The Australian Journal of Indigenous Education
Volume 49 ▮ Number 1 ▮ pp. 2–13 © The Author(s) 2018 doi 10.1017/jie.2018.11

Exploring Transformative Learning at the Cultural Interface: Insights From Successful Aboriginal University Students

Braden Hill, Grantley Winmar and Jenna Woods
Kulbardi Aboriginal Centre, Murdoch University, Murdoch, Western Australia 6150, Australia

Transformative learning theory articulates a process whereby students experience a change in perspectives that expands and transforms their worldview. Despite being well established and regarded within the literature relating to adult and continuing education, Mezirow's (1978) seminal education theory remains largely absent in the research relating to Indigenous higher education. This study explores the transformative impact of university learning on the student journeys of three Aboriginal graduates from a Western Australian university. Applying a collaborative auto-ethnographic approach, each author-participant's personal narrative of their student experience was exposed to comparative, thematic and critical analysis. It was found that each author had faced similar cognitive and emotional challenges at university. Significantly, it emerged that university had changed the author-participants' identities in ways that aligned with Mezirow's transformative learning construct. The narrative data also revealed elements that appeared related to the students' negotiation of Nakata's cultural interface. A dominant theme in the data referred to the relationships formed during university, as being integral to transformation. Furthermore, family was understood to have a paradoxical influence on their educational journey. The insights garnered from this study prompt further consideration as to how transformative learning theory might be mobilised at the cultural interface.

■ **Keywords:** transformative learning, Indigenous, higher education, success, cultural interface

Transformative learning (Mezirow 1996, 1995, 1991) articulates a process whereby students experience a change in perspectives that expands and transforms their worldviews. The catalyst for such change begins with a disorienting dilemma (Howie & Bagnall, 2013; Kitchenham, 2008) that arises from personal crises or circumstances that challenge an individual to shift previously held ideas or perspectives towards, what Mezirow (1997) refers to as, a transformed frame of reference. Frames of reference, or meaning perspectives, are the structures of assumptions that inform one's way of seeing the world — a set of orienting expectations and beliefs that 'selectively shape and delimit expectations, perceptions, cognition, and feelings' (Mezirow, 1997, p. 5). These structures of assumptions are comprised of 'habits of mind' that are expressed as 'points of view' (Kitchenham, 2008; Mezirow, 2009). These points of view are each comprised of meaning schemes; those habituated judgments, beliefs or emotional responses that, in shaping a particular perspective, influence and 'determine a specific chain of events or actions that are followed automatically unless they are considered through critical reflection and critical self-reflection' (Mezirow, 1994).

Mezirow's (1978) 'Ten Phases of Transformative Learning' outlines the process that learners may experience in the transformative learning process. This progression, as articulated by Mezirow (1978), is outlined in Table 1.

While this process remains fundamental to the way transformative learning is understood, it is not to be perceived as a universally linear or orderly process; it may be intermittent or fragmentary (Mezirow, 1991). Mezirow (2000) also notes that within the transformative learning process, learners may backslide or revert when confronted with the realities of change. In an update of this process, Mezirow (1991) included an additional phase to the original model, relating to the renegotiation of existing relationships and the negotiating of new ones. This new phase sits between Phases 8 and 9 outlined in Table 1.

An emerging critique within transformative learning highlights the fact that most research on transformative

ADDRESS FOR CORRESPONDENCE: Braden Hill, Kulbardi Aboriginal Centre, Murdoch University, Murdoch, Western Australia 6150, Australia.
Email: braden.hill@murdoch.edu.au

TABLE 1

Ten Phases of Mezirow's Transformative Learning Theory

Phase	Descriptor
1.	A disorienting dilemma
2.	A self-examination with feelings of guilt or shame
3.	A critical assessment of epistemic, sociocultural or psychic assumptions
4.	Recognition that one's discontent and the process of transformation are shared and that others have negotiated a similar change
5.	Exploration of options for new roles and relationships, actions
6	Planning of a course of action
7	Acquisition of knowledge and skills for implementing one's plans
8	Provisional trying on of new roles
9	Building of competence and self-confidence in new roles and relationships
10	Reintegration into one's life on the basis of conditions dictated by one's perspective

learning focuses on the experiences of students from Anglo/European cultural backgrounds. It is argued that such a limited scope continues to produce interpretations of transformative learning that lacks diversity (Merriam & Ntseane, 2008). While some studies focus on particular types of learners, for example, African American women undertaking remedial literacy studies (Bridwell, 2013), Emirati women undertaking a college education (Madsen, 2009), students from non-English speaking backgrounds (Jeyaraj & Harland, 2014), British Afro-Caribbean University students (Gordon, 2006) or nontraditional students in the Australian higher education system (Benson, Heageny, Hewitt, Crosling, Devos, 2014), research is rarely conducted from a crosscultural perspective. Where there is a crosscultural element to studies in transformative learning, there is a tendency in the literature to analyse the impact on Anglo/European students' engagement within a foreign cultural context (Bell, Gibson, Tarrant, Perry & Stoner, 2016; Choi, Slaubaugh & Kim, 2012; Collins & Geste, 2016; Scoffham & Barnes, 2009).

However, some studies are looking to address this critique by exploring transformative learning in relation to particular cultural groups. For example, Morrice (2013) found that while transformative learning is often couched in positive terms, for migrant learners the experience — because of cultural, social and political differences — can lead to negative outcomes. Similarly, Merriam and Ntseane's (2008) findings remind us that culture and cultural values significantly shape the way transformative learning is catalysed for learners and interpreted by learners and researchers alike. They stridently note the fact that research on transformative learning has largely been conducted in Western cultural contexts or by 'Western' researchers. This study, therefore, seeks to address this issue within the body of literature relating to transformative learning by exploring Mezirow's theory from an Indigenous perspective.

Simultaneous to this cultural critique, an argument to broaden the definition of transformative learning is emerging. While a cognitive focus on transformative learning has been core to the understanding and evolution of Mezirow's theory, discussion on the broader social and emotional elements of transformative learning is beginning to take place (Illeris 2014; Mälkki, 2010). Such lines of enquiry have argued that the definition of transformative learning, as articulated above, is too narrow and too oriented towards the cognitive domain as the target area of change or transformation (Cranton, 2005; Dirkx, 2006; Illeris, 2014; Kegan, 2000; Taylor, 2007). This emerging critique is driven by a 'basic conceptual uncertainty and even confusion as to what this term [transformative learning] actually includes, covers, and implies' (Illeris, 2014, p. 3). The lack of clarity and ambiguity, according to some (Illeris, 2014; Newman, 2012), has the potential to falsely position transformative learning as constituting anything that extends beyond traditional classroom practice. With this concern in mind, Illeris (2014) argues that the impact of transformative learning should be considered and defined through the concept of identity. This argument is reinforced by James (2002) who explains transformative learning as a process of identity development that creates space for learners to engage in a negotiation of the self. Key to these arguments is a contemporary psychological and sociological understanding of identity that sees constructs of self as fluid and influenced by social externalities. This paper seeks to build on this emerging thread within the current body of literature relating to transformative learning, specifically in relation to the experiences of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander undertaking studies at university.

