

Stories of reconciliation: building cross-cultural collaborations between Indigenous musicians and undergraduate music students in Tennant Creek

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Abstract

In this paper I look at what happens when a university music classroom is exchanged for a remote Indigenous community. I explore what happens when pedagogical practices are decolonised and placed into the hands of Indigenous Elders and musicians, and reveal the sorts of musical interactions that transpire when students and Indigenous musicians are given the opportunity to spend time together and collaborate. In order to do this, I describe a cross-cultural project I facilitated between Indigenous musicians at the Winanji-kari Music Centre in Tennant Creek and undergraduate music students from Brisbane. In the paper, I bring these interactions to life for the reader through my own personal observations, and the words and experiences of my students and our collaborators. I construct a narrative that explores the centrality of relationship building, issues of colonial guilt, the construction of Otherness, and the impact that this kind of cross-cultural engagement can have on the ways in which undergraduate music students understand and connect with Indigenous cultural practices.

Key words: Indigenous Australian studies; cross-cultural collaboration; field experiences; immersion experiences

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Introduction

As we board the Greyhound bus for Tennant Creek late one afternoon in June we don't quite know what to expect. We have equipped ourselves for thirty-six hours of travelling and two weeks at Winanji-kari Music Centre as best we can, but in all honesty we are entering the great unknown. No orientation sessions, journal articles, or words of advice can really prepare us for what lies ahead. The familiar lights of Brisbane fade into the distance as we travel the road northeast to Mt Isa and Camooweal. The landscape starts to change into dry red earth and the late afternoon sun turns the termite

mounds a warm orange colour. Just after we pass Cloncurry a dramatic sunset gives way to a stunning night sky of stars. As I lean against the frosted window and watch the outlines of trees flashing past, it occurs to me how unusual this situation is. University courses rarely venture beyond the walls of their institutions like this, and consequently students and Indigenous musicians are seldom given the opportunity to build meaningful relationships with one another. As I think ahead to our two weeks in Tennant Creek, I am keen to observe what happens when we make such a shift, and exchange our university classroom for an Indigenous community. I want

to understand what happens when pedagogical practices are decolonised and placed into the hands of Indigenous Elders and musicians. I am curious to observe what exchange of music and ideas might transpire when students and Indigenous musicians are given the opportunity to spend time with one another and collaborate.

As I stretch my arms above my head and glance behind me I notice the contorted shapes of the students' silhouettes. All seem to be sleeping soundly despite their awkward positions. This group of students come from Queensland Conservatorium (Griffith University), the School of Education & Professional Studies (Griffith University), and the School of Music (The University of Queensland). Amie, Andrew and Ryan are studying music technology and Carly, James, Lecia and Rhiannon are studying music education. I have been given the task of organising and facilitating the trip with the assistance of my colleague Myfany Turpin, who has been working in Central Australia for a number of years. Our decision to travel to Tennant Creek was not an arbitrary one. The Queensland Conservatorium was invited to bring a group of students to work at the Winanji-kari Music Centre in 2009. This transpired after the Conservatorium's Director Huib Schippers met a group of musicians from Winanji-kari at a conference in Alice Springs the year before. They dreamed up a plan together whereby a bus of students would travel to Tennant Creek to collaborate with the musicians for two weeks. I was then given the daunting task of making this dream happen. As I gaze up to the night sky and think of the road we've travelled to get to this point, and all the hours of preparation and planning, I can hardly believe it is happening.

Some hours later the gruff voice of the bus driver interrupts my thoughts, "Okay, folks we're almost in Tennant Creek." We all turn to look at each other in a sleepy daze. The digital clock at the front of the bus glows the figures: 2.59 (am). Groggily we gather our belongings as the bus pulls into the local BP station. Myfany, Jeff (from

Winanji-kari) and Alan (from Barkly Regional Arts) are standing there to meet us with two troupe carriers. The cool morning air greets us as we climb down the bus stairs. We have finally arrived. The distance and remoteness of this place is not lost on us.

