



**Batchelor**  
Institute

## **FINDING COMMON GROUND:**

NARRATIVES, PROVOCATIONS AND REFLECTIONS  
FROM THE 40 YEAR CELEBRATION OF BATCHELOR INSTITUTE

Editors: Henk Huijser, Robyn Ober, Sandy O'Sullivan, Eva McRae-Williams, Ruth Elvin



This book is a series of chapters responding to the Batchelor Institute 40 Years Conference: Finding Common Ground with Indigenous and Western Knowledge Systems (7-8 August 2014) held at Batchelor Campus, Batchelor Institute, Northern Territory, Australia.



All chapters submitted to the editors of this book meet the Australian Government Research Council's definition of research. Papers identified by \* on the contents page indicate chapters refereed by two independent peers. Papers without an \* identifier indicate non-refereed papers.

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## **Finding Common Ground:**

*Narratives, Provocations and Reflections from  
the 40 Year Celebration of Batchelor Institute*

Editors: Henk Huijser, Robyn Ober, Sandy O'Sullivan, Eva McRae-Williams, Ruth Elvin

# Acknowledgements

Putting together an edited collection that draws on the common ground on which we meet as Batchelor Institute, is both exciting and involves a lot of people. This collection features 30 direct participants, so our first thanks go to the authors for their wonderful and stimulating ideas, and their determination to persist through the reviewing and editing process. However, the large amount of reviewers have ensured the quality of the chapters in this book, so many thanks to them.

We want to acknowledge the traditional owners and custodians of the land we work on. Much of this book was produced on Kungarakana and Warai country (at Batchelor), as well as Larrakia country (Darwin), and Arrernte country (Alice Springs), with many of the participants working across other communities. We acknowledge all of them as central to the production of a text that is, after all, about common ground.

Batchelor Institute has been very supportive throughout the production of this book. From the organisation of the 40-year celebrations through to the submission of

the manuscript, we have had the support of many of our staff across a range of areas. Special thanks to Noressa Bulsey, Stephanie Barber, Elsie Carter, Sue Campbell, Louisa Castle, Victoria Dawson, Sarah Martin, Leanne Mahaffey, Kevin Arthur, Peter Hillier, Mike Crowe, Jurg Bronnimann, Adrian Mitchell, Kirsty Kelly, Brooke Ottley, Bob Somerville, Peter Stephenson, Maree Klesch, and the many other volunteers and contributors.

We hope you find this book stimulates and engages discussion around the robust topics it covers.

*Regards,*

*Henk Huijser, Robyn Ober, Sandy O'Sullivan, Eva McRae-Williams, & Ruth Elvin (The Editors)*

\*All chapters submitted to the editors of this book meet the Australian Government Research Council's definition of research. Papers identified by \* on the contents page indicate chapters refereed by two independent peers. Papers without an \* identifier indicate non-refereed papers.

\*\*There are different preferences for the use of the collective terms Aboriginal, Torres Strait Islander, Indigenous, and for the specific spelling and framing of individual language and country names. Individual authors have chosen to use specific collective terms, some framing that use in a way that supports the individual variation. The editorial team has chosen to support this variation in nomenclature as it reflects the difficulty in applying collective terms to varied communities and peoples.

# Foreword

Batchelor Institute, in its many iterations over the last forty years, remains an iconic Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander provider on the Australian educational landscape.

From its humble beginnings in 1964 as an annex of Kormilda College, Batchelor Institute has risen to become Australia's only Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander dual sector tertiary education and research provider. As such it holds a unique place in the university and vocational education and training space. More so, it holds a special place in the hearts and minds of many Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people who have either studied or been connected to Batchelor.

The Australian educational scene would not be complete without a tertiary institution that is founded upon Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander beliefs and cultural understandings and is able to interpret a western education system in a manner such that both are ultimately so intertwined that neither loses creditability. Rather the strengths of both result in a unique learning environment that is not only culturally safe but results in real outcomes: this is what we at Batchelor define as 'both-ways'.

The stories, personal commentary and scholarly writings contained in this book provide a context for Batchelor's future by defining and describing our past and articulating the dreams for the future. They also provide a challenge to the Institute as it moves into a future where tertiary education can be accessed wherever you are able to connect your laptop to the internet. Consequently, ensuring that language and culture are kept 'front and center' will be of paramount importance.

Batchelor Institute has provided training and education that has resulted in many Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people gaining the skills, knowledge and understandings that have improved and enriched their lives and livelihoods. The work Batchelor has undertaken over its forty years existence is nation building and changed the lives of people.

