



# Caring in Practice, Caring for Knowledge

SPECIAL COLLECTION:  
LEARNING FROM  
LOCKDOWN

ARTICLE

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## ABSTRACT

This paper positions Open Educational Practices (OEP) as adding significant value to pandemic-era online learning. Much of online learning during Covid was characterised as being low quality, and an emphasis on providing care began to override the impact that reformed pedagogy could have in caring for students. Concepts of Indigenous Knowledge Authority, consent, collaboration, situated knowledge in communities of practice can help to frame how caring pedagogy and cognitive compassion can be cultivated.

This paper shares the redevelopment and evaluation of a unit of learning called Cultural Capabilities amidst *pandemic pedagogy* rhetoric in which care for knowledge and online learning is discussed. The focus of this study was to refine the concept of care and compassion pedagogy whilst developing a sustainable model for caring for knowledge as higher education professionals.

The learning design process and emergent outcomes of the evaluation for learning design are shared. Student feedback showed significant appreciation for the learning design, affective experiences of the deeper learning facilitated by OEP and relational learning. Australian Covid lockdowns allowed for new approaches to open engagement to practical care and compassionate practices for learning and knowledges. This paper argues that successful OEP can be cultivated with cognitive compassion as a focus instead of a panic-induced care narrative for more sustainable caring academic and professional capabilities as we continue to learn online.

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## KEYWORDS:

Indigenous Studies; Cultural Studies; Open Educational Practice (OEP); Learning Design; Developmental evaluation

## TO CITE THIS ARTICLE:

Funk, J. 2021. Caring in Practice, Caring for Knowledge. *Journal of Interactive Media in Education*, 2021(1): 11, pp. 1-14. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.5334/jime.648>

COVID-19 lockdowns presented many challenges for learning and teaching. Among these was the rapid shift to online learning, and how learning is thought of and 'delivered'. This paper shares some findings on the use of open educational practices (OEP) for developing and teaching a unit about cultural capabilities. OEP are conceptualised as not just access to and use of content but multiple entry points to openness (Cronin & Maclaren 2018). OEP in this study are also characterised by 'collaborative practice in which resources are shared by making them openly available, and pedagogical practices are employed which rely on social interaction, knowledge creation, peer-learning, and shared learning practices' (Ehlers 2011: 6). This paper's OEP include freely available readings, collaborative peer review of drafts, open textbook production with students' work, and most significantly, sharing of Indigenous cultural knowledge as the main framework for the unit. This kind of open is not copyright bound but that which enables access to different cultural knowledge systems via *relationship* to knowledge authority in online learning.

This paper highlights a relationship to knowledge and openness that withstood *and* worked with cultural impacts of lockdown pressures and related web-based misinformation. The emphasis of Indigenous Custodianship and Knowledge Authority lays a foundation for collaborative and authentic participation in open practices for everyone involved in learning. This publication presents practices identified as part of a developmental evaluation which investigated the link between OEP, culturally significant issues and the skills OEP can support students with to navigate different cultural contexts with care and cognitive compassion rather than crises-driven reactivity.

## BACKGROUND

### Unit Renovation

The unit in cultural capabilities is a semester-long core unit for all first-year students in our blended delivery institution, having been offered for over 10 years. This renovated version was delivered for the first time in 2020, whilst the university continued its restructure. The main feature of this unit is its centring of senior Indigenous lecturers' cultural frameworks, micro lectures and relational knowledge practices that informed the use of OEP. The INSPIRE Lab and workforce development teams at Charles Darwin University's (CDU's) Northern Institute have also collaborated with Departments of Education, Primary Industries, The Fisheries Research Development Corporation, Aboriginal Corporations, and the Plant Biosecurity Cooperative Research Centre, developing strong authorship methods for use across these policy areas with Indigenous Knowledge Authorities.

Beginning with this historical relationship to Indigenous Knowledge Authority, we started the unit redevelopment in workshops with Yolŋu staff. We worked with senior Yolŋu lecturers Ian Gumbula, Rosemary Gundjarranbuy, Mercy Gumbula, Stephen Maliku Dhamarrandji, and Joy Bulkanhawuy to produce a framework of Yolŋu cultural capability. This included a set of audio-visual resources that were negotiated through a collaborative process to align with the learning outcomes and that built the ethos of the unit. Under their direction and authority, we were able to redevelop the unit with accompanying academic, information and digital literacies, activities, and assessment.

