



## **Indigenous Voice: a work-integrated learning case study in journalism education**

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**Indigenous Voice: a work integrated learning case study in Journalism education**  
***Heather Stewart, Michael Meadows, Leo Bowman, Kitty van Vuuren and Pauline Mulligan***

**Abstract**

The continuing misrepresentation of Indigenous affairs in the Australian media suggests that journalists are still finding it difficult to come to terms with more effective ways of doing their jobs. The many hundreds of students who graduate from Journalism programs across Australia represent an opportunity to at least challenge the predominant methods and strategies. But how prepared are our journalism graduates for working with Indigenous issues? This paper explores the processes involved in an intensive reporting practice course held at the University of Queensland mid-2009. The course aimed to raise journalism students' awareness of some of the issues involved as well as enabling them to interact and work with personnel from the Brisbane Indigenous media community, 98.9 FM, the National Indigenous Radio Service, SBS, and the ABC. The findings suggest that such structured programs have a significant impact on changing students' perceptions of, and approaches to, their role as journalists.

# Indigenous Voice: a work integrated learning case study in Journalism education

## Introduction

Australia has a long history of mainstream media misrepresentation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Island people, framed during the early period of colonisation. Although contemporary media coverage of Indigenous affairs does allow a space for some positive images — sometimes providing important contextual information for audiences who use media as their sole source of information about such issues — overall, the tenor remains one which defines Indigenous people as problems; almost always negative and usually associated with anti-social activities (Jakubowicz and Seneviratne 1996; Hippocrates et al 1996; Meadows and van Vuuren 1998; Meadows 2001; Ang et al 2002: 8; Meadows and Molnar 2002).

In a direct response to this, there is evidence globally of increasing levels of Indigenous media production, offering alternative ideas and assumptions about the world, particularly themselves. Albeit positioned largely on the periphery of the mainstream, these Indigenous, community-based public spheres enable their audiences to make sense of their own places and identities within broader society while at the same time offering a powerful critique of mainstream media processes (Roth and Valaskakis 1989; Meadows 1993; 2001; Rankine and McCreanor 2004; Wilson and Stewart 2008; Forde, Foxwell and Meadows 2009). This suggests the importance of creating and strengthening alliances between Indigenous and non-Indigenous media producers and their audiences. This was a key objective that led to the establishment of a media education project called *Indigenous Voice*.

Timed to coincide with the week-long annual celebration of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures organized by the National Aboriginal and Islander Observance Day Committee (NAIDOC), the course was established in March 2009, at the University of Queensland School of Journalism and Communication, in collaboration with the university's Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies Unit. Termed the NAIDOC Course, it was funded through the university's Higher Education Equity Support Program.

Evidence of continuing misrepresentation of Indigenous affairs in the Australian media indicated there could be benefits in getting together a group of people from the media industry, university and Indigenous community sectors to explore understandings of Indigenous affairs and the roles played by various participants. In addition, the NAIDOC Course was designed around a work-integrated learning model for journalism students, supported by these sectors to engage student journalists in critically reflecting on applied practices in covering Indigenous issues. Work-integrated-learning or WIL, is a concept that is growing in stature and importance across the Australian tertiary education sector as increasing numbers of students are placed in 'real world' workplace situations for credit towards their degrees (Billett 2009a; 2009b; 2009c). WIL is not simply 'work experience' although it can include this as an element. It is a much more structured consideration of the 'relational interdependence between the affordance of the workplace and the engagement of workers' (Billett 2008, 232) — in other words, it places a radical emphasis on the processes involved in learning in a workplace setting

and enhancing opportunities for these to occur. Early investigations on student experiences of WIL suggest that they learn as much about themselves as they do about the media industry in which they undertake an internship/placement (Forde and Meadows 2010). WIL also offers an important moment during which to explore the kinds of knowledge and the extent, duration and range of experiences required for students to apply effective practice in a particular workplace setting (Billett 2009a; 2009b; Forde and Meadows 2010). The importance of maintaining an active relationship between stakeholders — producers (i.e. student journalists), media industries and education institutions — in terms of curriculum design and students' personal development has been identified by several studies (Bowman and Lund 2007; Forde and Meadows 2010).