The next forty years will, in my view, see Batchelor Institute become firmly bedded into the Australian university scene as its next university. The Institute is already a 'Table A' higher education provider, our research capability continues to be enhanced and our further education provision grounded in capacity building training. Batchelor now is well positioned, well-funded and capable of providing educational provision from foundation skills through to a Doctor of Philosophy. Batchelor is already providing a planned learning pathway from training through to higher degrees. Batchelor has the expertise and the experience that will not only enhance Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander opportunity but also that of other Australians working with our communities.

Batchelor Institute is proudly Territorian, established in 1964 to provide training and upskilling to the Territory's Aboriginal para-professional workforce. While Batchelor will remain grounded in the Territory and continue to provide quality training and learning to Territorians, its future is to reach out across Australia and internationally. Batchelor's aim is to become Australia's preferred dual sector Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander tertiary provider.

The logo of Batchelor Institute represents a place of learning (central motive) where knowledge is gathered (coolamon) and culture and language protected (shield). It symbolises not only the foundations of this wonderful Institute but also its unique place in the educational landscape of Australia.

I commend this book to you as it represents a comprehensive 'glimpse' into the history of Batchelor Institute.

*Robert Somerville AM, Chief Executive Officer Batchelor Institute*

# Contributors

**Jacqueline Amagula** is a Warnindilyakwa woman from Groote Eylandt in the Northern Territory. She graduated from Batchelor College and has been a qualified Indigenous teacher since the 1980s. Education is her passion. She was the past Chairperson of The Ngakwurralangwa College Advisory Board. Ngakwurralangwa means ‘Our Way’: we own it and we lead it, we have our say. She is also a member of the Anindilyakwa Education and Training Board, NT Indigenous Education Council and the Indigenous Early Childhood Parent Reference Group as a representative of her regions, Anindilyakwa and Wuybuy.

**Dr Melodie Bat** began her career in Aboriginal education as a remote-based teacher, and has moved between teaching, research and management, with the common thread her ability and desire to create systems and connections. Melodie’s Masters degree in education was one of the first early literacy research projects in remote NT Aboriginal communities; and her Doctoral research into teacher education at Batchelor Institute provided a timely contribution to the national conversation on quality in Indigenous tertiary education. Melodie’s current VET-based role at Batchelor is Director of Humanities, managing programs in Health, Education and Early Childhood Education & Care.

**Catherine Bow** is a linguist with research experience in both descriptive and applied linguistics. She has described the sound system of an African language, investigated language development in children with impaired hearing, explored endangered language documentation, and researched the language and communication needs of international medical graduates. She has worked as a trainer and coach for language learners, and currently works as project manager for the Living Archive of Aboriginal Languages at Charles Darwin University.

**Noressa Bulsey** is from the Torres Strait, but has been in the NT for more than 40 years. She has worked and studied at Batchelor Institute off and on since 1978. Noressa’s current role is Indigenous Learning and Development Coordinator, and she has been involved

in cross-cultural awareness workshops and both-ways seminars. She is also a mother and grandmother to six grandchildren.

**Margaret Carew** has worked in the Northern Territory as a community linguist for 20 years. She undertook language research with the Gun-nartpa language group in north-central Arnhem Land in the 1990s and continues to work with a Gun-nartpa language team on language documentation and publishing projects. She has also worked on projects with language teams at Ti Tree, Utopia, Wilora, Artarre, Willowra, Yuendumu, Yuelamu and Tennant Creek. She has extensive experience in Indigenous adult education in both Higher Education and VET programs in the area of linguistics and Indigenous language documentation, and has collaborated with linguists on various other projects.

**Professor Michael Christie** worked as a teacher linguist in Yolŋu communities in Arnhem Land, Northern Territory, Australia, between 1972 and 1993 before moving to Darwin to set up the Yolŋu Studies program at Charles Darwin University in 1994. He is currently Professor in the Northern Institute, heading up the Contemporary Indigenous Knowledge and Governance research group, working on collaborative research and consultancies in a range of areas including health communication, ‘both-ways’ education, resource management, digital technologies, and contemporary governance.

**Lenore Dembski** is Kungarakan and her Mother’s country covers Berry Springs, Darwin River, Litchfield National Park, Batchelor and Adelaide River in partnership with Warai people. Lenore has undertaken research and made presentations on topics including: Indigenous policy development; service delivery; community development; health; housing; education; employment; training; textiles and fashion; science and Indigenous people; governance; leadership; and land management and rehabilitation. Lenore’s interest in flora and fauna relates back to studying biology and travelling extensively with

her family. As a Traditional Owner she is actively involved in Caring for Country. Lenore is the owner operator of Paperbark Woman.