Research on Transformative Learning Within Indigenous Higher Education

Despite being well established in research relating to adult and continuing education, Mezirow's transformative learning theory remains largely absent in the literature relating to Indigenous higher education. Research in

this context primarily focuses on experiences of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students at university (Barney, 2013; Rochecouste, Oliver, & Bennell, 2014); factors for success/student outcomes (Day & Nolde, 2009; Gallop & Bastien, 2016; Herbert, 2006; Pidgeon, Archibald, & Hawkey, 2014; Trudgett, 2014); enablers and obstacles to success (Barney, 2016; Cameron & Robinson, 2014; Kinnane, Wilks, Wilson, Hughes and Thomas, 2014); retention strategies (Asmar, Page, & Radloff, 2015; Shah & Widin, 2010; Pechenkina, 2015) and increasing Indigenous participation (Powell & Lawley, 2008).

And, while there are studies that suggest Indigenous student engagement with university learning (Hall, 2015; Hall et al., 2015) or learning experiences within Indigenous studies programmes can be transformative (Bullen & Roberts, 2018), there remains a significant gap in the literature exploring the relevance of transformative learning theory to the experiences of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students. This is important not only for a more diverse understanding of transformative learning, it is also a new perspective on the ways in which Indigenous students experience university learning. Such insights add significant value to the way universities approach improving Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander student outcomes and close the gaps between Indigenous and non-Indigenous student attainment.

Martin Nakata's cultural interface theory (2013; 2007a; 2007b; 2002), which has long informed Indigenous thought, policy and action in Indigenous higher education, provides a strong theoretical link to Mezirow's work. The cultural interface is where Indigenous and non-Indigenous histories, cultures, people and experiences inform the ways Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders understand and express themselves (Nakata, 2007a; Nakata, 2002). The cultural interface is, as Nakata (2007b, p. 199) explains, 'a multi-layered and multi-dimensional space of dynamic relations constituted by the intersections of time, place, distance, different systems of thought, competing and contesting discourses within and between different knowledge traditions, and different systems of social, economic and political organisation'.

The cultural interface is also a place of tension, ambiguity and contestation that requires continuous negotiation by Indigenous people (Nakata 2007a; 2007b; 2002). This negotiation is necessitated by the ambiguity and contradiction intrinsic to the way Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander ways of being and knowing are informed, shaped and expressed through a range of competing, conflicting and contradictory discourses (Nakata, 2007a). The cultural interface acknowledges that the lived experiences of Indigenous people are not situated within a series of interlocking and fixed binaries, but are instead 'constituted in complex sets of social and discursive relations' (Nakata, 2007a, p. 201). The complexity of the cultural interface ensures that universities are often difficult and complex intellectual and emotional spaces for Indigenous students to navigate (Nakata, Nakata, & Chin, 2008). Nakata (2007b, p. 10) argues that in negotiating their way between two knowledge systems, Indigenous university students embark on a 'transforming process of endless instances of learning and forgetting, of melding and keeping separate, of discarding and taking up, of continuity and discontinuity'. We suggest that this transforming process, for Indigenous university students at the cultural interface, is similar to Mezirow's (1997) notion of transformative learning. This paper explores the intersection between these two theories through analysis of the individual and collective narratives of the university experiences of the three Aboriginal authors, each of whom successfully completed undergraduate degrees and are undertaking postgraduate study. A collaborative analysis of the author-participants' individual and collective stories was applied to investigate whether or not university could be considered a site of transformative learning, in the context of their subjective experiences.

The Author-Participants

All three author-participants are currently enrolled research students. Braden (30) is the Manager of the Kulbardi Aboriginal Centre, Murdoch University's Indigenous Education Unit. He holds a Bachelor of Education and Bachelor of Arts (Australian Indigenous studies) and is completing his Masters in Counselling exploring transformative learning within the Indigenous Higher Education context. Jenna (25) is a tutor in the University's Community Development and Australian Indigenous studies major. She has a Bachelor of Arts and is currently enrolled in a Research Masters focused on women's experiences of domestic violence within the Perth metropolitan region within the School of Business and Governance. Grantley (23) is Student Success Officer at the Kulbardi Centre supporting Indigenous students in their undergraduate degrees. His undergraduate degree was in Security and Counter-Terrorism and Australian Indigenous Studies, while his Masters research is focused on familial responses to suicide within the Noongar community. All are Noongar people from the south-west of Western Australia and have all completed undergraduate degrees from Murdoch University in Perth, Western Australia. An important power dynamic to disclose is that Braden is line manager to both Grantley and Jenna.

Methodology

Collaborative Auto-Ethnography

Despite a substantial body of work looking at the experiences of Indigenous students within higher education, there continues to be an absence of firsthand voices articulating the ways in which Indigenous university students, subjectively and collectively, negotiate and experience the cultural interface (Nakata, 2007a). Auto-ethnography (AE) provides Indigenous researchers with a scholarly

method of voicing marginalised perspectives and adds depth to understanding the lived experiences of Aboriginal university students (Houston, 2007). In the AE process, researchers reflect on and analyse their personal narratives to provide insight into a particular culture (Houston, 2007). Personal experiences are transformed into data, which is then subjected to several rounds of self-reflexive, critical and/or qualitative analysis.

Collaborative auto-ethnography (CAE) takes the AE approach further (Chang, Ngunjiri, & Hernandez, 2013). It allows for the expression of multiple voices in the generation, analysis and presentation of data. Chang, Ngunkiri and Hernandez (2013) take a broad approach to defining CAE that is inclusive of multiple forms of research collaborations between two or more authors. CAE projects can take a myriad of forms, from community AE, collaborative narrative, collective performance and multivocality (Chang, Ngunkiri, & Hernandez, 2013; Ellis, Adams, & Bochner, 2011) to more traditional qualitative approaches, where the data is subjected to phases of thematic, analogic and dialogic analysis (Garbati & Rothschild, 2016). CAE has been employed to explore individual and collective identity and experience in several professional and academic contexts, including social work (Trotter, Brogatzki, Duggan, Foster, & Levie, 2006), education (Bennett et al., 2016) and communication (Geist-Martin et al., 2010). Additionally, CAE has been deemed more rigorous and ethical than AE due to the inclusion of multiple perspectives contributing to the analysis and its ability to 'support a shift from individual to collective agency, thereby offering a path toward personally engaging, non-exploitative, accessible research that makes a difference' (Lapadat, 2017, p. 589).

