptualise and communicate this work. It also reinforced for us the intense importance of having an active Advisory Group and consulting with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander colleagues before making significant decisions about representing communities and our project outcomes.
“Community”

The term “community” has been equally contested. When using this term people are often grouped together as “a community” for different reasons, whether it be a geographical community, a cultural community, a community of interest, and so on. The way in which this term is commonly used can also tend to denote that a community is a homogenous whole, which is certainly not the case. A further challenge with the term “community” is that it is made up of many different constituents, and people weight the presence or absence of these differently, hence leading to very different definitions and understandings of what community is or does. This can certainly create confusion when conceptualising and communicating work about “Aboriginal communities”, for example. In reality, in the contexts we’ve worked in, defining the concept of an “Aboriginal community” is highly problematic given that it lumps people into a uniform whole. Rather, what we’re referring to here is a dynamic and fluid space that includes a number of different Aboriginal language groups, with great diversity in terms of culture and protocols, along with non-Indigenous people who also represent tremendous diversity in terms of culture and ways of seeing and engaging with the world.

For guidance on this matter, we have referred to how our partners negotiate the use of this terminology. “Community” is still the most frequently used term to refer to our Aboriginal colleagues and the land upon which they live. For all its foibles, this all-encompassing term does evoke a sense of togetherness and a strong connection to place and country. For these reasons the team follows the lead of our partners and uses the term “community” frequently in this report, at the same time acknowledging its complexities and nuances.
Executive summary

At the heart of this project has been the desire to enhance the way in which Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultural content is embedded in higher education arts curricula. It comes at a time when higher education institutions are facing growing pressure to make curriculum content more representative of and responsive to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander culture. In response, many Australian universities have established formal initiatives to embed Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander culture and intercultural competency across the curriculum. This has taken the form of policies and reconciliation action plans, community engagement initiatives, networks and councils of Elders. Despite the proliferation of such initiatives, the incorporation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander perspectives into higher education curricula and cultures remains a challenging political, social and practical task. This project has sought to address this challenging task by positioning arts based service learning (ABSL) as a strategy through which Australian higher education institutions can promote Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultural content for students in ways that also directly support Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities.

Approach and methodology

Building on three years of pilot work in Central Australia, this project involved running ABSL projects with three Australian universities (Queensland Conservatorium Griffith University, Curtin University and the University of Western Sydney). These sub-projects were undertaken in collaboration with communities in regional and metropolitan areas in Western Australia and the Northern Territory, and largely involved students working alongside Aboriginal artists and Elders on community-led projects.

The team employed a meta-ethnographic data collection and analysis approach to document and interpret outcomes across the three sub-projects. The team collected data using shared semi-structured interview protocols, student assessment and reflection tasks, and researcher reflective diary/observations templates that were adapted to suit each university’s sub-project. The team used additional unstructured diary writing and video and photo observation techniques to document the different contexts within which the three sub-projects occurred. The team conducted four waves of collaborative and systematic qualitative data analysis over a period of 18 months between June 2012 and November 2013. This included: 1) a pilot analysis; 2) the development of a national coding schema; 3) collaborative interdisciplinary interpretation; and 4) feedback and final decision-making.

Key findings

The data collected for this project provides an extremely rich, multilayered, and complex picture of the intercultural processes and outcomes associated with each of the sub-projects. Most importantly, the data collected provides a gathering of viewpoints and experiences from all participants in the projects including Aboriginal artists, Elders and arts workers, partner representatives including school teachers and administrators, community arts organisation representatives, Aboriginal, Torres Strait Islander and non-Indigenous students, and ABSL facilitators from the partner universities.
When distilling the key findings, the team identified that three interconnected ways of learning were occurring in this work. They were framed around Ways of Knowing, Ways of Being, and Ways of Doing. In fleshing out how these three ways of learning can occur in ABSL, the team found great inspiration in Aboriginal scholar Karen Booran Mirrabaopa Martin’s (2003) descriptions of a Quandamooka worldview that encapsulates these three elements. Within these three ways of learning the team observed a further nine ways that engagement was occurring. These can be summarised as follows: 

**Ways of Knowing:** 1) sitting down on country; 2) respecting culture and First Peoples’ worldviews; 3) transforming understandings and worldviews through critical reflection. 

**Ways of Being:** 4) building and deepening relationships; 5) learning and sharing in reciprocal ways; 6) responding to contextual dynamics and politics with sensitivity.

**Ways of Doing:** 7) using the arts as a medium for connection and collaboration; 8) designing and implementing ABSL projects to meet both community and institutional needs; 9) building sustainability into ABSL projects.

At any given point in the sub-projects these ways of learning and engaging were taking place, and our community collaborators often subtly controlled the depths to which the team members travelled into, through and out of them. These ways of learning and engaging were also deeply interconnected and often contingent on one another, but not always the focus of attention at the same time. Once again, our community collaborators often guided what people came to know, how they related to others, and where and when this was done. Of course, the complex and interrelated ways in which this learning and engaging occurred were certainly not as neat and organised as this framework suggests. However, this framework resonates with our practice, and has provided a way of organising and representing a substantial amount of rich data in a way that takes inspiration from an Aboriginal worldview. In the following report, detailed testimonials and examples of practice are given under the headings of this framework. It is hoped this will be a useful starting point for those interested in developing new projects; a valuable reflective prompt for those in the thick of these projects; and a beneficial reference point for those evaluating these projects.

**Project outcomes and impact**

In addition to implementing these three sub-projects as part of the OLT project, the team was delivering three substantial outcomes: 1) a brochure with guidelines, strategies and resources that focus specifically on the processes, benefits and challenges of developing ABSL partnerships with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities; 2) a media-rich website that shares the results of this project, alongside a range of resources for universities, colleges and communities and a Facebook page; and 3) an edited book to be published by Springer in 2014/2015, entitled: *Arts-Based Service Learning with First Peoples: Stories, experiences, and methods to support respectful and mutually beneficial relationships and practice.* In addition to delivering these projected outputs the team has also delivered a range of creative outputs (including a documentary, a multi-media installation, co-written songs, performances, news stories, and more), international and national conference presentations, peer-reviewed journal articles, and cultural awareness training resources. At the time of writing this report, these outputs have had a significant impact already through the development of curriculum materials, community projects, university-community partnerships, graduate employment outcomes, community training, and teaching awards.
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Chapter 1. Background

This report presents the key learnings and outcomes from the *Enhancing Indigenous content in arts curricula through service learning with Indigenous communities* project (known publicly as the *First Peoples Arts Based Service Learning Project*). In many ways this report is an attempt to capture a richness of experience and intercultural connection and learning that many Australians do not commonly get to experience. It is no exaggeration to say that for many of those involved, the project has been life changing. In some cases it has thus been difficult to put these experiences into words on a page. As UWS student Lisa so aptly described: “I don’t know whether it’s possible to capture a lot of it as so much of it is interpersonal” (Lisa, UWS, 2012). To address this issue, and supplement this report, the team has prepared rich media resources including a project website: <www.firstpeoplesservicelearning.edu.au>, a facebook site <www.facebook.com/communityservicelearning>, and several mini documentaries depicting work at the partner universities involved in this project. The team have also prepared an informational brochure that summarises the key content of these resources and invites people to explore the stories contained therein in more detail. Academic discussions and analyses of this work have been presented in a number of international and national conference presentations, peer reviewed journal articles, a forthcoming edited volume, and a range of creative outputs.

While team members offer the above resources in the spirit of attempting to more fully capture the richness of relationships, country, and experiences in this project, the team acknowledge that much of what was learned and experienced through partnerships and friendships with our community partners needs to be experienced directly in relationships with others and their home environments to truly be appreciated, felt, and understood. This in itself speaks to the value of and need for approaches such as ABSL in building relationships and understanding among non-Indigenous people of Australian Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander culture and communities, in addition to other ways of learning about these cultures. The team hence hope that this report can provide a foundation for other universities and colleges across Australia and internationally to build mutually beneficial and strong bonds with First Peoples communities through ABSL partnerships and projects.

As was discussed with the Advisory Group, this work with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities must be handled with great care and restraint on the part of higher education institutions: Those institutions must not take this report as encouragement to “flood” Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities with either requests for ABSL projects or students. In this regard, ABSL must be but one part of a broader ongoing move toward bringing Indigenous content into the curriculum in Australian higher education and must be supported by many other institutional, interpersonal, and personal changes.