**Dr Brian Devlin** is an Associate Professor of bilingual education and applied linguistics at Charles Darwin University, Darwin. He was Visiting Professor and first holder of the Dr R Marika Chair in Australian and Indigenous Studies at Cologne University in Germany (October 2009–February 2010). He is currently helping to build a digital archive of the texts produced in the Literature Production Centres (LPCs) during the bilingual era of education in the Northern Territory. His various previous roles have included Chair of the NT Education Advisory Council, Dean of Education, UNESCO consultant, Principal, Teacher-Linguist, and Visiting Foreign Expert (Tsinghua University, Beijing).

**Dr Ruth Elvin** is a research, policy and communications management specialist based in Central Australia since 2006, working primarily with applied Indigenous research programs and with a particular focus on the sustainability of remote communities. She has worked at a senior level with a number of organisations, including the Desert Knowledge Cooperative Research Centre, the Centre for Appropriate Technology, and Batchelor Institute as Interim Head of Research and Research Training in 2014–15. Ruth holds postgraduate qualifications in both law and political science from Australian and US universities.

**Dr Lyn Fasoli** is Adjunct Professor at Batchelor Institute of Indigenous Tertiary Education. Her research focuses on Indigenous education, Aboriginal perspectives on early childhood education and care, remote Aboriginal community children’s service training and development and leadership practices. Before teaching adults she worked in a number of early childhood teaching positions in the early years of school, child care, advisory roles and a mobile service. She is an American–Australian who has lived in Australia since 1972 and in Darwin since 1978. She is the mother of one son and four grandsons.

**Dr Kathryn Gilbey** is a descendant of the Alyawarre people and has been a lecturer at Batchelor Institute for fourteen years. Her role teaching and co-ordinating

the common units she describes as the best job in the world. Kathryn finished her PhD in 2014 and is proud to be Batchelor Institute’s first doctoral graduate. In early 2015 Kathryn joined the College for Indigenous Studies, Education and Research at the University of Southern Queensland as a lecturer, but she has continuous involvement with Batchelor Institute.

**Dr Henk Huijser** has been a Senior Lecturer Flexible Learning and Innovation at Batchelor Institute since 2012, and more recently also Higher Degrees by Research Coordinator, until August 2015. Henk has a PhD in Screen and Media from the University of Waikato. His research interests include online learning, learning and teaching in higher education, Indigenous education, and cultural and media studies, and he has published widely in all these areas. In August 2015, Henk joined Xi’an Jiaotong Liverpool University in Suzhou, China, but he continues to be involved with Batchelor Institute in an Adjunct capacity.

**Claire Kilgariff** took up the position as Head of VET Division – Human Services, Arts and Foundation Skills at Batchelor Institute in January 2014, but began with the Institute in 2009 in the role as Head of Faculty Education Arts and Social Sciences. She has particularly focused on building strong collaborative relationships with industry, stakeholders and communities. Previously she has worked in senior policy and executive roles within the NT Department of Education and Training. In addition, Claire has been a community artist, professional musician and performance artist, secondary music teacher and artist director of Arafura Chamber Ensemble.

**Maree Klesch** has worked in Indigenous education for the past 30 years with people from urban, rural and remote communities in the Northern Territory and Western Australia. She is Project Manager for the Noongar, Wadeye and Mowanjum language project teams to support language maintenance, revival and education. She is also the Publisher of Batchelor Institute’s publishing arm, Batchelor Press. As Chief Investigator of ARC linkage project Living Archives of Aboriginal Languages (in partnership with CDU) Maree focuses on making the Centre for Australian Languages

and Linguistics (CALL) archives at Batchelor Institute accessible while providing advocacy for Australian languages in education.

**Ganesh Koramannil** lectures in the School of Indigenous Knowledges and Public Policy (SIKPP) at Charles Darwin University. He has also taught at Batchelor Institute and at Macquarie University. His research interests include EAL/D Indigenous students in higher education, higher education, languages and cultural studies. Ganesh has an MA (English Language and Literature), MEd (TESOL) and Post Graduate Diploma in Teaching and Learning (PGDTL). He has taught ESL, TESOL, Linguistics, Literacy, Education and English Literature in Australia and India. His background as an ESL student and educator, Cambridge Examiner, and his teaching practices in Higher Education, extensively influence his research interests.

**Professor Steven Larkin** is a Kungarakany man from Darwin. He is Pro Vice-Chancellor Indigenous Leadership and Director of the Australian Centre for Indigenous Knowledges and Education (ACIKE). Professor Larkin holds a Doctor of Philosophy (PhD) from Queensland University of Technology. He has chaired the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Higher Education Advisory Council (ATSHEAC) (2009-2012), and the Northern Territory Board of Studies (2010-2012); and he continues to serve on several professional organisations, including National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Higher Education Consortium (NATSIHEC), National Indigenous Research and Knowledges Network (NIRAKN), The Healing Foundation, and Beyond Blue, among others.