As researcher-participants, we agreed that a collaborative AE approach would enable us to examine our lived experiences in a rigorous and ethical way that gave primacy to our voices as experts of our individual and shared cultural experience, as Indigenous university students. Once we had decided on the methodology, we modelled our data collection and analysis on the iterative approach, suggested by Chang, Ngunkiri and Hernandez (2013) and applied by Garbati and Rothschild (2016) and Bennett et al. (2016). This approach involves phases of analogic data collection in the form of first-person narrations; subsequent data collation, in the form of dialogic conversation; comparative and thematic analysis of the data, and finally, critical analysis of the results in the context of existing literature.

A limitation within this study has been the potential for the author-participants to influence each other's analysis of the data, so the claim to authentic individual experience cannot be made. However, CAE offered us greater authority to comment on shared aspects of Aboriginal student experience, as we worked together to co-construct an analysis that represented our collective cultural experience. Additionally, our differing disciplinary backgrounds and research interests, added nuances of understanding through the application of multiple theoretical lenses. Additionally, while providing extra critical distance because the data is analysed by more than one person, CAE does not fully address the positivist critique of AE research lacking rigour (Holt, 2003). It does, however, provide authentic insight into the unique and (importantly) shared experiences of Aboriginal students undertaking university studies, by synthesising three distinct perspectives and applying multiple analytical lenses.

Ethical Considerations

It was important to us to share authentic narratives, including potential vulnerabilities in the data generation phases. In order to maintain the authenticity of our lived experiences, we decided to publish data that may at times appear critical of our families and communities. We did this because the data analysis revealed themes of this nature were not only significant to our individual experience, but they were a commonality between the group. To ignore or silence critical perspectives out of fear of offence, retribution or misrepresentation, would have meant hiding a collective truth and a significant finding. Furthermore, we are proud of the strength of our present-day family and community relationships and feel comfortable with our close family members and peers reading this work. In terms of ethics, we feel that is unethical to omit elements of our experience that were difficult — because sharing the truth might inspire students who are facing similar obstacles to know they are not alone. It must be noted, however, that while this data is integral to our individual and shared experiences as a group of three, it should not be generalised as being in any way representative of Aboriginality, Noongar culture, or to the experience of Aboriginal university students, as a whole.

Data Collection and Analysis

The idea for this paper came from ongoing conversations between the authors during a number of get-togethers involving our University's Indigenous research students. During one such meeting, the topic of discussion turned towards a collective reflection on our undergraduate experiences in relation to where we now find ourselves. In this discussion, the concept of change was identified as being important to success for all of us. Therefore, we decided to explore this commonality further in a collaborative research project so we could ascertain the extent to which personal change was important to our success as university students. We agreed that the first step would be to reflect further on our individual journeys into, and throughout, our undergraduate degrees. To do so, we wrote about our experiences of coming into and progressing through university studies in the form of first-person narratives. In writing these reflective narratives, we paid particular attention to the concept of change and the role it played in our journey as students. Next, we

collated our monological narratives to create a data pool. We then individually analysed the data, looking to identify common themes. Our following round of data collection was dialogic. We recorded an in-depth conversation, based on the themes we had individually identified in the first round of data, where we critically reflected on and further explored the ideas. This conversation was later transcribed and a second round of independent thematic analysis was conducted. Particular focus was placed on whether or not the multiple narratives constructed a collective account of our experiences as Indigenous university students. Finally, we determined whether or not we felt our collective experience demonstrated evidence of transformative learning, as discussed in the existing body of literature.

Discussion and Findings

Our analysis found that, for all three author-participants, university was indeed a site of transformation. While perspective transformation (Mezirow, 1997) was evident, what was most significant was that higher education had transformed, in multiple ways, our sense of identity. Aside from the impact that university learning had on our sense of self, our narratives also revealed the crucial role that relationships played in fostering our success as students. Interestingly, family was understood to be a paradoxical influence on our educational journeys as both sources of motivation and, at times, significant obstacles to success.

Transformed Identities

Mezirow's (1978) initial definition of transformative learning — shifts in meaning perspectives, frames of reference and habits of mind — has been critiqued for being too limited and too focused on cognitive aspects of change (e.g. Illeris, 2014; Dirkx, 2012). In seeking a broadening of this understanding, Illeris (2014) argues that the construct of identity is a more insightful lens through which to interrogate and understand the impact of transformative learning. For Illeris (2014, p. 40), transformative learning extends beyond shifts in perspectives or thinking and 'comprises all learning which implies changes in the identity of the learner'. This term, for Illeris (2014), encompasses not only the dimensions outlined in Mezirow's original definition, but also the broader mental, emotional and social aspects of transformative learning thus distinguishing transformative learning from learning that takes place in everyday or more traditional learning contexts.

In our analysis, the strongest theme was the impact that university learning had on our identities as Aboriginal people. Our participation in higher education, through both informal and formal means, had significantly disrupted firmly entrenched understandings about what it meant to be Aboriginal. At the cultural interface, such a disruption is likely to occur. Irrespective of Indigenous students' distance from 'traditional' ways of being and knowing, the ways of constructing knowledge remain familiar to many Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students and scholars. This familiarity comes from the dynamic social and cultural expressions that are significant, if not unique, to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people; ways of relating to family, story-telling, verbal and nonverbal ways of communicating, artistic expression and the sociocultural practices that remain integral to Indigenous people (Nakata, 2007a). Importantly, at the cultural interface, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people are similarly grounded in Western epistemology making this intersection a lived reality for Indigenous people in the contemporary context. Because of this, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders students and scholars are, as Nakata (2007a) explains, 'engaged [. . .] in a constant process of endless and often unconscious negotiations between these frames – or reference points – for viewing, understanding, and knowing the world'. Based on our study, the embodied experience of life at the cultural interface suggests that, for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people within academia, such a constant negotiation transforms the way we view, understand and know ourselves as Aboriginal people.

While identity disruption was common across all author-participant narratives, there were particular nuances as to how this impacted each member of the group. For Grantley, his engagement with higher education led to a greater sense of confidence in identifying as Aboriginal. For Braden, the awareness of a broadened and more inclusive understanding of Indigeneity provided the grounds for a deep sense of pride in the way his cultural identity was embracing of his sexual identity. While a more inclusive understanding of Aboriginality led Jenna to reflect on her previously held ideas about Indigenous identity and challenge those who sought to narrowly define Aboriginality in limited and stereotypical terms. Common among all the narratives was a sense that our understandings of, and relationships to, Aboriginal identity were changed by our experiences of studying at university.

As Grantley explained:

> university changed my idea of who I was as an Aboriginal person. It gave me a broader sense of what it means to be Aboriginal. You grow up thinking that that being Aboriginal means being poor, unemployed, not being able to look after your kids, being a drunk – it's sometimes all you see – but once you understand that this is founded in stereotypes and internalised racism, you can understand that being Aboriginal is so much more – it's like you realise regardless of what you do, you're still Aboriginal.