One daily cultural protocol is to Acknowledge Country and the traditional owners, custodians, and Elders of the lands on which we meet. This recognition of custodianship establishes a learning environment focussed on caring for and practising cultural knowledge, as informed by Indigenous ontologies. Rather than privileging only western academic values, the unit reframes a relationship to knowledge under the direction of senior authorities. We aim to have students see how respecting multiple perspectives openly and with compassion increases their own agency to do so elsewhere. Given global lockdown impacts on knowledge and learning, we hope that the redevelopment of the unit with Yolŋu Authorities will facilitate a more care-driven and compassionate approach to changes in students' lives, such as lockdown.

### Crisis, Compassion and Cognitive Wellbeing

As lockdowns and restrictions were rolled out, students were moved from a blended delivery to learning purely online, situated across Australia and offshore. The data included in this

study points to practices which students claimed helped them enjoy their experience despite the many challenges of 2020. Crisis-induced learning cultures affected students' experiences with technocratic management. Students are facing 'normal' university stressors, in addition to these lockdown stressors on their learning. Shifting knowledge management cultures during Covid magnified and added to issues with the use of learning technology. Face-to-face learning's primacy and motivational effects (Adnan & Anwar 2020) positioned online as second best, creating a panic-pivot-dynamic and 'reverse-engineering of traditional classrooms' with learning technology (Peters et al. 2020: 24–5). Watters (2020) describes this mode of unthinking transfer as akin to 'that drudgery of analog worksheets, and we've made that drudgery digital, and we call that 'progress.'" This study critically frames educational technology as a tool rather than a force unto itself which exacerbates that digital drudgery. Technical tools can support care and compassion in the learning conversation in a dispersed community, not determine it.

An emphasis on the need for care and compassion (Peters et al. 2020: 4) as antidote to panic-pandemic pedagogy could also displace pedagogical reform impacts and problematically frame what Peters et al. (2020: 12) promote as 'the intimacy of distance.' Echoing the tyranny of distance (Blainey 1966); an issue endemic to Australia's sparsely populated and vast landscape; the dynamics used to characterise distance between learners and institutions intensify impacts on services like online and distance education. This promotion of an 'intimate' distance could create an uncritical gaze on educational technology determining successful online learning and increased misguided emotional labour via these focusses on 'care'. Much global caring work is already carried out by women (OECD 2020). This unequitable expectation is likely being transferred to professional sectors given blurred boundaries between professional and private, creating what Boncori (2020: 681) termed a 'never-ending shift.' The emotional labour required to soothe students' and colleagues' vicarious trauma over-extends beyond professional duties of care to provide appropriately trauma-informed pedagogy within the institutional context, and it over- personalises our *professional duties of care*.

In our unit, taking time to acknowledge students' experiences within learning added authenticity and acknowledgement of their changing cultural backgrounds. Collaborating with students' realities developed more of a culturally safe, situated, cognitively compassionate and caring community of practice during very distracted times. Using check-ins for consensus during tutorials was helpful to continue informing what elements of the design was working. Focusing on authentic care for open knowledge practices rather than emotionally driven intimacy can be a more sustainable model of practising cognitive compassion in learning relationships within the remits of professional boundaries in higher education, especially with diverse student cohorts from multiple disciplines.

## COMPASSION PEDAGOGY, KNOWLEDGE AUTHORITY, COLLABORATION AND AUTHENTIC LEARNING

This section discusses pedagogical and theoretical concepts engaged with in this study. Knowledge authority, consent, collaboration, authentic learning, and participation in learning communities can develop a functional model of OEP that cultivates cognitive compassion. This model offers a view on pedagogy reform via knowledge custodianship, cognitive compassion, and care; that for Senior Knowledge authorities' direction *and* that which educators can facilitate. This 'cognitive compassion' can shape a sustainable long-term model for online teaching and learning that supports our relationships to knowledge.

Romanticising educational technology can pathologize communication and relationships required for learning to thrive. The call for universities 'to *function as places of compassion*' (Peters et al. 2020: 4) could further perpetuate imbalanced divisions of emotional rather than instructional labour; and ill-informed *intimacy-pedagogy* obstructing a sustainable and *cognitively* compassionate online learning model. In addition to 'intimacy' and its implications for framing learning this way within institutions, there are calls to critically challenge the 'foundations of who we are, what we teach and learn, and how we engage with the rest of the world' (Peters et al. 2020: 9). Digital burnout and fatigue of all users can come as a part of ongoing questioning and reactive compassion (Bozkurt & Sharma 2020). So that we can avoid compassion fatigue, and a weaponizing of care alongside other techno-determinist trends, the nature of compassion pedagogy needs clarification to remain a sustainable element of

higher education whilst the sector continues to groan under epistemological, political, and pandemic pressures.