**Dr Jillian Marsh** is an Adnyamathanha woman from northern South Australia and her research career involves community-driven research as well as cross-institutional research collaborations. She has worked as a Research Fellow with Batchelor Institute, Flinders University Rural Clinical School, and the Department of Rural Health at University of South Australia. Jillian is passionate about strengthening Indigenous research capacity in Australia, at both community level and the highest academic level. Currently Jillian is enrolled in the Master of Archaeology

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**Dr Eva McRae-Williams** is a Research Leader and Lecturer at Batchelor Institute of Indigenous Tertiary Education. Eva resides in Darwin and has been an employee of Batchelor Institute for over 8 years. She has held a range of positions, including research, teaching and project management responsibilities. She is currently the Principal Research Leader for one of 12 research projects operating under the nationally funded Cooperative Research Centre for Remote Economic Participation (CRC-REP). She also teaches into the Graduate Certificate for Indigenous Sustainable Partnerships, through the Australian Centre for Indigenous Knowledges and Education (ACIKE).

**Robyn Ober** is a Mamu/Djirribal woman from the rainforest region of North Queensland. She is employed as a Research Fellow with Batchelor Institute and is currently undertaking her PhD studies focusing on 'Aboriginal English as an academic discourse'. Robyn has an educational background, teaching in early childhood, primary and tertiary educational contexts. She has a strong interest in both-ways education, educational leadership and Indigenous Australian languages, in particular Aboriginal English. Robyn has undertaken several research projects focusing on these topics and has published papers in educational and linguistic journals, both nationally and internationally.

**Millie Olcay** is a Community Engagement Leader in the Office of the Pro-Vice Chancellor – Indigenous Leadership at Charles Darwin University. Millie has more than 17 years experience in early childhood and primary education, children’s rights, disability and inclusion. She has spent the last 4 years working in vocational education and training and higher education research across a number of remote Indigenous communities in the Northern Territory. At Batchelor Institute, she was Senior Lecturer (Community Services, Children’s Services) and Project Manager on ‘Building the Remote Early Childhood Workforce’ project, winner of the NT Training Initiative Award in 2013.

**Dr Sandy O’Sullivan** is a Wiradjuri woman and a Senior Indigenous Researcher at Batchelor Institute of Indigenous Tertiary Education in the Northern Territory, Australia. She is a current Australian Research Council Senior Indigenous Researcher, an enduring Australian Office for Learning and Teaching Fellow, and holds a PhD in Fine Art and Performance. Her current international research study focuses on the representation and engagement of Indigenous peoples in major museum spaces. Sandy is a practicing artist, and is committed to supporting positive outcomes for both museums and other keeping places in the representation of First Peoples.

**Brooke Ottley** was born and raised in Darwin, Northern Territory, and she is a young Gungarri, Wuthathi and Torres Strait Islander woman with seven years’ experience in graphic design. In 2007 she was awarded the Highest Achieving Indigenous Stage 2 student, ranking in the top 6.6% of 13,000 graduating senior high school students. She is currently studying an Advanced Diploma in Graphic Design and is due to graduate in November 2015. Brooke is also passionate about information technology, photography and cultural exchange, having hosted over 300 travelers from 31 countries—both couch surfers and paying Airbnb guests—in her home.

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**Sue Reaburn** first came to the Northern Territory as a remote school teacher in 1977. Since that time she has held a range of roles as a teacher, lecturer and administrator including involvement in Homeland Centre Education, Remote Area Teacher Education (RATE), Mentoring Aboriginal Teachers and Executive Teachers. Sue has written and co-authored a number of published and unpublished papers and supported the development published works which celebrate the capacity of Aboriginal educators. Since retirement, Sue passionately continues to undertake casual work which contributes to strengthening Aboriginal adults as educators and the pivotal role they play in their children’s education.

**Dr Bronwyn Rossingh’s** experience working for Aboriginal organisations and communities in WA and the NT extends over 25 years. Bronwyn is currently a Community Engagement Leader for Charles Darwin University working with Yirrkala and Galiwinku communities and has been Principal Researcher on numerous research and other projects. These projects include: understanding culture legitimate accountability; Indigenous youth leadership through skin group culture; empowerment of Indigenous women through financial literacy; community engagement research methodologies; building strong governance and business foundations for not-for-profit organisations; enabling opportunities for Indigenous art and culture funding; and inspiring young Indigenous and non-Indigenous school students to consider university.