Within this excerpt are examples of the initial phases of transformative learning. Grantley's engagement with higher education resulted in his self-examination of his identity (Phase 1), and also a critical assessment of his own assumptions about what it means to be Aboriginal (Phase 3). These experiences gave him a sense of ownership over his own identity:

> before coming to university I used to feel like I was on the fence – uncomfortable with both identities – that's not the case anymore. University learning made me more comfortable identifying as Aboriginal – I don't have to feel like a pretender anymore. I don't feel like I need to justify it anymore.

This newfound sense of comfort with his identity reflects Mezirow's final phase whereby students, based on their learning and experiences, and despite previous barriers, reintegrate confidently into their sociocultural context.

Furthermore, this broader understanding of Indigeneity developed within all author-participants a stronger sense of cultural identity — one that was more inclusive, sophisticated and nuanced. As Braden remarked during the group conversation, *being able to articulate my sense of self and stand very firmly in my cultural identity and sexuality – none of that would've happened without university. It was certainly a more inclusive version of being Aboriginal that I hadn't come across before.* This resonates with Nakata's (2007a) argument that while those within the higher education sector must recognise the complex space of tension that Indigenous students often find themselves, the response to such complexity cannot be a retreat from diversity. Indigenous subjectivity cannot and should not be 'bounded off and separated from the global' (Nakata, 2007a, p. 13). For Braden, immersion within academia enabled a critical reflection on the sociocultural assumptions and influences that shape the way he came to understand his own identity. More than this, much like Grantley, Braden was able to reintegrate this new understanding into the way he articulates his own subjectivity (Phase 10) at the cultural interface. Again, this aligns with Illeris' (2014) assertion that more than just perspective transformation, it is primarily a student's sense of self or identity that transforms.

A point of significant tension that was evident throughout the analysis was the policing of identity that can occur when Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students engage with higher education. For all author-participants, the decision to pursue further learning presented direct challenges to their identity as Aboriginal people — particularly from those within their families and communities. Some within the author-participants' lives saw the students' engagement with university studies as a form of rejection. This sense of rejection frequently gave rise to accusations of the author-participants wanting to be 'white'. As such, the term 'coconut' appeared regularly within the data. This is a pejorative term used to describe Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people who are Black on the outside (skin colour or superficial behaviour), but are 'white' on the inside (i.e. personality, beliefs, attitudes and values) (Dudgeon & Oxenham, 1989). Jenna, upon discussing this phenomenon, reflected that prior to coming to university she would have had no problem similarly labelling other Indigenous people as coconuts (in and of itself and transformed perspective). Furthermore, all members of the group indicated that at some point during their studies, they had been referred to as such. For those who reject the compulsion to align with dualistically constructed notions of Indigeneity, accusations of inauthenticity are common (Paradies, 2006). However, such attacks on identity ignore the heterogeneity within Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander culture and identity both within the contemporary and traditional contexts (Nakata, 2007b; Paradies, 2006).

Understanding the contemporary sociopolitical and economic context in which many Indigenous Australians now find themselves, goes some way to explaining the pervasiveness of identity policing and surveillance within Aboriginal communities. Individual accomplishments, particularly in education and employment, have the potential to challenge the dominance of a pan-Indigenous identity founded in a shared experience of oppression and disadvantage (Lahn, 2013). For example, the emergence of an Indigenous middle class is often met with suspicion or hostility by some within Indigenous communities (Langton, 2012; Pearson, 2007). It is the case that socioeconomic transformation can be perceived to undermine the cohesion needed to maintain a collective Aboriginal political identity, one that has been instrumental to social, political and economic gains for Indigenous people since the 1970s. These politics have significantly influenced thinking about Indigeneity through its embedding within the collective and individual narratives expressed and lived by Aboriginal people. Therefore, disruption to such social cohesion, particularly at the personal/familial level poses acute difficulties for Indigenous students embarking on university studies — the writing of new chapters to existing narratives can be threatening to those who may feel 'left behind'.

However, what was evident in the narratives was a sense that such accusations were intellectually understood but not taken personally because of the strong sense of identity developed throughout the students' time at university. As Jenna explains:

> I still get called that [coconut] by my family for going to uni or work, whatever, [. . .] the best thing I've found to say back is 'well if being Aboriginal means sitting around drinking, using drugs, going to jail, but being a coconut means having a stable life then I'd rather be a coconut!'. Stepping outside of what I grew up in didn't mean that I was being white; it meant that I could be a strong Aboriginal person and do well in life. I could go and get an education without that making me a coconut!

The author-participants' relationships with their peers were vital in their negotiating this challenge. As Jenna remarked in the group dialogue, *knowing that other students had been through the same thing with their families made me realise that I didn't have to drop out, I could keep going and everything would be fine.* This aligns well with

Mezirow's fifth phase relating to the exploration of options for new relationships in the transformative learning process.

Furthermore, each author-participant agreed that their persistence with university studies was underpinned by an overwhelming feeling that university was now a core part of their identity. As Jenna explains *university is so entrenched in my life that, if I leave, I feel like I'll lose a chunk of my life. I feel like this is me now, I can't walk away from who I am.* In response to this sentiment Braden stated, *yeah, it kind of gets stuck in you. My life is here, both personally and professionally. If I walked away, what would I do? Without it I wouldn't feel fulfilled. This is what I like to do, this is who I am. This is how I know I can best give back to my family and community.*

This challenge to Indigenous students is well reflected in the second, third and fourth phases of Mezirow's 10-step process. The second phase involving self-examination and sense of guilt or shame forced the author-participants to ask themselves 'who am I?'. The third phase, in light of their families' reactions to their engagement with university study, asked them to consider 'how do my family and community define me – is this agreeable to me?'. While finally, the fourth phase saw each person recognise that their sense of discontent was shared, and often successfully negotiated, by their peers. The narratives evident in this study suggest that identity transformation, as argued by Illeris (2014) has occurred. All author-participants in their reflections emphasised the role that higher education had in challenging and transforming identities — particularly as Aboriginal people. Shifting away from unhelpful, internalised and oppressive interpretations of Indigenous identity gave rise to greater confidence emerging from a stronger, more inclusive and diverse understanding of what it means to be Aboriginal.

