Routledge
Taylor & Francis Group

'Don't talk about what you don't know': on (not) conducting research with/in Indigenous contexts

Nado Aveling*

School of Education, Murdoch University, Murdoch, Australia

This article raises the recurrent question whether non-indigenous researchers should attempt to research with/in Indigenous communities. If research is indeed a metaphor of colonization, then we have two choices: we have to learn to conduct research in ways that meet the needs of Indigenous communities and are non-exploitative, culturally appropriate and inclusive, or we need to relinquish our roles as researchers within Indigenous contexts and make way for Indigenous researchers. Both of these alternatives are complex. Hence in this article I trace my learning journey; a journey that has culminated in the realization that it is not my place to conduct research within Indigenous contexts, but that I can use 'what I know' – rather than imagining that I know about Indigenous epistemologies or Indigenous experiences under colonialism – to work as an ally with Indigenous researchers. Coming as I do, from a position of relative power, I can also contribute in some small way to the project of decolonizing methodologies by speaking 'to my own mob'.

Keywords: being an ally; cultural protocols; decolonizing methodologies; Indigenous issues; interrogating whiteness; research ethics

Appropriation of Voice is a Hot topic of 'Post-colonial' discourse.
Who should research
Speak about Native peoples' Culture Oppression
Social movement experiences?
To Elders only those who have Experienced an event are Empowered to Speak about it.
Embrace First Voice as Methodology.
Only those who Are Aboriginal can speak about Being Aboriginal.
Can understand with any Depth
Our Meanings within a 'Native perspective'.
'Don't talk about what you don't know' caution Elders. (Graveline, 2000, p. 362)

The above lines from Fyre Jean Graveline's poem remind us that as non-Indigenous researchers wanting to conduct research within Indigenous contexts, we should heed the advice 'Don't talk about what you don't know'. Simultaneously, they exhort us to 'Embrace First Voice as Methodology'. For me this raises a fundamental question: Should non-Indigenous researchers attempt to research with/in Indigenous communities or not? Certainly, we need to step gently to avoid the 'intellectual arrogance' and lingering

*Email: n.aveling@murdoch.edu.au

'evangelical and paternalistic practices' (Smith, 1999, p. 177) that have characterized research about Indigenous peoples in the past. Thus, as researchers we must be wary of repeating past patterns, and should we wish to 'tackle any facet of Indigenous study' we ought at the very least to 'have a critical analysis of colonialism and an understanding of Western scientific research as a mechanism of colonization' (Absalon & Willett, 2005, p. 120). However, if research is indeed 'a metaphor of colonization' (Blodgett, Schinke, Smith, Peltier, & Pheasant, 2011, p. 522), then it seems to me that we have two choices: we have to learn to conduct research in ways that meet the needs of Indigenous communities and are non-exploitative, culturally appropriate and culturally safe, or we need to relinquish our roles as researchers within Indigenous contexts and make way for Indigenous researchers. Both of these alternatives are complex. Hence, this article represents a journey that has moved from wanting to be a researcher who did 'solid' research with/in Indigenous contexts to questioning the feasibility of such a project, leading ultimately to the conclusion that the production of Indigenous knowledge means constructing conditions that 'allow for Indigenous self-sufficiency' (Kincheloe & Steinberg, 2008, p. 135). How 'Indigenous self-sufficiency' might be understood and how I, as a white researcher, might do this without hijacking the agenda, while at the same time making a contribution to the project of shaping a more socially just society, is the key question for me as a researcher and one that has led me on a learning journey that is continually in the process of becoming.

The location from which the voice of the researcher emanates

The naming of one's location has epistemological value for Aboriginal peoples and communities because it establishes relationships; something that is 'at the heart of what it means to be Indigenous' (Wilson, 2008, p. 80). Absalon and Willett have argued that 'identifying, at the outset, the location from which the voice of the researcher emanates is an Aboriginal way of ensuring that those who study, write, and participate in knowledge creation are accountable for their own positionality' and that 'location is about relationships to land, language, spiritual, cosmological, political economical, environmental, and social elements in one's life' (2005, p. 99). Telling my readers that I am white, female and a feminist might be a start. I could also add that I have children and grandchildren, and that I am a teacher educator. But is this enough to indicate the place from which my voice emanates? To be accountable? Might I also mention that I was born in Germany, and although being a post-World War II baby, that Germany's history has weighed heavily on me? Ought I to mention that I grew up in Australia but have never felt that I belonged? Nor felt that I belonged in Germany? What concerns me, however, is that self-disclosure can come dangerously close to the phenomenon of 'me-too-ism'. But how much self-disclosure is too much? What is simply self-absorbed 'navel-gazing'? and 'whiteys lov[ing] to talk about themselves'? (Leibowitz, Bozalek, Rohleder, Carolissen, & Schwartz, 2010, p. 91). Whether this is a legitimate concern or just an example of epistemological slippage in which a white, western woman feels a huge degree of discomfort about ways of doing things that are not part of my cultural heritage, I do not know. Perhaps, my 'confessions of whiteness' simply constitute 'a form of pleasurable relief' (Applebaum, 2010, p. 19) because such confessions absolve me from any complicity in perpetuating a system that enables whites to maintain power?