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**Robert Somerville AM** (Member of the Order of Australia) is a Martu man from Jigalong in Western Australia and has a large extended family throughout the Gascoyne-Murchison region of WA. Robert was appointed as the Chief Executive Officer of Batchelor Institute in February 2015. Prior to joining BIITE Robert was in the Western Australian Education system as a senior executive leading their Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander provision. Robert is a qualified pilot and held the rank of Wing Commander, commanding 7 Wing, Australian Air Force cadets at RAAF Base Pearce in Western Australia from 2012 until his current appointment.

**Leon White, OAM** (Medal of the Order of Australia) has been working in a number of roles and places around the Northern Territory since 1970. He has previously work for Batchelor College and BIITE whilst based in Batchelor (1980 to 1986) and at Yirrkala (1986 to 1993 and 2008 to 2010). Leon is currently working as Principal of Yirrkala Homelands School. He was first involved with Batchelor programs offered through the Aboriginal Teacher

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**Dr Michele Willsher** taught for 4 years in a remote NT Indigenous community, after graduating from the University of Sydney in 1982. After teaching and studying Chinese language in north-west China, Michele returned to Australia, working for 8 years as a Senior Lecturer in teacher education at Batchelor Institute. She then worked overseas again (2001-2008), mainly in Laos, on large-scale teacher education projects. In 2009, Michele undertook ethnographic fieldwork in village schools in Laos, culminating in a PhD from RMIT University. Since 2013, she has been employed in various roles at Batchelor Institute again, and is currently an Academic Advisor.

# Table of Contents

<i>Acknowledgements</i> .....	iv
<i>Foreword</i>	
Robert Somerville AM .....	v
<i>Contributors</i> .....	vi
<i>Finding the common ground: looking at the next 40 years of Batchelor Institute</i>	
Robyn Ober, Sandy O’Sullivan, Eva McRae-Williams, Henk Huijser, & Noressa Bulsey .....	1

## PART I – INDIGENOUS EDUCATION: PAST, PRESENT, FUTURE

<i>Finding the common ground with Indigenous and western knowledge systems and seeking the common good for all present and future Australians - Where is the common ground if we are going to find it?*</i>	
Leon White .....	8
<i>Rhetoric, recognition and rights: the common units 1999-2011*</i>	
Kathryn Gilbey & Evelyn Schaber .....	21
<i>Looking for a new common ground: a reflection on Batchelor Institute’s teacher education training programs for remote Aboriginal education professionals in the Northern Territory*</i>	
Sue Reaburn, Melodie Bat, & Claire Kilgariff .....	31
<i>Critical Race Theory and Indigenous higher education: towards a remaking of the university*</i>	
Steven Larkin.....	43
<i>Being non-Indigenous in an Indigenous education space: Two perspectives on white privilege and the desire to move beyond mimicry*</i>	
Eva McRae-Williams & Henk Huijser .....	53
<i>Red Ochre Women: sisters in the struggle for educational reform</i>	
Jacqueline Amagula & Helen CD McCarthy.....	62

## PART II – FOCUS ON INDIGENOUS LANGUAGES

<i>Gun-ngaypa Rrawa ‘My Country’: a commitment to both-ways language documentation*</i>	
Margaret Carew .....	70
<i>Finding common ground in a digital archive of Aboriginal languages*</i>	
Michael Christie, Brian Devlin, & Catherine Bow.....	80
<i>Digital technologies and language resources – finding common ground*</i>	
Brian Devlin, Catherine Bow, Ailsa Purdon, & Maree Klesch .....	85
<i>Linguistic similarities of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander and international students from non-English backgrounds in higher education: implications for access and success*</i>	
Ganesh Koramannil .....	90

## PART III – RESEARCH, ETHICS, AND OTHER PROVOCATIONS

<i>Our contribution, our imperative: an argument beyond inclusion*</i>	
Sandy O’Sullivan .....	103
<i>The learning is always going both ways: early childhood education action research with remote Indigenous communities in the Northern Territory*</i>	
Millie Olcay, Michele Willsher, & Lyn Fasoli .....	111
<i>Indigenous research across continents: a comparison of ethically and culturally sound approaches to research in Australia and Sweden*</i>	
Kristina Sehlin MacNeil & Jillian K Marsh .....	119
<i>Over 40,000 years of accountability to culture: connecting two systems of thinking*</i>	
Bronwyn Rossingh .....	127
<i>Gouldian Finch recovery plan for Kungarakan and Warai traditional lands in North Australia</i>	
Lenore Dembski .....	135

# Finding the common ground: looking at the next 40 years of Batchelor Institute

*Robyn Ober, Sandy O’Sullivan, Eva McRae-Williams, Henk Huijser, & Noressa Bulsey*

