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# CULTURAL SAFETY: LET'S NAME IT!

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### ■ Abstract

This paper provides an overview of the Australian Indigenous higher education sector commencing from its development in the early 1970s to the present. It outlines how the first Indigenous higher education support program was developed, the reasons behind the development, and how and why it has been replicated across the Australian higher education sector. The whole process over the past 30 years of formal Indigenous participation within the higher education sector has been a very difficult process, despite the major gains. On reflection, I have come to believe that all the trials and tribulations have revolved around issues of "cultural safety", but we have never named it as such. I believe that it is time that we formally named it as a genre in its own right within the education sector. We need to extend it from our psyches and put it out there to be developed, discussed, debated and evaluated. This is what is beginning to take place within Indigenous health - so why not Indigenous education?

### ■ Introduction

It can be argued that there have been positive developments in Indigenous education. I would argue, however, that cultural safety is an issue which has not received adequate recognition. Williams (1999, p. 213) defines cultural safety as:

an environment that is spiritually, socially and emotionally safe, as well as physically safe for people; where there is no assault challenge or denial of their identity, of who they are and what they need. It is about shared respect, shared meaning, shared knowledge and experience of learning together.

Cultural safety extends beyond cultural awareness and cultural sensitivity. It empowers individuals and enables them to contribute to the achievement of positive outcomes. It encompasses a reflection on individual cultural identity and recognition of the impact of personal culture on professional practice. Alternatively, unsafe cultural practices, according to the Nursing Council of New Zealand (2002, p. 9), can "diminish, demean or disempower the cultural identity and well-being of an individual".

In the past, codes of ethics have stated that people should receive care "without regard to their sex, race or culture or their economic, educational or religious backgrounds". Cultural safety, however, requires that all human beings receive services that take into account all that makes them unique. Learning a little about culture, or confining learning to the rituals or customs of a particular group, with a "check list" approach, may negate diversity and individual considerations.

Aboriginal people had very little formal education because the early colonial authorities were divided on whether Aborigines could be educated. Many authorities were influenced by the French philosopher Rousseau's concept of the "noble savage", and saw Aborigines as people who lived in perfect harmony with nature, free from the constraints of urban living. Alternatively, other colonial authorities viewed Aborigines as "savages" who were "primitive" and incapable of accepting "civilising" influences.

In 1814, Governor Lachlan Macquarie launched a program for the "civilisation" of Aborigines. He asserted that although Aborigines appeared rude and uncivilised they could be trained as labourers to give the colony an exploitable labour force and therefore

validate a niche for themselves at the lower order of colonial life (Clarke, 1969, p. 120; Cleverly, 1971, p. 104). A "Native Institution" was established at Parramatta in 1815, for the purpose of educating, Christianising and giving vocational training to Aboriginal children. In 1819, an Aboriginal girl of 14 won the first prize in the Anniversary Schools Examination, ahead of 20 Aboriginal and 100 European children (Broome, 1982, p. 31).

Macquarie's Institution was, in some ways, the beginning of both missionary and educational effort for Aboriginal people (Rowley, 1972, p. 89). In the early years of missions, however, school was more often than not a misnomer, as teaching consisted of religion rather than a formal education program. The classroom teaching of schools was also often inappropriate for Aboriginal children and it was unable to compete with the teaching the children already had from their parent's culture. When the children returned to their communities, the school learning often became irrelevant as they were schooled in the depth and richness of their traditional culture.

While it was not official policy in the early years to educate Aboriginal children in segregated schools, in practice this is what happened. Aboriginals were herded onto reserves and missions and it then followed that the children attended the schools set up by missionaries and the state education authorities. However, a small percentage of Aboriginal children, in small country towns, did attend schools with their White counterparts, but were only allowed in circumstances where the White parents did not object. Unfortunately, many White parents did object; equally important was that the education provided to Aboriginal children was of poor standard, and these children were rarely allowed to proceed past middle primary school to ensure that they were to remain in servitude (Bin-Sallik, 1990, p. 9).

In the 1967 Referendum, Australians voted overwhelmingly to change the Constitution to allow the Federal Government to legislate for Aboriginals, and for Aboriginals to be included in the census. The overwhelming support for change led to the introduction of special education schemes for Indigenous Australians to redress the 179 years of denial and exclusion. However, no attempts were made to consult with Indigenous people and work with them to develop and implement appropriate strategies leading to specific programs.