Context for the project

The interface between Australian higher education institutions and Australian Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities has gained increasing attention since former Australian Prime Minister Kevin Rudd’s historic 2008 apology to members of the “Stolen Generations” of Australians who were forcibly removed from their families by government officials from the late 1800s through to the 1970s. There is growing pressure on higher education
institutions to support reconciliation by making higher education more representative of and responsive to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander culture. The National Indigenous Higher Education Network, for example, recommended in its report to the United Nations (2009, p. 7) that higher education institutions should “systemically embed Indigenous perspectives in curriculum and acknowledge the scholarly contributions of Indigenous communities in developing a culturally ethical framework to underpin research and learning”. Likewise, the authors of the 2008 Review of Australian Higher Education (Commonwealth of Australia, 2008, p. 32) recommended that:

higher education providers must not only address [Indigenous students’] learning needs but also recognise and act on issues such as the culture of the institution, the cultural competence of all staff – academic and professional – and the nature of the curriculum.

The most comprehensive move toward embedding Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander content in Australian higher education was Universities Australia’s 2012 National Best Practice Framework for Indigenous Cultural Competency in Australian Universities. This provided “a framework for embedding Indigenous cultural competencies within and across the institution in sustainable ways which engender reconciliation and social justice by enabling the factors that contribute to social, economic and political change” (Universities Australia, 2012). The Framework centres around five guiding principles, namely that:

1. Indigenous people should be actively involved in university governance and management;
2. All graduates of Australian universities will have the knowledge and skills necessary to interact in a culturally competent way with Indigenous communities;
3. University research will be conducted in a culturally competent way in partnership with Indigenous participants;
4. Indigenous staffing will be increased at all appointment levels and, for academic staff, across a wider variety of academic fields; and
5. Universities will operate in partnership with their Indigenous communities and will help disseminate culturally competent practices to the wider community. (Universities Australia, 2012)

In response, many Australian universities have established formal initiatives to embed Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander culture and intercultural competency across the curriculum. Recent initiatives include policies and reconciliation action plans which seek to embed Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultural competency for staff and students; Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community engagement, service learning and partnership programs; committees, networks and councils of Elders who advise on or oversee activities related to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander policy and engagement; and incentives and grants schemes for recruiting and supporting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff and students.

Despite the proliferation of such initiatives, the incorporation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander perspectives into higher education curricula and cultures remains a challenging political, social and practical task, which has even prompted negative media coverage (Trounson, 2012a, 2012b, 2012c). In many cases the inclusion of Aboriginal and Torres Strait
Islander curriculum, cultural awareness and content has been presented in an abstract manner that is removed from the lived experience of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander culture and traditional Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander protocols for sharing knowledge (Newsome, 1999). Mackinlay and Dunbar-Hall (2003) have suggested that in-class learning experiences can lack the intercultural relationships required to promote reconciliation and deeper understandings of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander ways of knowing, being and doing.

Our project sought to position arts based service learning (ABSL) as a strategy through which Australian higher education institutions can promote Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultural content for all students in ways that potentially overcome the above limitations and directly support Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities. Consonant with Molnar (2010) and others (see Lawton, 2010; Russell & Hutzel, 2007; Russell-Bowie, 2007; Thomas & Mulvey, 2008), it can be argued that ABSL can provide a culturally sensitive and enabling process for embedding Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander content. The team makes this claim on the basis that the arts foster interpersonal expression and empathy, individual control over personal expression and identity, and non- or extra-linguistic intercultural communication.

Service learning

Service learning has the dual aim of enriching learning and strengthening communities. The core concept is the combination of service and learning objectives, with activities designed to positively affect both service recipient and provider (Furco & Billig, 2002; Furco, 1996). Higher education students who have engaged in service learning have been found to demonstrate greater complexities of understanding than non-service learning comparison groups (Eyler & Giles, 1999), and for this reason (among others), service learning has emerged as an effective pedagogical strategy with benefits beyond the integration of community service into the academic curriculum (Cho, 2006; Robinson & Meyer, 2012). A key feature of service learning is that it is an organised activity wherein community service is integrated with classroom instruction or structured assessment (Cho, 2006; Robinson & Meyer, 2012). Furco (1996) emphasised that service-learning programs were distinguished from other forms of experiential education by “their intention to equally benefit the provider and the recipient of the service as well as to ensure equal focus on both the service being provided and the learning that is occurring” (p. 5). For many authors, service learning is also defined by shared control over projects between educators and community participants (see Boyle-Baise et al., 2001); by the mutual learning between students and community participants and not just the exchange of service; by the pursuit of concrete outcomes for participating communities; and by student contributions to broader civil society (Kraft, 1996; Soska et al., 2010; Stoecker & Tryon, 2009).

In Australia the phrase “service learning” is often used interchangeably with “community engagement”; however a number of authors have identified core aspects of service learning that separate it from other community engagement activities. Purmensky (2009, pp. 4-5), for example, lists five critical aspects of service learning:

1. Reciprocity: benefits for both students and the community;
2. Meaningful service: activity that meets the curriculum standards and objectives of the subjects taught;
3. Reflection: Learning and feelings contemplated through formal and informal discussions and writing;
4. Development: for example, a continuum from observation to experience and leadership; and
5. Diversity: students working in a diverse setting with a diverse population that they would not normally experience.

The contemporary literature on service learning offers numerous iterations of the above-mentioned criteria, but authors almost uniformly agree that the core aspects of service learning include reflection, structured activity, and reciprocity between students and community participants (see Cho, 2006; McCarthy, 2003; Russell-Bowie, 2007; Siebenaler, 2005). Butin (2003, pp. 1676-1677) identifies that “[i]rrespective of the definitional emphasis, service-learning advocates put forward a consistent articulation of the criteria for service learning to be legitimate, ethical, and useful. These may be glossed as the four Rs Respect, reciprocity, relevance, and reflection”. Hironimus-Wendt and Lovell-Troy (1999) further emphasise that service learning’s structure and “deliberate integration of service delivery and course content” (p. 361) differentiates it from volunteerism and internships, which are less structured and often more indirectly related to course content.

While Australian universities have explored service learning for well over a decade (Kenworthy-U’Ren, 2008; Print, 2001; Sunderland et al., 2004), it is now the object of renewed attention across the fields of management education and business ethics (Hrivnak & Sherman, 2010; Kenworthy, 2010); literacy education and teacher education (Naidoo, 2011; Power, 2012); computer and information science (Evans & Sawyer, 2009); women’s health (Parker et al., 2009); and law (Blissenden, 2006). However, other than in music education (Russell-Bowie, 2007; 2009) there is little evidence of Australian service learning projects for creative and performing arts students.

First Peoples’ perspectives on service learning

First Peoples service learning is a subset of service learning in which First Peoples and non-Indigenous students work directly in First Peoples’, community-led projects. Research on service learning with Australian Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities has primarily focussed on literacy support and teacher education in remote schools with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students, and our own previous work on collaborative music programs (see Bartleet & Carfoot, 2013; Jay et al., 2009; Naidoo, 2011). Elsewhere, literature on First Peoples service learning has drawn on the perspectives and experiences of law, environment and education students working with Native American, Hawaiian, Mayan, Andean, and South African First Peoples communities and cultures (see Feinstein, 2005; Guffey, 2008; Porter & Monard, 2000; Tirado & Rivera, 2002). Indeed, Litlepage, Gazley and Bennett (2012, p. 306) maintain that most research in the USA has examined service learning’s impact “from the limited perspective of a student’s pedagogical experience and the campus’s ability to support service learning”. While not typically tailored to First Peoples experiences and contexts, broader discussions of service learning for social justice and change (see Mitchell & Humphries, 2007; Lewis, 2004), multicultural service learning (see
Zygmunt-Fillwalk & Clark, 2007; Boyle-Baise, Epler, McCoy, & Paulk, 2001), and ‘interracial’ service learning (see Murphy & Rasch, 2008) offer important insights on the socio-political and intercultural dimensions of First Peoples service learning.

While there is relatively little existing literature dedicated to First Peoples service learning, there is even less literature that conceptually service learning from First Peoples’ perspectives. Notable exceptions to this include Guffey’s (2008) Keynote Address to the 2008 Northwest Indian College Second Summit on Indigenous Service-Learning in Washington State, in which he described building a “strong link” from First Peoples ways, the earth and nature into the larger society.

