

# Raising awareness of Australian Aboriginal peoples reality: Embedding Aboriginal knowledge in social work education through the use of field experiences

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*Effective social work practice with Aboriginal peoples and communities requires knowledge of operational communication skills and practice methods. In addition, there is also a need for practitioners to be aware of the history surrounding white engagement with Aboriginal communities and their cultures. Indeed, the Australian Association of Social Workers (AASW) acknowledges the importance of social workers practising cultural safety. Engendering knowledge of cultural safety for social work students is the opportunity to listen and talk with Aboriginal people who have experienced the destructive impacts of colonisation and the subsequent disruption to family and community. This article discusses the use of field experiences within a Masters of Social Work (Qualifying) Program (MSW) as an educational method aimed at increasing student awareness of contemporary Aboriginal issues and how to practice effectively and within a culturally safe manner.*

*KeyWords: Aboriginal Australia, social work education, cultural safety, field experiences, blended learning.*

Australia was colonised by Great Britain in the late 18<sup>th</sup> Century. From the outset, the impact on Aboriginal peoples was detrimental on many levels. As has been well documented, this impact has taken many forms, from semi-official extermination (Lake & Reynolds, 2008; Richards, 2008) through to social engineering policies of less

obvious brutality. Colonial policies such as the Assimilation Policy (1897-1965) were underpinned by the “principle of isolation on reserves, and total exclusion of whites” (Australian Human Rights Commission, 1997, para. 8). Reserves or missions, as they were called, were established, the purpose being to remove Aboriginal peoples from their homelands (Kidd, 1997) and, in many cases, remove lighter skinned children from their families for purposes of assimilation (Walker, 1993). These missions were operated with a high degree of surveillance and control, with Aboriginal people having little control over their lives including the lack of freedom to practice their traditional culture and beliefs (King, 2010).

The removal of lighter skinned children during the Stolen Generation era continued until the 1970s (Copeland, 2005). This was a formalised, institutionalised process undertaken for reasons that were considered by many at the time to be in the best interest of the children. In retrospect, these processes have been a source of shame (Schaffer, 2001). Along with other agencies and professions, the social work profession played a large role in the removal of children from their families (AASW, 2004). The effects of the Stolen Generation era impacted enormously on Aboriginal families’ health and well-being, and it is argued that this continues to do so (Healey, 2009). Indeed, Indigenous people still maintain distrust towards the social work and social welfare profession (Briskman, 2007; Gollan & O’Leary, 2009; Green & Baldry, 2008).

The AASW has formally apologised to Aboriginal people for past practices, acknowledging that:

...the historical actions of non-Indigenous social workers as government agents and instruments of government policy, regarding justice, welfare, and health, have contributed to the destabilisation and disempowerment of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and communities (AASW, 2004, p. 21).

However, despite this apology, Indigenous issues continue to be marginalised in social work education (Gair, Miles, & Thomson, 2005). This raises the possibility that graduating students would also marginalise Aboriginal issues in practice, including the recognition of the continuing socio-cultural impacts of Aboriginal people in contemporary society (Harms, et al., 2011). That is, Western social work practice continues to focus on individualistic values, pathology, and solutions as opposed to collective contexts.

Effective practice with Aboriginal peoples and communities must be underpinned by effective educational preparation that considers attitudes, skills, and knowledge (Briskman, 2007; Weaver, 1999). Importantly, challenging stereotypical attitudes, and decolonising Western social work practice methods is imperative. That is, Western social work encapsulates the notions that social workers are the experts and Indigenous people require ‘saving’ (Green & Baldry, 2008). Bennett, Zubrzycki, & Bacon (2011) contend that Indigenous social work practice must include the development of relationships with Aboriginal peoples and communities to further Indigenise practice. Additionally, Harms, et al., (2011) assert that three key areas of knowledge must be

obtained: that of Aboriginal history; Aboriginal culture; and the impacts of social work intervention.