In the two weeks that followed that gruelling bus journey the students participated in a range of activities. They played music on many occasions with the Indigenous men employed by Winanji-kari (mainly rock, country, and original songs written by the men), assisted with the set up of a new Music Centre at the Drover's Hall and undertook a range of recording projects. The students were also involved in songwriting sessions with a local Indigenous woman, Lynette Lewis who worked for the Melbourne-based organisation The Song Room. This involved writing lyrics, chords, making rough recordings and helping her teach and run her holiday program for local school children. The students also worked alongside a visiting theatre group, Australian Theatre for Young People, who were working on holiday programs for local Indigenous youth (approximately 10-14 year olds). This involved creating soundscapes, running songwriting workshops and performing at their final concert. Most importantly, the students also undertook daily Warumungu language and culture lessons with Warumungu Elder Rosemary *Narrurlu* Plummer.

One might call this an "immersive" learning experience. Similar immersion projects have been avidly described in music education literature (see Aguilar & Pohan, 1998; Canning, 1995; Marxen & Rudney, 1999; Emmanuel, 2005). These projects sometimes involve a 'cultural plunge' where students only spend part of each day in the setting, or entail community service of some kind (see Emmanuel, 2005). Others, such as our Tennant Creek project, involve students living and working in a setting for a short period of time so they become part of that community (see Sleeter, 2001, p. 96, in Emmanuel).

To encourage the students to deeply engage with this immersive learning process, be observant and self-reflexive throughout the experience, I gave them field diaries to record the events of their days and their thoughts, feelings and interpretations of what was going on. I was also keen to allow them to report about the process in a way that was creative, personal, visual, and musical, and thus gave them video cameras to create a digital story of their experiences. When they returned to Brisbane we had a screening of their digital stories so they could share the lessons they learnt with university staff, their peers, family and friends. To monitor how the students were responding to the experience, I also interviewed them individually during the trip, and undertook a follow-up focus group five months afterwards to see what lasting impression the learning experience had left on them. I also interviewed staff from Winanjjikari, as well as other community members the students had worked with, to find out what impact the project had on the community.

In this paper, I draw on insights from this material, as well as ideas from critical pedagogy, postcolonial theory, cross-cultural collaborations and Indigenous education, to weave a story about what was learnt in the two weeks that followed that bus trip to Tennant Creek. While there were many different learning spaces that the students moved in and between, in this paper I focus on two—the Winanjjikari Music Centre and Warumungu classes. In line with the ethnographic methodology used in my research and documentation of this experience, I bring these two settings to life for the reader by blending together the voices of the students, the Winanjjikari musicians and my own experiences in the field (see Behar, 1996; Amit, 2000; Cottrell, 2004; Ellis, 2004). The resulting narrative explores how we experienced a radical shift away from the conventional Western pedagogical agendas we were accustomed to experiencing in our various university departments, and touch on the deep

impression this made on our understandings of Indigenous culture and music practices, as well as our own cultural and racial subjectivities.

The Winanjjikari Music Centre

Still exhausted from our 3am arrival, we drag ourselves out of bed and pile into the troupe carrier the next morning. The Winanjjikari musicians work from 8am-12pm, so we have to get there early. We arrive at the Music Centre at 8.10am. Not quite sure where to go, we find the stage door at the back of the Drover's Hall and open it. The stage floor is covered with amps, leads and boxes of technical equipment and we cautiously weave a pathway through them. The hall is quiet and a few of the Winanjjikari musicians are slowly moving gear around. I watch the students' body language and can see they are unsure what to say or do. They gaze at their shoes as they take in the unfamiliar surroundings. I am equally unsure. I notice the Winanjjikari musicians are also unsure; some busy themselves with moving boxes while others retreat outside for a smoke. "Hello!" booms Jeff, breaking the silence. He suddenly appears from behind a large aluminium bookshelf. "G'day," I reply. "As you can see we're moving," he explains. "This is going to be the new Music Centre," he gestures with open arms. We look around the large dusty hall scattered with boxes of gear, bookcases, filing cabinets, desks and chairs. "You guys couldn't have timed this better. We could do with some help." I smile nervously in response, anticipating the massive job ahead. Probably sensing everyone's unease, Jeff suggests we get together in a circle to introduce ourselves. He gestures to the Winanjjikari musicians to join us. We pull up plastic chairs and sit facing one another. We tentatively exchange names and where we are from. We meet Joe, Alfred, Brian, Zaddock, Lester, Philip and Leslie. Each of us describes the music we play and what our instruments are. Cautious smiles are exchanged. I am mindful that this is probably the first time many of the students have