My journey as a researcher

I am someone who has always enjoyed listening to people – and 'yarning' with them – over other ways of collecting 'data'; in other words, in white, western terms, I am

unapologetically a qualitative researcher because qualitative research is better placed to listen to the voices of the marginalized or dispossessed. Given my feminist orientation, I have long been committed to a critical emancipatory approach as it seemed to me that research ought to make a difference in peoples' lives.

Some years ago I was invited to become involved in a well-funded project that was later billed as an innovative professional development program for educators appointed to teach in schools with a significant Indigenous[1] student population. While I felt that the project had the potential to make a difference, notwithstanding my emancipatory ambitions, I was largely unaware of my own deeply embedded preconceptions about what research ought to be, or that the Western paradigm from within which I was operating 'constantly affirmed the dominant culture's view of itself as the centre of legitimate knowledge' (Blodgett et al., 2011, p. 522).

My job description as one of the researchers in the project related to 'finding out what a particular school was doing' with regard to improving educational outcomes for Aboriginal students and to write up my findings as a case study. Colleen,[2] the school's Aboriginal and Islander Education Officer, was willing to talk to me, although in retrospect I imagine that she might well have felt that she had little choice in the matter given that the principal, speaking from his position of power, had asked all staff to cooperate with the researchers. As was my want, I pulled an audio recorder out of my bag while simultaneously asking rhetorically 'You don't mind if I use this?' Colleen looked at me – with a look I'll not so easily forget – and replied: 'Well actually, I do' or words to the same effect. I was flabbergasted but had enough wit about me to put the recorder back and mumble 'sorry'. That was my first lesson. As the interview progressed, I began to develop a sense that as far as Colleen was concerned, the study was yet another research project in a long line of projects. Even though I naively assured her that the project would have real impact, Colleen had been around long enough to understand that assurances were one thing and positive outcomes for Aboriginal people quite another. Certainly, there had been little or no consultation with Aboriginal stakeholders to find out how best to approach research that sought to better prepare non-Aboriginal teachers to work with Aboriginal students. Interestingly, my move to interview the Aboriginal staff before other staff members did not go unnoticed by non-Aboriginal teachers.

Without doubt, my experience with this project confirmed some of the pitfalls inherent in researching with/in an Indigenous context. However, during my two weeks' immersion into this particular school, I also learned that as a researcher within a nationally funded research project that sought primarily to speak to white teachers about how they could better address the learning needs of Aboriginal students, I was in a relatively privileged and powerful position to alert teachers to look inward towards their own praxis rather than attributing their students' poor educational outcomes to cultural deficits. In other words, I began to understand that our strategic efforts might be better placed to 'fix' teachers rather than to 'fix' students.

My experiences at the school proved to be not only the beginning of this particular learning journey, but also the beginning of a change in research focus. I became increasingly convinced that it was preferable to 'turn the gaze around' and instead of focussing on the differences/shortcomings perceived in the Other, to focus my research and teaching energy to decentre and deconstruct the normativity of whiteness in order to invert the gaze from 'the racial object to the racial subject; from the described and imagined to the describers and imaginers; from the serving to the served' (Morrison, 1991, p. 90). Coincidentally, at that time I also read Gloria Yamato's article *Something About the Subject Makes it Hard to Name* (1990, p. 23); a powerful short piece that addressed racism at the

level of everyday experience. Her advice to 'whites who want to be allies to people of colour' particularly resonated.

However, the journey from my hitherto 'emancipatory' position grounded in a white western paradigm, to being a reasonably effective ally has taken time and necessitated an in-depth exploration of, not only the literature dealing with Indigenous methodologies, but also a return to the scholarship that critically deconstructs whiteness. My primary aim was to investigate what Indigenous scholars were saying about research and find out what a non-exploitative, culturally appropriate approach to research might look like and where I might 'fit' in terms of doing research.

Towards a more culturally inclusive approach: What might it look like?

