



Mentoring as Two-Way Learning: An Australian First Nations/Non-indigenous Collaboration

*Kathryn Coff and Jo Lampert**

School of Education, La Trobe University, Melbourne, VIC, Australia

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*Correspondence:

Jo Lampert
j.lampert@latrobe.edu.au

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In this paper we explore how we are using the principles of two-way learning in a collaboration between two academics coming from different worldviews: an Australian First Nations scholar and a White, non-Indigenous scholar working together to promote First Nations Australian perspectives into the curriculum. This collaboration involves supporting each other, learning from each other, opening each other's hearts and minds to each other's worldviews. We act as each other's mentors at different times, we are each other's translators, have each other's backs, and see each other as equals with different views to offer in order to create critical and sustainable change in all areas of education.

Keywords: mentoring, two-way learning, First Nations perspectives, academia, yarning

INTRODUCTION

In this paper we explore how we, an Australian First Nations scholar and a White, non-Indigenous scholar, are using the principles of two-way learning as we work together on improving how one teacher education program can work more equitably, collaboratively and effectively to promote First Nations perspectives into the curriculum¹. This collaboration involves supporting each other, learning from each other and opening each other's hearts and minds to each other's worldviews. We act as each other's mentors at different times, challenge each other's ideas; we are each other's translators, have each other's backs, and see each other as equals with different views to offer. This collaboration brings about greater energy and a new way of thinking and feeling that merge theory and practice.

Our two-way mentoring relationship began, organically, with an opportunity. Kath had been working with schools and young people through a regional Australian First Nations organization and had recently been awarded a Fellowship in Indigenous Leadership. Jo was new to the University in which she now found herself working and had been invited to participate and speak at a forum on reinventing teacher education. The term reinvention, which might have become mere buzzword, instead created a moment in time when scope existed for enlarging the application of the word to truly encompass a transformative agenda (Cornwall and Eade, 2010, p.13). Simultaneously, Kath's CV had landed on Jo's desk introducing her as an Indigenous Community leader with extensive

¹The term First Nations is preferred by the authors of this article, as a political term that recognizes the Australian State of Victoria as the first to enter into formal treaty negotiations with Aboriginal Victorians. However, the terms Aboriginal, Indigenous, and Torres Strait Islander and Indigenous peoples are all used by the various scholars cited in this article, so terms vary throughout.

background working with young people². When we met in person at a talk given by another Indigenous scholar we were instinctively drawn to each other. This was primarily a personal connection since we had not previously met. Though it could be argued that our individual and extensive experience working with others on social justice projects gave us “good” instincts, this was also risky since both of us have subsequently disclosed that we sometimes make mistakes in who we trust, and trust is fundamentally crucial to this two-way work. Nonetheless, Jo invited Kath to attend the conference with her, since she had planned to speak on community engagement in teacher education, and the principles of collaborating with Indigenous communities to better inform teacher education.

It was primarily on the flight to the overseas conference that we got to know each other. Sitting side by side on a long flight we alternated between watching the in-flight entertainment and talking about our lives, our experiences and our work. This was a combined trust exercise where we tentatively “sussed each other out”³ Introductions began, as they do, with some discussion of our names, Country and ancestors:

Kath: I am a very proud Yorta Yorta Women living on Dja Dja Wurrung Country. I came from a family where our relationship with Country is strong and ongoing. You could say we were raised by Country. In the words of Australian Indigenous Kakadu Elder Bill Neidjie, “You look after Country...Country he look after you” (Neidjie and Taylor, 1989). I spent my childhood being with Mother Country. Feeling her beneath my feet, hearing the voices of the wind, and the healing of the warmth of sun and the cleansing of rain in my soul. We were brought up with the freedom to make mistakes and learned that no matter how much trauma my parents had endured in their childhoods, we believed that if we listened to Country, our heart and the messages of our Ancestors, we could do anything. We were taught the importance of hard work and self-sacrifice and taught that no matter how hard life seems you can always find beauty and laughter in things. These are important messages as I was brought up with the Indigenous Relational worldview of seeing the world. The American First Nations scholar Leroy Little Bear describes my belief system beautifully:

In Aboriginal philosophy, existence consists of energy. All things are animate, imbued with spirit, and inconstant motion. In this realm of energy and spirit, interrelationships between all entities are of paramount importance space is a more important referent than time. The idea of all things being in constant motion or flux leads to a holistic and cyclical view of the world (Little Bear, 2000, p. 77–78).