... I ask the question: how do people learn to find and know themselves in this world? The answer that I have come to is two-fold: first, by encountering and establishing spiritual connections with the earth through the senses, the intellect and the emotional body. Second, through the inter-relationship of storytelling and service-learning. Think of storytelling as a needle and service-learning as the thread. The story makes an impression and creates an opening, then service-learning follows. Together they draw the fabric of life: people, places and nature together in new experiences. Connecting the power of storytelling with each generation takes more than repetition and reflection on the stories. It also takes real-life encounters in the form of service-learning.

In addition to the deep formulation of intercultural reconciliation and reciprocity in the First Peoples’ perspectives of service learning, authors also invoke distinct “asset based” approaches. These approaches uphold “a commitment to appreciating the assets of and serving the needs of a community partner while enhancing student learning and academic practice through intentional reflection and responsible civic action” (Guffey, 2008, p. 9). As Hutzel (2007, p. 306 in Molnar, 2010, p. 11) has discussed, focusing on the “social, physical, environmental and human” assets of a community promotes respect for community members as capable agents and partners, rather than “people in need of being saved”.

**Arts based service learning (ABSL)**

Educators in the USA have explored ABSL as a way of connecting students and community members and promoting community arts practice, placing “art in a community context as both a creative practice and a teaching method to fulfill arts-based educational objectives ranging from creative self-expression to competency with discipline-specific standards” (Krensky & Steffen, 2008, p. 15). ABSL is distinguished from general service learning by the fact that the arts are “central to the experience as both a means to meeting community-identified needs and an end in and of themselves” (Krensky & Steffen, 2008, p. 15).

The literature on ABSL lists the benefits as: facilitating expression, communication and connections between diverse participants; evoking participants’ strengths and abilities (Thomas & Mulvey, 2008); developing empathy and compassion between participants and for other groups (Molnar, 2010); building community through “empathetic social interaction” (Jeffers, 2009, p. 19); providing opportunities to inquire into and affirm “personal, cultural, or spiritual values” (Jeffers, 2009, p. 18); and providing the ability to
“mirror” society in the form of artworks and “subsequently invoke social change” (Molnar, 2010, p. 19). It can be argued that many of these benefits are highly compatible with First Peoples’ perspectives of service learning. These perspectives have been identified in the existing literature and in our own ABSL work with Australian Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities. Yet, while some attention has been paid to using ABSL with culturally and linguistically diverse communities (see Southcott & Joseph, 2010), little attention has been given to specific applications with First Peoples communities in Australia or elsewhere.

Service learning for social change

The potential for academic work to achieve social change has long been emphasised (see for example Somerville & Perkins, 2003); however, “emancipatory” research projects working in intercultural contexts are often prescriptive in terms of how power should be shared between researcher and researched. In response to these concerns, the team sought to work beyond the emancipatory paradigm that has characterised much critical intercultural research (Somerville & Perkins, 2003). Team members situated our understanding of culture (and thus intercultural teaching and learning experiences) in critical theories of difference and diversity (cf. Carrington & Saggers, 2008; DePalma, 2008). These approaches build on socio-cultural understandings of “whiteness” and other critical constructions of race to arrive at a position that aspires towards decolonisation. Such a decolonising approach enables the project to explore “alternative possibilities to the forces of colonisation” (Somerville & Perkins, 2003, p. 255), by:

- Recognising and reconceptualising categories that maintain borders (e.g. First Peoples/non-Indigenous) (Giroux, 1992);
- Acknowledging hybrid subject-positions e.g. “temporal and contextual coalitions” (Haig-Brown, 2001) or the “third space” (Soja, 2000);
- Redrawing boundaries between constructions of experience and power (Giroux, 1992); and
- Questioning who has a right to speak and what is appropriate in particular contexts at particular times (Mackinlay, 2008).

The team have adopted service learning as a pedagogical approach that steps outside the traditional classroom to enable such intercultural experiences to occur. Within this paradigm the team embrace a critical service learning orientation, which means that the focus was on relationships, social change and power redistribution. As Mitchell (2008, p. 65) explains, in this way the project is able to develop and analyse initiatives with “greater attention to equality and shared power between all participants in the service experience and [opportunities for students] to analyse the interplay of power, privilege, and oppression at the service placement and in their experience in that placement”.

Such service learning projects have been integrated into curricular and community development projects as diverse as public health, teacher training and local economic transformation. These type of service learning projects are also applied in learning and teaching activities that focus on cross-cultural collaborations and often occur in “space[s] no longer controlled by ... conventions of Western academic discourse” (Mackinlay, 2008, p. 258), enabling students to critically question the positioning of the academy and of academic discourse in society more broadly.
Benefits of intercultural service learning

Facilitators of intercultural service learning have identified a number of benefits that make it more effective than classroom based learning for exposing students to social marginalisation and cultural difference. Examples of identified benefits for students include: putting “a face” to diverse others and their experiences; having experiences of being a minority “other” within a culture that is different to their own; opportunities to develop enduring friendships with diverse others; new awareness of one’s own cultural identity; opportunities for formal and informal community-led learning; transformation of personal and professional sense of self; and opportunities for profound “encounters” or epiphanies that lead to lifelong journeys of intercultural development (Bamber & Hankin, 2011; Zygmunt-Fillwalk & Clark, 2007; Boyle-Baise & Sleeter, 2000).

Despite broad agreement on these potential benefits of intercultural service learning, some authors have advocated for more in-depth and critical approaches. It is clear, for example, that the bulk of existing research on service learning focuses on student rather than community outcomes and perspectives. This is despite pervasive claims that service learning is about deriving mutual student and community benefit (Boyle-Baise et al., 2001; Furco, 1996). Some studies asked students to indicate what they thought were the benefits for their community partners (see for example Caldwell et al., 2008), however there is little direct record of community experiences, perspectives, or “voice” in the current empirical literature.

Murphy and Rasch (2008) argue that there has also been little philosophical or theoretical development of service learning that attends to intercultural relationship building. In place of detailed philosophical or theoretical development, these authors argue that there has been a general assumption that

as students began to enter communities, exchange insights with local persons, and work on relevant social projects, rapport would begin to develop between the two groups. Students would begin to bond with these communities and exhibit a sense of social commitment. (2008, pp. 64-65)

Similarly, Boyle-Baise (1999, p. 310) found that delineation of the “philosophical intentions” of intercultural service learning was rare, with “assumptions about citizenship, community, and service usually remain[ing] unquestioned.” Boyle-Baise (1999, p. 310) found that many of her participating students – who were primarily white middle class Americans – were subject to complex “systemic philosophic screens” that encouraged them to view and relate to diverse community partners in a deficit way: that is, as “less than” themselves. She argued that common functionalist student conceptions of service learning as “charity work” further exacerbated this deficit view by stimulating student “giving” without producing significant change in their world views or understandings of inequality (Boyle-Baise, 1999, pp. 310-312).

Murphy and Rasch (2008) applied Allport’s (1954) “contact theory” to intercultural service learning to describe the conditions that are required to produce positive intercultural outcomes between culturally diverse students and community members. Contact theory emerged in the United States at a time when black African American and non African
American children were first united in public schools following the abandonment of segregation. Significantly, Allport argued that authorities should not assume that interracial “contact” alone would produce positive outcomes (1954 in Murphy & Rasch, 2008, p. 69). He suggested, rather, that certain “conditions” must be met if interracial contact is to produce positive outcomes, including “equal status, cooperation, common goals, and support from authorities” (Allport, 1954 in Murphy & Rasch, 2008, p. 69).

Our experience of ABSL projects over the years indicates that collaborative music-making can fulfil Allport’s conditions for interracial contact to produce positive outcomes. Further research by Antonio (2001) however reemphasises that not all forms of intercultural contact will produce positive outcomes. In a study of interracial contact between students on a university campus, Antonio (2001, p. 593) found that

... casual interracial interaction is particularly beneficial among students with more racially homogeneous friendship circles, especially with regard to developing leadership skills. In addition, findings indicate that frequent interracial interaction among students may be more important in developing cultural knowledge than involvement in formal activities such as cultural awareness workshops.

Antonio’s findings reaffirmed Allport’s original thesis that ‘negative results such as the reinforcement of racial stereotypes’ are likely to occur if the contact is casual: that is, if contact only involves incidental interactions such as attending the same venues or courses separately (Allport, 1954 in Antonio, 2001, p. 596). This is echoed in Mary Louise Pratt’s (1992) description of contact zones – that is, where peoples geographically and historically separated come into contact with each other – and the reality that these zones are full of both “possibilities and perils” (as cited in Somerville & Perkins, 2003, p. 255).