## Introduction

Looking back over the last forty years of Batchelor Institute, the title for the conference that inspired this book is about as apt as one can get. Finding common ground has been a key theme over the last 40 years, finding expression in Batchelor Institute’s continuing both-ways approach and philosophy. Importantly, the emphasis on finding common ground, both as part of past discourse and captured in the following chapters, suggests a continuing process, rather than a final destination that has been, or will be, reached. This relative fluidity of ‘finding common ground’ should not be seen as a weakness; on the contrary, it should be seen as a strength that occurs in a productive space of continuous reflection and engagement with diversity and difference. This space at Batchelor Institute is where the ‘burden of representation’ should be absent, and where people are valued, based on their particular strengths, without the need to explain or defend their Aboriginality. This space should be one of respect and it should be owned by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, in the sense of having agency over how things operate and function

at Batchelor Institute. In fact, this sense of ownership was a central theme during the 40 year celebrations and conference in 2014. When reflecting on the past 40 years, many Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander participants and visitors stressed that Batchelor Institute (or Batchelor College, as many still call it) was ‘our place’. While this may imply a space of cultural safety, and while that is definitely a key aspect of it, it is important to stress again that it is also a space in constant flux as well as a constantly contested space. What the past 40 years have shown, and what is reflected in some of the chapters in this book, is that the space that Batchelor Institute provides, a productive common ground, can never be taken for granted but needs to be continuously claimed, fought for, reinforced, and reasserted.

As the history of Batchelor Institute is widely discussed in the chapters that follow, illustrated with passionate narratives and analyses, it becomes clear that finding the common ground has been a continuous struggle, and continues to be so. Of course this struggle is not limited to Batchelor Institute, but is part of the wider Australian context. In other words, while Batchelor Institute can lead the way in terms of tertiary education for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, it does not exist in a vacuum, and is to an important extent dependent on external forces. These forces do not only relate to where education and research funding come from, but also to what others in the tertiary education sector are doing to open up new opportunities for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff and students. However, what becomes clear as well from these narratives and discussions is that when the stars align, the end result can be enormously powerful and potentially life changing, as indeed it has been for many Batchelor Institute students and staff. As history is thus widely told and reflected on in the pages that follow, we focus in this chapter on the future, and where the next 40 years may, or should, take Batchelor Institute. The key ingredient, as it has been during the last 40 years, is



Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander agency and a sense of ownership. This is worth fighting for, as without it, there can be no common ground.

## **Both-ways into the future**

The metaphor used to capture 'finding common ground' at the 40th year celebrations shows pairs of feet in a circular shape making connection to each other and the red dirt on which they are standing.

This visual metaphor is significant in that it displays the various shades of colours, shapes, forms and positioning of the bare feet on red dirt. In relation to both-ways it makes a strong statement that our learning starts with us - Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, people grounded in their own knowledge/s, ways of doing, ways of making meaning and ways of thinking and expressing themselves. Grass roots people who possess deep, intrinsic and complex knowledge of their own worlds and who are encouraged to draw on their knowledge systems within the both-ways teaching and learning space at Batchelor Institute.

However over the past 40 years this space has moved back and forth, expanded and detracted, from a limited, narrow, uneasy, uncomfortable way of thinking about both-ways, to a radical, emancipatory, unlimited force where students and staff felt empowered to bring about change. In terms of the future of both-ways at Batchelor Institute, the space is changing, with multi-ways, many voices, new ideas, technologies and theories, but still connecting us to who we are as Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

The new fresh feet joining the circle force the expansion of the circle, ensuring there is movement, there is development, there is growth. The red dirt in the middle of the circle represents 'common ground', sharing, respect, reciprocity, responsibility but also roughness of the ground, capturing the tensions, struggles, conflicts, as we work together to move forward in the various discipline areas of academia and vocational education. As an

Indigenous tertiary institution, the circle is expected to incorporate the feet of people in areas of governance, administration, student services and operations. As new discipline areas are introduced, so too our thinking about curriculum development, delivery and assessment should be guided by a both-ways approach to teaching and learning. Both-ways should never be a limited, restricted circle, but there should always be room for growth, open-mindedness, and a search for new ways of doing things in the area of teaching and learning and beyond. However with growth, there are also growing pains, indicating resistance against new ideas, concepts and ways of doing things.

As Batchelor Institute develops and grows its business, so too the common ground extends and expands new ways of operating in a both-ways learning and research environment. The common ground is continually changing to accommodate students' ways of being, doing and making meaning in a tertiary educational context. It is a continuous learning journey that is unique to Batchelor Institute because it emerges from Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people who have strong connections to country, language, and culture. These connections are acknowledged and celebrated as the fundamental base to draw on and move forward into the professional academic domain. Just like the visual metaphor 'bare feet on red dirt', a both-ways learning journey is ongoing, never ending, without restrictions, but continually guided by the expanding circle of feet on common ground. Research is a crucial element in this process.