The development of relationships with Aboriginal people and communities as part of graduate training can take several forms. For example, the most common form is practicums whereby students undertake supervised social work practice aimed at preparing them for graduate practice. Field experiences, however, within a social work context appear to have been minimally utilised as an educational and learning tool. More often, research has considered the relevance of field experiences within the science and biology sectors (Peterman, 2008; Rahman & Spafford, 2009), nursing (Sandstrom, 2006), primary and secondary school systems (Anderson, Nielsen, & Nashon, 2009) and programs within international universities (Mongkhonvanit, 2007). In linking with the AASW Australian Social Work Education and Accreditation Standards (2008), field experiences can provide students with a first-hand account of the “ways of knowing, being, and doing” (Martin, 2003, p.71) which the AASW suggests is the most appropriate way of learning social work practice with Aboriginal peoples and communities. That is, communicating with and listening to Aboriginal Elders, practitioners and community members provides a deeper analysis of social work practice through assessing the cultural context, yarning and storying (AASW, 2012, p.23).

The benefits of taking students into the field are evident when linking student experiences with principles of education. Stated benefits in terms of student learning include the provision of natural environments for exploring phenomenon, promotion of ‘real’ methods of observation and hypotheses creation, increased active engagement in learning, enhanced integration of knowledge including past and present knowledge, and support for social learning processes via discussion and cooperative learning (Zoldosova & Prokop, 2006, p.305). This is particularly important when teaching cultural safety to social work students. Cultural safety has been long accepted within the nursing and health field, however, it is now valued within other areas such as the child protection sector (Zon, et al., 2004). Cultural safety firstly requires practitioners to ensure they are cognisant of the service recipients’ cultural background (Papps & Ramsden, 1996). This requires practitioners to go beyond the concepts of cultural sensitivity and awareness, by providing “an environment that is spiritually, socially and emotionally safe, as well as physically safe for people; where there is no assault challenge or denial of their identity, of who they are and what they need. It is about shared respect, shared meaning, shared knowledge and experience of learning together” (Williams, 1999). Importantly, the onus is on the practitioner to be aware of their own attitudinal views of the service recipient, in this context, their views of Aboriginal people (Sue, 2006).

Historically, Aboriginal units have been taught through traditional means, that is, weekly lectures and tutorials. While a valid method of teaching, on-campus teaching gives students no exposure to the lived experience of Aboriginal communities or a chance to interact with community members, except when Aboriginal people are

invited as guest speakers. However, this does not challenge privileged ways of ‘white’ knowing because it takes place in an environment structured to meet standard academic pedagogical requirements. In contrast, field experiences foster challenges to privileged ways of knowing, allowing students to experience, observe and communicate within an Aboriginal community, further contributing to the development of a more holistic insight into the issues faced by Aboriginal people.

As part of the MSW (Qualifying) Program, students are required to undertake a unit focusing on effective social work practice with Aboriginal peoples and communities. The learning outcomes of this unit are for students to:

- Competently argue for the importance of identity and spirituality to the empowerment of Aboriginal communities;
- Ethically practise culturally-safe protocols of communication and respect;
- Challenge societal assumptions of Aboriginal communities;
- Interpret the AASW professional standards; and,
- Apply ethical practice in these diverse settings.

Learning outcomes are linked to the AASW Education and Accreditation Standards (2008), Practice Standards for Social Workers (2003), and the Specific Cross-Cultural Curriculum Content (2008) required by the AASW.

Student demographics within this degree are diverse. Approximately, a third of students possess a social work, human services, or social science undergraduate degree. Similarly, there are varied levels of direct practice experience; some students have practised in the field for up to 20 years or more, while others have very limited experience of one year or less or no experience at all. The remaining two-thirds of Masters students possess degrees in law, nursing, counselling, education and business. In our experience, students who have backgrounds in law and business, in particular, can struggle to recognise and understand the social issues impacting on individuals and communities within a social work context. Furthermore, addressing these social issues is often a foreign concept.