Incorporating student input as OEP and a cognitively compassionate pedagogy keeps learning development more sustainable. We hope to ensure equitable practice, by engaging in student co-design in a 'peer-based working relationship' so that student 'voices and lived experiences are embedded' (Kukulka-Hulme et al. 2021: 27–36). We did this in the unit via making one assignment based on students' experiences and observations of cultural concepts in action. This practical valuing of students' cognitive labour engages with them in an empowering way through re-framing a relationship to knowledge work, where they are doing more than 'simply follow along where the instructor leads' (Morris 2020). Support for this critical shift in how we learn requires professional development and creativity in how we use OEP, learning technology and blended delivery (Dhawan 2020; Bond 2021). How this is done within professional capabilities also requires ongoing defining, including the most basic aspects of addressing digital poverty and faculty's digital literacies (Adnan & Anwar 2020).

The deeper shifts in relation to knowledge and power within academic settings can be supported with deeper working with knowledge authority, consensus, collaboration, and authentic participation in a community of practice (Christie & Verran 2013; Douglas 2015; Habermas 1987; Cummins 1996, 2000; Lave & Wenger 1991; Wenger, McDermott & Snyder 2002).

## **KNOWLEDGE AUTHORITY**

The term 'knowledge authority' is the practice, role, and responsibility of Aboriginal custodians to care for knowledge (Christie & Verran 2013; Douglas 2015). The ways knowledges are organised are based on deep relationships between creation, Country, and kinship; it enriches instruction for students, as taught by the Yolŋu Studies program. This program is taught from Yolŋu Country. This respects the Knowledge Authority of Larrakia Country (on which CDU sits) by teaching Yolŋu Studies in situ in Arnhem land via livestream, not on Larrakia land.

With this foundation, an understanding of Indigenous Knowledge Authority permeates research and learning design created in CDU's College of Indigenous Futures, Education and Arts. Under senior Indigenist research fellows' and lecturers' direction, we cultivated ways of working that centres Indigenous ways of knowing, being, and doing (Martin & Mirraoopa 2003) and understanding culturally safe and dignified spaces for students (Bin-Sallik 2003; Harless 2018). Custodianship helps frame a relationship with knowledge and its authorities as one of cognitive compassion and care instead of hoarding, hyper-productivity, or data mining. Positioning knowledge as something to be cared for and represented in diverse ways offers a challenging and critical approach to enriching western academic practice. Under leadership from Senior Cultural Authorities and inviting students to co-design and participate in open peer review on the discussion board, for example, they claim responsibility as authors of their own knowledge. Part of this authorship and authority also extends to publishing an open textbook with students' volunteered work. We hope students feel authority over their learning while respecting that of others. By using OEP in the co-design of learning programs in this way, we can keep growing a sense of knowledge authority and authentic care-based consensus around collaborative learning.

## **CONSENSUS AND COLLABORATION WITH KNOWLEDGE AUTHORITY**

While respecting knowledge authority, we need to be consensual and collaborative in our relationships with knowledge and learners. A focus on communication (Habermas 1987; Bottomore 2002), can frame OEP in this study as an attempt at functional consensus across cultural knowledge systems. Communicative action (Habermas 1987) distinguishes ways we establish consensus on different levels, which requires more work to develop understanding when we learn online. This does not assume that consensus leads to outright agreement or compromise. Rather, communicative consensus can give space for multiple perspectives. This element of 'dissensus' (Verran 2015) highlights positive differences in Indigenous knowledge management, and this concept of communicative consensus embraces 'going-on doing difference together' (Verran 2015). These nuanced understandings lend themselves significantly to current global trends and trust in information and could be helpful for institutions that work with knowledge to open a more cognitively compassionate and collaborative rhetoric.

Blending communication and consent (Habermas 1987) with concepts from second language learning, our learning design uses OEP to create relational knowledge conversations. Attempting communicative action for learning design can set up an open dynamic where learning collaboration becomes more consensual (Habermas 1987; Freire 1970). As identified by Cummins (1996, 2000), cross cultural conversations need to be collaborative, and context embedded. This can add to the focus on consensus by respecting the languages and knowledge authority of the learners. This aligns with the conditions which lead to collaborative relations of power in the classroom (Cummins 2009).

Consensus building offers pause to check our assumptions about the reasons for the communication and how to engage on several levels with partners in our conversations. Such a pause was taken within the workshops with Yolŋu Authorities. The time and space taken to develop understanding before delivery led to the unit embodying more authenticity. Time is also taken to 'check in' with students each class regarding concepts definitions and how they manifest in the world. Using learning technology creatively to take time to collaborate on understanding conceptual frameworks supports students' agency in using the concepts meaningfully. Polling activities established consensus over session timings and blended synchronous and asynchronous delivery via polling, given enrolment was 750 yet only 50 attended synchronously. When cultural authority is shared, deeper consensus about learning can be approached.