## **Growing the research space**

The role of research and the relationships forged between Indigenous and non-Indigenous researchers for the benefit of our communities and communities of practice remain at the centre of the Batchelor Institute ethos. The concept of 'common ground' is not used unproblematically in our approach to research. In forging robust research networks and opportunities for further

research in our Indigenous-centred space, dissonance can provide an important mechanism for how we grow in collaboration.

In 2015, and following on from the 40 years Batchelor Institute conference, the research area at the Institute has formed a new approach that focuses on collaboration and networked research. With the emergence of the Centre for Indigenous Research Collaboration (CIRC), the act of bringing together wide-ranging perspectives, views and ideas to forge meaningful outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Communities, is front and centre. The notion of the personality-driven research approach is minimized to rather focus on what really matters in conducting research that supports engagement, including the complex variety and unique requirements of our communities. The Centre for Aboriginal Languages and Linguistics (CALL), a well-respected institution that takes language-development and support direction from communities, is an exemplar of this approach and CIRC will use their model of engagement and reciprocity to form a robust approach. CALL continues, with the support of community linguists and researchers, to be at the forefront of language maintenance and revitalization across the country, which is the focus of Part II of this book.

Being part of a 40-year history of engagement means that the Institute has seen a great deal of change for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples, and in particular the research that is carried out by, and for, Indigenous peoples. Batchelor Institute has also led some of this change. 40 years ago there were few Indigenous researchers working within higher education institutions. Today, the Institute has more than a dozen PhD and Masters candidates completing the highest level of education in the research area, led by both Indigenous and non-Indigenous researchers with national and international profiles. These candidates are a part of the newly developed Batchelor Institute Graduate School, an environment that is uniquely formed to provide support, encouragement and a space for innovation in research.

In 2014 - the year Batchelor Institute turned 40 - two Aboriginal research candidates enrolled in the higher degrees programs were awarded the Institute's inaugural PhDs. The first was Dr Kathryn Gilbey, whose focus was education, and in particular the importance of understanding and reviewing the history of programs that support success in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander higher education students (see also Chapter 3 in this book). The second was Dr David Hardy who focused on identity, sexuality and 'coming out' within the structures of a creative writing submission and exegesis. This included writing a novel, a play, and a broader body of work, as well as a theoretical research framing.

These candidates, our research staff and academics, our centres and our support staff all work towards empowering Indigenous communities and communities of practice. The focus as we move towards our next forty years of research is on ensuring that the voices of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples are front and centre in all levels of research practice and that the work we do is edifying, supportive and provides genuine agency. To accomplish this, the next part of the research journey of Batchelor Institute will take us into the international space, with programs that will bring Indigenous researchers here from overseas, and will send our own researchers into these spaces to create meaningful discussions across communities where we share some of the same ideas and ideals.

## **The digital future**

Of course working in an international space is increasingly enabled by digital technology, digital media, and the internet. Corn (2013) has called this digital future 'the Indigital revolution', as it has created huge opportunities on the one hand, and it has been taken up in a big way in Indigenous contexts in recent years, especially in the social media space. Of course this then has an impact on educational and research spaces such as Batchelor Institute, and it raises questions about the extent to which Batchelor Institute responds to the opportunities

the digital future provides. With specific reference to the context of the Northern Territory, Heron (cited in Nadarajah, 2012, p. 6) points out for example that, “for the first time we have the opportunity to do away with the ‘remote’. Indigenous communities no longer have to be isolated – they can be connected. Limitations of time and space no longer need to apply”. In other words, while teachers may still ‘fly in and fly out’ of ‘remote’ communities across the NT, there are now increasing opportunities to maintain and develop relationships on an ongoing basis over time. Interestingly, if teachers learn how to leverage existing social media use, it would in many ways be highly learner-centred, because Indigenous people in general, and particularly young Indigenous people, appear to have taken to social media use, and technology in general, in a big way (Hall & Maugham, 2015).