Student learning is guided by a Professional Learning Plan completed at the commencement of the MSW (Qualifying) Program which requires students to reflect on areas of learning needs and goals as they relate to social work practice, and assisting students to focus on particular areas where knowledge or experience may be lacking. Overall, evidence of a lack of experience or knowledge of working with Aboriginal communities has been reflected in these Plans over the three years that the MSW (Qualifying) Program has been taught.

For a majority of students, working with Aboriginal peoples and communities is a major learning deficit in their overall plan, with many students having little knowledge of Aboriginal peoples and fewer having any direct experience within this area on professional and/or personal levels. This finding is reinforced by Moreton-Robinson

(2011) who cites data showing that approximately 91% of white Australians have limited or no contact with Aboriginal people. Moreton-Robinson (2011) further states that the majority of people then gain their understanding of Aboriginal issues through media representations, which are often negative portrayals of the communities (Coffin, 2007). This can lead to stereotyping which continues to be one of the biggest issues in Aboriginal health (Coffin, 2007). As such, ideological interpretations are adopted that are typically far removed from reality and lead to unfounded biases. Furthermore, students have expressed their anxiety and concern about their abilities to work in this area due to a lack of cultural expertise or knowledge.

In order to address these issues mentioned above and to equip students with a more balanced view of Aboriginal communities that would in turn lead to more informed frameworks for practice, the idea of using an up-front and candid experience evolved. It was thought that by giving students the opportunity for a real world experience, student knowledge of Aboriginal issues and practice frameworks would be more informed and less judgemental. As a result, field experiences to an Aboriginal community northwest of Brisbane have taken place over the past three years for MSW (Qualifying) Program students.

Students were able to visit the community and listen to community members and service providers about their experiences and issues in a frank and honest way. Students were able to observe first-hand the hardships and issues that plague many Aboriginal communities, while also hearing about positive change being driven by Aboriginal community members. This first-hand experience provides a rich contextual learning experience that cannot be achieved in a lecture hall at a university. In addition, it illustrates the stark differences in media representations of Aboriginal communities and their lived reality.

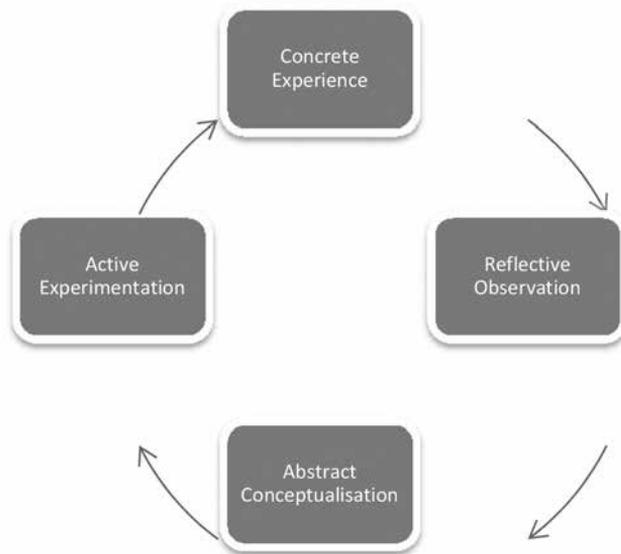
The Aboriginal community that has been visited was the second largest Aboriginal mission in Queensland from 1901 to 1986. The community has a number of social services that are accessible to community members and people external to the community. Agency visits provided students with different methods of practice and practice frameworks, with services primarily being operated under an Aboriginal worldview or perspective.

To further promote student learning, Kolb's Experiential Learning Cycle was endorsed within student assessment. The idea that students would be given a 'real world' experience, be required to reflect on what they had observed and what they had learnt, with supporting literature, was vital to identifying elements of changing attitudes and effectiveness of learning. Furthermore, students then had to plan how they would use their new knowledge in future practice contexts.