Over the last decade or so, eminent Indigenous scholars have begun speaking to the research community and challenged us to 'to think critically about [our] research processes and outcomes, bearing in mind that Indigenous peoples' interests, experiences and knowledge must be at the centre of research methodologies' (Porsanger, 2002, p. 109). Moreover, the literature makes the point that researchers – whether Indigenous or non-Indigenous – must observe cultural protocols (Houston, 2007; Jackson-Barrett, 2010; Martin, 2002; Moreton-Robinsons, 2000; Nicholls, 2009; Smith, 1999; Wilson, 2008). While the idea of adhering to cultural protocols may appear to be simple, it is nevertheless a concept that is replete with, not only layers of meaning, but also with cultural specificities. For example, ways of 'asking permission, using preferred language, terms and expressions, with the ultimate aim of maintaining relations' (Martin, 2002, p. 213), will be specific to the community within which the research is conducted. Further, attention to cultural protocols includes, but is not limited to the 'R words' of research. Kirkness and Barnhardt (1991) were perhaps the first to outline the importance of 'Respect, Relevance, Reciprocity and Responsibility'. Others have conceptualized the 'R' words differently. Jackson-Barrett, for example, writes of 'Responsibility, Relationships and Respect' (2010), while Wilson speaks of 'Respect, Reciprocity and Relationality' (2008). Resistance, Reciprocity, Reflexivity and Representation are yet other key 'Rs' that might be included here (Houston, 2007; Kovach, 2009; Martin, 2002; Nicholls, 2009; Wilson, 2008). Yet, these 'Rs', however many there may be or however they may be conceptualized, are not discrete entities; they are rather intertwined to form the basis of the protocols that must guide research with/in Indigenous communities regardless of whether the researcher is Indigenous. Conversely, a 'lack of understanding of cultural protocols . . . impinge on the ability . . . to develop relationships and appropriate processes' (Minniecon, Franks, & Heffernan, 2007, p. 31). In other words, if we are not familiar with cultural protocols or ignore them, we fall straight back into the intellectually arrogant trap of thinking that we know what we are doing.

While Indigenous researchers stress the diversity within and among Indigenous peoples, at the same time Indigenous writing shows evidence of similarities that cut across cultural specificities to the extent that it almost becomes possible (but not quite) to speak of a pan-Indigenous research approach. Thus, there are features of Indigenous research that are common to many (but not all) Indigenous researchers:

- Research is grounded in an Indigenous epistemology (Houston, 2007; Kovach, 2005; Martin, 2002; Rigney, 1997, 1997; Smith, 1999; Steinhauer, 2002);
- Research privileges Indigenous voice (Houston, 2007; Martin, 2002; Minniecon et al., 2007; Porsanger, 2002; Rigney, 1997; Wilson, 2008);

- Research design demonstrates an explicit decolonizing aim (Absalon & Willett, 2005; Houston, 2007; Porsanger, 2002; Sikes, 2006; Smith, 1999);
- Research honours and respects sacred knowledges (Kovach, 2005, 2009; Running Wolf, 2008; Wilson, 2008);
- Researchers observe cultural protocols (Houston, 2007; Jackson-Barrett, 2010; Martin, 2002; Moreton-Robinsons, 2000; Nicholls, 2009; Wilson, 2008);
- Research emphasizes collaborative research and should benefit Indigenous peoples (Kovach, 2005; Nicholls, 2009; Smith, 1999; Wilson, 2008);
- Researchers utilize Indigenous methods such as storytelling (Bessarab & Ng'andu, 2010; Clay & Costillo, 2008; Houston, 2007; Jackson-Barrett, 2010; Kovach, 2005; Thomas, 2005; Wilson, 2008);
- Research gives back to the communities being 'researched' (Absalon & Willett, 2005; Minniecon et al., 2007; Porsanger, 2002; Smith, 1999);
- Research reports include a space for self-location (Kovach, 2005; Martin, 2002; Moreton-Robinsons, 2000; Porsanger, 2002; Steinhauer, 2002; Wilson, 2008).

The learning journey continues: What is ethical and culturally respectful research?

While I continued to be dubious about the ability of non-Indigenous researchers to ground our research in an Indigenous epistemology, at that stage my learning journey took another, more practical, turn when a number of Aboriginal postgraduate students with whom I was working ran into trouble with the Ethics Committee at my university.

In Australia, as elsewhere, all researchers who wish to conduct research with/in Indigenous communities must address national guidelines concerning ethical research in their application to institutional ethics committees. However, Kovach (2009) pointed out that ethical considerations can frequently be taken to mean different things depending on whether one views the research process from Indigenous or western perspectives. Shawn Wilson, in *Research is Ceremony*, for example, suggested that ontology asks 'What is real?' (2008, p. 33) and goes on to outline the profound epistemological/ontological differences, relating to land, language, spiritual, cosmological, political, economical, environmental and social elements, between Indigenous researchers and white western researchers. My experience has certainly shown that ethics committees' decisions are grounded in a white, western paradigm and thus have their own ideas about what constitutes 'meaningful engagement and reciprocity' (National Health and Medical Research Council, 2007, chapter 4.7) or how to interpret the directive that 'Indigenous knowledge systems and processes must be respected' (Australian Institute for Ethical Research in Indigenous Studies, 2000, p. 2).