In this case, the inaugural NAIDOC course – a 10-day intensive journalism and cross-cultural awareness internship — was designed to replace a more conventional industry WIL placement by engaging students in reporting on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander affairs during the 2009 NAIDOC Week in Brisbane, the national host for the event. Rather than students going to industry, it was a case of the reverse, with experienced industry practitioners coming to the students' workplace with the aim of producing appropriate material suitable for publication.

Until 2009, the University of Queensland's School of Journalism and Communication — like most of the other 20 or so journalism programs around Australia — had no specific focus on how journalism graduates might cover Indigenous issues. The project set out to explore whether an intensive WIL experience, such as that offered by the NAIDOC course, could enhance student engagement to generate informed coverage about Indigenous issues. What impact might this have on students' world views? The course aimed to enhance students' cross-cultural awareness and reporting skills with regard to Indigenous affairs. Our research problem revolved around the impact of such a course on students' experiences in engaging with this often contentious area.

### **Journalism and its 'accidental audiences'**

As suggested in our introduction, it is clear that Australian journalism has been and remains complicit in creating and sustaining the current environment of uncertainty and division in Australian race relations through its systematic management of information. If media are important cultural resources, then it remains crucial to explore the nature of journalism practices to reveal insights into the processes by which meaning is constructed. While speaking primarily about the experiences of African Americans, Gandy (1998, viii) observes that it is important to continue to investigate ways in which media 'fail to perform responsibly as an agent of its minority consumers'. Media continue to consider minorities—including Indigenous peoples—as an 'accidental audience'. But he acknowledges (1998, 3) that it is a 'complex of inequalities' that has contributed to the inability of minorities to speak out against the constraints inherent in the structure of privilege that defines dominant cultures. Stereotypes, or 'distillations of complexity' (Gandy 1998, 5), continue to define Indigenous people in Australia. Noted Australian anthropologist W. E. H. Stanner (1977) has observed that

Aboriginal Australians have been framed largely within a 'history of indifference'. There is little evidence of the existence of notions of Indigenous identity, for example, constructed through real dialogue between Indigenous and non-Indigenous people—and very little evidence of opportunities for such a dialogue to develop. The role played by the media and journalism in this process of cultural management is clear, as Gandy (1998: 155) suggests:

[It] takes place through a multidimensional structure of routinized relationships that are governed by well-structured systems of beliefs and opinions. Those beliefs and opinions are generated, integrated into cognitive structures and reinforced by direct and indirect experiences. The mass media are the primary source of those indirect or mediated experiences.

As a key cultural resource—and most often, the only source of information about ideas of race relations—the media (and journalists) since first contact have fulfilled a key ideological role in framing Indigenous people in particular ways. The images have ranged from those of the noble and the ignoble savage, through assimilationist and paternalistic perspectives, superseded by the 'Aboriginal problem' stemming from the emergence of land rights struggles from the 1960s. The 'rights' debate re-emerged in the 1990s following the High Court cases around Native Title. This pattern bears a striking similarity to the stereotyping, patronizing, romanticizing, and ignorance identified by Weston (1996, 163) in her extensive study of press images of Native North Americans. On both continents, identity has been constructed as a constrained stereotype, largely defined by non-Indigenous people who have had little to do with Indigenous people. While there have been some notable departures, the overall tenor of media representation thus far has focused—and, sadly, continues to focus—on conflict and difference.

Langton underlines the importance of media in the formation of identity and suggests three ways in which this process occurs: through Indigenous people seeing themselves in terms of their kinship relations; through observations by non-Indigenous people who have no real contact with the Indigenous world (producing the prevailing mainstream media stereotypes); and a third, more dynamic process as the result of dialogue between Indigenous and non-Indigenous people. This last shared concept of identity is the most useful because it is sustainable and relates more closely to the dynamic nature of culture (Langton 1993). It has clear implications for journalism practices and, specifically for our discussion here, how student journalists might begin to critically engage with such issues.