## METHODOLOGY

Kolb's Experiential Learning Cycle (Kolb & Kolb, 2005, Richlin, 2006) formed the pedagogical basis for the field experience as an engaged teaching and learning approach. Although sharing similar concepts with PAR (participatory action research), the use of Kolb's experiential learning cycle was applied for specific pedagogical purposes. In the case of the field experience, there were certain student learning outcomes that could only be achieved through engagement and action within the community setting. In this sense, rather than student as researcher type role, the student, immersed in the setting, was expected to learn through doing. This transformative knowledge in turn functions to strengthen students' use of self in practice.

The field experience was used as an intentional and transformative strategy that aligned the in-class, face-to-face interaction with experiential learning. The use of an experiential learning methodology was designed to actively engage students through 'action'. The learning through action premise provided a space for authenticity in the field experience, as many aspects of understanding the lived experience of Aboriginal people in a community context cannot be taught in a traditional class setting. Thus, an anticipated outcome was that students could develop new knowledge about the topic of the lived experience of Aboriginal people in a specific community context. Figure 1 illustrates Kolb's experiential learning cycle experienced by students participating in the field experience.



**Figure 1: Kolb experiential learning cycle (cited in Richlin, 2006)**

In reading Figure 1 in a clockwise direction, the experiential learning cycle relied on *concrete experience* (immersion in the community and being actively engaged in ‘doing’), *reflective observation* (reflecting on key observable insights from the experience, identifying dissonances with established knowledge), *abstract conceptualisation* (evaluating new knowledge, conceptualising the experience and learning’s) and *active experimentation* (integrating and embedding new knowledge into practice framework and applying new knowledge in a real-world practice setting, for example, workplace or placement context) (Richlin, 2006).

The methodology also incorporated socio-cultural constructivism in which students could generate collective insights informed by interactions with peers and significant others, community leaders, and the theoretical literature (Kincheloe, 2005). Such a use of socio-cultural constructivism as a deeper transformational learning tool inspires guided social interaction for developing a shared understanding of multiple lived experiences mediated by the Aboriginal community context. The creation of a shared new knowledge through interaction also functioned to optimise student learning outcomes (Kincheloe, 2005).

In this sense, a community of practice emerges, in which students constructed a new and personalised meaning associated with working with Aboriginal people. The complex interaction between tacit knowledge and active immersion necessitated a seamless process that promoted interest, investment and commitment on the part of the student. From there, any previously held assumptions could then be challenged and reframed. This reframing in turn promotes engagement with, and application of, new knowledge within professional practice settings (Kincheloe, 2005). The last point relates to the embedding element of the overall transformative process. An example of the embedded learning process emerging from experiential learning cycles is depicted in Figure 2.



**Figure 2: Embedded Learning Processes (Richlin, 2006)**

As an evaluation was conducted rather than research, ethics clearance was not needed, however, the National Health and Medical Research Council (NHRMC, 2003) guidelines for working with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Communities were followed including the concepts of reciprocity and respectfulness as the main considerations. That is, assurance was undertaken that the community and the community members would benefit from students visiting the community. The Values and Ethics: Guidelines for Ethical Conduct in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Research (2003) provided principles for reflection in terms of assuring that the field experience was of benefit to all parties and, in particular, the community and community members. The following section outlines some of these principles.

### **Building relationships**

It was fundamental that a solid relationship was built with community from the outset, based on respect and reciprocity. It was deemed essential to acknowledge the community and community members respectfully by initially speaking with an Elder of the community. The unit coordinator has familial links within the community and, as such, was able to establish a firm relationship with the Elder based on a mutual and shared community interests. Discussions were then sought with agency practitioners, who were contacted via the Elder to engender interest in talking with students about the work they do and their practice methods.