Given that 'Indigenous researchers have invoked Indigenous knowledge and spirituality frameworks to dialogue with research' (White, 2010, p. 15), some of the students with whom I worked have attempted to ground their research in an Aboriginal epistemology and have used various metaphors to conceptualize their research in terms of 'Ways of Knowing, Ways of Being and Ways of Doing' (Martin, 2002, p. 211) that are specific to their cultural background. Some have used the metaphor of the circle to ground their research and others have utilized the image of a particular tree or the Earth; still others employed Nyungar[3] seasons to frame their work. Regardless of the metaphor, what these researchers shared was the desire to place Aboriginal epistemology at the centre of the inquiry. While these frameworks certainly illustrate 'the thinking behind the doing' (Kovach, 2009, p. 39), and despite adherence to national guidelines, the Indigenous researchers with whom I work have had ethics applications questioned (or withheld) on the basis of conflicting expectations about what research ought to be.

For example, the use of 'yarning' as an approach to collecting data was frequently called into question despite the fact that yarning is culturally safe and 'has a legitimate place alongside other western research methods in the gathering of data and is one of many tools enabling the application of Indigenous methodologies' (Bessarab & Ng'andu, 2010, p. 47). It has been defined as a 'web of relationships, interactions and ways of working' (Dean, 2010, p. 7) and has been used in health research and a variety of community-based research projects (Burchill, 2004; Miimali, 2004; Power, 2004; Soriano, Weston, & Kolar, 2001). Indeed, 'yarning' is the method of choice for data collection within Aboriginal contexts. Yet, it tends to be viewed with suspicion within the context of an academic dissertation because it is not a word that is part of the language of western methods. Yarning is moreover 'a process that requires the researcher to develop and build a relationship' (Bessarab & Ng'andu, 2010, p. 38); hence, it 'can meander all over the place', allowing the teller to decide 'what parts of their story to tell and which parts to leave out' (Bessarab & Ng'andu, 2010, p. 39). To insist (as has been the response of the ethics committee at my university) that 'yarning needs to be structured' or that students 'need to provide a list of the indicative questions and yarning topics for the interviews' was entirely missing the point because yarning is not simply another name for interviewing that pays lip-service to Indigenous sensitivities; it is, rather, a concept that is grounded in an Indigenous epistemology (Bessarab & Ng'andu, 2010, pp. 38–39), and to impose structures on yarning (or storytelling), positions the listener in ways that are counter to Indigenous storytelling traditions (Thomas, 2005). In fact, to demand that 'yarning needs to be structured' is an example of the 'epistemological tyranny' that 'still functions in the academy to undermine efforts to include other ways of knowing and knowledge production' (Kincheloe & Steinberg, 2008, p. 144).

When I was first confronted with this 'epistemological tyranny', I was shocked, angry and mortified. Janet, the student whose research project had come into question, felt that her culture had once again been judged as inadequate; she was incensed but she also told me that she had come too far to capitulate. We discussed our options and decided to challenge the conditions that the committee sought to impose. Other students who followed benefitted from our decision. Given that these women are strong and determined and had thought long and hard about research that would benefit their respective communities, all decided to try and 're-educate' committee members. For all of us, our reading about Indigenous ways of doing research proved to be the key to mounting successful challenges. For me, it was another step along my white western learning journey and my first opportunity to contribute to the fight for social justice by way of being an ally.

'Don't talk about what you don't know': being white and being an ally

Whiteness is neither simply about skin colour, nor is it a trans-historical essence. Rather, it refers to 'a set of locations that are historically, socially, politically, and culturally produced' (Frankenberg, 1993, p. 6) that can be understood to have three inter-related components: a location of structural advantage, a standpoint from which those of us who are white understand the world and our position in it and a set of cultural practices that in white settler societies such as Australia are dominant (Dlamini, 2002; Evans, Hole, Berg, Hutchinson, & Sookraj, 2009; Frankenberg, 1993). These inter-related components have implications for the ways in which 'white academics come to understand the world as an object of analysis' (Evans et al., 2009, p. 898) from the position of white privilege. Kendall (2006, p. 141) suggested that 'one of the most effective ways to use our privilege is to become an ally of those on the other side of the privilege seesaw'. As an academic with tenure, I occupy a position of relative privilege, but at the same time, as a white woman I am mindful of the

ways in which my whiteness is mitigated by my gender and cultural background. In sum, my whiteness has been shaped by a particular set of historical circumstances that relate to my German heritage. It is also shaped by the process of growing up in Australia; a nation that has yet to come to terms with its colonial history.

