

Building Relationships between Universities and Indigenous Communities Through Service Learning Projects in the Arts

Project Summary

PROJECT BACKGROUND

Despite the endorsement of policies related to the inclusion of Indigenous knowledges and content across Australian universities and colleges, within many disciplines such as the creative arts, the incorporation of these Indigenous perspectives is still minimal. While some educators have brought Indigenous artists into creative arts classrooms, in many cases the inclusion of Indigenous curriculum content is presented in a somewhat tokenistic and abstract manner, removed from the lived experience of Indigenous culture.

This project addresses the need for more effective approaches to including Indigenous content in higher education by bringing together students and Indigenous communities in collaborative learning partnerships. Building on three years of preliminary work in Central Australia, this project takes students from four different universities to Indigenous communities to work on service learning projects in the arts. These projects involve students working alongside Indigenous artists and Elders on community-led projects such as recording and writing albums, documenting cultural activities, managing community festivals, and running school programs.

This project aims to demonstrate how collaborative projects between students and Indigenous communities can develop intercultural understanding, deepen students' appreciation of Indigenous culture, and support Indigenous communities through arts activities that have direct benefit to them.

SERVICE LEARNING

Service learning is a teaching and learning strategy that integrates community service with instruction and reflection to enrich the learning experience, teach intercultural awareness, and strengthen communities. Service learning steps outside of the traditional classroom to enable students to engage with real versus imagined subjects and, thus, learn about Indigenous culture through their own lived experience. There are a range of benefits associated with this approach, such as:

- Assisting Indigenous communities with projects of cultural significance;
- Facilitating social outcomes by meeting community needs;
- Assisting students to develop the ability to interact appropriately with Indigenous artists and Elders;
- Enabling students to critically reflect on their own racial subjectivities in relation to others;
- Promoting community awareness and deepening students' moral and civic values;
- Exposing students to real-world contexts and relationships;
- Expanding students' and Indigenous artists' disciplinary knowledge.

WHAT WE DO

1. **Intercultural training:** Intercultural workshops; project briefings; readings; Indigenous language classes.
2. **Service learning projects:** Four projects 2012-2013 led by Indigenous communities in collaboration with four Australian universities.
3. **Communicating the experience:** Students and community members present the important lessons they learnt to the broader community.
4. **Materials development:** Develop and share practical resources, guidelines, and strategies for service learning with Indigenous communities.

SERVICE LEARNING PROJECTS 2012-2013

TENNANT CREEK NT: GRIFFITH UNIVERSITY

The Griffith University service learning project in Tennant Creek led by Brydie-Leigh Bartleet will involve a team of music students working with artists at the Winanjjikari Music Centre on recording sessions, mixing albums, songwriting workshops, and audio and lighting equipment set-ups for the Desert Harmony Festival.

TENNANT CREEK & ELLIOTT NT: UNIVERSITY OF WESTERN SYDNEY

The University of Western Sydney service learning project led by Anne Power will involve music and drama students assisting teachers in Bush Music Teaching in Tennant Creek and surrounding areas, including the trial of an e-mentoring system for teachers using video conferencing. It will also involve music and drama students assisting in community projects with the Australian Literacy and Numeracy Foundation.

KATANNING & HALLS CREEK WA: CURTIN UNIVERSITY

The Curtin University service learning project led by Dawn Bennett will be based in Katanning and Halls Creek. Six performance students will work with Indigenous Elder and Centre for Aboriginal Studies Director Simon Forrest, building on stories of place in connection with the Stirling Ranges of WA to produce performance pieces in the community and university. Performance students will work on the 2013 Halls Creek Dreaming Festival with Anthony Johnson, Chairperson of the Mudya Loop Community.

MUNGKARTA NT, SYDNEY CONSERVATORIUM OF MUSIC, UNIVERSITY OF SYDNEY

The University of Sydney service learning project led by Kathryn Marsh will involve music education students running a range of creative song making projects with school children in Mungkarta. It will also involve working towards the publication of a book of Warumungu songs for school children with elder Rosemary Plummer and the production of an accompanying recording of songs.

PROJECT TEAM

Dr Brydie-Leigh Bartleet & Dr Naomi Sunderland (Queensland Conservatorium, Griffith University)

Professor Dawn Bennett (Curtin University);

Associate Professor Anne Power (University of Western Sydney);

Associate Professor Kathryn Marsh (Sydney Conservatorium of Music, University of Sydney).

REFERENCE GROUP

Associate Professor Simon Forrest (Centre for Aboriginal Studies, Curtin University)

Professor Anna Haebich (Curtin University);

Dr Juliana McLaughlin (Queensland University of Technology);

Dr Sandy O'Sullivan (Batchelor Institute of Indigenous Tertiary Education);

Kim Walker (NAISDA Dance College);

James Winwood (past Tennant Creek project student, The Song Room).

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Contact: Project Leader, Dr Brydie-Leigh Bartleet, Queensland Conservatorium, Griffith University.

Email: b.barleet@griffith.edu.au Phone: +61 (0)7 3735 6249.

Digital Stories YouTube Channel: <http://www.youtube.com/desertmusicstories>

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