### **CONSENSUAL, COLLABORATIVE, AUTHENTIC PRACTICE IN A COMMUNITY OF KNOWLEDGE AUTHORITY**

Authentic Learning is a two-way process (Yunupingu 1989; Bartlett, Marshall & Marshall 2012); happening with, not to learners (Freire 1970). Two-way, consensual, collaborative engagement reduces 'banking' learning (Freire 1970), developing more competence in learners (Funk & Mason 2015). Authentic education can also supersede learning management that constitutes cultural invasion (Freire 1970). Without the effort to re-present knowledge (Freire 1970), and acknowledge learners' backgrounds, there exists a potential for distorted conversation and strategic action (Habermas 1987) which values technology's role in learning more than cultural knowledge authority.

Ensuring OEP are embedded in authentic contexts with consent and collaborative knowledge authority can lead to communicative action (Habermas 1987). Coercive 'external organisation and definitions' placed *onto and for* learning distorts communication (Outhwaite 2009: 43). This is the consequence of territory being *claimed* over knowledge production in non-consensual practices. Via coercive learning technology use, this pathology could magnify. This also echoes Cummins' (1996, 2000) coercive relations of power for its neglect of learners' abilities, knowledge authority and cultural background, perpetuating oppressive pedagogies and cultural invasion of the learner (Freire 1970).

More authentic, situated learning in communities of practice (COP) (Lave & Wenger 1991; Wenger, McDermott & Snyder 2002), influenced by Learning on Country (Indigenous place-based education) (Country et al. 2015; Fogarty 2010; Simpson 2014) performs contextualised learning and inspired many of the examples and activities linked to the Yolŋu lecturers' framework. Authentic, collaborative design values a COP (Lave & Wenger 1991), embodies praxis, and empowers participation (Freire 1970). Educational Technology can be a rich ground for re-placed and re-presented practice; and if used as a tool, can centre authentic human participation (DeRosa & Robison 2015). Situated learning and legitimate participation in a COP also align with context-embedded (Cummins 1996, 2000) and relational practices in the unit. Critical reflection Assessments on the Yolŋu Cultural Framework engage students in sharing their own situated experience of cultural concepts, and research reports help apply principles we develop over the term to real world cultural events involving anti-Asian discrimination related to Covid, for example. Participation in where learning is happening creates community, legitimating learners, and their situated knowledge, shared in the digital setting. Situating this 'real world relevance' within a collaborative space informed by Indigenous Knowledge Authority has developed a deeply satisfying unit for many students, but also a framework for learning development which is sustainably compassionate for the cognitive influences learning in higher education can have.

## A Framework for Cognitively Compassionate and Culturally Informed OEP

Placed, open practices and consensual, collaborative learning can establish space where competence and engagement can centre learners as valid knowledge authorities on *their* process. That learning further legitimises authorship within the COP. Collaborative communities can breed cognitive compassion and responsibility to knowledge authority and create space to *relate* to knowledge. Higher education can make critical inroads into compassionate duty of care for knowledge and learning we have as a remit; but without emotional over functioning and burn out that might occur because of overextending care without respect for pedagogical reform and associated impacts. Doing this can create and galvanise cognitively compassionate work, custodianship for knowledge practices, respect for authorities by being guided by them, and work with socio-political stresses with a measure of emotional intelligence by which most students can be appropriately supported.

## METHODOLOGY AND METHODS: ONGOING DEVELOPMENTAL EVALUATION

This study blends developmental evaluation (Patton 2006, 2010) and ongoing content analysis (Neuendorf 2017). Developmental evaluation is an iterative method with which to develop *and* assess a program simultaneously. This can ensure stakeholder perspectives are embedded in design; in this case Yoliju Lecturer frameworks, student feedback, and accredited requirements. Developmental evaluation is a cyclical and circular *process*, rather than a linear and finite *procedure*. Freire’s concept of praxis (1970) also informs this method, unit of learning and ongoing evaluation.

The methodology aligns with knowledge authority, adaptive characteristics of OEP, collaborative, consensual, authentic learning, and legitimate participation in a community of practice. Remaining situationally responsive acknowledges the uniqueness of the evaluand and its situated knowledge (Lave & Wenger 1991; Patton 2010; Outhwaite 2009). Acknowledging power imbalances via co-designing with stakeholder input creates more communicative and collaborative action (Habermas 1987; Kemmis & McTaggart 2005; Kincheloe & McLaren 2002; Funk, Worthington & Price-Winter 2016).