Given that interrogating whiteness is not about feeling 'good about being white in non-racist ways' (Thompson, 2003, p. 15), it is a struggle to keep whiteness off-centre or to avoid the trap of being a 'good white'; someone who needs to prove her anti-racist credentials by resisting and actively working against the 'ideology . . . that enable whites to maintain power' (Dlamini, 2002, p. 58). Hence, what interrogating whiteness requires is that we confront 'a world in which whiteness is not only around [us] but also working through [us]', requiring that 'white allies cultivate identities rooted in understandings of [ourselves as whites] and [our] relations to others'; a process that is never complete but 'always becoming, always in need of another step' (Yancy, 2008, p. 238). Accordingly, disrupting sites of whiteness means consistently examining 'my decisions and thought processes through the lenses of white privilege' (Kendall, 2006, p. 147). It also means breaking the nexus between being 'a good white' and 'being an ally', for while these constructs slide into one another quite easily, they are not one and the same thing and care needs to be taken to resist speaking from one's 'good white' position, rather than a position of being an ally. The drive of the white persona is to feel 'good' about doing something about racism, while the positionality of an ally is invariably tenuous and often accompanied by discomfort. It is a discomfort that is grounded in not being an expert and not being centre stage when working with Aboriginal people but it is also a position that does not make me popular with many of my white students or colleagues. However, in the final analysis we need, as Kendall commented, to 'become comfortable with the uncomfortable and uncomfortable with the too comfortable' (2006, p. 153).

Critical whiteness scholarship underpins the ally position, but it is also at the basis of the questions I posed earlier: 'Should non-Indigenous researchers attempt to research with/in Indigenous communities or not?' If who we are, where we come from and how we conceptualize research is fundamental to the ways in which we conduct research, then Lester-Irabinna Rigney's (1997, p. 118) comments advance my argument for not engaging in research with/in Indigenous contexts. He wrote:

> Indigenist research is research undertaken as part of the struggle of Indigenous Australians for recognition for self-determination. It is research which engages with the issues in, and which have arisen out of, the long history of oppression of Indigenous Australians, which began in earnest with the invasion of Australia in 1788. It is research which deals with the history of physical, cultural and emotional genocide. It is also research which engages with the story of the survival and the resistances of Indigenous Australians to racist oppression. It is research which seeks to uncover and protest the continuing forms of oppression which confront Indigenous Australians. Moreover, it is research which attempts to support the personal, community, cultural and political struggles of Indigenous Australians to carve out a way of being [in] which there is healing from the past oppressions and cultural freedom in the future.

Rigney uses the term Indigenist research to differentiate it from research conducted by non-Indigenous researchers within an Indigenous context (Kendall, Sunderland, Barnett, Nalder, & Matthews, 2011, p. 1723), and while I acknowledge that he takes a somewhat essentialist position, it is a position that resonates with me. Hence, given his perception of Indigenist research as research that is grounded in the experience of oppression, then non-Indigenous people cannot engage with research that is truly decolonizing. Even though both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal researchers 'must have a critical analysis of colonialism and

an understanding of Western scientific research as a mechanism of colonization' (Absalon & Willett, 2005, p. 121), no matter how well intentioned I may be, my understanding of colonization can only ever be partial as my view is invariably coloured by my own experiences. As a white western woman I can bring my awareness to the fact that there are realities and worldviews other than my own and I can learn to listen to other voices, but I cannot speak about experiences I have not had. Additionally, Absalon and Willett (2005, p. 111) made the point that 'an analysis of colonization . . . contextualizing and revising Aboriginal experiences, events, and history can help [Aboriginal peoples] make sense of our reality'. This 'making sense of our reality' (as opposed to white western researchers deluding ourselves that our interpretations represent Indigenous realities) privileges, by definition, Indigenous voices. Indeed, research that privileges Indigenous voices is at the heart of talking back to western research paradigms (Dunbar, 2008). In this, the place of the non-Indigenous researcher is limited; I could, for example, collect stories from Indigenous people if I am open to listen. But I wonder if by capturing the words, I would also be able to capture the meanings? In the final analysis, however, I cannot 'do' Indigenist research grounded in an Indigenous epistemology because I am not Indigenous. In other words, I do not know ways of being, knowing and doing that are grounded in an Indigenous epistemology. My ways of being, knowing and doing emanate from a position of white privilege, and are always and already historically and culturally specific. For me this answers the question of whether I, or someone like me, could do research within an Indigenous context, with a resounding 'no'.

However, I can use my learning to work as an ally and play some part in the journeys of Indigenous researchers to obtain the credentials they seek. It has been argued that finding a supervisor is more difficult for Indigenous research students because of the need to find ways to conduct research that is respectful of Aboriginal ways of knowing (Saunders, West, & Usher, 2010). Hence, Laycock (2009, p. 49) argued:

> Ideally, students need an academic supervisor with relevant expertise and a shared interest in the area of research, who is able to understand Indigenous ways of doing things and can help the student incorporate this into the research methodology and approach. . . . There are not enough Indigenous postgraduate supervisors available, and few non-Indigenous supervisors have this knowledge and experience.