sat alongside an Indigenous person, looked into their eyes and spoken to them about music. As I watch these timid, yet significant, interactions unfold, I realise how powerful this learning space is. Free from a “Whitefella” lecturer’s pressing agenda, assessment concerns, books, desks and PowerPoint slides, this space is focused purely on relationship building and storytelling. No text books, articles, and lectures can come close to the experience of looking into one another’s eyes and hearing their stories. This reminds me of what Mary Louise Pratt (1992) describes as a contact zone where “peoples geographically and historically separated come into contact with each other” (as cited in Somerville & Perkins, 2003, p. 255). For Pratt these zones are full of “possibilities and perils” (as cited in Somerville & Perkins, 2003, p. 255). I see the perils in this vulnerable space, where our meeting somehow evokes centuries of colonial baggage. We all know this shameful past, and it sits uncomfortably under the surface of our well-meaning interactions. However, I also see the possibilities, and recognise this is a potentially transformative space where we can hear one another’s voices and recognise one another’s presence (hooks, 1994, pp. 7 & 207).

This space is fleeting though. Soon after 12pm most of the musicians disappear without any word. The students continue working until Jeff tells them to stop. “You guys need to slow down,” he explains. They look confused. “And once you’ve slowed down you need to slow down some more.” Their puzzled faces look at me for explanation. I can see they are wired on city time and eager to keep working. “You can’t be fairies that do all the work at night,” Jeff chides. “That’s not the way it works out here.” Silence pervades the big hall. “If you slow down and work together with the fellas, you’ll find things work a lot faster here,” he explains. As the students reluctantly put down the gear, I can see an important lesson about cross-cultural collaboration dawning upon them. Jeff’s comments remind them of where they are.

They are no longer in a task-oriented university classroom, where assessment targets need to be accomplished at the expense of all else. Relationship building and task sharing have to be prioritised if the students hope to accomplish anything. In the days that follow, I notice a change in the student’s rhythm. I can see they’ve realised the importance of showing respect, developing trust, sharing the load, and taking the time to build connections properly. James reveals this understanding in his fieldwork diary:

At times it has felt like things have been moving quite slowly and we might not be achieving as much as was expected of us. However upon reflecting on our first week I have realised some of this slow-going has actually been a necessary and ideal way to settle in to the new environment, acclimatise and become familiar with who we are working with. We have begun to make a whole new series of contacts around town and actually built a very solid foundation from which to work off for the second week. I don't think it would have been advisable for us as guests in a new environment to begin in any other way. For example, if we had arrived and simply jumped straight in all 'gung-ho' and tried to do too much too soon it would have potentially come across as rude and arrogant and turned people off us. Taking the time to acclimatise and allow the people of Tennant Creek a chance to get to know us and feel comfortable with us in their town has been a very necessary aspect of this trip (James, fieldwork diary, June 2009).

This initial jarring of different agendas, which James’ fieldwork diary alludes to, is something researchers and musicians working in other cross-cultural collaborations have often spoken about (Barney & Solomon, 2009; Haig-Brown, 2001; Mackinlay 2008; Selby, 2004; Somerville & Perkins, 2003). There seem to be no set ways of aligning these agendas. As Katelyn Barney and Lexine Solomon (2009) explain, it is something that needs to be continually negotiated (p. 213).