In 1969 the Aboriginal Study Grants Scheme (Abstudy), a financial incentive, was introduced but in the early years very few Aboriginals were enrolled in universities and Colleges of Advanced Education, so the bulk of the grants were used for apprenticeships and job training programs (Sykes, 1986, pp. 38-39). In 1970, the Aboriginal Secondary Grants Scheme (ABSEG) was established, granting limited financial aid to assist Indigenous children to remain at school beyond the compulsory age. All expenses were paid for students from remote areas of the country to attend boarding schools (Miller et al., 1985, pp. 121-122; Sykes, 1986, p. 31).

By the early 1970s there were only 18 Aboriginals known to be undertaking tertiary studies throughout the country (Department of Aboriginal Affairs, 1980). Given the enormous neglect and problems facing Indigenous students in the education system, it could well have been argued the implementation of these special financial grants were paternalistic gestures to alleviate guilt.

The problems facing Aboriginals seeking tertiary education at that time were threefold:

- The failure of the secondary school system to equip Aboriginals with the higher education prerequisites meant that most were denied entry to tertiary institutions. This failure was the result of past government policies motivated by theories of scientific racism which advocated that Indigenous Australians were intellectually inferior. This resulted in poor attempts to educate children past primary school, not to mention that up until the 1960s Indigenous children could be refused entry into state schools with a majority of White children.
- The situation of being the only Indigenous student in an otherwise White colonial environment that was devoid of any sort of cultural safety provisions for Indigenous Australians. This resulted in many of the early students being overwhelmed and dropping out of these institutions.
- The curriculum was still embedded in theories of scientific racism and gave a grossly distorted view of Indigenous histories and collective cultural worth.

There are now some 3,500 Indigenous students enrolled in universities across Australia. The increase in Indigenous enrolments has been attributed to equal opportunity and positive discrimination policies within universities as bi-products of the International Convention of Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination, to which Australia was a signatory. I argue that while these factors have made a small contribution, the real impetus was the determination of Indigenous people to safeguard their students from being "whitewashed" in these institutions by ensuring provisions were in place for a culturally safe environment.

It is important to remember that by the early 1970s Indigenous Australians had undergone a number of debilitating processes decreed by successive government policies based on scientific racism that served to legitimate colonialism and imperialism (Bin-Sallik, 1992). First there was germ, chemical and armed warfare by the colonial invaders to enforce genocide (Butlin, 1983). Once it was realised that total genocide in Australia had failed, the policy of segregation was introduced for the survivors of genocide as an attempt to enforce Indigenous servitude so that they became an exploitable workforce. Lastly, when the numbers of Indigenous people started to increase, they were subjected to an assimilation policy for absorption into the wider Australian community (Broome, 1982; Rowley,

1972). There is no doubt that one of the greatest victories against colonialist oppression was Indigenous Australians' resistance to forced assimilation, which led to the Federal Government abandoning its genocidal assimilation policy. Not only did Indigenous people enter universities against such a destructive colonial backdrop, Indigenous nations were in the process of rebuilding and restoring cultural identity and practices. So this period became one of cultural consolidation and restoration. Consequently cultural survival and safety was of foremost importance and it still is the case today, as there is a continuing threat of cultural erosion.

In 1972, the Australian Labor Party won federal office under the leadership of Gough Whitlam. The new Prime Minister introduced the self-determination policy for Indigenous peoples of this country, and established the Department of Aboriginal Affairs (DAA), which led to the implementation of programs in education, health, legal aid, medical care and housing, in consultation with Indigenous Australians.

This was an opportune time for the development of an Indigenous higher education sector. However, this sector was not planned but neither did it occur by accident. In 1973, the former South Australian Institute of Technology (SAIT), in Adelaide, had implemented a once off special program called the Aboriginal Task Force (ATF), to train a cadre of Indigenous people to work in the area of social welfare. The proposal for the program came from the Adelaide Department of Community Welfare (DCW), at the request of the Adelaide Aboriginal community, who wanted their own people to work as case managers with Aboriginal clients. It was hoped that the graduates from this program would be able to:

- establish contact with Aboriginal communities and groups;
- identify with Aboriginal people and their social needs;
- act as liaison persons, lucidly reporting to those governments and agencies that could best meet the Aboriginal needs;
- work with community development consultants in programming and implementing community development projects; and,
- become facilitators of creative social interaction among Aboriginal communities at the personal and group level (Lippmann, 1973, p. 2; Bin-Sallik, 1990, p. 23).

