

GUEST EDITORS' INTRODUCTION



Knowledge Intersections: Exploring the Research of Central Australia

Lisa Hall and John Guenther 

Batchelor Institute, Batchelor, Australia

KEYWORDS Intercultural research practices; indigenous knowledges; knowledge intersections; inter-epistemology; interculturality; education; central Australia

The papers in this issue emerged from the inaugural Knowledge Intersections Research Symposium held in May 2017 at the Desert Peoples Centre campus of Batchelor Institute of Indigenous Tertiary Education located in Alice Springs, Australia. The theme 'Knowledge Intersections' was adopted for the research symposium and has continued into this volume. The symposium was held in conjunction with the 2017 Northern Territory (NT) Writers' Festival, which had the theme of 'Crossings | *Iwerre-Atherre*'. The language in the title came from local Arrernte people who interpreted crossings as *iwerre-atherre*, meaning two roads meeting, neither blocking nor erasing the other; two-way learning or travelling together.

Each of the papers included in this special edition explores how local researchers and the research work they are doing reflect these ideas of 'crossings' and 'knowledge intersections'. Contributors were challenged to reflect on these two questions;

- How can/does research help create intersections or meeting points for knowledge systems, without one blocking or erasing the other?
- How does two-way learning happen in research and how does it help us to travel together?

Both the symposium and this subsequent special issue came about out of a desire to showcase and share the variety of research work being done across the central Australian region. It was also an opportunity to explore the 'Knowledge Intersections' to be found across and between this work. Together these papers provide an ongoing way of engaging with and exploring the intersections of knowledge happening in research in many of the remote and rural spaces of Australia.

Batchelor Institute PhD candidate, Majon Williamson-Kefu, begins the issue with her reflection on the epiphanic moments that informed her choice to undertake a PhD and examines how this informs the place from which she engages with her research. She explores the insider/outsider role of an Aboriginal researcher and ultimately claims a research standpoint as a 'dynamic inbetween'. The discussion explores how this reflective process influenced and impacted her research process. In her work we see how her

position as a 'dynamic inbetweener' meant that she in fact embodied the point of intersection between knowledges.

The next papers explore the intersection of knowledges in formal education settings. Strangeways and Papatraianou examine knowledge intersections in a school context; this time in a remote school in central Australia. Their study focuses on teacher resilience. In particular, at narrative and art-based approaches to resilience inquiry in order to explore understandings of resilience that contest western constructions. At the centre of the paper is the case of one Arrernte teacher from central Australia. The study examines how the visual and the spatial intersect in this teacher's meaning-making. The paper invites us to embrace uncertainty, ambiguity and contingency in the places where knowledges intersect.

The paper by Benveniste and others explores boarding schools in Australia as a site of knowledge intersection but also as a place of differential and often race-based power interventions. The study is important because of the high number of Aboriginal students from remote and very remote communities who attend boarding schools in Australia. The study uses Critical Race Theory as mechanism to examine the ways that knowledge intersects for Aboriginal students, their families, and communities; using the themes of rules, routines, discipline and relationships. The impacts of these race/power interventions have important learning and wellbeing implications for these students.

Osborne and his coauthors offer a study based in the tertiary education sector. Their paper looks for intersections between western and Indigenous knowledge in relation to Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (STEM) education in Higher Education. The authors explore how students from remote Aboriginal communities might be more engaged and participate in greater numbers if courses were grounded in the dual epistemological spaces. Furthermore the study argues for more than recognition of different knowledges but rather for the creation of spaces where locally generated Indigenous knowledge can meaningfully intersect with the 'official knowledge' of mainstream universities. The authors note however, that this must be done cognizant of the risks and the inherent power relationships within and between knowledges.

The middle section of this issue explores how knowledges can intersect through collaboration. The paper by Curran, Martin and Carew describes a collaborative intercultural book production project. The detailed account of how the project was undertaken highlights important ethical considerations that demonstrate how traditional knowledge can be represented in ways that reflect the agentic leadership of Warlpiri people. However, there is a degree of reflexive critique that emerges from the non-Indigenous research processes which support the project, highlighting the potential risks associated with this kind of intercultural work, particularly in terms of power. Nevertheless, the production of a 'modern' representation of traditional Warlpiri songs and the knowledge they contain, is a testament to the shared power that inheres in the relationships between the collaborators.