The Role of Relationships in Identity Transformation

Research exploring transformative learning has highlighted the essential role that relationships play in fostering transformative learning (Cranton & Carusetta, 2004; Taylor, 1998). For Cranton (2006), transformative learning relies on the development of meaningful and authentic relationships between teachers and students. Peer-to-peer relationships are also seen as being integral to the process of transformative learning (Carter, 2002; Cranton, 2006; Eisen, 2001; Lyon, 2001; Mejiuni, 2009). Despite recognition of the important role that relationships play in the process of transformative learning, research has only just begun to explore the complex nature of these relationship relative to Mezirow's theory. Perhaps of most relevance to this study is Cooley's (2007) exploration of women's enclaves as sites for transformative learning. Defined as a 'group of people who are culturally, intellectually, or socially distinct from those surrounding them' (Cooley, 2007, p. 304), an enclave is, to some extent, comparable to an Indigenous Education Unit within a university. Results in this study found that enclaves were vital in fostering strong relationships that invited honest and challenging conversations among participants that led to transformative learning. This again resonates with Mezirow's Phase 4 as the author-participants' negotiate tensions shared amongst the Indigenous student community.

In line with the aforementioned, one of the key themes emerging from the data was the importance of relationships fostered through the Indigenous centre. For the author-participants, relationships formed through their engagement with the Indigenous centre were seen as vitally important in terms of not only supporting and enabling success, but also fostering personal transformation. While the Indigenous centre — particularly through the enabling programme, Indigenous Tutorial Assistance Scheme and associated learning resources — provided a strong foundation for further success, the supportive relationships with other Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people was seen as most vital.

As Grantley explains, *having support from staff and peers who have had similar life experiences was important to me, it gave me reinforcement that I could do it!* Seen as a bridge between home and university, the Indigenous centre was a place of comfort and reassurance but also a source of inspiration — as Braden explains, *speaking to people who were succeeding at university made me believe that, well, if they can do it, I can too.* Similarly, Jenna felt that the centre provided unique support through peer interactions that did not often come from home: *when I come here* [the Indigenous centre where] *other people are parents, have jobs, they study, it's easier to talk about things and not just necessarily to have people understand what's going on in your life, but to help as well.* All author-participants were clear that they thought they would not have undertaken, let alone completed, university studies without the support network they developed through the Indigenous centre. As Jenna put it, *the Indigenous centre, and the people I met there, changed my life completely.*

While the Indigenous centre was perceived as being important to the author-participants' individual journeys, once the role of the centre was explored in further detail, it emerged that of greater importance were the relationships forged within it. Such connections are crucial to the process of transformative learning. As Baumgartner (2001, p. 19) argues, 'transformational learning is not an independent act but is an interdependent relationship built on trust'. It is through equal, trusting and respectful relationships that individuals are able to critically question through dialogue, share insights and knowledge and come to a mutual and collective understanding about their experiences as learners (Baumgartner, 2002). Again, these experiences align with Mezirow's Phase 4 descriptor 'recognition that one's discontent and the process of transformation is shared and that other have negotiated a similar change' (Mezirow, 1978, p. 12). The opportunity

to form relationships with other Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students was crucial in transforming each author-participants' perspective on their ability to succeed at university studies and their capacity to persist despite significant obstacles.

The Double-Edged Sword of Family

Within the context of Indigenous higher education, some studies highlight the positive role families play in enabling the success of Indigenous students in Australia (Barney, 2016; Cameron & Robinson, 2014; Shah and Widden, 2010; West, Usher, Foster, & Stewart, 2014). Where families were found to have been barriers to success, it was a largely gendered issue. For White (2009), Indigenous women found it difficult to manage both familial responsibilities and undertake studies simultaneously — the unequal distribution of work at home exacerbated this. In exploring different cultural/national contexts, both McMurchy-Pilkington (2013) and Bingham, Adolpho, Jackson, and Alexitch (2014) found similar barriers to Indigenous women succeeding at university in both New Zealand and Canada, respectively.

The gendered nature of this phenomenon was, to some extent, evident in this study. For Jenna, her family was critical of her decision to place her child in day-care in order to better balance home and university life. She was accused of being a 'bad parent'. Her decision to end a violent relationship was also met with disapproval, as it was deemed not in the best interest of the child. This tension was evident. Evident also is the fact that Jenna's narrative below incorporates Mezirow's Phases 7–10:

> So I had a lot of, kind of, patriarchal ideas about what a woman should be doing thrown back at me when I was trying to change myself and do better because of what I was doing – it wasn't what I would be expected to do. To most people around me it was expected that [y]ou'd just stayed with the man that beats you because that's your man and the father of your child. Yeah, you don't need a job or you don't need an education because you got kids to look after. I got a lot of that. I didn't really understand at the time that my situation was part of a much bigger picture (Phase 7), a lot of our women aren't able to pursue their dreams because of the structures around them that limit their opportunities. I felt like he tried to trap me, he used to say that he owned me because I had his kid, like I was some type of material possession, but it doesn't have to be that way (Phases 8–9). I can be a good mother, a good partner, a good sister and a good daughter and I feel like I can do this a lot better now that I am happy in myself and my life (Phase 10).

Jenna's ability to effectively articulate the structural barriers she faces as an Aboriginal woman reflects the growth in her educational journey. Her theoretically informed response to the issues she has faced as an Aboriginal woman demonstrates the significant shift in Jenna's ability to conceptualise and articulate highly complex personal and social issues in order to effectively confront them.

Another theme that emerged in regards to family was the sense that our families did not fully understand the demands, and to some extent, the value, of a university education. Jenna says, her mother, although supportive, *didn't really kind of understand what I was doing. So she would support me in principle but not really know how to support me with what I was actually doing at uni. But comparing that to the rest of my family! Well, they were not helpful at all.* For Grantley, his grandparents and father were very encouraging of him pursuing further education. Braden's experience was slightly different: *My nan got her degree. I remember watching her graduate when I was young. And my immediate family were always supportive. My father would say "you don't want a job like mine, keep studying." So, they were never obstructive, it more came from members of my extended family.* It was surmised a lack of understanding about the author-participants' motivation to study led to, at various points in time, their labelling members of the research group as 'coconuts'. As Grantley reflected, *it's not a joke and it hurts you at times because that's your family, they shouldn't think like that. But I still get called a coconut a lot for just going to work or uni.*

University was also seen as being important in providing the author-participants with the tools to effectively deal with such criticism and, in turn, positively influence those around them:

> Seeing other Aboriginal people here at uni dealing with the sorts of things that I had to deal with gave me a lot of confidence. I could deal with those who I felt tried to bring me down, but it helped me to also explain to them why I thought this was important, to not only me, but also those around me. In the end, some of my cousins who were calling me a coconut in the beginning were all of a sudden enrolling alongside me. That was nice. I felt vindicated. I never took this kind of stuff personally, but I admit that it hurt. But having them turn around their thinking made me feel that I was definitely on the right path. Some of them are well on their way to finishing their own degrees now.