In the ATF planning process, and with the insistence of the Adelaide Aboriginal community, an Aboriginal Advisory Body (AAB) was established, with representation from DCW and SAIT School of Social Studies, with the majority of members from the local Aboriginal community. SAIT saw the role of the AAB, chaired by a member of the Aboriginal community, to advise SAIT on matters relating to Indigenous Australians that needed to be considered for the program's success. However, the AAB saw its role differently and its four main objectives were to ensure:

- the program embraced Indigenous histories and cultures from an Indigenous perspective to complement the Western theories and models;
- the AAB was involved in the selection of students who were committed to their respective communities and were likely to succeed;
- the program would adopt the highest levels of cultural safety practices; and,
- all students were Indigenous Australian and who identified as such and were accepted as being Indigenous Australian by their respective Indigenous communities.

The AAB's view of cultural safety encompassed the provision of an emotionally and physically safe environment in which there was shared respect and no denial of identity.

Consequently, when the program was implemented in 1973 it had its own identified space that included classrooms, a study area and common room decorated with Indigenous artefacts and posters. The academic program incorporated Indigenous knowledge systems, cultures and histories as well as social welfare and psychology theories and practices; and the teaching staff that worked in the program were selected based on their experiences and sensitivity to Indigenous peoples. This culturally safe program was to be a one-off program of two years and graduates were to receive a non-accredited special certificate.

An evaluation of the program at the end of its first year by Lippmann (1974), a researcher from Monash University, concluded that the program was successful, although only a longitudinal study could be conclusive. Lippmann recommended that the program be continued, though it could not possibly cater to all the needs of the Aboriginal community. The summary of the report in part states:

Based on the students' comments alone, it seems clear that the preliminary year of the Task Force training scheme has more than fulfilled its promise. Students are very positive in their remarks. Results of the course which they constantly stressed were: increased confidence, self-awareness, feelings of competence; greater skills in communication and intervention; wider vision and understanding of community problems; more optimistic feelings about the future (Lippmann, 1974, p. 12).

The DAA decided to accept Lippmann's recommendation for the program to continue and provided funds for a 1975 student intake into the ATF program. By 1976 the students proved that they were more than capable of tertiary studies so they were enrolled in the host institution's accredited Associate Diploma in Social Work and studied alongside their non-Indigenous counterparts. However, they continued to study the Indigenous related subjects on their own within their own culturally safe environment. The ATF was a national program because the funding came from

the Department of Aboriginal Affairs. Therefore students came from across the country and by 1977, Torres Strait Islander people enrolled in the program. Under the auspices of the AAB, the ATF developed a culturally safe supportive environment model that has become the blue print for Indigenous higher education growth in Australia. The model is now replicated in universities across the country. Initially these support programs were called enclaves but they now are referred to as support units. The model consists of four major functions:

- Staff whose role is to assist students in dealing with their course work and developing the necessary skills to proceed through their course to graduation. This involves counselling support and the provision of and arrangement of extra tutorials, personal and academic support.
- Structures supporting the maintenance of an Aboriginal identity.
- Separate space to complement the above (Jordan, 1984, p. 6).
- Special entry conditions because of the failure of the secondary schooling system to accommodate the needs of Aborigines (Bin-Sallik, 1990).

### ■ The Development of Indigenous Higher Education

The Indigenous higher education sector developed and expanded because Indigenous students proved that given opportunities and culturally safe environments, they were able to succeed in higher educational endeavours despite the failure of the primary and secondary levels of education to meet their needs. They were soon able to dispel the racist notion of Indigenous intellectual inferiority. I would argue that successive Federal Governments capitalised on Indigenous success at the higher education level because of the following:

- Australia's perceived need to redress its failings in regard to Aboriginal people particularly in the light of its international political position in the early 1970s (Rowley, 1972; Broome, 1982; Sykes, 1986).
- The Federal Government's policy of self-management, which required competent Aboriginal leadership.
- The increased demand for qualified Aboriginal people to take up positions in the growing Aboriginal private and public sector organisation; some 600 positions were identified for Aborigines in 1981 in the Commonwealth Public Service (Brokensha, 1980; Miller et al., 1985).
- A growing demand by Aborigines for higher education.