Some have argued that Australia's cultural identity is inextricably bound up with the idea of 'Indigeness'—in other words, that the very notion of Aboriginality embodies the 'vital elements' absent in settler Australian culture (Attwood 1989, xxv). But evidence of an inability to come to terms with such issues abounds. A study of media coverage of *Bringing Them Home*, the 1997 *Report of the National Inquiry into the Separation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children from their Families*, reveals an overwhelmingly 'positive' emphasis on stories about the inquiry. The study estimates that media coverage represented the equivalent of advertising worth A\$12–18 million. The study found that the terms 'stolen generation' and 'stolen children' are 'probably understood by most people in Australia' following coverage of the inquiry and the subsequent report launch (Smythe and Associates 1998, vii). But at around the same

time, the federal government verbally and institutionally attacked the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission (ATSIC), ordering an audit of its operations, and shifting responsibility for its programs to other government-funded departments, leading to its eventual demise. Perhaps this is an example of the tortured processes of 'governmentality' in relation to Indigenous affairs that oscillate uneasily between benign neglect and congenital failure (Kidd 1997).

The media fulfill a role in providing simplistic, commonsense explanations for questions and events where more complex and contextual answers often seem more appropriate. It is 'common sense' that is the basis for the routine practices that reinforce and reproduce racist structures (Gramsci 1988; Gandy 1998, 238). Journalists seek closure, easy resolutions, something that can be told in half a dozen paragraphs or in a six-second sound bite. But life is not like that. A conspiracy, by journalists, their sources, or proprietors seems a nonsensical explanation—there are simply too many places where things could go wrong—and yet the powerful impression of media representation that privileges the dominant culture persists. The mass media continue to play a central role in the process of transforming traditional guidelines and criteria used to determine group membership. But, as Dower (1986, 13) reminds us, while some transformations might have taken place, stereotypes are not necessarily dispelled: 'They remain latent, capable of being revived by both sides in times of crisis and tension.' At the time of writing, the 'spectre' of asylum seekers arriving uncontrolled in boatloads has dominated mainstream media coverage of the issue despite the fact that groups arriving by boat make up a tiny fraction of all asylum seekers entering Australia (Phillips and Spinks 2010).

The ease with which stereotypes can prevail is perhaps the most compelling reason to continue to examine the nature of journalistic practices that produce particular ideas and assumptions about Indigenous people and their affairs. It is also a compelling reason to explore ways of establishing a dialogue between Indigenous and non-Indigenous people — practitioners and audiences alike — based on an expectation of improved cross-cultural understanding. And that is precisely how the *Indigenous Voice* project has been framed.

## **Research methods**

The NAIDOC Course involved a group of undergraduate and postgraduate journalism students each exploring five story ideas about Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander issues during a 10-day WIL journalism intensive. In a day-long workshop, the stories were pitched to industry professionals and students recorded a video diary about what they learnt from the feedback. Over the next few days, students engaged in cultural sensitivity training with experienced Indigenous community and industry personnel before applying their skills to gather information for their proposed news and current affairs stories. The entire learning process was documented by each student in a video diary. With support and mentoring in the field from industry professionals, Indigenous community representatives and education mentors, they gathered the raw material for their stories, prepared their scripts and received editorial input from the industry

professionals. The student story formats were multi-platform with more than one media outlet in mind.

This process helped students' understanding of the conflicts between editorial charters and industry audience expectations versus reporters' experiences and knowledge of the stories in the field through to the end product. By re-purposing the same story for multiple outlets, students experienced different ways in which the same story could be told and presented and then were able to reflect on its significance. This had the potential to have a significant impact on their world view as they learned by doing. Finally, students participated in a live outside broadcast as a team during NAIDOC Day followed by a peer reviewed forum which provided further insight into their learning experiences.