For these reasons, author-participants found family to be a key motivator for success. The desire to become a positive role model for younger people in their lives was critical, particularly in order to show their families a different way of life. This was evident in Grantley's account: *Well I'm the oldest of six, both of my parents were unemployed my whole life so I felt like I had something to prove to my brothers and sisters to make sure that they could see that if I went first it could prove to them that they could too.* Jenna too explained that studying at university and benefiting from the opportunities that arose meant that she felt an obligation to bring along as many of her family as possible:

> Most of my brothers and sisters are kind of messed up and I followed that path, but then after being at uni I wanted

> something different for my nieces, nephews and my son. For my son, at the time I was studying, all of his male role models were terrible, like, they were using drugs, they were all violent – they're all people that I don't want him to look up to. So I wanted to show him that you can do something else.

The tension evident in these narratives suggests that while each of the author-participants experienced significant shifts in their worldview and identities, these positive transformations are not without potentially negative consequence. Balancing familial expectations with the demands of university learning was a constant struggle. However, the desire to persist and become strong role models for those within their families and communities saw them through some of the most challenging of life events throughout the course of their studies — two author-participants experienced the suicides of close family members and the deaths of others close to home while undertaking their bachelor degree. One was the victim of ongoing domestic violence and two saw close members of their families incarcerated at some point in time. Despite such difficulties, all author-participants renegotiated their relationships with family on their own terms and, for the most part, forced a shift in the way their families perceived their decision to participate in university studies.

While not overwhelmingly positive, the impact of family on the educational journey of each author-participant is evident. In applying Mezirow's (1978) 'Ten Phases of Transformative Learning' (see Table 1), the importance of family to the transformative learning process is revealed. While the Ten Phases model remains fundamental to the way transformative learning is understood, it is not to be perceived as a universally linear or orderly process, it may be intermittent, fragmentary or skip over phases (Mezirow, 1991). Mezirow (2000) also notes that within the transformative learning process, learners may backslide or revert when confronted with the realities of change. The disorienting dilemma (Phase 1) for each of the author-participants emerged from their participation in university studies and, subsequently, their families' challenge to their pursuit of further education. This, for each member of the group, brought upon a sense of guilt or shame (Phase 2) in feeling as though they were abandoning or leaving their family behind to undertake university study. However, each member of the group critically examined the epistemic, sociocultural and psychological assumptions (Phase 3) that were underpinning not only their sense of guilt, but also their families' reactionary responses to their decision to engage with higher education. In recognising that these experiences are shared by others (Phase 4), via new relationships (Phase 5) formed within the Indigenous centre, each member of the group developed skills and knowledge (Phase 7) to confidently and competently negotiate their new identities as Aboriginal university students (Phase 9). This process eventually led to a strong sense of agency and purpose that is informed by these newly transformed perspectives (Phase 10). In reintegrating these perspectives into their lives, each member of the group became role models and leaders for their families to follow. While some relationships with family were ended, and others renegotiated, each of the author-participants felt the transformation that had occurred throughout their studies was important to their lives and the lives of those around them.

Conclusion

For each author-participant, engagement at the cultural interface led to significant transformation. University studies encouraged each member of the group to move beyond dualistic understandings of Indigeneity towards a frame of reference that situated their lived experiences within a broader more inclusive identity construct. These experiences reveal a complex picture of Indigenous life within the academy and broader society. Furthermore, they also challenge the tendency within Indigenous higher education theory and practice to construct Indigeneity and the academy within an unhelpful or adversarial dualism. The diversity within the Indigenous student experience is evident in the author-participants' narratives, that there is no one way to be Indigenous is important for the higher education sector to acknowledge. Furthermore, this study demonstrates the potential for university study to effect positive change in the lives Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people — while a predominately non-Indigenous space it must not always be understood in terms of a threat to Indigeneity. That personal transformation enables Indigenous students to embrace higher education, on their own terms, without sacrificing a strong sense of who they are, adds significant insight into the way students may develop a sense of agency throughout their engagement with university learning. This paper also highlights the important role that relationships provide in not only supporting Indigenous university students, but also fostering positive and meaningful change. Also, while not to be generalised, the experiences of this small group of students provides a valuable insight into the difficulties Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students may face in balancing family expectations with personal educational ambition. While far from being a representative study on the realities of Indigenous students at the cultural interface, the transformative experiences outlined in this paper highlight the potential for universities to be positive sites of transformation for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students. This potential is not only in relation to their ambitions as students, but their aspirations as individuals, who are part of families, that make up our communities.

References

Asmar, C., Page, S., & Radloff, A. (2015). Exploring anomalies in Indigenous student engagement: Findings from

a national Australian survey of undergraduates. *Higher Education Research & Development, 34*(1), 15–29. doi: 10.1080/07294360.2014.934334

Barney, K. (2013). 'Taking your mob with you': Giving voice to the experiences of Indigenous Australian postgraduate students. *Higher Education Research and Development, 32*(4), 515–528. doi: 10.1080/07294360.2012.696186

Barney, K. (2016). Listening to and learning from the experiences of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students to facilitate success. *Student Success, 7*(1), 1–11. doi: 10.5204/ssj.v7i1.317

Baumgartner, L.M. (2001). An update on transformational learning. In S.B. Merriam (Ed.), *New directions for adult and continuing education* (pp. 15–24). San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

Baumgartner, L.M. (2002) Living and learning with HIV/AIDS: Transformational tales continued. *Adult Education Quarterly, 53*, 44–70.

Bell, H. L., Gibson, H. J., Tarrant, M. A., Perry III, L. G., & Stoner, L. (2016). Transformational learning through study abroad: US students' reflections on learning about sustainability in the South Pacific. *Leisure Studies, 35*(4), 389–405.

Bennett, R., Hobson, J., Jones, A., Martin-Lynch, P., Scutt, C., Strehlow, K., & Veitch, S. (2016) Being chimaera: A monstrous identity for SoTL academics. *Higher Education Research & Development, 35*(2), 217–228. doi: 10.1080/07294360.2015.1087473

Benson, R., Heageny, M., Hewitt, L., Crosling, G., & Devos, A. (2014). Diversity and achievement: Is success in higher education a transformative experience?. *Australian Journal of Adult Learning, 54*(2), 8–31.

Bingham, J., Adolpho, Q.B., Jackson, A., & Alexitch, L.R. (2014). Indigenous women college students' perspectives on college, work, and family. *Journal of College Student Development, 55*(6), 615–632.

Bridwell, S.D. (2013). A constructive-developmental perspective on the transformative learning of adults marginalized by race, class, and gender. *Adult Education Quarterly, 63*(2), 127–146.

Bullen, J., & Roberts, L. (2018). Driving transformative learning within Australian indigenous studies. *The Australian Journal of Indigenous Education*, 1–12. doi:10.1017/jie.2017.40

Cameron, S., & Robinson, K. (2014). The experiences of Indigenous Australian psychologists at university. *Australian Psychologist, 49*(1), 54–62. doi: 10.1111/ap.12036

Carter, T.J. (2002) The importance of talk to midcareer women's development: A collaborative inquiry. *The Journal of Business Communication, 39*, 55–91.