**Table 1** Criteria for Evaluation.

|  |
|--|
| Theory related criteria  |
| Knowledge authority  |
| Authentic learning   |
| Collaborative, communicative action  |
| Community of Practice  |
| Universal Design Principles (and accredited requirements for online readiness) |

The theories in the literature section and **Table 1** helped me to select and map the criteria in **Table 3** used to evaluate and refine each semester’s content. I also gained ethical clearance (CDU HREC H20097) to use student evaluations and work samples.

Of the student evaluations, between 11 and 20% (N = 82 – 150) completed all or some of the form. Responses were divided by on-campus and online attendance and ranged from 11.11 to 17.12% for on-campus students and 18.52 to 21.82% for online students.

Optional open-ended questions below below in **Table 2** were also asked in the evaluations, from which some comments are shared in the Findings and Discussion section of this paper. I collected voluntary student evaluation comments and work samples referring to learning and cultural challenges. I also selected 27 work samples and ten students returned consent forms for their writing to be used as material. This low response rate could be attributed to the requests being sent out at the onset of summer holidays after the semester finished but is higher than response rates from the students’ evaluations. These samples were anonymised, combined into a master document, and grouped for common themes and the concepts in **Table 1**.

1. What were the best aspects of this unit and its teaching staff?
2. Can you elaborate on any of your more critical responses above (or any other areas where you think this unit needs to improve)?
3. Please comment on any part of your learning experience; how we talked about the cultures we participate in, the ways we contribute to our future learning and work, how we interact with other humans via the platforms we learn and work on (e.g., discussion board, feed forward, tutorial sessions, flexibility, learning environment, report writing, working in pairs/teams).

**Table 2** Optional open-ended questions for Student Evaluations.

## DATA AND ANALYSIS

The data in **Table 3** represent the results of the evaluation and content analysis of unit materials relating to **Table 1**'s theoretical criteria (theory and item) and the emergent outcomes of the evaluation so far (issue, actions and future strategies I hope to employ). This includes the ongoing analysis of the materials, student work samples and feedback analysed for relationship to a range of criteria mapped to the theoretical elements in the literature.

**Table 3** Criteria and results for Evaluation and Content Analysis of unit materials.

| THEORY RELATED CRITERIA                  | DATA ITEM IDENTIFIED IN EVALUATION  | ISSUE  | OUTCOME   | FUTURE ACTIONS  |
|--|-------------------------------------|--|---|---|
| Knowledge authority                      | Yolju lecturers' videos             | Need more framing and centring                         | Scaffolded more; tied into lectures   | Need to reinforce links to student experience   |
| Authentic learning                       | Mental health                       | Generally, an issue these days                         | discuss consent, triggering content, trauma informed  | Weekly polling, word clouds, interactive  |
| Collaboration, communicative action, COP | Student experience and expectations | Want 1:1 feedback, resistant to critical reflection    | Welcome video for navigating, <i>critical thinking</i> , co-creation, and agency increased systematically | Needs links to disciplines, assessment and study help, open text, Discussion Board engagement protocols                               |
| COP, Authentic learning                  | My View results                     | Students want more staff                               | Change assessments to quizzes an option but this is disposable learning                                   | More Rubric-based self and peer evaluation  |
| Authentic learning, COP                  | Digital Literacy                    | LMS is not social media, info-seeking digital skills   | JISC digital, needs online cultural awareness, digital learning skills                                    | Publishing work openly on platforms, Open texts   |
| Authentic learning, COP                  | Information Literacy                | Scope of sources and 'info-demic'                      | We need 4 moves applied to current issues, case study on digital criticality                              | <a href="https://webliteracy.pressbooks.com/chapter/four-strategies/">https://webliteracy.pressbooks.com/chapter/four-strategies/</a> |
| Collaboration, communicative action      | Content presentation                | Needs more scaffolding                                 | For low bandwidth options, mobile phones, time, data poverty  | Review with this again <a href="#">Cali College criteria UCT Online Course Design</a>   |
| communicative action, COP                | pedagogical practices               | Inconsistent uptake of practices distinct from content | Language use, connectedness, situated, intercultural, participatory                                       | Framework needs re-potting for students to use  |
| Authentic learning, COP                  | a/synch/hyflex delivery             | Students have isolated experience                      | Welcome video and set up pre-week 1   | Discussion Board engagement protocols   |
| Universal Design Principles              | Communication clarity               | Confusion/info overload                                | Need to keep editing questions/ assignment guidelines<br>Instructional text with each link                | Streamline assessment and materials (ongoing)   |

In the student evaluation forms, 25 student respondents rated agreement with statements on a Likert scale of 1–7, in **Table 4**.

It is notable that the last two sections in **Table 4** demonstrate gaps in agreement regarding learner ownership and agency. The number of students who rated these optional questions are in each graph (N = 25) and was significantly smaller than the overall completion of evaluations (N = between 82 and 150 students).