The lack of enrolment of Indigenous students in higher education is well documented and is evident in a lack of Indigenous engagement in Journalism and Communication courses at the University of Queensland (Anderson et al 2008). Apart from a few notable exceptions, this is the norm for most journalism programs in Australia. It has national implications for Australian journalism and communication studies as Indigenous Australians are simply not visible in mainstream media. This project sought to address this in several ways: by developing a specialist Indigenous journalism and communication strand; by facilitating rapid engagement and retention of Indigenous students in the University of Queensland's School of Journalism and Communication by building a new relationship with our industry and education partners; and by networking with new industry and education partners nationally and Internationally.

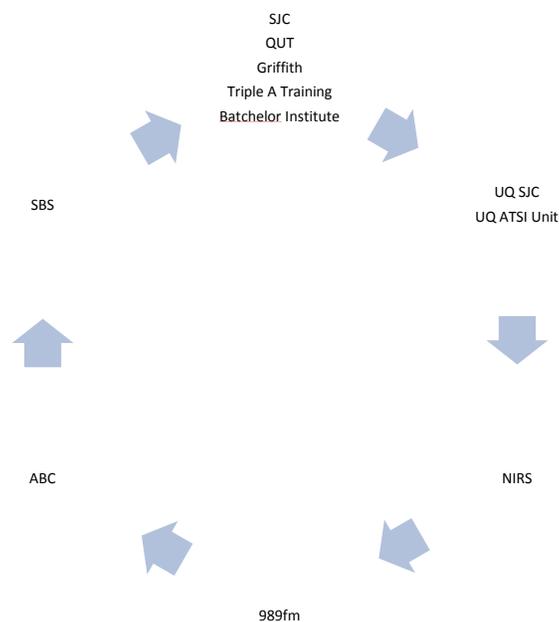
Data was gathered using the following methods:

- Participant observation of the teaching and learning processes using video, still photographs and field notes;
- Questionnaires administered before and after the course to gauge changes in attitude;
- Two student video diaries recorded — the first after an initial 'industry day' where media professionals engaged with students on various levels and the second that cumulatively documented students' progress and reflections;
- A reflective essay in which students contextualised their learning experiences using relevant literature; and
- Students' journalism work products.

The news and current affairs stories created by students during the course centered around the 2009 NAIDOC theme, 'Honoring our Elders, Nurturing our Youth'. On the final day of NAIDOC Week at celebrations held in Brisbane's Musgrave Park, stories gathered by students were broadcast on National Indigenous Radio Service (NIRS) news bulletins and featured in a 55 minute long podcast of a special NAIDOC program on the NIRS site before the program had finished going to air. In addition, images gathered by students were uploaded to the project's photo gallery and a 14-minute feature was broadcast on SBS Radio. Students also participated in a live outside broadcast run by Brisbane's first Indigenous community radio station, 98.9 FM. Student material was posted on a purpose-built website: [www.indigenousvoice.com.au](http://www.indigenousvoice.com.au). 50 interviews were conducted in the 14-hour period from 7am to 9pm during the day-long

NAIDOC event, from which 23 audio segments were produced and posted through online forums for broadcast on 98.9 FM and were made available for NIRS, SBS and ABC. Photographs, digital stories and diaries were uploaded to the site as well as copies of the live-to-air crosses from students.

Participants included 18 mostly undergraduate journalism students from four education institutions: University of Queensland, Queensland University of Technology (QUT), and Griffith University. In addition, students undertaking a Triple A Training Certificate in Radio Broadcasting students were also involved with half of these of Aboriginal or Torres Strait islander descent. This provided another important cross-cultural element for all students. The university students were at the end of their programs of study and were technically and editorially proficient before they started the project.