By 1984 three higher education institutions had recognised the need for accredited courses specifically designated for Aborigines. These institutions were:

- SAIT, in South Australia, with three courses: the Community Development Certificate, the Associate Diploma in Community Development and the Bachelor's Degree in Aboriginal Affairs Administration;
- Armidale College, in NSW, had an Associate Diploma in Aboriginal Studies; and,
- Darwin Institute of Technology had a certificate in Aboriginal Studies.

This was an excellent strategy because it ensured Indigenous presence in Colleges of Advanced Education and Institutes of Technology. However, it overshadowed the other areas of need for Indigenous economic development and independence. It also resulted in neglect by the traditional universities, which were very slow in opening their doors to Aborigines in any significant number. Though it can be argued that every university in the country now has an Indigenous support program with a significant number of Indigenous students, these programs have mainly been inherited through the amalgamation of the Colleges of Advanced Education and Institutes of Technology in 1990, when the then Federal Minister for Education, the Hon. John Dawkins, restructured Australia's higher education system streamlining the binary system into one system.

The presence of Aboriginal support programs located within 14 institutions across the country assured a steady growth in Aboriginal higher education (Jordan, 1984). This was mainly facilitated by the former National Aboriginal Education Committee's (NAEC) Aboriginal Higher Education Policy which aimed to have 1,000 Aboriginal teachers trained by 1990. The policy was supported by the Federal Government and based on the indigenisation program in New Guinea, when the country was an Australian protectorate (Willmot 1987).

The major focus of the Indigenous higher education sector up to 1984 was on teacher education. Most of the teaching institutions already had subjects about Aborigines to prepare White teachers to work in Indigenous communities. So with very little academic effort on the part of institutions, Indigenous students were encouraged to enrol in pre-existing White-oriented teacher education courses. By 1988, there were 42 programs, and the following year there were 62 actively operating around the nation. However, now with the streamlined university system there is an Indigenous education unit, based on sound cultural safety practices, in all Australian universities, and Indigenous students are enrolled in fully accredited courses though still mainly concentrated in Arts and Humanities programs.

Now that Indigenous students are able to gain entry to all universities across the country they no longer need to move interstate to gain higher education qualifications. Prior to this, for many students it meant uprooting and relocating their families motivated by the desire to achieve; knowing that this may be their last chance at gaining appropriate qualifications, or their last chance at getting themselves off the dole queues or any other form of

government welfare benefits. Some students gave up jobs in pursuit of education opportunities; others were unemployed and felt they had nothing to lose; a significant number had only ever experienced failure and felt that they too, had nothing to lose. This took enormous courage especially given that they had all been casualties of Australia's education system.

Can you begin to imagine what it would have been like for students arriving in a strange city with families, faced with the daunting task of trying to secure accommodation only to be turned away time and time again because of the colour of their skin? Can you imagine the students who had never lived in, or had never seen a city in their lives, trying to cope with the culture shock? Can you image the feelings of isolation and the stress on families not having their extended families to support them?

It was because of the courage of those early students, and programs that the National Aboriginal Education Committee (NAEC) was able to successfully lobby the Federal Government to inject more funds into Indigenous higher education. During that time Indigenous Australians were well aware that even if the education system was to change overnight to meet the needs of their children, it would take at least three generations before it had any positive impact on our communities. Indigenous Australia could not afford, and still cannot, to wait for Australia's education systems to clean up its act. Indigenous peoples could not afford to stand by and watch their people being thrown on the scrap heap of human morbidity. The courageous people who gained tertiary qualifications became the education role models in their homes and communities. Consequently some of the students currently enrolled in universities are family members of those first students and are now second and third generation tertiary students.

Since then, every university in Australia has subjects in Indigenous studies that are offered to the wider community and taught by Indigenous academics, and most institutions have degree courses in Indigenous Studies with Indigenous academic leadership. Indigenous academics realised that they needed develop our degrees representing Indigenous knowledge systems and histories for three main reasons:

- So that Indigenous people who were traditionally denied access to their histories and knowledge systems and were now wanting to access them, and wanted the skills associated with such knowledge and histories to work within the Indigenous industry.
- To produce Indigenous academics to teach in universities to both Indigenous and non-Indigenous students and to reclaim our cultural knowledge systems, cultures and histories from the non-Indigenous academics who were becoming the so-called Indigenous experts despite the fact their interpretations of Indigenous knowledge systems and histories were from non-Indigenous perspectives.