Background knowledge was provided for both students and academics prior to attending the field experience. Information included the history of the community (its Mission status, the diversity of the First Peoples who were removed to the community, the dormitory system and the rules and regulations imposed on community members), current demographics, the range of social issues and health issues present, and the types of programs and agencies available in the community to address these social issues. Students were also encouraged to undertake their own research about the community and share with their peers.

It was also deemed important to ensure we gave back to the community. On a personal level, the Elder of the community acknowledged the importance of non-Indigenous people visiting the community and gaining an understanding of the past, in terms of the social issues currently experienced by community members (personal communication, May 9, 2012). This suggests that both the Elder and the unit coordinator, as an Aboriginal person with an academic background, held a shared vision of educating non-Indigenous people about Aboriginal peoples and communities that gave a more truthful and authentic version of the issues faced by Aboriginal peoples and their communities. This version was in contrast to perspectives often generated from external community sources such as the media. He insisted that students asked questions and gave them a safe social place in which to do this. The outcome was a frank and open discussion about his and his communities' experiences and the issues faced, with students actively participating and thus gaining firsthand information not accessible on campus.

As part of the field experience and in the spirit of reciprocity for hosting the student group, students were asked to support local businesses for refreshments. In addition, they were also asked to provide a small monetary donation to the local museum and the school as a gesture of appreciation for knowledge shared. In a broader context, the university has yet to formalise a relationship with the community, though student practicums have occurred with community. Rather, this relationship has been based on one of the first author's personal community attachment and commitment. It is acknowledged that if the university aspires to continue this relationship, a formal Memorandum of Understanding must at least be worked towards in keeping within the context of collaboration with Aboriginal communities.

In order to appraise whether students obtained valued knowledge from being in the field, qualitative feedback was conducted through the use of a unit-based natural group with informal conversation while travelling from the field education site and through the use of a questionnaire that used open-ended questions. A workshop was held two weeks after the field experience to allow students who were unable to attend the field experience, engage in insightful discussion of the experiences of attendees. Feedback was also forwarded to the Elder of the community and other community members to demonstrate the extent of awareness and realisation students gained from this experience. Additionally, students were able to use the field experience as a precursor to the unit assessment whereby an analysis of a social issue impacting on Aboriginal peoples and communities was undertaken, including consideration of how students own practice with community members can be achieved effectively.

## **FINDINGS**

The findings indicate that field experiences to Aboriginal communities are a worthwhile social work educational teaching method. When used in a blended learning context, field experiences have the ability to increase students own self-awareness, increase socialisation skills with Aboriginal people, and understand the history of Aboriginal colonisation and its impacts to a greater degree.

### **The provision of natural environments for exploring phenomenon**

Student learning was increased within the natural environment, the 'being in the community'. Students initially felt hesitation and uncertainty, unsure of how their own non-Aboriginal presence would be received. None of the students had previously been to an Aboriginal community. When asked what their initial thoughts were about visiting the community, student responses were somewhat mixed:

Fairly hesitant – wasn't sure what to expect but excited to learn something.

I was worried we would be getting around on a bus and looking at the community like we were at the zoo.

Apprehension – what/where we going to see / what would be the response.

On the other hand, students embraced the opportunity:

Very excited as I know one of the ladies who was involved in developing the [Museum] and had heard so much about this. I was very much looking forward to the visit.

Excitement! Heard about [the community] mainly through work re: mental health and suicides. [I] had to maintain contact with staff from the health service. [I] have Murri friends from [the community]. Overall, wanted to know first-hand what it was like and how well they were doing for future contact through work.

This perhaps indicates that students who have had previous engagement with Aboriginal people were less hesitant. The benefits, however, were clearly acknowledged through their feedback in terms of changing views and attitudes of Aboriginal people and communities.

Values and beliefs have been changed. I feel if I had done this in my undergraduate degree, I would have been much more aware of these issues and would have worked on my 'sense of self' earlier.