**Figure 1.**

The learning module was aligned with four Industry outlets — ABC, SBS, NIRS and 98.9 FM — and sought support and guidance from the University of Queensland Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies unit (see Figure 1). Industry mentors representing the project partners attended an industry day, briefing the students. Students pitched five real story ideas to the industry team and were then charged with the task of delivering this material to the respective outlets for national broadcast.

Students prepared five multi-media Indigenous story outlines and following the Industry presentations pitched these to Industry mentors. On the second day of the intensive, students recorded a video diary about their initial experiences and completed a

questionnaire designed to assess their understanding of cultural sensitivity, level of experience regarding coverage of Indigenous Issues. This was followed by a two-hour intensive cultural sensitivity session. On days three to five, students went out into the field and began covering their stories, documenting progress in their video diaries. Four students elected to travel outside Brisbane to gather editorial content. One student took a week to travel independently to Bundaberg and Rockhampton for a series of stories; three travelled to Stradbroke Island and one student travelled to Toowoomba. Story content for the project was wrapped up in the second week in the form of radio news and features and TV stories. Students started their final day of the intensive at 0700 on location at the NAIDOC Family Fun Day in Musgrave Park in Brisbane and recorded interviews with visitors. They were tasked to find Indigenous content and edit it in the field.

Students were evaluated through their responses to pre and post course semi-structured questionnaires, student feedback, a survey and self-reflective essay, coursework and video diary analysis, and peer-reflective forum on the final day. The forum was drawn from the idea of the 'cooperative seminar' (Grubb and Badway, 1999), a key element in cooperative education (Smollins, 1999). Based on Grubb and Badway's notion, a focus group discussion involving course participants using a semi-structured discussion framework enabled data to be recorded. This process helped students to compose their final video diaries, prompting participants to think about issues such as the meaning of everyday engagements with Indigenous people and affairs and to articulate their own interpretations. It encouraged them to think through broad theoretical concepts related to their recent industry or practical experiences and to gain insight into the relationships between themselves, their workplaces, Indigenous affairs, and society generally. It also encouraged students to evaluate and better understand how career decisions shaped their practical experiences (Grubb and Badway, 1999).

## **Findings**

This project enhanced student engagement defined as students' involvement in activities and conditions linked with high-quality learning. As we suggested earlier, in practice-orientated disciplines such as journalism, nursing, engineering, medicine and law there is an increasing focus nationally on the notion of 'work integrated learning'. This is of particular relevance to journalism graduates because it offers opportunities for them to engage in learning situations in the 'real world'. Employer expectations in media industries – as in many of the discipline areas already mentioned – is that graduates must be work-ready. As such, a focus on the nature and effectiveness of work integrated learning goes well beyond simple work experience or work placements because it necessitates the identification and application of specific teaching and learning goals and outcomes (Billett 2009a; Forde and Meadows 2010). Student work products were broadcast as a direct result of Industry contact in the intensive teaching mode throughout the experience. Industry mentors were involved from the beginning, in the field, in the production and in the final editorial stage of each item giving students a real-world experience, not necessarily guaranteed in a standard journalism internship placement. Students used current technologies, wrote scripts and edited them using the

latest software applications. These 'real world' outcomes encouraged student engagement from the outset as they were putting their university course skills into practice under the watchful gaze of industry and education mentors and provided students with materials for their professional portfolios. Because the course was an elective, student participants were self-selecting — another significant element that contributed to their high level of engagement. The course gave students direct one-on-one contact with Industry leaders setting up valuable network contacts. It gave them a sense of newsworthiness, timeliness and immediacy essential for graduates seeking employment in the media. Finally, student engagement was enhanced in this project through the peer reflective session at the conclusion of the course as a learning tool fundamental for the work-integrated learning process (Grubb and Badway 1999; Forde and Meadows 2010).