- To ensure that Aboriginal Studies as a multi-disciplinary area of study would be developed further from Indigenous perspectives including Indigenous protocols. All three reasons are based on Indigenous cultural safety.

#### ■ The Major Issue Facing Indigenous Higher Education

Students, whether Black or White, drop out of studies for a host of reasons. Indigenous students have the added stress of trying to cope with discrimination and racism by teachers and the institutional racism inherent within their host institutions. The derogatory representations and misrepresentations of Indigenous Australians in the classrooms, as well as in the literature, exacerbates this. Universities have moral obligations to implement strategies to combat all forms of discrimination relating to race and gender. In 1992, I argued that for the most part universities purported to have focused on these areas but there had not been any real attempt to combat institutional and individual racism (Bin-Sallik, 1992). Although universities do have policies and guidelines dealing with discrimination and racism, the commitment seems to mainly focus on rhetoric and not action. Such policies need to be adopted and implemented with determined commitment from the highest levels of authorities within universities. For instance universities are in receipt of Indigenous Education Support Funding (IESP), from the Federal Government, to support their Indigenous students with their studies. One of the conditions of the contract with the Federal Government to obtain these funds is the commitment to provide cultural awareness programs for staff. Now if universities were effectively carrying out such programs, why are Indigenous students still subjected to the following:

- Courses in Australian history which do not include Aborigines and Torres Strait Islanders.
- Courses in Australian history, which exclude Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander perspectives.
- Sociology courses, which deny the legitimacy of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander family structures (NAEC, 1989)?

Much of the relevant literature still refers to Indigenous people in derogatory terms. The Unaipon School in the College of Indigenous Education and Research at the University of South Australia has made it mandatory for its students to use the document; "Guidelines For Non-Racist Language Used in Aboriginal Studies" (Hollinsworth, 1986, pp. 1-2). The section entitled "Advice on Terminology" in part states:

The use of incorrect, inappropriate or dated terminology is to be avoided as it can often give offence in Aboriginal Studies. Many terms in common usage some years ago are now not

acceptable although they can be used in "quotation marks" to indicate their original text. Terms that fall into this category include "nomad", "savage", "half-caste", "fullblood", "part-Aboriginal", "coloured", "primitive", "lubra", "gin", "nigger". The terms "tribe" or "tribal", "chief", and "nomad" have specific meanings derived from foreign societies and are not necessarily applicable to Aborigines. Alternative terms depending on circumstances include "language group", "community", "clan", and "totemic unit".

But this strategy has not been adopted by all universities and certainly has not been adopted outside of the Unaipon School at the University of South Australia.

There is also a concentration of Aborigines within the courses related to teaching and the arts. This is probably because the Aboriginal support program system had its genesis, and is still fundamentally located, in previous Colleges of Advanced Education and the Social Science Departments of Institutes of Technology (Bin-Sallik, 1992). In 1985 the "Report of the Committee of Review of Aboriginal Employment and Training Programs" condemned the education sector for not responding to the economic needs, wishes and development of Aborigines. It asserted that priority should be given to the labour market and employment conditions and prospects because:

- a large number of qualified Aborigines were urgently needed at all levels of the Aboriginal industry to promote a better service delivery; and,
- Aborigines needed to be given the opportunity of realising their aspirations across a broad range of professional areas relating to the labour market (Miller et al., 1985, pp. 221-225).

That was 19 years ago, and to date there has been very little change except for the proliferation of Indigenous support programs in universities across the nation. Institutions have capitalised on the monies made available for Aboriginal education by the Federal Government but have yet to use these monies creatively and responsibly - one has to question their commitment to Aboriginal education.

The low level of graduates with Degrees as opposed to Associate Diplomas, and Diplomas (Hughes et al., 1988), is still a reality. Associate Diplomas and Diplomas served Aborigines well in the 1970s and 1980s when we were just getting a foothold into the higher education sector, and more importantly graduates were readily employed within the Aboriginal organisations and the public service. Universities now need to concentrate on increasing the numbers of Aboriginal undergraduates, especially in a wider range of awards, while acknowledging that Associate Diplomas are important for certain Aboriginal community groups. But we must not collude in nurturing the Associate Diploma "culture".