Chang, H., Ngunkiri, F.W., & Hernandez, K.C. (2013). *Collaborative autoethnography*. Walnut Creek, CA: Left Coast Press.

Choi, S., Slaubaugh, M., & Kim, A. (2012). International exchange as a transformative learning experience: A case study. *International Journal of Educational Reform, 21*(3), 160–172.

Collins, J., & Geste, A. (2016). The transformative effect of study abroad: Australian teaching experience on US preservice teacher identity formation. *International Education Journal: Comparative Perspectives, 15*(2), 13–22.

Cooley, L. (2007). Transformational learning and third-wave feminism as potential outcomes of participation in women's enclaves. *Journal of Transformative Education, 5*(4), 304–316. doi: 10.1177/1541344607310573

Cranton, P. (2005). Transformative learning. In L. English (Ed.), *International encyclopedia of adult education* (pp. 630–637). London: Palgrave Macmillan.

Cranton, P. (2006). Fostering authentic relationships in the transformative classroom. *New Directions for Adult and Continuing Education, 2006*(109), 5–13.

Cranton, P., & Carusetta, E. (2004). Perspective on authenticity in teaching. *Adult Education Quarterly, 55*(1), 5–22. doi: 10.1177/0741713604268894

Day, D., & Nolde, R. (2009). Arresting the decline in Australian indigenous representation at university: Student experience as a guide. *Equal Opportunities International, 28*(2), 135–161. doi: 10.1108/02610150910937899

Dirkx, J.M. (2012). Self-formation and transformative learning: A response to "Calling transformative learning into question: Some mutinous thoughts," by Michael Newman. *Adult Education Quarterly, 62*(4), 399–405.

Dirkx, J.M. (2006). Engaging emotions in adult learning: A Jungian perspective on emotion and transformative learning. *New Directions for Adult and Continuing Education, 109*, 15–26.

Dudgeon, P. & Oxenham, D. (1989). The complexity of aboriginal diversity: Identity and kindredness. *Black Voices, 5*(1), 22–38.

Eisen, M.J. (2001). Peer-based professional development viewed through the lens of transformative learning. *Holistic Nursing Practice, 16*, 30–42

Ellis, C., Adams, T., & Bochner, A. (2011). Autoethnography: An overview. *Historical Social Research/Historische Sozialforschung, 36*(4) (138ds), 273–290. Retrieved from http://www.jstor.org/stable/23032294.

Gallop, C.J., & Bastien, N. (2016). Supporting success: Aboriginal students in higher education. *Canadian Journal of Higher Education, 46*(2), 206–224.

Garbati, J.F., & Rothschild, N. (2016, March). Lasting impact of study abroad experiences: A collaborative autoethnography. In *Forum qualitative sozialforschung/forum: Qualitative social research* (vol. *17*, no. 2). doi: 10.17169/-17.2.2387

Geist-Martin, P., Gates, L., Wiering, L., Kirby, E., Houston, R., Lilly, A., & Moreno, J. (2010). Exemplifying collaborative autoethnographic practice via shared stories of mothering. *Journal of Research Practice, 6*(1), Article M8. Retrieved from http://jrp.icaap.org/index.php/jrp/article/view/209/187.

Gordon, G. (2006). Transforming thinking amongst British African Caribbeans as an academically based community service contribution. *Journal of Transformative Education, 4*(3). doi: 10.1177/1541344606290369

Hall, L. (2015). What are the key ingredients for an effective and successful tertiary enabling program for aboriginal and torres strait islander students? An evaluation of the evolution of one program. *Australian Journal of Adult Learning, 52*(2), 244–267.

Hall, L., Maughan, C., Wilkes, M., Thorpe, T., Forrest, J., & Harrison, A. (2015). Swimming not drowning — resilience as a key determinant of success for Aboriginal and Torres strait islander pre-tertiary students. *Journal for Multicultural Education, 9*(3), 159–173.

Herbert, J. (2006). *Owning the discourse: Seizing the power!* Paper presented at the Australian Association for Research in Education (AARE) 2005, Parramatta, NSW.

Holt, N.L. (2003). Representation, legitimation, and autoethnography: An autoethnographic writing story. *International Journal of Qualitative Methods*, *2*(1), Article 2. Retrieved June 15, 2017 from http://www.ualberta.ca/~iiqm/backissues/ 2_1final/html/holt.html.

Houston, J. (2007). Indigenous autoethnography: Formulating our knowledge, our way. *Australian Journal of Indigenous Education, 36*, 45–50.

Howie, P., & Bagnall, R. (2013). A beautiful metaphor: Transformative learning theory. *International Journal of Lifelong Education, 32*(6), 816–836. doi: 10.1080/02601370.2013.817486

Illeris, K. (2014). Transformative learning in higher education. *Journal of Transformative Learning, 3*(1), 45–51. Retrieved from jotl.uco.edu/index.php/jotl/article/download/50/48.

James, P. (2002). Discourses and practices of competency-based training: Implications for worker and practitioner identities. *International Journal of Lifelong Education, 21*(4), 369–391.

Jeyaraj, J.J., & Harland, T. (2014). Transforming teaching and learning in ELT through critical pedagogy: An international study. *Journal of Transformative Education, 12*(4), 343–355. doi: 10.1177/1541344614550042

Kegan, R. (2000). What "form" transforms?: A constructive-developmental approach to transformative learning. In J. Mezirow & Associates (Ed.), *Learning as transformation* (pp. 3–34). San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

Kinnane, S., Wilks, J, Wilson, K., Hughes, T., & Thomas, S. (2014). *Can't be what you can't see: The transition of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students into higher education: Final report 2014.* Broome, WA: University of Notre Dame Australia.

Kitchenham, A. (2008). The evolution of John Mezirow's transformative tearning theory. *Journal of Transformative Education, 6*(2), 104–123. doi: 10.1177/154134460883222678

Lahn, J. (2013). 'Aboriginal Professionals: Work, Class and Culture' (Working Paper 89, Centre for Aboriginal Economic Policy Research)

Langton, M. (2012). 'Indigenous exceptionalism', Speech presented at Melbourne Writers Festival, 26 August 2012, accessed 20/8/2017.

Lapadat, J.C. (2017). Ethics in autoethnography and collaborative autoethnography. *Qualitative Inquiry, 23*(8), 589–603. doi: 10.1177/1077800417704462

Lyon, C.R. (2001). Hear our stories: Relationships and transformations of women educators who worked overseas. *Studies in the Education of Adults*, *33*, 118–126.