Concluding comments: what being an ally means to me

As Kincheloe and Steinberg (2008, p. 140) have argued, 'it is important for Indigenous peoples to have informed allies outside their local communities'. Being an ally is not about helping; it is, as Kendall (2006, p. 148) has suggested, about working with Indigenous researchers and 'using our privilege, power and access to influence and resources to change the systems that keep [Aboriginal] people . . . oppressed'. On a personal level, 'being an ally' means that I am willing to make mistakes, that I am willing to be uncomfortable and that I confront my own privileges (without necessarily being able to shed them at will). It means remembering that universities are white, privileged spaces and to be mindful of 'the power of whiteness and how it can invade the last of the Aboriginal territories—the mind and the body, through a process of infusion into the skin—to reinscribe or prescribe what it is and means to be Aboriginal' (Laycock, 2009, p. 46).

During my learning journey, the realization that it is not my place to conduct research within Indigenous contexts has come slowly. The realization that I can use *what I know* – rather than imagining that *I know* about Indigenous epistemologies or Indigenous experiences under colonialism – to work as an ally with Indigenous researchers has come equally

slowly. However, coming as I do, from a position of relative power, I can also contribute in some small way to the project of decolonizing methodologies by speaking 'to my own mob' (Ngarritjan Kessaris, 2006, p. 360) in various ways: not only with regard to my research/teaching focus with white students, but also with those who have the power to grant or withhold ethics approval for Indigenous students to deconstruct what we mean by 'ethical considerations' or 'rigorous' research. Accordingly, when I work with Indigenous research students my concern is to be supportive and be the best ally I can possibly be. Certainly, this does not mean speaking for Indigenous peoples.

Thus, as an ally, I see my 'job description' as falling into three broad areas: firstly, self-education; secondly, providing academic support for students, and thirdly, 'running interference' with the academy. These areas are inter-related with the first being the most comprehensive, for as an ally I have much to learn. It is only then that it is possible to establish good relationships and support Aboriginal students in academic as well as personal ways. Learning to listen deeply and hear what is being said is part of that learning process. As Smith (2000, p. 242) has advised, we need to show respect by 'exhibiting a willingness to listen, to be humble, to be cautious, to increase knowledge. To not trample over the "mana" of people'. Certainly, this means adhering to cultural protocols. Finally, it is important to address the 'epistemological tyranny' of institutions and institutional ethics committees and turning my efforts to reconceptualizing the practices of the academy where I sense that this might be warranted. I can see, for example, that 'HREC [Human Research Ethics Committee] generated regime of truth-making around what constitutes research ethics and ethical research' (White & Fitzgerald, 2010, p. 283) will need on-going vigilance. In short, being an ally means that I work with Indigenous researchers to do their own research. It also means adhering to those criteria that Indigenous scholars have identified as essential components to conducting research within Indigenous contexts.

Not only that, being an ally means having high expectations of all my students. Just because a student is Aboriginal and her/his research is grounded within an Aboriginal epistemology does not mean that I will not challenge a student's work because 'we will be ineffective as allies if we give up our abilities to analyse and think critically' (Kivel, 1996, p. 87). Sometimes, finding the balance between listening and challenging is difficult. It is all too easy to criticize in the name of 'academic rigour' and to cast doubt on research that does not totally conform to western methodologies. It is here that the various Rs come into play again: as 'experts' in our field, we need to be humble and to be *respectful* in our listening; we need to be *reflexive* about the feedback we provide, and above all, we need to build resilient *relationships* with the students with whom we work. For me this means sharing aspects of my humanity; it means getting to know individuals as human beings and not merely as one-dimensional graduate students, and finally, it means having high expectations of students' work. I imagine that I do not always 'get it right'. As Kendall wrote (2006, p. 150):

> Allies expect to make some mistakes but do not use that as an excuse for inaction. As a person with privilege, it is important to study and to talk about how your privilege acts both as a shield and as blinkers for you . . . we need to remember that each of us . . . is going to say something dumb or insensitive. Our best bet is to acknowledge our mistakes openly and learn from them.

Hence, I work with students to reaffirm that it is possible to use Aboriginal cultural knowledge and be a researcher at the same time. This has not always been easy but I am getting better as I learn to 'speak with rather than for the Other' (Giroux, 1992, p. 28). Nevertheless, I still catch myself wanting to talk – not listen. Here I have talked about the sorts of things

I have learned, taking seriously the Elders' call 'Don't talk about what you don't know' (Graveline, 2000, p. 362). My learning journey has led me to conclusions that may not suit everyone; however, it is the approach of choice for me at this moment in time.

Notes

1. When referring to Indigenous peoples in Australia, as far as possible I use the specific tribal names of the First Nations peoples to whom I am referring. I use the term Indigenous more broadly to include not only Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples in Australia, but also Indigenous peoples worldwide.
2. All names used throughout are pseudonyms.
3. Nyungar (or Noongar) is the language spoken by the First Nations people in that part of Western Australia that extends from the coast in an arc from Geraldton in the north to Esperance in the south.