Data from the first student video diaries suggested that they felt they were confronting a steep learning curve on the industry day and many expressed feelings of being 'completely overwhelmed' and 'intimidated' by the task which lay before them. They expressed feelings of shame about their lack of knowledge of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander issues and people and were fearful of meeting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and interviewing them in case they 'got it wrong'. All expressed a genuine commitment to learning more and immersing themselves in the project and were grateful the course had been offered. This observation by one student journalist reflected the thoughts of many:

I believed that I was not racist. However, throughout the study and interviews of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander issues, I was painfully made aware of how much I had been influenced by media coverage and publications.

Data from the second video diaries was most compelling when students who had a great deal of experience in the tools of journalism found it came to naught when the sources did not want to continue with the story. They found contact with some Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander sources frustrating and confusing because they could not engineer their material as they would with a non Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander source. But as the project proceeded, students began to find other ways of dealing with this apparent impasse, as this survey participant suggests:

...it did not take me long to break down the stereotypes surrounding the Indigenous population that I believed to be true up until recently. All that I needed to do was to speak to and listen without any preconceived notion of how the story should sound. In that sense, perhaps it should be mandatory for journalists to undertake cross-cultural training or to spend some time as cadets speaking to Indigenous people.

The challenge for many was that some Indigenous sources they had contacted did not turn up at the appointed time, were late or did not return their phone calls. Students acknowledged the need for them to spend more time at the grassroots level with sources to win their trust. Some found this frustrating and abandoned their stories to ensure the success of other projects within the 10-day timeframe. This was as close to real-world deadlines as could be accommodated within the constraints of the project format. One student observed this in response to a survey question:

What I discovered was that in order to make a difference in the future the right steps need to be put into affect now. By focusing on the optimistic side of Indigenous societies, with the power that the mainstream media has, social change can be achieved for the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young generations as they see role models which they too can strive to be like. The power lies within journalists to eradicate this racial stereotype.

Perhaps one of the most important element of work integrated learning where it is carefully structured stems from students learning about themselves through their engagement with 'real world' processes (Forde and Meadows 2010). The NAIDOC course revealed a similar responses from participants. And it perhaps here that the course can make its strongest claims to impacting on the world views of those who took part. During the 10-day intensive, most student participants expressed alarm at not only the parlous state in which most Indigenous people continue to live but also their own lack of awareness of this situation. This student survey response reflected the thoughts of many:

I believed that I was not racist. However, throughout the study and interviews of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander issues, I was painfully made aware of how much I had been influenced by media coverage and publications.

A new awareness of the power and role of mainstream media is arguably something that many journalism interns with mainstream media outlets will never experience. If the very issues that identify differential power relations are not evident, then it is likely that students often bedazzled by the 'celebrity status' of a broadcast newsroom, for example, will have no conception of the power relations involved— until perhaps later when a more critical reflection might unveil the 'real world'. But for students undertaking the NAIDOC Course, power relations framed their entire experience, as this comment suggests:

Through talking and spending time with various participants of the local Indigenous community, I came to understand that most of my life I was fed on unfair, stereotypes about the Aborigines. The subjects who were involved with the walk were in contrast to the kind of individuals I first imagined I'd be interviewing.

Another student journalist had a more proactive outlook:

The next generations of journalists need to use fair, balanced and accurate skills to cover Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander issues; and, to educate the audience, adjust the practices, to help bring the media into line with a changing Australian society.

## **Discussion**

So what contribution did this project make to our current understanding of the learning and teaching processes involved? We will consider this in light of five key criteria identified by the Australian Learning and Teaching Council (ALTC) that underpin learning and teaching excellence (ALTC 2009).

### ***Approaches to teaching that influence, motivate and inspire students to learn***

The aim of this project was to offer an alternative to the reality of many students' internship experiences — sitting around observing or making coffee while the reporters do their job in the newsroom or in the field. The NAIDOC Course set out to actively engage students from the start. But most importantly, it set out to challenge their world views about Indigenous affairs and appropriate ways of reporting on them. This immediately set up a critical framework through which all of their prior journalistic experiences — admittedly limited — had to be re-imaged. Instead of watching someone else do it, they had to do it themselves. They were actually doing the job in a real-world but supportive environment and their product was published. Their biography and profiles and work product were raised on the Indigenous Voice site with the view of creating an e-portfolio "Show reel" which could be used for job applications.