I believe that these issues will not be solved without commitment from universities. These commitments cannot be on paper alone, especially when the responsibility for Indigenous student success is placed on the shoulders of Indigenous academics, who are excluded from the major decision-making structures. Though I believe over the past quarter of a century Aborigines have made strong inroads into the higher education sector, it has been a struggle that has met with resistance every step of the way. Indigenous academics are always having to prove that we are either good enough or can cope with whatever new direction is advocated. There has never been a situation where we have been approached and encouraged to participate in real decision-making. We have always had to go cap in hand. This is also despite the fact that since 1972 successive Federal Governments have developed formal policies of self-determination and self-management for Indigenous Australians. Universities have never made attempts to facilitate this process with any determined efforts. They are all too ready to promote the fact that they have Indigenous people employed as academics, but fail to reveal that these academics are not a part of the major decision-making structures of their institutions, and that the major and most important decisions are made by high ranking non-Indigenous staff.

Currently Australia has one faculty dedicated to Indigenous knowledge systems, cultures and histories. It is the Faculty of Indigenous Research and Education (FIRE) at Charles Darwin University (CDU), Darwin, Northern Territory. It comprises the School of Governance and Administration, the Centre for Indigenous Natural and Cultural Resource Management, and the Indigenous Academic Support Unit. In 2004, the School of Governance and Administration will be teaching a compulsory Indigenous unit for all first year undergraduate students at the university, making it the first higher education institution in the country to give such an undertaking. FIRE was the second Indigenous designated Faculty in Australia. The other was the Faculty of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies at the University of South Australia, Adelaide, but this was disestablished in 1998 and renamed the College of Indigenous Research (CIRE). CIRE comprises one school, a research unit and a support unit and was headed by a titular Dean until 2001, but now has a Visiting Professor one day a week. Other universities either have schools or support units that teach Indigenous studies and are all helping to make a difference in Indigenous higher education. There are now some 15 Indigenous professors, four of whom are men.

However, despite the efforts of these units, whether they are schools, units, the college or the faculty, their ideas and authority are restricted to their specific places of work. I believe that for Indigenous higher education to be truly effective in relation to serving the needs of Indigenous Australians, universities have to give serious consideration to appointing an Indigenous Pro-Vice

Chancellor in every university. Until we have our own Indigenous Pro-Vice Chancellors to oversee Indigenous issues, universities will continue to make decisions on our behalf and to date these decisions have not all been positive. This is not a new concept. Indigenous academics have been mooting this possibility for some time and so far, one university in New Zealand has its own Pro-Vice Chancellor Maori.

### ■ Cultural Safety

I believe that we should be challenging universities from a cultural safety standpoint as opposed to those of equal opportunity, positive discrimination and anti-racism. Though we have been advocating "cultural safety", we have literally never named it as such. We have got caught up on these Western dominant concepts of positive discrimination and equal opportunity. It could be argued that these Western paradigms have served us well, and that may be true to an extent in the very early years, but is certainly is not the case now. We have only to mention these concepts, and our non-Indigenous counterparts get defensive.

One only has to peruse the daily papers across Australia, listen to talk back radio, eavesdrop in public places where non-Indigenous people congregate, as well as the hallowed halls of universities (which are all microcosms of the wider community), and it will soon become evident that the opinions are that Indigenous Australians get too much in terms of equal opportunity and positive discrimination, that we are racists, and that we hold the White community to ransom through political correctness. The wider community then asserts it is unable to challenge us for fear of being called racist. Therefore I am advocating that we now formally use the term "cultural safety" because it does not imply special treatment like the terms "positive discrimination", "equal opportunity" and "culturally appropriate", when we are advocating or negotiating with universities for culturally safe environments, courses and curriculum and behaviours.

"Cultural safety" is a term that all cultural groups can relate to and it does not have connotations of special treatment. I am not arguing that we should dispense with equal opportunity or positive discrimination policies. I am arguing that when advocating issues relating to (a) designated Indigenous spaces, (b) culturally appropriate curricula, (c) culturally appropriate courses and behaviours and, (d) the need for Indigenous academics to teach Indigenous studies, the issues would be better argued under the aegis of cultural safety because that is what it is.