Notes on contributor

Dr Nado Aveling is a Senior Lecturer in Education at Murdoch University with responsibilities for teaching undergraduate and graduate courses in social justice studies. Her more recent research has focused on the use of autobiographical narratives to deconstruct the normativity of 'whiteness' and the social construction of gendered and racialized subjectivities.

References

Absalon, K., & Willett, C. (2005). Putting ourselves forward: Location in aboriginal research. In L. Brown & S. Strega (Eds.), *Research as resistance: Critical, indigenous and anti-oppressive approaches* (pp. 97–126). Toronto, ON: Canadian Scholars' Press.

Applebaum, B. (2010). *Being white, being good: White complicity, white moral responsibility, and social justice pedagogy*. Boulder, CO: Lexington Books.

Australian Institute for Ethical Research in Indigenous Studies. (2000). Guidelines for Ethical Research in Indigenous Studies (pp. 1–13). Retrieved from http//www.austlii.edu.au/au/journals/AILR/2003/12.html

Bessarab, D., & Ng'andu, B. (2010). Yarning about yarning as a legitimate method in indigenous research. *International Journal of Critical Indigenous Studies*, *3*(1), 37–50.

Blodgett, A.T., Schinke, R.J., Smith, B., Peltier, D., & Pheasant, C. (2011). Indigenous words: Vignettes as a narrative strategy for presenting the research voices of aboriginal community members. *Qualitative Inquiry*, *17*(6), 522–533.

Burchill, M. (2004). Enough talking – more walking – achieving deadly outcomes. *Stronger Families Learning Exchange Bulletin*, *6*, 6–9. Retrieved from http://www.aifs.gov.au/sf/pubs/bull6/enough.html

Clay, J.A., & Costillo, J. (2008). The tribal disability actualization process (TDAP) as a process for culturally relevant community development. In *Intersecting interests: Tribal knowledge and research communities. Proceedings of the intersecting interests: Tribal knowledge and research communities conference*, April 16–17, 2008 (pp. 114–125). Bozeman: The University of Montana.

Dean, C. (2010). A yarning place in narrative histories. *History of Education Review*, *39*(2), 6–13.

Dlamini, S.N. (2002). From the other side of the desk: Notes on teaching about race when racialised. *Race, Ethnicity and Education*, *5*(1), 51–66.

Dunbar, C., Jr. (2008). Critical race theory and indigenous methodologies. In N.K. Denzin, Y.S. Lincoln, & L.T. Smith (Eds.), *Handbook of critical and indigenous methodologies*. Los Angeles, CA: Sage.

Evans, M., Hole, R., Berg, L.D., Hutchinson, P., & Sookraj, D. (2009). Common insights, differing methodologies: Towards a fusion of indigenous methodologies, participatory action research and white studies in an urban aboriginal research agenda. *Qualitative Inquiry*, *15*, 893–910.

Frankenberg, R. (1993). *The social construction of whiteness: White women, race matters*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota.

Giroux, H. (1992). *Border crossings: Cultural workers and the politics of education*. New York, NY: Routledge.

Graveline, F.J. (2000). Circle as methodology: Enacting an aboriginal paradigm. *Qualitative Studies in Education*, *13*(4), 361–370.

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

Jackson-Barrett, E. (2010). *Sacred turf: An exploration of the teaching of aboriginal studies within western Australian schools* (Unpublished MEd dissertation). Murdoch University, Perth.

Kendall, E., Sunderland, N., Barnett, L., Nalder, G., & Matthews, C. (2011). Beyond the rhetoric of participatory research in indigenous communities: Advances in Australia over the last decade. *Qualitative Health Research*, *21*(12), 1719–1728.

Kendall, F.E. (2006). *Understanding white privilege: Creating pathways to authentic relationships across race*. New York, NY: Routledge.

Kincheloe, J.L., & Steinberg, S.R. (2008). Indigenous knowledges in education: Complexities, dangers and profound benefits. In N.K. Denzin, Y.S. Lincoln, & L.T. Smith (Eds.), *Handbook of critical and indigenous ethodologies* (pp. 135–156). Los Angeles, CA: Sage.

Kirkness, V.J., & Barnhardt, R. (1991). First nations and higher education: The four Rs – respect, relevance, reciprocity, responsibility. *Journal of American Indian Education*, *30*(3), 1–10. Retrieved from http://iaie.asu.edu/v30/V30S3fir.htm

Kivel, P. (1996). *What does an ally do? How white people can work for racial justice*. Gabriola Island, BC: New Society.

Kovach, M. (2005). Emerging from the margins: Indigenous methodologies. In L. Brown & S. Strega (Eds.), *Research as resistance: Critical, indigenous and anti-oppressive approaches* (pp. 19–36). Toronto: Canadian Scholars' Press.

Kovach, M. (2009). *Indigenous methodologies: Characteristics, conversations and contexts*. Toronto, ON: University of Toronto Press.