Broader literature on “interracial” communication in the United States and Canada indicates that arts activities can offer a positive medium for reducing “stereotype threat” and associated anxiety around intercultural engagements. For example, in their study of interracial communication between white and Canadian First Peoples, Vorauer, Main, and O’Connell (1998) found that when white Canadians were concerned about being stereotyped as “racist” they generally performed less well in interracial verbal communication (for example, stuttering) and relationship building. Tatum and Sekaquaptewa (2009) also found that “whites” who were concerned about appearing racist spoke less and adopted a submissive “learner” role when discussing race with African Americans. Data collected throughout our project indicates that problems associated with intercultural anxiety may be overcome or at least mitigated through informal collaborative arts based and creative processes involved in ABSL.

Queensland Conservatorium Griffith University Pilot Program 2009-2011

Prior to the current OLT project, in 2009 the Queensland Conservatorium Griffith University (QCGU) commenced a pilot ABSL program in collaboration with Barkly Regional Arts and the Winanijjikari Music Centre, located in Tennant Creek, NT. Each year from 2009 to 2011, students and staff travelled to Tennant Creek for two-week programs during which they
worked alongside Aboriginal artists and Elders on a range of community-led programs. These included recording and writing albums, documenting cultural activities, managing community festivals, staging and recording performances, building community arts infrastructure, and running school holiday programs. The aims of the ABSL pilot program were two-fold: first, to enhance the way in which Aboriginal content was embedded in arts-based curricula at Griffith University; and second, to develop Griffith’s relationships and connections with Aboriginal communities in Australia. The pilot project directly involved approximately 20 students across seven undergraduate arts programs. The pilot also hosted students from The University of Queensland’s (UQ) School of Music and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies Unit. Within Tennant Creek itself, the program involved work with over 30 Aboriginal artists and Elders and over 50 youth.

To put Tennant Creek into context, it is a township of approximately 3,500 people, located 500 kilometres north of Alice Springs and 1,000 kilometres south of Darwin. Approximately 70% of the current population is Aboriginal, and sixteen Aboriginal language groups are spoken in the region. Barkly Regional Arts (BRA) provides an interface between Aboriginal and non-Indigenous cultures and delivers around 50 annual programs and projects to over 800 artists. Given the region’s high levels of unemployment, social disadvantage and cultural erosion, BRA’s programs focus on building social and community well-being, cultural maintenance, career pathways, and financial and health support. BRA auspices the Winanjjikari Music Centre (WMC), which operates as a music production house and training centre for Aboriginal musicians and music production technicians in Tennant Creek. WMC projects promote social cohesion and community building by generating and fostering complementary income streams, positive lifestyle choices and intergenerational activities that transmit and celebrate traditional and contemporary music.

Like many Australian universities, Griffith University had expressed commitment “to the creation of a curriculum that is informed by and respects the knowledge systems of our first peoples—Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders” (Griffith University, 2011). However, participation and retention rates within the Conservatorium are variable for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students, and there has been concern about lack of alignment between the formal curriculum and the prior learning experiences of these students (QCGU Review Document, 2012). Given that service learning relationships may prove to be the most effective means by which QCGU can interact positively with Indigenous communities (QCGU Review Document, 2012), the ABSL program was strongly positioned to form part of a solution.

The pilot ABSL approach in Tennant Creek

In contrast to the functionalist “charity” view of service learning, QCGU’s overarching philosophical approach to designing the ABSL pilot project could be described as “postmodern” (Boyle-Baise, 1999). Postmodern approaches to service learning encourage: empathising with others as equals; demystifying cultural differences; fostering dialogue and trusting relationships across differences (i.e. border crossing); and developing caring and responsive students and staff who work alongside diverse others on community-led projects (Boyle-Baise, 1999, p. 317). The QCGU facilitators have enacted this approach through a strong partnership with the regional arts organisation Barkly Regional Arts and local
Aboriginal musicians and sound engineers at the Winanjjikari Music Centre in Tennant Creek, Northern Territory, in central Australia.

As documented elsewhere (see for example Bartleet & Carfoot, 2013; Bartleet, 2012, 2011), QCGU service learning project facilitators and partners sought to create opportunities for Aboriginal Winanjjikari staff members and local Elders to lead informal activities with students on a day-to-day basis during service learning trips. In many cases this has involved students simply “turning up” at the Winanjjikari Music Centre shed and “hanging around” in the open jamming area and recording studio. This largely informal approach to service learning activities provided an organic context for intercultural engagement, which was largely unstructured on a day-to-day basis. As a result music students typically fell in with whatever activities were taking place at the Centre, such as setting up sound and lighting for local events, recording local musicians, or jamming with musicians who were present each day.

The program was offered in second semester to accommodate community events, requirements and seasons, and to allow sufficient time for student recruitment, gaining community permissions and establishing cultural protocols. Each year the same two people have facilitated the program, and this continuity has had a positive effect on the relationships formed with Aboriginal Elders and artists. The program activities have differed each year in response to community needs. The first year involved setting up a recording studio, the second year aligned with the Desert Harmony Festival, and in the third year of the pilot project students worked on song writing and recording projects.

Despite the varied activities, each iteration of the project incorporated three key phases. First, students received intercultural training. Where possible, this commenced prior to the program and included a brief cross-cultural orientation session. Once in the community, students attended classes on language and culture with respected Warumungu Elders. Second, students collaborated with Aboriginal artists at Winanjjikari Music Centre in artistic tasks, and on everyday errands that form part of working in a remote community. All students engaged in three reflective activities, which formed their assessment and provide important data for the program’s ongoing research (Swords & Kiely, 2010). Students: (a) produced field diaries, documenting their learning processes as well as reflecting on the intercultural competencies developed through this work; (b) participated in an interview with the facilitators about the learning process and the implications of this for Aboriginal content in the curriculum; and (c) created a five-minute digital story about the experience using footage from their trip. Lastly, students communicated their experience to the university and broader Brisbane community, via digital stories, workshops and presentations.
The QCGU processes and experiences from 2009 to 2011 informed the development of this broader OLT project, as well as a new service-learning program at Curtin University. Experienced ABSL facilitators in the UWS School of Secondary Education have also conducted ABSL programs in Tennant Creek since 2009 in partnership with the Australian Literacy and Numeracy Foundation. Long-term experiences from both this UWS work and the QCGU pilot project have significantly informed the shape and approaches taken in the current OLT project.

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1 As a sign of cultural respect, we have covered the face of one of the Winanjjikari Music Centre members who has recently passed away.
Positioning ourselves

**Project Leader Brydie-Leigh Bartleet** is a Senior Lecturer at the Queensland Conservatorium Griffith University, Deputy Director of the Queensland Conservatorium Research Centre, convenor of the Music and Communities Strand and convenor of the Bachelor of Music Honours Program. She is a non-Indigenous woman who grew up between South Africa and Australia. This bi-cultural upbringing has led her to become fascinated with the role that music plays in bringing cultures together. She has been involved in research alongside Australian Aboriginal colleagues and communities for the past 8 years. As described in the aforementioned pilot description, Brydie has been collaborating with the Tennant Creek community for the past 5 years, and is known locally by her skin name *Nungarroyi*. She works closely with her husband Gavin Carfoot on this project, and their close relationship has been a defining influence on their shared work in Tennant Creek. Brydie has also worked on projects closer to home alongside Griffith’s Council of Elders and facilitated the recent production of a CD of songs called *Cungeella* (2013) with William *Dura Danje* Leisha, Shem *Curan Danje* Leisha and Aunty Anne *Birrabin Barndha* Leisha. She has also worked to include Aunty Anne and Uncle Bill on the teaching staff for her large first-year class at the Conservatorium. Brydie is also working on the Australian Research Council (ARC) funded project *Captive Audiences* (2012-2013), which explores performing arts rehabilitation programs in prisons. Prior to this she worked on the Australian Research Council funded project *Sound Links* (2007-2008), which was one of the largest studies into community music in Australia and featured two Aboriginal case studies (one remote community – Borroloola and one metropolitan community – Inala). Her research focuses broadly on intercultural community arts practices, and during the final stages of the OLT project she undertook a Visiting Fellowship at the University of Cambridge to work on a new international intercultural arts network. For her personally, the most defining moment in this work to-date was taking her two-year old twins Caitlin and Claire (known in Tennant Creek by their Warumungu skin name, *Nampin*) on the project in 2013. Watching the community warmly embrace her girls reiterated what she has always known: the most fundamentally important element in this life and work is relationships.