The digital future provides opportunities for Batchelor Institute to connect people across Australia and internationally in constantly evolving learning and research communities, and to thereby break through some longstanding preconceptions and boundaries that have informed Indigenous learning and research spaces in the past. In particular, digital technologies in general, and social media in particular, have huge potential to overcome the ‘tyranny of distance’, and with specific reference to Indigenous contexts in Australia, the ‘tyranny of remoteness’. Even though remote communities are increasingly becoming ‘connected’, “currently online learning is not available for most remote living Indigenous people in the Northern Territory (NT)” (Vodic, Senior, Dwyer, & Szybiak, 2012, p. 34). This means that for many Indigenous people in remote communities, learning still follows a well-trodden path of (mostly) non-Indigenous trainers and teachers flying in and out to ‘deliver’ self-contained learning modules largely in isolation, without necessarily being linked together, nor necessarily being linked to a local context. In other words, despite all good intentions, this is essentially a ‘tick-box’ kind of

approach where the emphasis is on the teacher being able to sign off on the delivery being achieved, or the learning being ‘delivered on time’.

Batchelor Institute is a dual-sector learning and research institution, and of course there are huge differences between VET courses, higher education programs, and postgraduate studies and research training. Moreover, there is huge diversity amongst Batchelor students in terms of cultural backgrounds and locations. However, what the digital future promises is the potential to develop linkages and pathways and thereby cross some of these boundaries. In many ways, this process is well underway in the learning and research spaces, and digital technology is of course also increasingly an integral part of employment.

## **Is a focus on employment too narrow?**

### **The VET - Higher Education nexus**

Through policies to recruit, retain and advance Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff at the Institute to the main business of providing learning experiences and qualifications of market value to its students, the Institute has remained committed to supporting pathways into and through employment for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. Yet it is the nature and form of ‘supportive pathways’ and the assumptions and values that might be attached to various real and imagined destinations that must continue to be discussed and explored as the Institute moves forward.

The Institute does not exist in a vacuum and is situated in a larger context where the purpose and value of ‘education’ is heavily influenced by economic directions and labour-market policies and priorities. Getting individuals ready for economic participation through either developing competency in work-related skills, or broadening the skills of those already in the work-force, is the underlying aim of most educational and training programs, including those developed and delivered by the Institute. Engineering and supporting pathways into and

through employment for Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander people is seen as the key response to addressing not only financial inequities but also improving indicators of individual and community wellbeing (McRae-Williams & Guenther, 2012). The responsibility for engineering and supporting pathways into employment is firmly positioned within the Vocational Education and Training sector, as well as to a large extent, the higher education sector.

Following linear and causal pathways through formal education into work, achieving (economic) independence and accumulating wealth have become the most virtuous and legitimate aspirations and representations of success in this dominant cultural frame (McRae-Williams, 2014). At the same time increasingly the role of education systems in enacting such pathways are understood through the standardisation of approaches to testing, professional standards and curriculum (Guenther, Bat, & Osborne, 2013). Pathway engineering in such a frame, can hardly avoid privileging a certain kind of individual and conferring legitimacy to only a limited number of journeys with predefined destinations (McRae-Williams & Guenther, 2014).

Robinson (2011) has highlighted the risks of such education reforms, based as they are on linear assumptions of market supply and demand. He argues that such reforms approach pathways through education and employment and into the future as mechanistic and a process of creating standardised products. It is a process, he argues, which dangerously inhibits creativity through ignoring diversity among learners and subsequently constraining economic innovation and potential. For Batchelor Institute to continue to provide a space that privileges and respects Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander knowledges, perspectives and identities with the ultimately goal of empowerment, it cannot simply focus on and direct its activities to the production of 'standardised' or 'normalised' workers for labour-market engagement. Rather an exciting future for the Institute will involve an openness and active

engagement with established, but also creative and innovative, pathways to economic participation that amplify Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander peoples' strengths. By developing and nurturing common ground where new economic potentialities can germinate and evolve, the Institute will not simply contribute to increasing employment outcomes but may work to disrupt regimes of power that continue to inhibit Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander empowerment and the associated respect for difference and diversity.

## **Conclusion**

Looking into the future of Batchelor Institute from various angles, as we have done in this chapter, it becomes clear that the role of the Institute continues to evolve, and so it should be. As many of the chapters in this book show, Batchelor Institute has always been a contested space, and again, this is how it should be, as contested spaces can be very productive spaces. The key element that makes it a productive space is Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander control over the agenda of the Institute, for this is the element that makes it 'our place'. The biggest threat to the Institute would be a lack of control over the agenda, and indeed this threat has surfaced at various times during the past 40 years, and it requires continuous vigilance to keep it at bay. None of this is to suggest that the Institute should have a narrow or inward-looking focus; quite the opposite, it benefits from a very inclusive approach to education and research, and the future directions as outlined in this chapter, are testament to that, as the Institute look internationally and in cyberspace to broaden its scope. However, Batchelor Institute is unique because its agenda is controlled by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, and this defines its unique position to grow and strengthen into the future and to serve the communities it knows best.

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