After our first week at Winanji-kari, I start to notice this negotiation happening in small, but significant ways. I notice the students getting up to jam with the musicians and the warm ways

in which they communicate with one another musically. I notice the smiles, the laughter, the improvisation, the sharing of ideas, and teaching of tunes. I notice James and Lester, the Winanji-kari drummer, sharing an iPod one day. With a headphone in each ear, their faces inches apart, they react in unison to the music blaring from the earpieces. There is little fanfare or explanation given in these interactions, but I can see this relationship building and personal negotiation is providing a powerful learning experience. In an interview with Lester that day, he echoes this observation: "The guys came in and we just got up on the stage straight away and made music. We got together really quick. We all worked together and all the ideas came from each other, from all of us. We worked together as a team" (Lester Peterson, personal interview, July 2009). In this jamming, which Lester describes, I am struck by the trust that is shown by the Winanji-kari musicians and the students.

On another occasion, I notice a local Indigenous man, Anthony 'Junkyard Dog' appearing at Winanji-kari. He has heard about the students from his family. Word travels fast around here. Anthony migrates towards Ryan and Amie. After telling them about his life as a painter and bush mechanic, and sharing stories of his life on the highway, his homelessness, and playing for Port Power, Anthony asks them if they could help him set some lyrics he has written to music. The lyrics are about a white settler who came to his father's land. For the next couple of days the three worked together on this song. In his fieldwork diary, Ryan describes the exchange and what I meant to him: "When the three of us sang the song Anthony was very moved and ended up in tears, it was a special moment. I felt extremely privileged to be welcomed by him and invited to collaborate on something extremely personal and important. He wanted us to record these songs so he could give them to his father and his sons. I felt proud that I had the skills to work with him and produce a song that we were really happy with"

(Ryan, fieldwork diary, June 2009).

As I watch these daily interactions at the Music Centre unfold, it becomes apparent that race is a spectre that cannot be ignored. In the Music Centre, and indeed anywhere we travel in town, our race is made visible to us. We cannot hide our glaringly White faces in the sea of Indigenous faces we see every day. We are forced to not only acknowledge it, and reflect on it, but have a dialogue with it. In her fieldwork diary, Rhiannon describes the foreign nature of this feeling: "It's just strange to think I'm still in my home country, it doesn't feel like it" (Rhiannon, fieldwork diary, June 2009). It seems in some respects, the students have become the Other. This resonates with the words of Giroux when he speaks about the social, political and cultural insights that come not from undertaking the "patronizing notion of understanding the Other," but rather understanding "how the self is implicated in the construction of Otherness" (Giroux, 1992b, p. 32). This acknowledgement of our racial subjectivities and how we are implicated in this construction of Otherness also means that we cannot possibly shy away from the complexities and devastation that colonisation has caused our Indigenous peoples. This is not lost on some of the students. As Lecia describes in her fieldwork diary at the beginning of the trip: "The aboriginals were surviving fine and well before the whites came and either slaughtered them or led them in the so called, 'right direction.' It is our history that makes me wonder whether these people will even want us here or our help now" (Lecia, fieldwork diary, June 2009). In this setting, there is nowhere to hide from such issues. In their fieldwork diaries a number of the students describe the unease that sometimes crawls within them as they realise their own ignorance and the shame of our country's past:

As we developed a stronger appreciation for just how complex and detailed the indigenous culture is I felt an increasing sense of shame for what has been inflicted on these communities and the ongoing difficulties they encounter as a result.

What we learnt in only two weeks broadened my understanding and appreciation for indigenous culture immeasurably. Even though this was only enough time to touch the surface of one of the oldest and proudest histories on earth, it saddens me to know it is still well and truly so much more than the vast majority of white Australians have or will ever be exposed to. I can't help but feel that it is simply ignorance and lack of understanding on behalf of white Australia that has led to such a divide between two cultures (James, fieldwork diary, June 2009).