**Project Team Member Dawn Bennett** is a Senior Research Fellow, Australian Learning and Teaching Fellow, and Director of the Creative Workforce initiative at Curtin University. Her research and teaching focuses on the education, working lives and economic circumstances of creative artists. Her research incorporates studies on learning and engagement amongst undergraduate and graduate students; academic work; practising artists; identity development; and research frameworks. Dawn holds postgraduate degrees in education and performance (viola) and has worked as a musician and academic in the UK, Australia and Canada. She has authored over 50 publications in the areas of education, careers and the creative workforce, including four monographs and edited collections. Dawn is on the editorial
boards of the International Journal of Music Education and the Australian Journal of Music Education. She is a member of the Music Council of Australia and a commissioner for the International Society of Music Education’s Teaching and Learning Forum. Dawn has taught in the higher education sector since 1997 and has been a consistent contributor to the development of higher education curriculum. This has included membership of the Curriculum Services Support Network and authorship of a degree program for regional students. From 2000 until 2002 she was responsible for the management and leadership of a regional academic team delivering programs in the visual and performing arts, textiles, graphic design and information technology. Within this role she established a community arts program that won the Curtin Vice Chancellor’s Community Service Award (2000). Many of the arts programs were delivered in Aboriginal communities such as that in Lake Grace, WA. In the year 2000 she co-facilitated a National Learnscope project that identified and delivered professional development for lecturers in regional locations, and in 2003 she completed a National Fellowship in Flexible Learning with the Australian National Training Authority. Dawn was an Australian Learning and Teaching Council (ALTC) Fellow with a project that concluded in 2011. Recently she was awarded the Curtin Vice Chancellor’s Award for Excellence for her inspirational leadership.

**Project Team Member Anne Power** is an Associate Professor in Music Education in the School of Education and the Centre for Education Research at the University of Western Sydney. Her international connections have led her to investigate and publish on the relational learning that happens through music and the arts. As Course Adviser for the Master of Teaching Secondary Program and co-Convenor of the service learning unit, she has strongly linked schools with community programs. Her years in Tennant Creek have brought together her arts-based learning with her service learning passion and she rejoices in her skin name, Nangali. Anne is a 2010 winner of the ALTC Award for University Teaching for *Beyond Institutional Walls: Community engagement in secondary teacher education* for programs that enhance learning. She is the author of a chapter in *Opera Indigena: Re/presenting First Nations and Indigenous Cultures* (2010). Related projects are in global education. Anne is editor of *Musicworks*, the journal of the Australian National Council of Orff Schulwerk. She is on several editorial boards of journals. Her co-authoring of national reports includes *School Music Education Provision in Australia* and *Boys’ Education: Motivation and Engagement*. Anne’s commitment to social justice issues emerges in her work on the report *Positive Behaviour for Learning* and the ensuing ARC project *Enabling schooling success* (2014). This commitment underpins her work on *Teaching for a Fair Go: Exemplary teachers of students in poverty*.

**Project Team Member Kathryn Marsh** is a member of the Music Education Unit at the Sydney Conservatorium of Music, University of Sydney, where she was formerly Chair of Music Education (2005-2010) and Associate Dean, Research (2008-2009). She teaches subjects relating to primary music education, cultural diversity in music education, Aboriginal music education and music education research methods. With a PhD in ethnomusicology and a professional teaching background in
school music education and English as a Second Language education, her research interests include children’s musical play, children’s creativity, music in the lives of refugee children and multicultural and Aboriginal music education. She has written numerous scholarly and professional publications, including her book, *The Musical Playground: Global Tradition and Change in Children’s Songs and Games*, published by Oxford University Press and winner of the UK Folklore Society’s Katherine Briggs Award. In conjunction with the NSW Department of Education and Training, and the NSW Board of Studies, she has been actively involved in curriculum development and teacher training for many years and has presented internationally on a regular basis. She has been the recipient of national research grants from the ARC and the Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies which have involved large-scale international cross-cultural collaborative research into children’s musical play in Europe, the UK, Korea, USA and with Aboriginal communities in and around Tennant Creek in the Northern Territory. On the basis of her broad knowledge of primary music education, she was invited to be a member of an interdisciplinary research team that conducted the National Review of School Music Education in Australia in 2004-2005, and was also invited to be editor of the primary music section in the *Oxford Handbook of Music Education* (OUP). Due to serious health issues Kathy had to withdraw from the project, but the team acknowledges her here for her contributions to the early parts of the project and the tremendous work and effort she put into trying to make her University of Sydney project work despite all odds.

**Project Manager / Research Fellow Naomi Sunderland**
is Senior Lecturer in First Australians and Social Justice in the School of Human Services and Social Work at Griffith University. She was Project Manager for the OLT project reported on here. Naomi is an active musician and songwriter and has a background in applied ethics and human rights, music, and social research for happiness, health, and wellbeing. Naomi travelled to Tennant Creek to co-facilitate the Queensland Conservatorium ABSL trips during 2012 and 2013. Here she was able to collaborate on songwriting and performance activities with members of the WMC and Barkly Regional Arts and visiting musicians including Warren H. Williams and Coloured Stone.

Our Advisory Group consisted of three Aboriginal scholars and artists, two non-Indigenous scholars, and a past student from QCGU’s pilot project.

**Associate Professor Simon Forrest** is Director for the Centre for Aboriginal Studies. A recognised Elder in the Noongar group of people, Simon is also related to the Yamatji and Wongi people. Simon has a Master of Education (UWA) and has had considerable experience working in the field of Aboriginal education and reconciliation. In 2005 Simon was awarded the National Scholar of the Year, NAIDOC National Awards, the WA Aboriginal Education and Training Award and the Aboriginal Education Award of Excellence, Perth. Simon has a particularly strong background in Aboriginal cultural issues and over the years, has contributed extensively to the provision of cultural awareness training to the wider West Australian community.
Dr Sandy O’Sullivan is a member of the Wiradjuri Nation. She is currently an ARC Indigenous Research Fellow and was previously an ALTC Teaching Fellow (2008-2009). She lives in Brisbane and works in the Research Division of Batchelor Institute of Indigenous Tertiary Education, located in the Northern Territory of Australia.

Kim Walker is Executive Director and Head of Dance at the National Aboriginal Islander Skills Development Association Dance College (NAISDA) Dance College. For more than 30 years NAISDA Dance College has been building long lasting links with traditional communities. It is through these links that NAISDA has been able to contribute so greatly and uniquely to the development of contemporary Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander dance throughout Australia.

Professor Anna Haebich joined Curtin in 2011 as a Senior Research Fellow to research Aboriginal performance and festivals in Western Australia. Her research is informed by her background in university teaching and research, centre directorship, museum curatorship, visual arts practice, work with Aboriginal communities and her personal experiences of living in migrant and Aboriginal communities.

Dr Juliana McLaughlin was a recipient of an ALTC grant in 2010 for her project “Supporting future curriculum leaders with embedding Indigenous knowledge on teaching practicum.” She is from Manus Island in Papua New Guinea. Her research interests are driven by a commitment and responsibility to First Peoples’ knowledge systems, decolonising methodologies and embedding First Peoples’ ways of knowing in university programs.

James Winwood attended the first QCGU pilot program in Tennant Creek in 2009 and has been working in the Barkly region since graduating, was technical manager at the Desert Harmony Festival in 2013, and has been appointed co-manager of the Winanjjikari Music Centre for 2014.

The project was evaluated independently by Dr Jan Strom, who comes to the project with significant experience in the field of community engagement and working alongside Australian Aboriginal colleagues in university settings, local council and community. In the early stages of the project Canadian-Australian scholar Professor Barbara Holland played an evaluative role, and brought to the early planning stages significant expertise in designing service learning projects with First Peoples. The team has also relied strongly on the ongoing guidance and support from Griffith’s Council of Elders and its co-Chair Aunty Anne Leisha.

