



The Australian Journal of **INDIGENOUS EDUCATION**

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The section of the book that deals with the period after 1850, is entitled "Transformations: 1850–1886". This period was a time of great flux and fluidity, a time when Aboriginal people, whose population was by now horrendously decimated, were variously ignored and neglected, incarcerated on missions and reserves and promised a place of their own being acknowledged as a free and autonomous people. It was also a time of broken promises and outright lies. Key characters dominate this period, emerging as leaders and Broome evokes a real sense of their personalities with an evocative writing style. William Barak and Billibellary, for example, both come across as men who negotiated a long and politically fraught struggle. Perhaps most distressing of all is that this continuing struggle would be recognised by both men as existing through to the present.

The mission period of isolation and "protection" resulted in an entirely unpredictable and unexpected outcome. Within the reserve and mission system Aboriginal people were able to expand their kinship ties as they developed familial relationships with new groups of people. The result of this is well-documented by Broome who explores with sophistication the emergence of what he calls "New Communities". Although the mission period was in many ways genocidal there are many interesting things to emerge in this period, and even the relevant legislation of the time reveals the complexity and perhaps even ambivalence of the authorities' responses. Tragically, as Broome shows, by the late nineteenth century government legislation, particularly the 1886 and 1890 Acts had a devastating effect of Aboriginal families. Life under the Acts is shown by Broome to have been extremely harsh. Yet the obvious hope, optimism and determination to survive as a people comes through the historical record and the remembered stories.

The last section of the book is dedicated to what Broome terms an Aboriginal "Renaissance" which he documents occurring from 1970 onwards. This section deals with issues of autonomy and identity. On the former Broome is exemplary, he presents the development of the many Aboriginal organisations and services; the extra-ordinary moments such as when the freehold title to Lake Tyers and Framlingham Reserves were handed to the communities; some of the innovative economic initiatives many have undertaken (such as the boomerang factory of Belgrave and various art shops) and perhaps most importantly of all the emergence of a group of Aboriginal people who had university training and education. Perhaps less successful is the latter section on the issue of identity. It is difficult to imagine a more fraught topic for a "white" historian to attempt to document. And although I have no quibble with what Broome has written, I felt it did not go far enough. Being Aboriginal or Koori is not necessarily quite as rigid as Broome seems to suggest. It can be shifting, fluid and even at times ambivalent as some have observed

(e.g. Minchinton in his web-based art-text project *Void: Kellerberrin walking*). None of which detract from the experience of identifying in a particular way.

As is usual for an Allen and Unwin publication the production values are high and there seem to be few typographical or printing errors. However, if the book goes to a second edition (as I am sure it will), Richard and Christina Frankland's names should be spelt correctly. Overall this is an excellent exploration of an important area of Australian history. It will be a valuable tool for teachers of Indigenous histories at school and university level. I shall certainly be recommending my students read it as I know of no other place they could get all that detailed information in an accessible and engaging form.

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INDIGENOUS EDUCATION AND THE ADVENTURE OF INSIGHT: LEARNING AND TEACHING IN INDIGENOUS CLASSROOMS

Neil Harrison

Post Pressed, Flaxton, 2004, x+219pp, ISBN 1876682590

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In this book Harrison has given a comprehensive, personal account of his journey as a teacher and researcher in Indigenous education over an extensive period, 1978–2001. Highlighted is the slippery nature of positioning oneself as a practitioner embracing the challenges of Indigenous/non-Indigenous relations.

He states his journey has been an “adventure of insight” revealed to him in time through a continued communication with Indigenous students.

The book also leads the reader on a journey where attention is often diverted backwards and forwards through time and ideas in different phases of the author’s mind path. Organisation of the book is exemplified by the posing of many questions, which form bold headings throughout the text. The key question, which led to the author’s self-examination, is “How does an Indigenous student learn outside the non-Indigenous pedagogue’s knowledge and power in the crosscultural classroom?”.