Similar to Curran et al., Hall's description of collaborative research work demonstrates how a university-based research project can translate into outcomes of value to Aboriginal teachers in central Australia. Hall describes a research process, conducted 'in good faith' with her collaborators, that produces knowledge generatively at the intersection of Aboriginal and non-Indigenous cultures. The context of this work is important: located in remote communities, but within the hegemonic domain of western schooling. The tools

of decolonisation that she describes in terms of storytelling, disconcertment and dialogue provide pragmatic examples for researchers, teachers and educational bureaucrats who want to see better outcomes for students, schools and communities in remote contexts. In the context of educational policies that focus on partnerships between schools, communities and parents, this article provides a useful theoretical and practical base.

Lovell and Wallace also describe their long term collaboration and how this informed their specific work on a piece of intercultural arts-based research. Together they explore the idea of research data as well as important methodological questions. At the centre of the study is Wallace's communication of the relationships of her homelands as a system of knowledge through her extensive artwork. The paper proposes a formative research framework to guide research through points of intercultural and methodological intersection.

The issue is rounded out by Morrison's exploration of the intersection between people, place and story. Morrison's research recounts six historical accounts of intercultural encounters from the 1860s to the 2000s in a series of 'walking stories'. His description of these encounters as 'a milieu of interpenetrating social worlds' highlights the contested nature of contact and the enduring perception of central Australia as a 'frontier' rather than a place to call home. Nevertheless, Morrison suggests that a resurgence in 'songlines' as an alternative to the frontier narrative offers hope that a different story can emerge from intercultural encounters. The lessons from history are important for contemporary thinking, and this is highlighted in his analysis of the 'Intervention era' – while on the one hand political discourses offer the promise of 'boundless possible'¹ as a new narrative, we might ask whether this represents a frontier narrative, or a narrative that calls central Australia a place to call home.

The papers in this issue represent the diversity of how research can help to create intersections or meeting points for knowledge systems. They offer insight into the points of intersection that happen within formal education settings such as schools and tertiary settings. However these studies also come with a warning about the power relationships and the risk of one knowledge system blocking or erasing the other. Other papers within the issue offer a way forward for research wanting to remain conscious of and actively work to dismantle such power relationships. These papers point towards collaborative and decolonising research methodologies, practices and ethical considerations that offer ways of doing intercultural research that welcomes the two-way learning that can and should happen in research. Finally this issue prompts us to reflect on our own standpoints as researchers and our relationship to place and invites us to travel together in research spaces that seek intersection.

We hope you enjoy reading it.

Note

1. <http://www.abc.net.au/news/2018-08-20/boundless-possible-tourism-northern-territory/10143652>.

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the authors.

Notes on contributors

Lisa Hall Although she grew up north of Melbourne, Lisa was lured to the blue skies and red dirt of Central Australia almost 20 years ago and has lived and worked in education in remote communities throughout the desert. For the past 7 years Lisa has also worked for Batchelor Institute of Indigenous Tertiary Education as a Lecturer in the Preparation for Tertiary Success (PTS) course. In 2016 she completed her PhD 'Moving Deeper into Difference – Developing meaningful and effective pathways into teacher education for Indigenous adults from remote communities' through Charles Darwin University. Her research speciality is in qualitative methodologies with a particular interest in narrative methodology and its capacity to facilitate collaborative and generative research processes. Lisa has also been exploring decolonising methodologies and ethical research practices. Her theoretical strengths are in the areas of Critical Race Theory, post-colonial theory, settler colonial theory, whiteness theory, and collectivist theory.

John Guenther Over the last 10 years John has conducted research and evaluation projects which have focused on remote contexts, particularly in the Northern Territory of Australia. A recurring theme in all his work is the importance of learning, whether it be for adults, young people or children. He is also interested in education systems and their impact on learning. In recent work on remote education systems a focus has been on the importance of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander knowledge systems and their accompanying epistemologies, ontologies, axiologies and cosmologies. Understanding the interface between cultures in the 'red dirt' context of schooling in remote communities has also been a key concern. John prefers to use mixed methods approaches where the powerful combination of qualitative and quantitative data can be used for transformative purposes.

ORCID

John Guenther  <http://orcid.org/0000-0002-0080-1698>