The multiple positions, viewpoints and experiences this collaborative team of both Aboriginal and non-Indigenous colleagues has contributed has been crucial to our intercultural work in this space. As our colleagues Mackinlay and Barney (2012) noted in their own OLT report, such an intercultural team responds to a call for dialogue and reconciliation:

*While we recognise that there are multiple perspectives and opinions in relation to the issue of whether non-Indigenous people should engage in acts of representation about, with and for Indigenous Australian peoples, knowledges and cultures, the project team*
consists of both Indigenous and non-Indigenous members and represents in many ways the call from Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples for non-Indigenous people to enter into meaningful dialogues with one another so as to bring about a reconciled Australia. (p. 10)

Figure 2. Advisory Group Meeting at Griffith University in Brisbane (November 2013)
Chapter 2. Approach and Methodology

Building on the aforementioned pilot work in Central Australia, this project involved running ABSL projects in three Australian universities (QCGU, Curtin University and UWS). Project Team members were responsible for coordinating the ABSL programs at their individual institutions, and worked collaboratively with colleagues (detailed below) to deliver these sub-projects. These programs were run in collaboration with communities and partners in regional and metropolitan areas in Western Australia and the Northern Territory, and largely involved students working alongside Aboriginal artists and Elders on community-led projects. The team underscores the words community-led, as all sub-projects were determined by the community, rather than being imposed by a university.

Project scope

While the project originally planned to look at performing arts (as was detailed on our proposal, and as such, is shown in the title of this report), in the early planning stages the team saw significant benefits in expanding this to encompass a broader conceptualisation of the arts, for instance to include film and television, journalism, industrial design, and visual arts in addition to music, dance, drama and education. This choice was also in response to the student cohorts which the team had access to and the nature of the community projects that were requested.

The choice of where to undertake the QCGU and UWS projects was made for us. Both institutions had previously been invited to work in the Tennant Creek community, and the team underscores the word invited, as a community invitation is so crucial in this work (still to this day, after working in Tennant Creek for 5 years, the team begins our consultations every year by asking if that invitation still stands). Having this previous relationship and three years of pilot work in this community meant that the QCGU and UWS sub-projects would naturally occur in Tennant Creek and continue to deepen our relationships, partnerships and work there.

The Curtin sub-project’s location and focus was chosen differently as there was no pre-existing ABSL project to work from. Initially plans were for Curtin students to travel far north in WA to work with communities that the Advisory Group members had relationships with. While this was an exciting thought, the team decided for a number of reasons that it would be more sustainable and sensible to work closer to home. As is detailed in Chapter 5, one of the facilitators Michelle also already had a relationship with the Perth Aboriginal community on which the project could build the project. She also felt that Curtin is located in Noongar country and should therefore prioritise the Noongar community. Hence the team utilised existing networks to ask local organisations whether there was anything to which Film and Television, journalism and writing students might be able to make a contribution. This led to a number of potential projects, some of which were enacted once the team was able to match community needs with the timeline of the project and the skillsets and capabilities of students and their lecturers.
The team had originally planned a fourth ABSL with students from the University of Sydney under the facilitation of Kathryn Marsh. Initially the team talked about the possibly of working with a Torres Strait Islander community, as one of Kathy’s previous students was working at a local school there. After considering this in-depth, the team decided it was not going to be achievable due to various possible restrictions, as well as the expenses that would be associated with travelling to the Torres Strait. The team decided to rather re-focus on Central Australia where Kathy had previously worked with communities in Mungkarta and Tennant Creek. Unfortunately, due to serious ongoing health issues for Kathy, the team had to reassess the viability to traveling to Central Australia. The project explored a range of different options and plans (including sending someone else in her place). Following extended consultation with local partners in Central Australia and team discussions, Kathy and the team resolved to relinquish the OLT project funds set aside for this trip due to her ongoing ill health. The team then successfully proposed to the OLT to redirect the University of Sydney project funds toward community engagement activities and creative outputs, which were agreed upon at the March 2013 Advisory Group meeting. Contingency planning for the University of Sydney project consumed significant time for the team. This was due to the complex range of factors that impacted upon the decision-making process, but ultimately the team believes the most sensitive decision was made in order to retain the integrity of Kathy’s relationship with the community, and ensure the appropriate duty of care and guidance was given to potential students participating in these sub-projects.

Project limitations

As with any project of this magnitude and complexity there are always limitations. While community partners and our Aboriginal colleagues have been front and centre in the planning and implementation of all these projects, in the research accompanying this work, ensuring a widespread representation of community voices in interviews was not always possible or appropriate. A number of colleagues were interviewed for the research, and transcript excerpts of these are included throughout the report, but oftentimes this formalised, Western way of capturing impressions was entirely unsatisfactory. Likewise, the Project Team felt self-conscious about imposing too much on community members. So much of their time had already been given to the projects they were involved in without adding the imposition of a further formalised interview to the mix.

The Project Team grappled with ways to ameliorate this, and also sought the advice of the Evaluator about finding ways to ensure the community’s voice was heard in this work. While the team went some way to addressing this in 2013 with return trips explicitly designed to seek feedback on what the project has accomplished (and Project Leader Brydie was told repeatedly that Tennant Creek has a very efficient filtering out process, if the team was not wanted there the team wouldn’t have been welcomed with such open arms); however, the team still felt uneasy about the proportion of reflections from the students in comparison to those of community members in the reporting. While the team acknowledged that gathering this data from students was a much more straightforward process given that they were required to complete reflections as part of their assessment, team members still felt that this reporting didn’t accurately represent the strong involvement of the community members in each project.
Through closer reflection, the team came to realise that the Westernised ways of gathering research and quotes on tape were not always appropriate, and so much more could be gleaned from actions and observations. The deep connections that were visible on stage as the QCGU students performed with the WMC musicians, the way local Aboriginal children jumped into the laps of UWS pre-service teachers unprompted, the proud looks on the Elders’ faces as they watched the footage shown at the Curtin showcase. These significant moments, and there are many that come to mind, give us confidence that the work involved has been valued by the community. Likewise, sharing insights from this research and seeking community feedback as well as input from our Aboriginal colleagues on the project’s Advisory Group adds to our assurance in its focus.

Description of the ABSL sub-projects

Curtin University, Indigenous Community Education and Awareness, Kart Koort Wieren, Langford Aboriginal Association and Noongar Radio

**Curtin team members:** Dawn Bennett (Music); Michelle Johnston (Film and television); Bonita Mason and Chris Thompson (Journalism)

**Community team members:** Indigenous Community Education and Awareness (ICEA); Kart Koort Wieren; Langford Aboriginal Association; and Noongar Radio

**Student team members:** Kimberley Benjamin, Michael Clark, Jessica Cummins, Matilda Cunningham, Louise Dryburgh, Jess Keily, Esther Kim, Jesse McCarthy Price, Rebecca Metcalf, Gabiso Ndiweni, Louise Rennie

The team at Curtin University in Perth focused on creating relationships with the local community so that students might begin to see Australia’s First Peoples as part of their own communities. It was also felt that working in Perth would allow the participating students to have the opportunity of building relationships within their own community and therefore continue to build on those relationships even after they had completed the Curtin project. This prerogative led the Perth team away from initial plans to work with a community almost 3,000km from the capital city, and to focus instead on projects that might be undertaken closer to home.

With the objective of building more culturally appropriate relationships between students, communities and universities, the Curtin team employed participatory and democratic processes by working with rather than for community participants. Specifically, the project team adopted a ‘critical service learning’ framework to acknowledge the multi-directional relationships involved in service-learning projects. The team positioned its work as action research (sometimes known as participatory research or participatory action research), which creates change through action and change that results in action (Johnston, 2013, p. 76). Action researchers, more accurately described as facilitators (Stringer 1996), work with a community group who participate not as subjects but as co-researchers or co-facilitators “in the production of knowledge through rigorous, well-planned, structured and self-aware methods. All participants in a project can contribute to the research, feeding back their thoughts and observations and actively engaging with the research process” (Tacchi, Slater & Hearn, 2003, p. 13). In this case the students, community and educators worked together as participant researchers to bring together action and reflection, theory and practice.
The Curtin University community service-learning project involved 13 students from film and television (FTV), journalism and feature writing. Most were in their second year of study, and one student was undertaking her honours year. A call for expressions of interest was sent to all students in the faculty during the previous semester, and in this call the team noted pre-requisites that would ensure the students had sufficient skills to meet the anticipated needs of community partners (camera skills, interview and writing skills for example). This was followed with an information session, which had the added incentive of free food, and which only one student attended. Hoping that the poor attendance related to end-of-year pressure rather than lack of interest, the team followed up with a second email and encouraged colleagues to also relay information about the project. At the same time, the team utilised existing networks to ask local organisations whether there was anything to which FTV, journalism and writing students might be able to make a contribution. This led to a number of potential projects, some of which were enacted once the team was able to match community needs with the timeline of the project and the skillsets and capabilities of students and their lecturers.