Likewise, Ryan explains, "It's very interesting learning about the local laws and customs and a bit worrying that we didn't already know these kind of things" (Ryan, fieldwork diary, June 2009). Such comments are riddled with guilt. Selby (2004) also talks about guilt as an often unacknowledged part of the relational dynamics between Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples (p. 154). The students' comments allude to guilt about their ignorance, guilt about this country's past and guilt over their complicity in this situation.

As our experiences in the Winanji-kari Music Centre begin to teach us, the only way to start reconciling these issues is through dialogue and the building of relationships. This resonates with Elizabeth Mackinlay's (2008) suggestion that by "engaging in a musical dialogue with performers as real rather than imagined subjects [...] the door is opened for students as researchers to [...] reconsider and retheorize understandings about music culture and performers" (p. 259). This process also allows them to come to new understandings about their own cultural and racial subjectivities.

Warumungu Classes

After finishing our morning of work at the Winanji-kari Music Centre, we gather in a circle around Rosemary *Narrurlu* Plummer. For the past few days we have been meeting Rosemary every afternoon for Warumungu language and culture classes. Rosemary is a respected Elder within this community and a highly experienced

Figure 1. Musicians and students at the Winanji-kari Music Centre



language and cross-cultural teacher. We have been learning vocabulary, greetings, bush tucker names, appropriate behavior, and about *Wumpurrarni* ('Aboriginal' in Warumungu) ways. Today the students are receiving their skin names. As we move around the circle Rosemary asks the students who they have been working with at the Winanji-kari Music Centre, so she can determine what name they should be called. She looks at James and he explains he has been playing drums with Lester Peterson. Rosemary nods knowingly, "you'll be *Jappaljarri* then." Myfany writes the name on a small piece of paper and places it in the circle in front of James. He smiles looking noticeably chuffed. When Rosemary gets to me I explain, "Last year in Borrooloola I was given the Yanyuwa skin name, *Nungarrima* because of my close relationship to Liz Mackinlay." Rosemary thinks about this for a moment. "That sounds like *Nungarrayi*," she suggests, "that will be your Warumungu name." When she has finished going around the circle and giving everyone a name, Rosemary begins explaining everyone's relationships. "*Nungarrayi*," she looks at me, "you're my *wankili* (cousin)." The students listen and try to figure out their newfound relationships. Looking at their faces and furrowed brows I can see they are completely perplexed. As we study the *punttu* (skin relationships) diagram in our Warumungu picture dictionary we follow the arrows to work out who our parents, brothers and sisters are. We roar with laughter when we discover that James is my father and Rhiannon is my mother. Through this gesture of giving us skin names, Rosemary not only begins to teach us about our relationships towards one another, but also the culturally appropriate behaviour that accompanies these relationships. This learning process echoes with the experiences of Elizabeth Mackinlay (2008) when she describes, "one of the most powerfully transformative teaching and learning resources about Indigenous Australian performance practice that we all have at our fingertips is not something we will find in a

book on the library shelf, in an article published by a 'white expert' (such as myself), or on an internet website. Rather, it rests in the multi-faceted potential of 'relationship' as a teaching and learning approach to Indigenous Australian musics" (p. 4).

This emphasis on relationships and appropriate ways of communicating with one another continues in our Warumungu class the next day. "*Piliyi angi* (how are you)?" Rosemary asks. "*Piliyi arni* (good)" we reply. We then each take turns to ask one another around the circle. Once she is satisfied with our progress, Rosemary teaches us a greeting song called *Piliyi angi* to reinforce what we have learnt. She asks the students to harmonize the melody and work out the chords so our singing can be accompanied by guitar. It is a magical moment where the language the students have been struggling to get their tongues around coincides with music making and they are finally able to get it. The enjoyment on both Rosemary and the students' faces is clear to see. When we are leaving our language class that day some Warumungu women are sitting outside. Rosemary tells us we must sing in Warumungu for them. When we do, their faces light up with delight. I can't help but notice their somewhat bemused expressions as they watch our White faces singing in Warumungu. "*Piliyi!*" they all shouted afterwards. It is a magical moment we all talk avidly about at the Caravan Park that night.