The Maori have developed cultural guidelines within nursing and midwifery education and practicum, and now some Indigenous health programs are looking at the concept of cultural safety. For instance, "Binan Goonj" (Eckermann et al., 1992), and the Faculty of Indigenous Research and Education at Charles Darwin University, in the Graduate Certificate: Multi-Disciplinary Research. The

Nursing Council of New Zealand (2002) contend that there are two processes toward achieving cultural safety in nursing and midwifery practice, and I would contend that the same processes may equally be applied to the higher education sector. The processes are: (1) cultural awareness, as a beginning step toward understanding that there is difference; and, (2) cultural sensitivity which may alert the learner to the legitimacy of difference and begin a process of self-exploration as the bearers of their own life experiences and the realities and impact this may have on others. Cultural safety is an outcome that enables safe service to be defined by those who receive the service.

### ■ Conclusion

I believe that universities have to facilitate alliances between Indigenous personnel and the heads of faculties and schools to mount a well-structured and supported effort to deal with these problems. Of course the issues of institutional racism need to be in the forefront. With Australia's profile within the global village growing, particularly with the increasing numbers of foreign students studying in this country, universities can no longer continue to promote structures embedded in institutional racism. This will not be an easy task and not one that has a quick and easy solution. There is an urgent need for long-term strategic planning to develop curricula that incorporate cultural, contemporary and historical issues from the Indigenous Australian perspective. Such curricula would need to be developed in such a way that is sensitive to both Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians that will lead to a better understanding and acceptance.

However, I believe that there is a viable short-term solution, which is also cost effective. As all universities have an Aboriginal and Islander unit of some form or another in place that also teach Aboriginal and Islander studies, it would not take much for those units to service teach their specialised subjects in awards throughout their respective universities to provide students with the same sort of understanding and principles as outlined in the long-term strategy. Though this is not the answer to the problem I believe that it is a good short-term strategy. It will give students the opportunity to get Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander perspectives relating to their respective disciplines, be exposed to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander histories and cultures, and gain a first hand understanding of past policies and their affects on the Indigenous peoples of Australia.

I believe that this short-term strategy is crucial because universities have the responsibility for educating professionals. They educate the teachers, the economists, the political and social scientists, the historians, the mining engineers, the doctors, lawyers, accountants, social workers, researchers and veterinary scientists to name a few. These are the professionals who go on to

become the nation's decision-makers and leaders. These are the people who move into positions of power and authority. These are the people who shape the nation's economic and social profile. To the extent that Reconciliation has as one of its goals, the changing of Australia's economic and social profile to overcome the marginalisation and disadvantage of the Indigenous population, then these leaders of the future are clearly a crucially important target group.

Further, given that the decade of Reconciliation is almost over and there is no evidence to prove that it has made the anticipated impact, universities have to seriously think about their own decade of academic reconciliation. Why? Because I agree with Patrick Dodson (1999, p. 5), the inaugural chair of the Reconciliation Council, who asserts that Australia cannot afford to leave it to the next generation because it is too hard for this generation of Australians. Further, there are now a growing number of Indigenous academics who will continue to mount this type of challenge to universities. It is up to these institutions, with their collective capacity, to show that they have the foresight and wherewithal to understand that they have a moral obligation to deconstruct what they are responsible for constructing in the first place. Alternatively, they may continue to turn a blind eye to the scientific and institutional racism within their institutions because they are too hard to deal with, and be content to bequeath it to the next generation of leaders.

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## ■ About the author

Professor Mary Ann Bin-Sallik holds the Ranger Chair in Aboriginal Studies, and is also Director of CINCRM and Dean of the Faculty of Indigenous Research and Education at Charles Darwin University. She holds a Masters and Doctorate in education, both from Harvard University. She also has qualifications in community development, social work and nursing. MaryAnn is an Indigenous Australian who identifies strongly with her mother's Djaru people of Esat Kimberley, as well as with the Indonesian heritage of her father. She began her career in nursing in Darwin, before turning to an academic career in education. Before taking up her present position at CDU, MaryAnn was Dean of the College of Indigenous Education and Research at the University of South Australia in Adelaide. She previously held a research position in the Institute of International Development at Harvard University and the South Australian College of Advanced Education. She has also held visiting appointments in the School of Behavioral Sciences at Northern Arizona University, USA, and the School of Maori Studies at the University of Waikato, New Zealand. Professor Bin-Sallik has a substantial research background in the fields of Indigenous education and Aboriginal identity. She has also conducted research into Southeast Asian influences on Indigenous identity in northern Australia.