The book relates the theories of other ethnographers and is heavily laden with their findings, which it is assumed are supported by the author at the time of writing. This is perhaps a difficulty with his continual movement backwards and forwards within ideological development. He does reiterate in the last chapter that the book was intended to recognise and theorise partially unconscious relations at work that until now have been under-theorised. There is an investigation of the relational parallels of the ethnographer/informant and pedagogue/student and the eventual arrival at action research theory as a defining development in avoiding problems of power and authority associated with ethnography.

A preface introduces the reader to the author’s present view of how he positions himself as a critical ethnographer and phenomenologist according to his experiences. It also explains how the book is organised in different timeframes and the reasons for doing so. Many methodological and ethical questions are posed with recognition that they may not necessarily be answered within the pages of this text, with even a suggestion that they are indeed unanswerable.

Chapter 1 is a chronicle of Harrison’s professional and personal development outlining his experiences and understandings as a teacher of Indigenous students. It is strongly influenced and supported by the ideas of other authors in the field. Chapter 2 presents a digression. As a result of misguided preliminary interpretations of interview data Harrison tries to find some way of connecting, or reconciling, what the students are saying with what his interpretations are presenting. He turns to a study of how dialogue works in communication, and the work of Lacan, Foucault and Derrida among others.

Chapters 3, 5, 7 and 9 introduce and isolate the student informants’ voices from the author’s critiques of his positions and practices, which appear in the following alternate chapters. It is not quite clear whether these data come from the original interviews in 1993 or were a result of further consultation with the informants.

In Chapter 4 the interview data of Chapter 3 serves to reinforce the author’s reflective mode commenced in the first two chapters, and informs him of earlier

misguided practices involving the ethnographer’s gaze and the ethnographer’s interpretations.

Chapter 6 uses the data of Chapter 5 to shift the emphasis from the ethnographer/informant relationship to the teacher/student relationship and continues the discussion of power, authority and knowledge production in the cross-cultural classroom. It draws parallels between how established discourses continue to marginalise Indigenous students and perpetuate miscommunication in a different context.

Chapter 8 matches the data of Chapter 7 in introducing critical pedagogy and how the Indigenous student fits within those theories. Chapter 10 relives the author’s journey for the reader and finally addresses the question of how students learn outside the authority of the pedagogue through the development of intersubjective knowledge.

Some sweeping statements are made throughout the text, one of which is that Harrison “asks questions that haven’t already been asked before by all those who have conducted research in indigenous education” (p. ix). Many critical researchers, both Indigenous and non-Indigenous may take offence at such a generalisation that excludes them from current thought. There could also be a challenge to the negativity of the author’s statement that “the crosscultural ethnographer positions the informants within discourses of progress and enlightenment” (p. 48). This may be a correct assumption in the context of his early interpretations but may not necessarily represent or describe the positions and contexts of all critical ethnographers working with Indigenous Australians. The terms *progress* and *enlightenment* could be viewed in different ways through different contexts, especially if deconstructed by Indigenous informants.

The choice of terminology used in research texts may seem of minor significance; however, even subtle differences can tell readers much about authors and their attitudes; their ways of knowing. For example, in some contexts the use of the term *cross-cultural* may carry with it negative connotations suggesting that the researcher/informant and teacher/student are working at “cross-purposes” that prevent or hinder effective communication. This may have been indicative in the context of the author’s early research and teaching. Now, when supporting a positive, more insightful approach, perhaps an encouraging term to use might be “co-cultural” signifying a mutual desire for constructive negotiation in a learning-teaching reciprocal process.