Student evaluation comments and work sample analysis identified themes which fell into two main categories: content design and teaching and learning interactions. Of these two categories, comments relating to knowledge authority, collaboration, consensus and understanding, authentic learning and community of practice were identified. A lot of the commonly used terms were embedded in effusive statements of student experience (e.g., *really*, *feel*, *well*, *best*). Common terms used are below in **Table 5** and **Figure 1** word cloud.

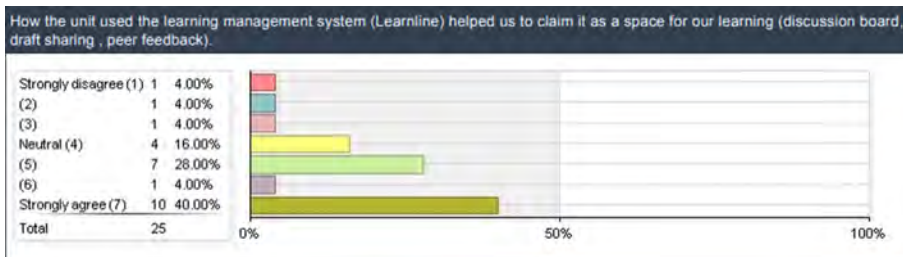
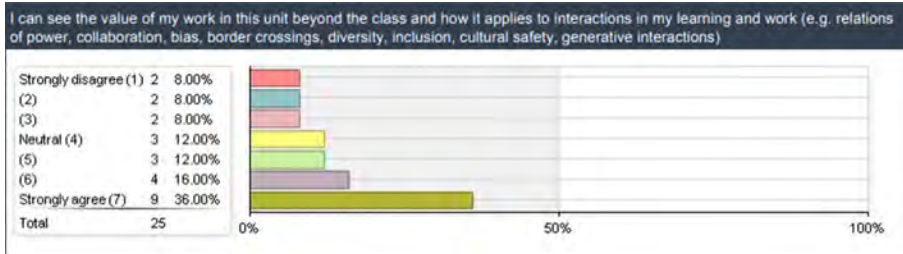
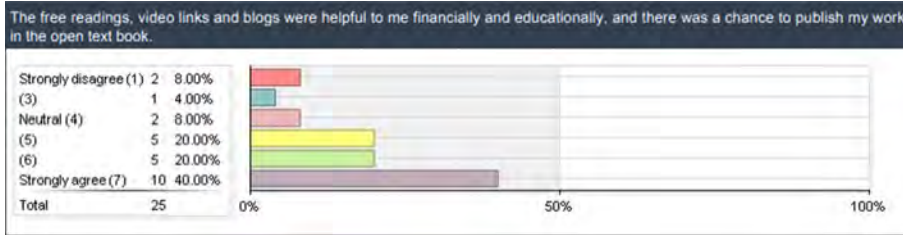


Table 4 Student Ratings of Pedagogy.

|             |              |          |               |            |
|-------------|--------------|----------|---------------|------------|
| 10 learning | 9 discussion | 6 board  | 5 environment | 5 online   |
| 5 student   | 5 students   | 5 way    | 4 helpful     | 4 readings |
| 4 really    | 4 tutorial   | 4 unit   | 4 well        | 3 academic |
| 3 best      | 3 content    | 3 create | 3 culture     | 3 even     |
| 3 external  | 3 feel       | 3 group  | 3 knowledge   | 3 lectures |

Table 5 Commonly Used Words in Student Feedback.



Figure 1 Word Cloud of Commonly Used words.



Also notable is that all but one of the comments omitted direct reference to Covid. Given that the data was collected during Covid-relevant times, but with reference to students' learning experience, it is hoped this makes this study relevant to learning during other stressful socio-political conditions which mandate online-only learning. After six months of lockdown in Melbourne, one student did give this feedback:

*'Thank you once again, it was a pleasure studying with you last semester during my Melbourne lockdown. I found your lectures enjoyable, interesting and your tone & body language was always so happy, informative, encouraging, positive. You were always a joy & a lovely light during our harsh but needed Covid lockdown.'*

## FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

This section uses the written work and feedback from students to inform the discussion of findings with reference to theoretical literature.

### KNOWLEDGE AUTHORITY

*'Being an indigenous woman myself I feel greatly appreciative that individuals are continuing to path a way to ensure that the education, the knowledge and the tools are there to better help others in creating an understanding of our culture.'*

Working, learning, and teaching with knowledge authority is a significant theme in this study. The Yolŋu lecturers' framework singles this unit out as more than just 'cultural awareness training.' The Yolŋu framework makes this unit an ontological cornerstone for students' understanding of how culture instructs knowledge practice. I hope that students leave the unit with appreciation of how they relate to and practice knowledges beyond academia. Students' feelings about having cultural concepts represented added appreciation and legitimacy of two-way (Yunupingu 1989) knowledge systems at work in higher education.