Laycock, A. (with Diane Walker, Nea Harrison and Jenny Brands). (2009). *Supporting indigenous researchers: A practical guide for supervisors*. Casuarina, NT: Cooperative Research Centre for Aboriginal Health.

Leibowitz, B., Bozalek, V., Rohleder, P., Carolissen, R., & Schwartz, L. (2010). Ah, but the whiteys love to talk about themselves': Discomfort as a pedagogy for change. *Race, Ethnicity and Education*, *13*(1), 83–100.

Martin, K. (2002). Ways of knowing, being and doing: A theoretical framework and methods for indigenous and indigenist research. *The Australian Public Intellectual Network*. Retrieved from http://www.api-network.com/main/index.php?apply=scholars&webpage=default&flexedit=&flex_password=&menu_label=&menuID=homely&menubox=&scholar=105

Miimali Reconnect Action Research Focus Groups Project. (2004). *Yarning about cultural appropriateness. Stories and findings*. Retrieved from http://www.cmy.net.au/Assets/551/1/Yarningaboutculturalappropriatenessborders.pdf

Minniecon, D., Franks, N., & Heffernan, M. (2007). Indigenous research: Three researchers reflect on their experiences at the interface. *The Australian Journal of Indigenous Education*, *36*, 23–31.

Moreton-Robinsons, A. (2000). *Talking up to the white woman*. St Lucia: University of Queensland Press.

Morrison, T. (1991). *Playing in the dark: Whiteness and the literary imagination*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

National Health and Medical Research Council. (2007). *National statement on ethical conduct in human research*. Canberra: Australian Government.

Ngarritjan Kessaris, T. (2006). About being Mununga (Whitefulla): Making covert group racism visible. *Journal of Community and Applied Social Psychology*, *16*, 347–362.

Nicholls, R. (2009). Research and indigenous participation: Critical reflexive methods. *International Journal of Social Research Methodology*, *12*(2), 117–126.

Porsanger, J. (2002). *An essay about indigenous methodology*. Retrieved from http://uit.no/getfile.php?PageId=977&FileId=188

Power, K. (2004). Yarning: A responsive research methodology. *Journal of Australian Research in Early Childhood Education*, *11*(1), 37–46.

Rigney, L.I. (1997). Internationalisation of an indigenous anti-colonial cultural critique of research methodologies: A guide to indigenist research methodology and its principles. *The Journal for Native American Studies*, *14*(2), 109–121.

Running Wolf, M. (2008). Building an online Native American archive: Problems and premise. In *Proceedings of the intersecting interests: Tribal knowledge and research communities conference*, April 16–17, 2008 (pp. 135–146). Bozeman: The University of Montana.

Saunders, V., West, R., & Usher, K. (2010). Applying indigenist research methodologies in health research: Experiences in the borderlands. *The Australian Journal of Indigenous Education*, *29*, 1–7.

Sikes, P. (2006). Decolonizing research and methodologies: Indigenous people and cross-cultural contexts. *Pedagogy, Culture and Society*, *14*(3), 349–358.

Smith, L.T. (1999). *Decolonizing methodologies: Research and indigenous peoples*. London: Zed Books.

Smith, L.T. (2000). Kaupapa maori research. In M. Battiste (Ed.), *Reclaiming indigenous voice and vision* (pp. 225–247). Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press.

Soriano, G., Weston, R., & Kolar, V. (2001). Meeting the challenges of parenting: Factors that enhance and hinder the role of parents. *Family Matters*. No. 58. Australian Institute of Family Studies.

Steinhauer, E. (2002). Thoughts on an indigenous research methodology. *Canadian Journal of Native Education*, *26*(2), 69–81.

Thomas, R.A. (2005). Honouring the oral traditions of my ancestors. In L. Brown & S. Strega (Eds.), *Research as resistance: Critical, indigenous and anti-oppressive approaches* (pp. 237–254). Toronto: Canadian Scholars' Press.

Thompson, A. (2003). Tiffany, friend of people of color: White investments in antiracism. *International Journal of Qualitative Studies in Education*, *16*(1), 7–29.

White, J., & Fitzgerald, T. (2010). Researcher tales and research ethics: The space in which we find ourselves. *International Journal of Research & Method in Education*, *33*(3), 273–285.

White, N. (2010). Indigenous Australian women's leadership: Stayin' strong against the post-colonial tide. *International Journal of Leadership in Education: Theory and Practice*, *13*(1), 7–25.

Wilson, S. (2008). *Research is ceremony: Indigenous research methods*. Halifax & Winnipeg: Fernwood Publishing.

Yamato, G. (1990). Something about the subject makes it hard to name. In G. Anzaldua (Ed.), *Making face, making soul*. San Francisco, CA: Aunt Lute Foundation Book.

Yancy, G. (2008). *Black bodies, white gazes: The continuing significance of race*. Boulder, CO: Rowman & Littlefield.