Early in the book Harrison emphasises the importance of the participants’ input in the communication and although this is basically a story of his journey, it is not until Chapter 3 that we begin to hear directly from the students. Harrison devotes chapters solely to the participants’ responses in an “attempt to interrupt [the] power relation” by separating interview data from his interpretations. He must be credited for addressing

the issue of (re)presentation in ethnographic work; nevertheless, it must be recognised that no matter how data are presented, realistically there is no way of escaping the fact that the accompanying interpretations remain "one writing about the other". It could also be true for Indigenous Australian researchers talking and writing about Indigenous Australian peoples with whom they may, or may not have affiliations as suggested by insider-outsider theories.

No matter how often an interpreter acknowledges his or her dubious position as one who can read minds, the interpretation remains simply that; just one possible story among an infinite many. The author acknowledges this but still desires to find the "right way" to do ethnography. Yes, vigilance is always necessary, yet any research unavoidably implicates the researcher in a position of power and authority and should not be cloaked in the guise of modified methodology. This will always be the case in qualitative research regardless of how scientific one may claim to be or not to be. Perhaps responsibility lies not in distancing oneself from indiscriminate practices but remaining emotionally involved with the issues at hand and gaining "comfort from the discomfort" (Mackinlay, 2003). This book could be supported or denigrated for its emotional involvement.

Reference is often made to the *scientific* nature of the author's research methods and findings, perhaps suggesting that he is concerned with an imbalance between the demands of research being rigorous and an obligation to appropriate Indigenous representation. Qualitative research has been prolific in introducing alternate approaches and working towards validating them as scientifically rigorous. For example, the reliability of people's life testimonies is becoming more accepted as valid research data. Perhaps Harrison could have more trust in the authority of what the informants' are telling, retelling and reliving in their offered dialogues.

A concern for being "scientific" in research need not necessarily imply an adherence to Western viewpoints, although that has been the yardstick in the past to which ethnographers have felt pressured to conform. While it remains essential to continue critiquing past methodologies, perhaps there is possibility in the future of exploring Indigenous approaches (Sheehan, 2004; Smith, 1999). This is not a suggestion that Harrison appropriates or assimilates Indigenous knowledges, but an attempt to see Indigenous viewpoints from different perspectives to redirect the ethnographer's adventure of insight. He introduces and supports the methods of action research and scaffolding as more appropriate ways of learning about oneself, deconstructing the learning process, and learning about how one fits in that process. These methods are not new to the fields of research and teaching but could offer more satisfactory ways of addressing Indigenous issues in these fields. Teaching action

research skills to Indigenous researchers wishing to work with Indigenous peoples has been the emphasis of an academic program at the Curtin University in Western Australia.

Harrison's theoretical examination of the issue of the ethnographer's gaze (his gaze) is covered in Chapter 4. He uses Said to establish an analysis of the ways in which Western writers establish positions of authority in their talk of others. Discourse of the Other is further related in the theories of Foucault, and exemplified by Nakata in direct historical relation to Torres Strait Islanders. Some could argue that, once again, we are falling into the trap of using Western philosophy to not only analyse our own positions but also implicate Indigenous peoples and their perspectives.

Harrison identifies the fact that marginalised peoples such as Indigenous Australians are portrayed in Western discourse as being "in need". The development in postcolonial views has been one of categorising indigenous peoples worldwide as being "vulnerable" (Rowse, 2005). The emphasis throughout the book is on the unequal powers of non-Indigenous over Indigenous peoples as constituted through the gaze of ethnographers and teachers in research and pedagogy. The discussion tends to confirm the notion that Indigenous Australians are still very much victims in the mainstream education system. The limited scope of the data points to this. In earlier discussion of how subjects are constituted in discourse, Harrison mentions consenting authority in a reciprocal gaze between informant and ethnographer. Also in the final chapter he reveals the possibility of a returning gaze from the "victim", one in which the victim could be negotiating and critiquing various practices and positions encountered in research and the classroom. However, little weight is given to presenting Indigenous informants and students as non-passive participants. If the author intended the book to examine the reciprocal relation of recognising authority and power, there seems an imbalance favouring the author's narrative over that of the informants.