In our lesson a few days later Rosemary extends this focus on relationships to places and the land. She tells me she would like to show the students the town camps so that they can understand where members of the different language groups live. I offer to drive the group. We load the students into the troupe carrier and Rosemary and I sit in the front seat. As we drive in and out of the town camps Rosemary explains who lives here. The dire living conditions are plain to see. We are saddened when she explains some of the musicians we have been working with live in these surroundings too. Tiny

tin sheds and smashed windows, rusting old car frames, junk and dogs everywhere. We notice the community centres in each of the town camps have been badly vandalised. "It's the young people who did this," Rosemary explains with a pained expression on her face. In this moment, I am reminded of the sadness I felt when I saw the town camps in Borroloola last year, and the shame I felt that our Indigenous people have to live in such rotten conditions. After we have been driving in and out of a few camps, I notice the students start chatting in the back of the troupe carrier about dinner. I silently fume at them for their insensitivity. I am ashamed that they're talking about their food when they're witnessing such extreme poverty in front of their own eyes. I silently hope Rosemary isn't offended. It is only a month later back in Brisbane, when I look at their fieldwork diaries that I realise they were not as blasé as I had thought. As Ryan describes, "We went for a drive with Rosemary to the camps out of town in the afternoon—they are really like a third world country. I didn't really know how to feel or think as I hadn't seen anything like it before and it was worse than I expected. Every building was falling apart, windows smashed, rubbish everywhere, dogs and broken down cars" (Ryan, fieldwork diary, June 2009). Likewise, Carly explains, "There also doesn't appear to be good infrastructure such as water and power in some of the camps. Rosemary also pointed out some small tin shacks which are basically four tin walls with a roof where people stay when there are ceremonies and rituals. It is sad and really eye opening to see people living like this" (Carly, fieldwork diary, June 2009). Amie also elaborates, *This is something that we wouldn't have been able to do without Rosemary (as an elder) with us. This was a real eye-opener as to the way of life for many of the people out here at Tennant Creek, and I'm sure many more towns similarly like this. [...] Just seeing the state of how the houses and yards were kept was a bit of a shock to see. There was so much rubbish lying around the place. All of the community halls that had been built (and were often positioned in the middle of the camps)*

had been vandalised by the youth Rosemary said. Some of these were barely even standing now with completed chunks of actual walls missing etc. It was hard to comprehend how people could live like this on a day-to-day basis out here like they do. This was a really important part of what we are learning while we are out here (Amie, fieldwork diary, June 2009).

The students' responses seem to echo Jane Selby's words (2004): "non-indigenous peoples with a colonial heritage are challenged by political and social problems associated with the guilt of centuries of systematic oppression of indigenous cultures" (p. 144). As I later came to realise, the students were grappling with the political and social devastation of our country's colonial past. This past that was now all of sudden very much in the present, and before their own eyes they could see the devastation it was causing their new Indigenous friends and collaborators. They were genuinely shocked and appalled, and unsure of how to respond, for such things are rarely spoken about let alone experienced in university music classrooms.