At the time of the project there was no generic service learning or work integrated learning unit at Curtin University; and yet the team wanted to ensure that students received course credit for their work. As a result, the Curtin project was run within a ‘special projects’ unit. FTV students were able to enrol directly; however, other students such as those in journalism were unable to enrol because of the lack of elective space within their double degree programs. These students participated in the project as part of other units, and to enable this they agreed on an alternative assessment schedule with lecturers. The situation was far from ideal, but it enabled the project to begin.

The students undertook a semester-long course that allowed them to work with local Aboriginal communities on community-led projects. In terms of the formal learning context, action research allowed a focus on the process of creating media projects rather than the video or journalistic product that each student must submit for assessment. There was an emphasis on taking the time, early in semester, to observe, to listen, to talk, and to establish relationships with community partners. During this time students participated in a range of preparation activities such as Aboriginal culture and language training, and they worked in inter-disciplinary teams with their local organisations for most of the semester. The team also visited the site of the 1834 Pinjarra Massacre, under the leadership of Yamatji Noongar Elder and Advisory Group member Simon Forrest. Over the course of a day the team traced the steps of Governor James Stirling and his men from metropolitan Perth to the township of Pinjarra, 86km from the city, where Binjareb people of the Whadjuk Tribe were attacked and killed². At the massacre site, Simon Forrest led the team in a ceremony that paid respect for lives lost and called for a shared understanding of Australian history (see Figure 3).

Guided reflections were undertaken at regular points throughout the Curtin project, which concluded with a showcase and celebration for all participants and the wider community. Over the ensuing three months, each student and academic responded to a series of reflective questions and attended an interview with the facilitators of the project. These post-project activities enabled the findings of earlier data to be validated, refined and extended.

Queensland Conservatorium, Griffith University (QCGU), Barkly Regional Arts and Winanjikari Music Centre

**QCGU team members (2012-2013):** Brydie-Leigh Bartleet, Gavin Carfoot (now Queensland University of Technology – QUT), Naomi Sunderland

**Community team members (2012-2013):** Barkly Regional Arts (BRA) – Alan Murn, Kathy Burns, James Winwood, Lincoln McKinnon, Corinne Berry, Shayne Teece-Johnson; Winanjikari Music Centre – Brian Morton, Brendan Hines, Dirk Dickenson, Jordan Newcastle, Lesley, Elvis, Terrance Limerick, Adrian McNamarra; as well as Elders such as Rosemary Plummer and Rose Graham, touring musicians such as Warren H. Williams and Frank Yamma, and local musicians such as Jeff McLaughlin, and teachers such as Paul Tighe

**Student team members (2012):** Bure Godwin, Carey Ryan, Jeff Tanerii, Sophie Gleeson

**Student team members (2013):** Abby Gardner, Euan Cumming, Joel Wiggins, Josh Lovegrove, and Rohin Power (QUT)

As is detailed above, the QCGU sub-project has involved students travelling to Tennant Creek...
to work alongside Aboriginal artists and Elders at the Winanjjikari Music Centre on a range of community-led projects, such as recording and writing albums, documenting cultural activities, managing community festivals, staging performances, building community arts infrastructure, and running school programs. With both the pilot and OLT phases of the project combined, this project has directly benefitted over 30 students across 7 undergraduate programs; 30 Aboriginal artists and Elders; and 50 children/youth in Tennant Creek. During the OLT phase of the project in 2012-2013, team members also developed a partnership with QUT (as one of the facilitators Gavin took up a new position there) and hosted a guest student from this institution. As the team mentioned above, while the QCGU sub-project demonstrates a systematic approach to both coordination and implementation, it is also designed to be flexible and responsive to community needs. The project is offered in second semester each year, to accommodate the varied timing of different community events, needs, and seasons, and to allow sufficient time for student recruitment, gaining community permissions and ensuring cultural protocols are in place. In order to maintain a continuity of relationships with our Aboriginal colleagues, each year the project is facilitated by the same two staff, Brydie and Gavin.

During this OLT project in 2012 to 2013, the students were working at the Desert Harmony Festival – an annual 10-day multi-arts and cultural community festival that features music, visual arts, theatre, music, food, cultural activities, parades, film and dance from the Barkly Region as well as artists from across Australia. In 2013, the highlight of the festival was a special performance the team gave in collaboration with musicians from the Winanjjikari Music Centre. After a week of sharing and learning each other’s songs, team members presented an intimate evening of intercultural stories and songs under the stars at the celebrated cultural centre Nyinkka Nyunyu. Well over 100 attended (mostly Aboriginal community members from Tennant Creek and surrounding communities, including important Elders) and around 300 people tuned in from around the world to watch the live streaming. It was hosted by QCGU alumnus James Winwood who has been working in the Tennant Creek region since he was part of the first trip in 2009 (see Figure 4).
The students also performed as featured acts, as well as backing bands for a number of touring artists in the festival, including renowned Aboriginal artist and Red Ochre Award winner Warren H. Williams. As is the case with many community arts projects, they were asked to do a range of creative and technical tasks, from acting as the film crew for live streaming around to the world to painting backdrops for performances.

The aforementioned three steps used in the pilot 2009-2011 were used in 2012-2013, although students were given more flexibility in how they chose to communicate the experience. Rather then requiring a digital story, students were asked to produce a creative output in response to the experience (these included original songs, improvisatory performances and short stories). During 2012-2013 the team also worked more concertedly to integrate the students’ learning into the QCGU curriculum. For instance, in 2013 the students gave a Project Week Workshop via live hook-up when the team were in Tennant Creek, and they’ve given presentations in Jazz workshop, the Bachelor of Popular Music Major Study class, and Music Industry Internship Class Presentations, and this work has featured in the Popular World Music class. The students also recently gave a highly successful presentation to the University of the Third Age with Naomi Sunderland.
University of Western Sydney (UWS), Australian Literacy and Numeracy Foundation, Papulu Aparr-Kari, Tennant Creek High School and the Mungkarta School

**UWS team members (2012-2013):** Anne Power (in Tennant Creek schools); Shirley Gilbert (in Elliott School).

**Community team members (2012-2013):** Australian Literacy and Numeracy Foundation (especially Eric Brace), Papulu Aparr-Kari (especially Karan Hayward), Tennant Creek High School staff (especially Pauline Davenport and Maisie Floyd executive) and students, Tennant Creek Primary School and Mungkarta School, Barkly Arts (especially Alan Murn and Adrian McNamarra).

**Student team members (2012):** Corinne Berry (visual arts); Lisa Judge (English); Sharni Potts, Melissa Silva (dance) Blake Roberts, Nicholas Woodford (music); and five science and primary school pre-service students.

**Student team members (2013):** Stacey Coates, Kylie O’Brien (Mungkarta and Tennant Creek Primary schools), Ian Hooper (music); Victoria Ryan (visual arts); and two other primary school pre-service teachers.

The University of Western Sydney sub-project involves participants from the Master of Teaching postgraduate degree. For the pre-service teachers, part of their experience in Tennant Creek is the completion of a four-week professional experience block in schools. The other part comes from responding to community requests in small projects. Our partner is the Australian Literacy and Numeracy Foundation, working closely with the language and cultural centre, Papulu Aparr-Kari. The professional experience block is the culmination of the teaching qualification. It is prepared by cultural training that takes place in a focus week in June. During this week, the community members are invited to suggest projects on which the future teachers can work. The project decision-making is shared with the community members. Our OLT project uses a critical service-learning framework, positioning the pre-service teachers as actively involved in reflecting on their practice. This happens naturally through debriefs at the end of the day and through reflective evaluations. Before selection, the pre-service participants undertake an interview and then engage in three data gathering stages: after the focus week in June, during the block in October and after the experience is complete. The pre-service teachers re-think and re-configure their experiences as they reflect on them in an action research cycle that is designed to have ongoing resonance as they complete their pre-service status and step out into their professional careers.

This report highlights those students who have an arts focus in their teaching: on dance, music and visual arts. Each of their community projects derives from an artistic process. For example, Sharni collaborated with her dance class to create a flash mob performance for an outdoor event. Corinne engaged her younger visual arts students in creating passport stamps that were part of a display on virtual travel (see Figure 5).
She also engaged her older students in tie-dying football jerseys. Victoria engaged her younger visual arts students with creating soft toys from football socks, with the intention of selling through community markets. Her older students she engaged with the drawing of illustrations based on Shaun Tan’s book, *The Lost Thing*. Paul and Genesa worked on song-writing with their classes. For their project, they connected with the Winanjikari Music...
Centre and provided the students with an opportunity to record their songs. Following their trail, Nick and Blake continued the opportunity of recording songs and initiated a community open mic night. Ian engaged students and community members on a multicultural night. Powerful reflections on these projects reveal the impact of the experience in the community on their personal and professional lives.