While the text provides a comprehensive and valuable review of theories and theorists, the act of self-reflection can become introverted if one cannot move beyond the knowledge and thinking already contained within that process of reflection. By continually measuring one's ideas and practices with and against previous theorists it may be difficult to break away and discover new ways of thinking and knowing. In turning back to Harrison's quote of Foucault's, a curiosity is needed "that seeks ... to perceive differently than one sees", to free oneself from what is proper to know (pp. 38-39). The discourse of relentless self-reflection may become merely another way of unwittingly legitimising established knowledge and ways of knowing. Nakata (1998) believes that we are still caught up in the "denseness" of colonial discourses in which it becomes

difficult to distinguish whether we speak from within them, whether we can speak outside them, or whether we can speak at all without them.

Overall, the book is thought-provoking, reader-friendly, and poses questions for those who are practising ethnographers or about to embark on their own journeys. Its sentiment demands responses of agreement or dissent from the reader. Harrison has been courageous in revealing his understandings, misunderstandings and mistakes in the hope that others will be aware of some of the pitfalls involving power and authority of "being an ethnographer and pedagogue". The book shifts between positions and periods of knowing through a persistent self-reflective process, which at times can become repetitive. However, there is much to recommend the text to prospective readers.

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SEXUAL HEALTH FOR LIFE SERIES

Ian McAllister & Phil Brake

Australian Training Initiatives Pty Ltd, Beaumaris, 2004-, ISBN 0-646-43649-X

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The *Sexual Health for Life* series is a set of co-authored handbooks, divided into units for easy reference. The series is aimed at young adults and outlines a range of issues presented in a straightforward, workshop-style format. A range of significant issues are explored throughout the series: McAllister authored Unit 1, *Sexually transmitted infections (STIs/STDs) and other common infections of the genital tract* (2004), Unit 2, *Drug and alcohol awareness* (2004)

and Unit 3, *Contraception*, with section 7 (verbal contraception) of Unit 3 written by Hall. A *Values for your life: Decisions, values, destiny* (2005) workbook authored by Brake accompanies the series, although the style and content of Brake's edition does appear somewhat out of place with an otherwise useful set of workshop manuals.

McAllister, in the first three units, provides an excellent overview of the various issues facing young people today in relation to sexuality and drug use. Perhaps the most useful aspect of this series is the author's transition from latex to life, as he moves beyond the well-trodden path of facts and figures, and presents a variety of social contexts to be explored. Young people are asked to take part in exercises and workshops in which they think through situations, explore peer pressure, think about the implications of life choices, do various self-assessments and think through their own personal beliefs, before they are potentially confronted with those situations. The real-life implications behind the facts, makes the information that is presented all the more valuable.

These self-assessments are an excellent tool in assisting young people to define their own boundaries and take control of their own lives. In the first three units the overriding message to young people is to be smart, prepared, responsible and in control, "sexual health should be enjoyed for life, not something you worry about for the rest of you life".

The information relating to substance use (Unit 2) presents a clear overview of the negative impacts of drug use, while also openly exploring the reasons why young people may use drugs in Australia. It is well-presented without sensationalism and explores alcohol and smoking in context as dangerous drugs. McAllister clearly outlines the variety of social, health and legal implications of drug use while also providing activities which ask young people to think through different aspects of drug use, identify warning signs, and complete activity sheets filling in appropriate addiction help lines.

The series also lends itself to the potential of cultural adaptations. In its current format the series is more suited to a mainstream youth setting. There is an assumption that many of the services and institutions referred to in this series are available to all young people. However, Indigenous young people and people from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds may find the reality of accessing these services quite different, presuming they are available in the first place.

The influence of culture and ethnicity is also an important aspect to discuss in relation to values and worth further exploration. Also the impact of racism greatly impacts upon our young people and the decisions they make in relation to their sexual health and decisions surrounding substance use. Future editions taking into account an understanding of