Madsen, S.R. (2009). Transformational learning experiences of female UAE college students. *Education, Business and Society: Contemporary Middle Eastern Issues, 2*(1), 20–31. doi: 10.1108/17537980910938451

Mälkki, K. (2010). Building on Mezirow's theory of transformative learning: Theorizing the challenges to reflection. *Journal of Transformative Education, 8*(1), 42–62. doi: 10.1177/1541344611403315

McMurchy-Pilkington, C. (2013). 'We are family': Māori success in foundation programmes. *Higher Education Research and Development, 32*(3), 436–449. doi: 10.1080/07294360.2011.643294

Mejiuni, O. (2009). *Potential for transformative mentoring relationships among women in academia in Nigeria.* Paper presented at the Eighth International Transformative Learning Conference. College of Bermuda.

Merriam, S.B., & Ntseane, G. (2008). Transformational learning: How culture shapes the process. *Adult Education Quarterly*, *58*(3), 183–197 doi: 10.1177/0741713608314087

Mezirow, J. (1978). *Education for perspective transformation: Women's re-entry programs in community colleges.* New York: Center for Adult Education, Teachers College, Columbia University.

Mezirow, J. (1991). *Transformative dimensions of adult learning.* San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

Mezirow, J. (1994). Understanding transformation theory. *Adult Education Quarterly, 44*(4), 222–232.

Mezirow, J. (1995). Transformation theory of adult learning. In M.R. Welton (Ed.), *In defense of the life-world* (pp. 39–70). New York: State University of New York Press.

Mezirow, J. (1996). Contemporary paradigms of learning. *Adult Education Quarterly, 46*(3), 158–172.

Mezirow, J. (1997). Transformative learning theory. In E.W.T.J. Mezirow & Associates, (Ed.), *Transformative learning in practice: Insights from community, workplace, and higher education* (pp. 18–32). San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

Mezirow, J. (2000) Learning to think like an adult. Core concepts of transformation theory. In J. Mezirow & Associates, (Eds.), *Learning as transformation. Critical perspectives on a theory in progress* (pp. 3–33). San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

Mezirow, J. (2009). Transformative learning theory. In E.W.T.J. Mezirow, & (Ed.), *Transformative learning in practice: Insights from community, workplace, and higher education* (pp. 18–32). San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

Morrice, L. (2013). Learning and refugees: Recognizing the darker side of transformative learning. *Adult Education Quarterly, 63*(3), 251–271.

Nakata, M. (2002). Indigenous knowledge and the cultural interface: Underlying issues at the intersection of knowledge and information systems. *International Federation of Library Associations Journal*, *28*(5/6), 281–291.

Nakata, M. (2007a). The cultural interface. *The Australian Journal of Indigenous Education, 36*, 7–14

Nakata, M. (2007b). *Disciplining the savages, savaging the disciplines*. Canberra: Aboriginal Studies Press.

Nakata, M. (2013). The rights and blights of the politics in Indigenous higher education. *Anthropological Forum, 23*(3), 289–303. doi: 10.1080/00664677.2013.803457

Nakata, M., Nakata, V., & Chin, M. (2008). Approaches to the academic preparation and support of Australian indigenous students for tertiary studies. *Australian Journal of Indigenous Education*, *37*, 137–145.

Newman, M. (2012). Calling transformative learning into questions: some mutinous thoughts. *Adult Education Quarterly*, *62*(1), 36–55.

Paradies, Y. (2006). Beyond black and white: Essentialism, hybridity and Indigeneity. *Journal of Sociology*, *42*(4), 355–367.

Pearson, N. (2007). Through the class ceiling, *The Weekend Australian*, 4–5 August 2007, accessed 15/6/2017.

Pechenkina, E. (2015). Who needs support? Perceptions of institutional support by Indigenous Australian students at an Australian university UNESCO Observatory Multi-Disciplinary Journal in the Arts, *4*(1), 1–17.

Pidgeon, M., Archibald, J., & Hawkey, C. (2014). Relationships matter: Supporting aboriginal graduate students in British Columbia, Canada. *The Canadian Journal of Higher Education, 44*(1), 1–21.

Powell, B., & Lawley, M. (2008). Australian Indigenous students tertiary education choices: Exploring the decision to enter higher education and choice of university. *Journal of the Australian and New Zealand Student Services Association, 31*, 23–41.

Rochecouste, J., Oliver,, R., &Bennell, D. (2014). Is there cultural safety in Australian universities?. *International Journal of Higher Education, 3*(2), 153–166. doi: 10.5430/ijhe.v3n2p153

Scoffham, S., & Barnes, J. (2009). Transformational experiences and deep learning: The impact of an intercultural study visit to India on UK initial teacher education students. *Journal of Education for Teaching, 35*(3), 257–270.

Shah, M., & Widden, J. (2010). Indigenous students' voices: Monitoring indigenous student satisfaction and retention in a large Australian university. *Journal of Institutional Research, 15*(1), 28–41.

Taylor, E.W. (1998) Transformative learning: A critical review. *ERIC Clearinghouse on Adult, Career, and Vocational Education* (Information Series No. 374).

Taylor, E.W. (2007). An update of transformative learning theory: A critical review of the empirical research (1999–2005). *International Journal of Lifelong Education*, *26*(2), 173–191.

Trotter, J., Brogatzki, L., Duggan, L., Foster, E., & Levie, J. (2006). Revealing disagreement and discomfort through auto-ethnography and personal narrative: Sexuality in social work education and practice. *Qualitative Social Work, 5*, 369–388. doi: 10.1177/1473325006067366

Trudgett, M. (2014). Supervision provided to Indigenous Australian doctoral students: A black and white issue. *Higher Education Research & Development, 33*(5), 1035–1048. doi: 10.1080/07294360.2014.890576.

West, R., Usher, K., Foster, K., & Stewart, L. (2014). Academic staff perceptions of factors underlying program completion by Australian Indigenous nursing students. *The Qualitative Report, 19*(12), 1–19.

White, N. (2009). University-educated Indigenous women: Their struggles and triumphs in their leadership journeys. In J. Frawley, M. Nolan & N. White (Ed.), *Indigenous issues in Australian universities* (pp. 95–105). Darwin: Charles Darwin University Press.

About the Authors

Braden Hill is Head of the Kulbardi Aboriginal Centre at Murdoch University. Responsible for Indigenous education and strategy. His research interests relate to Indigenous education, identity politics, queer identities in education and transformative learning.

Grantley Winmar is a current research master's student enrolled in Counselling. His research is focusing on the ways Aboriginal families respond to suicide within the family to develop an understanding of the ways families may assist in the prevention of suicide. He is also a casual tutor at the University within the Kulbardi Aboriginal Centre.

Jenna Woods is a research masters student exploring the impact of child protection policies on the reporting of domestic violence by Aboriginal women in the south-west corridor of Western Australia. She is also an academic teaching within the University's Community Development program.