*'The content in the unit including the readings, videos, mini lectures and discussions on the DB strengthened my understanding of the topics and made me think more deeply about myself, and how I can monitor and change my behaviour to be more culturally capable in everyday life.'*

Centring Indigenous frameworks adds to long-term outcomes of designing learning with respect to knowledge authority. Mini lectures, academic skills and complementary reading clips helped link students' learning to the Yolŋu lecturers' conceptual framework.

- *'...inspiring and empowering without focussing on guilt about implicit biases or other privileged aspects of my background.'*
- *'... the best way we learn individually.'*
- *'The learning has urged me to listen to my own bias when analysing specific cultural topics...reflect on ontologies, epistemologies, our concepts of self and collective identities'*

It could be interpreted from these comments that students felt the cognitively compassionate design that fostered resilience, responsibility and authority in their learning which could be highly relevant outside the unit.

### CONSENSUS AND COLLABORATION

Developing compassionate consensus practice (Habermas 1987) around cultural concepts is wedded to caring for knowledge authority and custodianship in this unit. Knowledge practices shared by Yolŋu lecturers, complemented by principles developed from their framework reframe our relationship to knowledge from one-direction 'mastery' to collective custodianship. During such a globally tumultuous time, many students found the culturally charged topics more confronting than usual. This made reaching understanding more difficult and, at times, combative in the chat section of the tutorial sessions. Understanding of both students and material via caring practices was a strong theme in feedback. Students spoke of how the unit;

*'bought back the passion of learning ...through thought provoking questions, understanding and immense empath and equity ... Each Assessment in this Unit has helped to layer core concepts and themes in a simple way that prepared us and was very helpful with giving assignment feedback...'*

Design was *'inclusive of online learners ... the lecturers went over the readings and interpreted them into their own words was the best learning tool for this subject. They were able to break down the content to ensure it was understood.'*

Understanding and consent to engage critically did not always reach students.

- *'As someone beginning what should be a science-based degree with very practical skills required, I did not see the value of this unit.'*
- *'I loathed this snowflake course. ... In no point in my life have I used my so-called white privilege. Like we should feel guilty for the colour of our skin... My parents came to Australia with nothing but the clothing on their back and a suitcase ... Please explain to me how I used my white privilege in life?'*

Although not always successful, developing collective understanding through multiple modes of collaboration broadened our use of compassionate, consensual communication. Collaborative relations of power emanate from meeting students with context embedded, cognitively demanding skills development (Cummins 1996, 2000). Embedding relevance of the concepts to students' social and professional interactions is demanding at so many distances. We developed understanding about shared and different meanings of cultural concepts by checking for understanding through workshopping drafts, provocations, mini reading lectures, tutorials for discussing complexities, and a blend of synchronous and asynchronous peer review. Science as culturally informed, or privileges enjoyed on a spectrum by several social groups required multiple engagements with these terms, and then unpacking in several ways with cognitive compassion and gentle reminders of categories of critical thinking versus polarised side-taking. Differences between personal values, opinions, concepts, and associated power relations are areas to continue to work on cultivating as critical thinking skills. It could also be that given global crisis dynamics, this subject matter is contentious and cognitively demanding to participate in for some. Regular cognitive compassion is a standing item on the agenda for discussion of framework concepts in relation to current events, misinformation, and implications for students' lives.

## **AUTHENTIC PARTICIPATION IN A COMMUNITY OF PRACTICE**

Authentic design can increase students' capability and participation in the two-way process of their learning and avoid the distortion of banking education and technocratic invasion (Freire 1970). Without the Yolŋu lecturers' authentic input and invitation to participate in the framework, the learning would have been invasive of Indigenous knowledge, and invasive of students' ability to safely create their own learning culture to care for.

*'I now see myself standing up prouder and stronger to educate people around my culture and more so now with the knowledge of a deeper education and history. I will always stand by my culture, but I have gained knowledge on how to have a healthy discussion and not have bias towards other people during their opinion and voicing their concerns, it's very important to be able to create a safe space within having a discussion so that both parties can feel equal.'*

We embedded learning in policy and sector issues, current events, and Covid itself through the conceptual framework and use of academic, digital, information skills. Using relational links to how concepts could surface in different sectors embeds abstract ideas of culture in situations that affect students' realities and adds authenticity to collaborative relations in the student community of practice.