The naturalistic setting was effective for observing community interactions, with students commenting that 'seeing the community with their own eyes' assisted them to comprehend how much the community had grown despite the Mission history. This effectively challenged students' attitudinal beliefs of how Aboriginal communities are perceived, with a consensus that if a field experience such as this had been undertaken within their undergraduate degree, awareness of Aboriginal issues would have been increased. Importantly, undertaking a field experience in the undergraduate degree would have provided opportunities to 'work on their sense of self' earlier, further influencing their practice.

Indeed, all students participating in the field experience commented on the anger felt after the field experience when recognising the juxtaposition between media portrayals of Aboriginal communities and peoples, and the reality of what they witnessed and heard from Elders in the community. This was particularly so when visiting the primary school. The Close the Gap campaign has focused considerably on increasing school attendance and retention for Aboriginal children, and the effectiveness and success of the methods used at the school to encourage children to attend on a regular basis was clearly noted by the MSW (Qualifying) Program students.

### **Increased active engagement in learning: 'real' methods of observation and hypotheses creation**

Students were quite eager to further their knowledge and understanding of Aboriginal issues and a renewed enthusiasm was evident in an increased desire to work with Aboriginal people and communities in urban, rural and remote contexts. The field experience did provide a more direct approach in their learning in terms of protocols, communication and practice, and the opportunity to discuss practice methods and frameworks with Aboriginal practitioners was, as some students stated, a highlight of the field experience:

To improve the gaps. Although I felt having only met agency workers as opposed to all different community members, my views may be different to the reality of practising directly.

I feel better equipped to work with Aboriginal clients. Feel I better understand the whole story and picture – not just the one imposed on me by my culture.

For a long time I have wanted to do more work with Aboriginal people and communities – I have just not known how. I have visited some communities where I have felt there are important stories to tell. So I'm not sure what or how yet, but I am also aware that I'm a white woman who does not live in the community and the issues around white professional flying/driving in and out. Whatever I do, has to be in true partnership with the local people.

I now have an understanding of the Aboriginal people and their values and beliefs. I would feel more comfortable in supporting people in a manner that is culturally sensitive.

### **Enhances the integration of knowledge including past and present knowledge**

Another goal of the field experience was to integrate past and present knowledge. It was evident that the students' undergraduate degrees did provide some knowledge of Aboriginal issues. However, many students considered that the knowledge they did have did not provide enough basic practice knowledge to undertake practice meaningfully with Aboriginal people. Students commented that the field experience complemented the lecture materials and information provided within this unit, making many students feel more prepared for an Aboriginal practice context. The community has a historical precinct, including a Museum and students were provided a guided tour of the history of the community, including the dormitory system, policies that underpinned the community when it was still a Mission, and the practices imposed on community members by white protectionists. This also had impacts:

The most challenging aspect of the field trip was listening to how the town was under a Superintendent until the late 1950s or 1960s and [people were] classed as criminals due to cultural background.

I feel in a better position to respond to stereotypical and value-laden views and attitudes, but have realised for a long time that the issues are really complex, and that we need to listen to particular stories to understand Aboriginal people's experiences.

This suggests that non-Indigenous social work students feel they have a better understanding of the impacts of the past on Aboriginal peoples and communities, simply by being provided an avenue to engage with Elders, practitioners and community members. This links well with the following section.

### **Support of social learning processes**

In terms of social learning, the field experience enabled students to liaise with Elders in the community on a semi-individual basis. This provided intimate discussion of

the issues within the community and those social issues particularly impacting on community members and their health and well-being. Conversations with agency practitioners heightened student's awareness of Indigenous practice frameworks and methods of interacting and supporting Aboriginal people:

I want to practice in rural mental health, and the fact that the hospital there has their own mental health ward has prompted me to do placement there.

Yes I would like the opportunity to work with Aboriginal people and within Aboriginal communities. I have had some opportunities do to this as a worker and really enjoyed this.