As the data suggests, for most, this experience was a challenging and ultimately a defining one. Analysis of the observations — drawn from student video diaries, survey forms and course evaluation feedback — suggests significant shifts in the ways students learned about Indigenous affairs and their role as journalists (Forde and Meadows 2010). The high levels of commitment and enthusiasm displayed, despite a heavy and challenging work regime, is further evidence of their motivation.

### ***Development of curricula and resources that reflect a command of the field***

The project relied on a team of Industry consultants to provide real feedback – students needed to take in that feedback, follow instructions and deliver their material on time and still face the consequences if it was not up to broadcast standards: either it made it on air or they did it again; or students needed to make a choice of whether to abandon their material and start again on something else. Student learning in this course was achieved through a mix of approaches including:

- personal and self-directed learning supported by regular meetings with a supervisor;
- group and team collaborations;
- skilled note taking, reviewing and critiquing of professional literature;
- monitoring related media in various formats;
- experience in the Industry setting during NAIDOC Week and during the visits to NIRS and 98.9 FM;
- observation, interviewing and reading documents (sourcing);
- recording/writing/scripting and editing (constructing);
- undertaking personal and self-directed reading (including listening and debating);
- completing assigned readings;
- regular meetings, phone conferences with Industry mentors;
- successfully completing assessment tasks;
- monitoring and paying attention to the news media, including the Internet; and
- reviewing of course contents and material.

### ***Approaches to assessment and feedback that foster independent learning***

While students received a high level of support for their projects, they were required to devise ways of completing their own recordings, scripting and post production. They recorded a progressive video diary which enabled them to see how far they had come in the 10-day experience and what they learned progressively as the course proceeded.

### ***Respect and support for the development of students as individuals***

The most important part of this experience for students was the self-guided learning and team work which was required to meet the real time deadlines to enable outcomes to be produced. Students had to work together on the outside broadcast production to generate material to meet the appropriate deadlines. In the early stages of the project, almost all students reported feelings of fear or apprehension about dealing with Indigenous people. Based largely on their prior beliefs, often stereotyped and inaccurate. For some, this was a time of high anxiety and needed to be dealt with sensitively by course mentors. And while instructors did not shy away from confrontation in terms of students' existing world views, there was nevertheless a supportive environment created that enabled student to voice their concerns and work towards addressing them.

### ***Scholarly activities that have influenced and enhanced learning and teaching***

Students needed to reflect on the basic journalism principles they had acquired throughout their studies and to be able to comment on how they applied this prior knowledge in the field. Importantly, it enabled them to reflect on how this experience supported their learning and prepared them for the real world. In addition to the learning objectives outlined above which illustrate a command of the field, students participating in the course activities illustrated the following abilities:

- to apply a high level of competency in using necessary recording, editing and broadcasting technologies;
- to critically engage with a variety of research resources, including scholarly journals and the Internet;
- to identify, research, report and present interesting stories relevant to a particular media outlet's audience from an Indigenous perspective;
- to write accurate and concise news copy, to conduct telephone and face-to-face interviews and to edit to industry requirements;
- to process stories from a variety of news sources for publishing online or by other means;
- to demonstrate an understanding of legal and copyright limitations and other media law relevant to the role of the journalist;
- to demonstrate an understanding of the various ethical, cultural and socio-political problems journalists face and ways of overcoming those problems.
- to demonstrate an understanding of the importance of appropriate permissions and community consultation in gathering information;

- to work as part of a small team operating at a high level of expectation and to appropriate deadlines; and
- to critically evaluate their achievements and learning as an individual and as a member of a team.

### **Conclusions:**

There is strong evidence that the ‘relational interdependence’ (Billett 2008, 232) between students, Indigenous participants (including industry professionals), and academic staff created an environment highly conducive to learning. And we suggest that it was the ‘radical emphasis’ on the learning processes involved that enabled such significant outcomes.