In subsequent lessons we learn more about language, *Wumpurrarni* ways, and the land. For our final class Rosemary decides to take us to the local dam, an important women's place. As we drive along the dam road, she points up to the rocks and explains this is what was traditionally ground up to make paint. We decide to find a concrete pagoda by the river to sit and have our final lesson. While the afternoon sun is blazing down, there is a cool breeze coming off the water through the eucalyptus trees. Myfany stokes up a fire and makes us some tea in a billycan. As we sip it, we all comment on the smoky flavour. Opening up our Warumungu book again, we continue to practice our language. Today we are continuing to learning about *malungku* (relations). "*Kangkuya* (father's father)" we all rehearse. "*Jurttanti* (mother's mother)" we recite, trying to get our tongues around the unfamiliar words. The lesson draws to a close without any major fanfare. As a thank-you gift, the students present Rosemary

with typed up copies of the songs we've worked on together and a recording of us singing her songs so she can use these in her lessons with school students. "*Piliyi!*" she exclaims. As we say our farewells and begin the drive back to town, I think through all we have learned with Rosemary. I suppose the privileging of learning language and culture in an Indigenous way could be thought of as an important step in decolonizing our classroom. This has involved "questioning, critiquing, and moving aside the pedagogical script of colonialism in order to allow Indigenous ways of understanding music and dance to be presented, privileged and empowered" (Mackinlay, 2005, p. 113). Andrew describes the impact of such an experience and the self-realizations that come with it: "The question of 'finding oneself' after such a journey I still feel a cliché but entirely relevant. The trip was great. Conceptions have been challenged. Assumptions punished; curiosity welcome. ... Trapped inside

a fragment of time with infinite repercussion" (Andrew, fieldwork diary, July 2009).

Conclusions

Our final day in Tennant Creek has arrived. After throwing the last of our bags into the two troupe carriers we pull out onto the main road. Jeff and the students are in the Winanji-kari troupe carrier ahead of Myfany and me. I can only imagine the noise and commotion that is probably going on in the Winanji-kari troupe carrier. The students and Jeff are now the greatest of friends and I am sure there will be chatter and music all the way to Alice Springs. As we pass the last of the town buildings and hit the open road, I start to feel a pang inside. I am sad to be leaving. As I watch the termite mounds flash by, my mind begins to wonder and think about what we've just experienced since that long journey to Tennant Creek two weeks ago. It honestly feels like it has been a lifetime.

Figure 2: Final Warumungu lesson at the dam



During this trip I was keen to observe what happens when we exchange our university classroom for an Indigenous community. I discovered that new learning spaces are opened up where the centrality of relationship building is crucial. Without these relationships, the perils of our colonial past paralyse us, and the possibilities of our interactions amount to nothing. I watched firsthand the realisations that came from understanding more about our own racial subjectivities and our role in the construction of Otherness. I was also keen to understand what happens when pedagogical practices are decolonised and placed into the hands of Indigenous musicians and Elders. We all learnt how Indigenous ways of knowing and learning can be privileged through this process, and the multitude of new insights that this brings. I was curious to observe what exchange of music and ideas might transpire when students and Indigenous musicians are given the opportunity to spend time together and collaborate, and discovered the sense of openness there is to such endeavours when people are given the time and opportunity to work together. A letter the Winanji-kari musicians sent us before our digital story showcase reiterates this:

Was great working together on the workshops. Thank you for coming and meeting up. Hope the stories you tell goes down well and people up your way learn from them. It helps us a lot down here in Tennant doing interviews with you and getting to know you mob much better. We hope to see you mob in the future and do more workshops. Next time we take you out hunting and camping out and teach you how to live off the land [...]. From the Winanjikari men. Winanjikari means 'Singing for Belonging': That's it. (Letter from Joe Davey, Zaddock Johnson and the men of Winanjikari)

This isn't where the story ends. Of course, if relationships are central to this work, a one off meeting does not suffice. Two of the students returned within a year to Central Australia. Andrew returned with Myfany on a fieldwork project. James moved his band to Tennant Creek

to write their latest album and also to work with Indigenous children in Tennant Creek and surrounding communities. I returned with my colleague/husband and a new group of students in 2010, and he subsequently returned again in 2011. Those stories are for another time. Rest assured this is an ongoing tale, and really couldn't be any other way.

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