Project aims

In running these three ABSL sub-projects, the team sought to achieve the following two aims:

1. **Enhance the way in which Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander content is embedded in arts curricula through community service learning.** This curriculum design and delivery goal aimed to (a) incorporate intercultural collaborations with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities into learning and assessment activities in ways that prepared students for work in diverse local and international contexts; (b) contribute to the quality of students’ learning experiences, intercultural competencies, and career preparation, while supporting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities in their cultural learning endeavours; and (c) inform the expansion of future service learning projects with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities in the arts. This goal was designed to directly address the OLT objective: to promote and support strategic change in higher education institutions for the enhancement of learning and teaching, including curriculum development and assessment.

2. **Demonstrate how Australian universities can integrate community service learning with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities into their performing arts curricula.** This dissemination goal aimed to (a) model respectful and culturally appropriate ways of building relationships with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities and acknowledge Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander ways of learning and teaching; (b) exhibit the creation of culturally appropriate Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander content in performing arts curricula through service learning partnerships; and (c) demonstrate the ways in which students, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities, and tertiary institutions can learn together in innovative, mutually beneficial service learning partnerships in the performing arts. This goal was designed to addresses the OLT objective: to develop effective mechanisms for the identification, development, dissemination and embedding of good individual and institutional practice in learning and teaching in Australian higher education.

Research questions

In order to meet these aims, research data collection and analysis underpinned the implementation of the sub-projects. Through this research the project sought to answer the following questions and sub-questions:

1. **In what ways can service learning in the performing arts with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities enhance the inclusion of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander content within university curricula?**
a. How can cross-cultural collaborations in the performing arts with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities enhance both learning and assessment activities?

b. How can service-learning projects contribute towards the quality of students’ learning experiences, intercultural competencies, and career preparation, while supporting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities through actions that also have a direct benefit to them?

c. How can service-learning partnerships in the performing arts with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities inform the expansion of future partnerships in other disciplines?

2. What steps and strategies are required in order for Australian universities to successfully integrate community service learning with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities into their performing arts curricula?

a. What measures are necessary for universities to build respectful and culturally appropriate interactions with communities and acknowledge Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander ways of learning and teaching?

b. What steps and protocols need to be followed in the development of culturally appropriate Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander content through service learning partnerships?

c. How can universities ensure students and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities learn together in innovative, mutually beneficial service learning partnerships, and how can the performing arts experience inform these actions?

These research questions were designed to be closely aligned with the aforementioned project aims, and through the answers to these questions the team sought to meet our ultimate goals of enhancing the way in which Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander content is embedded in arts curricula through ABSL, and demonstrating how this can be done. These questions and aims also guided the development of the project’s conceptual framework, which is detailed below.

Methodology

Data collection

The team employed a qualitative meta-ethnographic data collection and analysis approach to document and interpret outcomes across the three sub-projects. The team collected data using shared semi-structured interview protocols, student assessment and reflection tasks, and researcher reflective diary/observations templates that were adapted to suit each university’s ABSL project. Examples of these data collection tools are given in Appendix B. The team used additional unstructured diary writing and video and photo observation techniques to document the different contexts within which the three sub-projects occurred. The resulting data collected provides a rich picture with viewpoints and experiences from all participants in the projects including participating Aboriginal artists and community workers and partners, community partner representatives including school teachers and administrators, community arts organisation representatives, Aboriginal and non-Indigenous students, and ABSL facilitators from the partner universities.
Full ethical clearance was given for this data collection to occur. After the Project Leader secured ethical clearance for the project from Griffith University, team members at partner organisations then obtained ethical approval for their specific service learning projects through their institutions’ ethics review committees. Anne Power obtained additional approval from NT Department of Education Research Review Committee to conduct the UWS project and associated research in NT schools. The project used standard informed consent mechanisms, with information sheets in “plain English.” Where participants were not able to read these documents, they were read aloud by a team member. Team members are also in regular contact with the communities they’ve been working with to ensure this consent remains, and appropriate cultural protocols are adhered to; for example, removing all public images and music featuring deceased participants (QCGU has temporarily removed their entire digital stories channel from YouTube as many of the digital stories feature images of two recently deceased colleagues). Where participants are unnamed throughout the report, this has been done in some cases to protect their identity due to the inclusion of sensitive material, and in other cases at the request of the participant.

Data analysis

The team conducted four waves of collaborative and systematic qualitative data analysis over a period of 18 months between June 2012 and November 2013, as described below. The outcomes of these waves of analysis have informed the project’s conceptual framework and the content and insights given in the following chapters.

1. **Pilot analysis:** A preliminary inductive thematic coding schema was developed using pilot data from the QCGU’s annual ABSL student trips to Tennant Creek 2009-2011. Codes were developed to reflect themes and sub-themes in the data alongside particular concepts or processes that were directly relevant to the project research questions. All 2009-2011 data was coded during this process using NVIVO software. The pilot coding schema and selections of coded material (e.g. quotations from community, student, and staff interviews and diaries) were presented to the project Advisory Group in March 2013 for feedback. The Advisory Group did not request any revision to the coding schema at this point.

2. **National coding schema:** The team collated additional data from the 2012-2013 QCGU trips and the 2012-2013 Curtin University and University of Western Sydney ABSL projects using NVIVO software and revised the pilot thematic coding schema developed in wave 1 analysis to reflect the full national collection of data. This included incorporating preliminary themes developed by the Curtin University team who had conducted their own thematic analysis of the Curtin data. All team members provided input and feedback on the resulting national thematic codes (see Appendix C) and conducted inter-rater checking of selections of coded material. The Project Manager then coded the full data collection using the agreed coding schema and presented the final collection of coded material, including matrix query analyses developed through NVIVO, to the team.

3. **Collaborative interdisciplinary interpretation and refinement:** The third wave of analysis involved team engagement with and refinement of the entire coded data
during a concentrated series of face-to-face meetings in late November 2013. The focus of this analysis was to streamline the coding schema developed in previous waves of analysis, and to develop interdisciplinary interpretations of the significance of the coded experiences and outcomes in the national data collection.

4. **Feedback and final decision-making:** The final draft analysis outcomes were then presented to the project evaluator and national Advisory Group during a one-day face-to-face meeting held in Brisbane on 21 November 2013. The team presented their key findings and interpretations as stimulus for discussion and decision-making about the project’s conceptual framework, key findings, and what shape the final outputs would take to reach a range of different audiences. The project team then met again to distil the recommendations from the Advisory Group and finalise the key content to be communicated in project outcomes.

During these waves of analysis the team found that there were strong similarities in experiences and outcomes across the three projects; however, there were also some differences between them that related to how, where, and with whom they were conducted. The disciplines of the students involved in each project appeared to have some impact on the kinds of things they reflected on during data collection. For example, some education student teachers involved in the UWS ABSL trip to Tennant Creek appeared to have more awareness of the broader socio-cultural, economic, and social inequalities that surround the children and families they were working with. Likewise, and perhaps not unexpectedly, Curtin University student journalists were more critically aware of the role of the media in producing and reproducing racist stereotypes and cultural ignorance around Australian Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. While these differences may be instructive for other universities, colleges, and communities seeking to implement ABSL projects, our purpose in this report is not to compare and contrast the three projects in a competitive or evaluative way. Rather, the team seek to explore and draw cumulative wisdom from across all three projects in order to lay a foundation for diverse future work.

**Key insights:** The implementation of three very different ABSL sub-projects – all at different stages of development, in different universities in QLD, NSW and WA, in metropolitan and remote settings, and within diverse arts disciplines – allowed the team to meet the project’s aims. This was certainly not desktop research, and the hands-on approach privileged the interpersonal nature of this work, and enabled the team to refine the tools and strategies utilised on the ground, and foster deeper community and institutional engagement. The qualitative meta-ethnographic data collection and analysis approach then allowed the team to delve into the complexities, subtleties and “lived experience” of each project, and appreciate their similarities as well as their specificities. It is hoped that the resulting broader conceptual framework as well as the uniquely individual testimonies and quotes included in this report will be instructive for other universities, colleges, and communities seeking to implement ABSL projects. The approach, including the research design, and provisions for ongoing stakeholder input via data collection and analysis, is summarised in Table 1.