*'Through the careful crafting of content, incorporated in each week's learning materials, I have had the opportunity to, by building a unit based on sense of trust, you have created an academic environment which challenged me to rediscover my voice'*

Situated learning in communities of practice (Lave & Wenger 1991; Wenger, McDermott & Snyder 2002) further collaborates with students' experiences as learning material via participatory development and peer evaluation. Use of the discussion board to workshop instalments of assignments every week scaffolded skills and understandings, time management habits, and created an understanding and environment of trust.

- *'... studying online was a positive and unifying experience... the discussion board was my safety net. Everyone was helpful towards one another; no judgment or exclusion occurred'*
- *'The flexibility of the course was really refreshing. Fantastic collaboration and peer support'*
- *'Appreciated how the teachers and students interacted on the discussion board.'*
- *'This helped as even though it's online still like learning in a classroom...The positive environment that was created by the team'*

Starting each tutorial with an Acknowledgement of Country linked to Yolŋu framework clips further situated our care for knowledge within a cognitive gear shift shared with students. This can establish the cultures and people using that technology rather than technology as the main interface. Uncritical technologizing can further distance and alienate users, weaponizing technology and its knowledge management rather than using it as a tool to develop cognitively compassionate practice. Student feedback related the community dynamics created for and by students added to their feelings of and cognitively compassionate support.

## **FURTHER RESEARCH AND CONCLUDING RECOMMENDATIONS**

Two main provocations have emerged from the evaluation at this point:

Some students want lectures with rigid boundaries and written PowerPoints, others loved the flexible delivery and agency. How else can we make the online experience more 'like a classroom' and explore what students feel as agency using these methods, within the contained preference for a particular structure? Given the particularities of what helped students identify a lack of agency in the data, the next round of evaluation might best look at the problematic aspects to online learning and pedagogies we used. This can also invite an evaluation of knowledge cultures in students who prefer in-person learning to support digital literacies and open practices.

Regarding problematic reactions to content, the issue remains of how to help students see the conceptual fluidity and relevance to social contexts regardless of their background or future career path. Building in this critical thinking content and practice might support students being open to accepting ideas such as the existence of white privilege without feeling personally attacked, or the relevance of culture and power relationships within any workplace, especially scientific work in a region with such significant Aboriginal culture and community. These ideas continue to inform strategic development in this and other knowledge management projects to include studies on digital criticality, culture, scholarship, and online cultural awareness.

Synthesis of the findings with theory so far indicate three main points:

First, universities need sustainable ways to embed cognitive compassion for knowledge, learners, and staff, such as in training required of all staff. This embeds another layer of knowledge authority which is culturally appropriate and collaborative with students' diverse backgrounds and growing sense of intellectual agency. Cognitively compassionate online teaching and learning can develop a knowledge culture alternative to competition-centric 'mastery'. Curiosity, multiplicity, and custodianship can cultivate a practice characterised by care for knowledge authority, and collaboration on knowledge; not weaponization thereof.

Next, universities should promote learning and technology use in a compassionate way, within our remits. Systemic emphasis on cognitive compassion could therefore be helpful in promoting a more critical, culturally responsible, sustainable practice that evolves past initial crisis pedagogies. Situating learning in realistic and relatable activities can support this cognitive compassion and use of learning technology. Institution- situated, professionally qualified counselling staff are also critical to managing vicarious trauma and stress during these times, managing the learning-related cognitive duties of care for staff and students.

Finally, universities and staff should keep developing and expanding on OEP. Inviting student and stakeholder into curriculum design keeps in touch with their realities and forms collaboration and consensus across the many forms of distance we contend with. Ongoing development with staff participatory workshops, underpinned by knowledge authority, consent, and participation develops a collaborative community of practice. The concepts are baked into the development process, teaching materials and delivery, forming a circular relationship with knowledge and learning, and a relational approach to learning beyond the semester's end.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I acknowledge the Traditional Owners and Custodians of the lands on which this research was conducted; the Larrakia. I also extend my respects to Yolŋu Senior Lecturers who shared the theoretical framework for this work. I pay my respects to all elders, past, present, and emerging.

## FUNDING INFORMATION

This research is part of the GO-GN Fellowship Round 2020, funded by The Open University and Hewlett Foundation.

## COMPETING INTERESTS

The author has no competing interests to declare.

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Funk  
*Journal of Interactive  
Media in Education*  
DOI: 10.5334/jime.648

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**TO CITE THIS ARTICLE:**

Funk, J. 2021. Caring in Practice, Caring for Knowledge. *Journal of Interactive Media in Education*, 2021(1): 11, pp. 1–14. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.5334/jime.648>

Submitted: 05 February 2021  
Accepted: 25 May 2021  
Published: 08 September 2021

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*Journal of Interactive Media in Education* is a peer-reviewed open access journal published by Ubiquity Press.