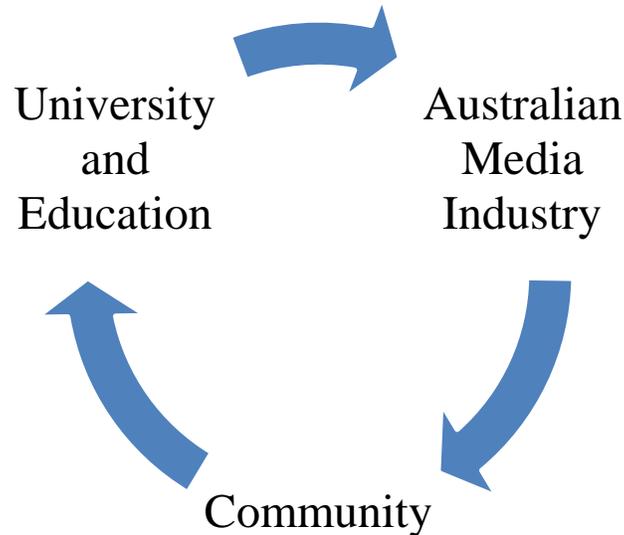
The evidence shows clearly that the course played a significant role in raising students’ levels of cultural sensitivity in relation to Indigenous affairs and people. Some had never really engaged with Indigenous people before undertaking the course. Following completion of the course, several students took up opportunities to work freelance for the National Indigenous News Service — something that would have been unthinkable prior to the experience.

The course provided students with real-world situations where their problem-solving skills were tested and refined contributing to their development as citizens who understand not only their disciplinary and professional knowledge and requirements but also the societal context in which they will perform their professional duties. The heightened levels of awareness of existing media bias in relation to Indigenous affairs is strong evidence of a shift in their understanding of their own role and place in the world — both as individuals and as potential journalists.

Clearly, students’ level of skill in dealing with Indigenous sources and issues was significantly improved as a result of their participation in the NAIDOC Course. Levels of confidence expressed by all students at the end of the course had increased significantly from their initial feelings — a key finding that is supported by more recent research into work integrated learning (Forde and Meadows 2010).

But this is one course amongst thousands of journalism courses being taught around the country. While it is not the only one that deals with Indigenous affairs reporting, it is arguably unique in its approach. It is significant, too, that such courses, where they exist, are offered as electives rather than as a core component of a journalism education suite. This must change. Given the continuing poor understanding of Indigenous affairs in Australia, reflected in generally ill-informed or inaccurate media coverage, the onus is on journalism educators to take the lead. Mainstream media, with the possible exception of government-funded organisations and a handful of commercial producers, see little benefit in changing their existing modus operandi regarding Indigenous people. But if we, as journalism educators, claim to be overseeing programs that are producing ‘good’ journalists, then Indigenous affairs reporting should be at the core of our programs. We have an obligation to do this. Regardless, there is a clear need for a more concerted effort by journalism educators to address the lack of

confidence and skill amongst students reporting on Indigenous affairs as a *core responsibility* (see Figure 2).



**Figure 2.**

The *Indigenous Voice* NAIDOC course addressed a key concern that coverage of Indigenous affairs in Australia remains largely informed by stereotypes that reinforce negative images of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. Our assessment of the course offers an insight into what is possible as well as what we must do to change the way we think about Indigenous affairs in our curriculum. There is no escaping the fact that the course as it was offered in 2009 is very resource intensive. When the course was re-run in 2010, it was modified in some respects to take account of this. At the time of writing, discussions amongst the three participating universities — UQ, QUT and Griffith — have begun to explore a more sustainable cross-institutional approach to build on the achievements of this invaluable experience. Regardless, the model that we have presented here — and perhaps more importantly, the student outcomes we have identified — offer a sound base for future courses that address this gaping void in Australian journalism education.

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