This suggests that students feel more confident in interacting within a social work context with Aboriginal peoples and communities, be it they also acknowledge that their learning is still at the beginning stages.

The response from students has provided the beneficial contexts of field experiences in terms of students seeing the sometimes difficult realities that Aboriginal communities face. Yet, students also recognised the pride expressed by the Elders, and the resilience and strengths of the community:

The level of attachment to 'place' of [our host] – even though this was a place he was taken from his family – where huge injustices have been imposed on Aboriginal people.

Seeing from my own eyes made me think how [the] community is growing, thriving.

The strong sense of community. Although only there for a day I could just feel it! That's so powerful.

Again, student understanding of the impacts of the past, but also the resilience of the community was recognised and appreciated.

The following section discusses the overall benefits of field experiences to Aboriginal communities. However, it is recognised that this is only the beginning of the learning process in terms of future practitioners supporting and advocating for Aboriginal peoples.

## **DISCUSSION**

The evidence from the qualitative survey and informal discussions with students highlights the effectiveness of field experiences as a learning tool. The field experiences allowed students to take what they had already learned in the classroom and to see this knowledge in a contextual way, in an Aboriginal community. It gave a reality to the lived experience of Aboriginal people in their own environment that was completely foreign to almost all of the students. Hearing first-hand the stories of issues that face Aboriginal peoples on a daily basis, but also hearing stories of strength and commitment of community leaders and service providers who work in this area, provided an invaluable experience. This contextual knowledge has been indispensable

in changing attitudes and preconceived ideas of Aboriginal communities, that is all too often, exacerbated by media representations. Students were challenged and often confronted by what they saw and heard, and were often left feeling a level of discomfort as observers in the community. However, students experienced a greater appreciation of what it is like to be the less dominant group.

For Aboriginal Australians, history is important, and the role of social workers in that history has not been viewed favourably. The exposure of social work students to an Aboriginal community should benefit both parties. Our evaluation was limited to the students themselves, except for one of the author's personal communication with the Elder, however, the results over the first three years of the MSW (Qualifying) Program suggest that the field experiences are promising. There was evidence that the students appreciated the real world experience, and that many students reflected on their experience in terms of its relevance to their future professional career. It appears to have prepared them well for future practice contexts that involve Aboriginal Australians.

In addition to the lack of exposure to Aboriginal people that is common among non-Aboriginal Australians, almost no students had ever visited a similar place, and their brief exposure to this naturalistic experience clearly had several effects consistent with the objectives of their MSW (Qualifying) Program. Students demonstrated an active engagement with learning, including a greater appreciation of the significance of the colonial experience for Aboriginal Australians. Several of them reflected on the challenges they experienced to their attitudes and beliefs in regard to Aboriginal Australians. On these counts, the field experience can be considered successful.

The limitations of the field experience predominantly focused on the length of time spent within the community. The community is several hours drive away from the nearest capital city and, as such, the day extended to 14 hours in length. Some students suggested staying in the community at least overnight, primarily to meet community members. Firstly, this is problematic due to other students' family commitments. Secondly, it highlights the issue that students still do not quite understand the concept of immersing the self into community. That is, to talk with community members requires a committed length of stay so community members build a sense of trust with non-Indigenous people. This allows for further evaluation of the unit as a whole, in terms of additional learning and knowledge requirements.

Despite the limitations discussed, field experiences to Aboriginal communities have the potential to greatly change the personal views and the professional and ethical aspirations of social work students and indeed contribute to changing some of the negative views of social workers held by Aboriginal people. Clear respectful and reciprocal relationships must be negotiated between communities and learning institutions so as not to continue engendering a detached and potentially colonised process of engagement with Aboriginal peoples and communities, especially within the social services domain. In conclusion, provision must be made to provide a learning

context that is culturally safe, respectful, and reciprocal for both community members and social work students.

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