All my life I have seen my world like this.

Jo: I was born and raised in Toronto, Canada but have been living in Australia for nearly twenty-five years, where I’ve always worked in Education. My background is Jewish, though I am completely secular, but when Kath probed me to explain how these matter to me, I was a bit stumped to explain it—it’s a sort of cultural

knowledge felt in my bones, but in my daily life I feel removed from this and would—and still do—tick the White privilege box. I feel it more as a lack (something I don’t practice) than something I deeply hold, and yet I know that my ancestry and the culture means something to me. There is certainly a sense of identity, for instance, in knowing the historical trauma my people have experienced. I get a little embarrassed though, claiming this as a common bond, since I was raised so removed from any of this, and always describe myself as completely unspiritual. Maybe my ancestry contributes to my sense of social justice—maybe it doesn’t.

During the conference itself Kath’s worldview shifted the relationship and demonstrated some of what we each now contribute to each other’s learning. Kath’s perspective on White academic versions of privilege was demonstrated by her amusement at Jo’s in-flight concern that *there will be many important people in the room* and her effort to explain to Kath who some of these people were and their fields of expertise. Kath was interested in these people’s work, but not at all interested in their status or daunted by their reputation. Instead, she hoped both to hear and be heard, quite rightly assuming she was bringing something equally significant to the table. In fact, she was the only First Nations person at the conference. She looked forward to a genuine process of sharing rather than a sitting at an expert’s feet. Kath herself is an expert, and unintimidated. This was something of a revelation for Jo, who has invested more in the academic fandom. The difference in these perspectives cannot be underestimated and is relevant to developing a framework for two-way mentoring where each perspective, and each persons’ contributions are of equal value. This is not to say there is no such thing as leadership. For instance, to be an Elder is highly important, an earned and respected status.

Kath: Credentials are not what is most important to me. I would always begin a relationship by wanting to know what your name is, where in Country you’re connected to and where your ancestors are from. It’s a ‘learning’ for people to talk in a different way. I can feel energies change around the room when we talk like that because we start to see each other as humans rather than colleagues. People are craving to be seen like that.

Reproducing the White privileged view, mentoring relationships are often inherently paternalistic. Even mentoring established on principals of social justice assume a mentor and a mentee, with the mentee perceived as needing the social or cultural capital to navigate the university system. Established White academics know and benefit from the implicitly “hidden agenda” of a university system; knowledge the seemingly “less privileged” Indigenous academic may need in order to advance their career, survive, or thrive. In this White relationship, however, there is still an expert and a novice. Professional knowledge trumps what is problematically mis-defined as “experiential knowledge,” reinforcing what First Nations scholar Martin Nakata calls the knowledge boundaries of the colonizers (Nakata, 2013). Even the fact that some knowledge is deemed professional and some “merely” experiential is political and problematic. As McMahan (2017, p. 228) points out, Indigenous peoples have “worldviews, social systems and expert fields of knowledge for every facet of

²In this paper, when they are directly related to Indigenous worldview, the words Country and Community are capitalized because, as Kath puts it, *Country and Community are seen as animate and alive*. As living entities, these are proper nouns in an Indigenous sense.

³<https://www.urbandictionary.com/define.php?term=suss%20out>.

life.” This is not mere experiential knowledge, but intellectual, scientific and professional knowledge.

Nonetheless, in the academy, where status, academic credibility and “success” are dependent on cultural capital and impact on opportunity, it is often taken-for-granted that the mentor is the person with “higher status” as proven by their publication record, level of education and number of degrees, number, and ranking of publications and even salary. And yet, it does not take much critical analysis to recognize that these measures of worth, the kind academics are reliant on in promotion and grant applications, only represent one sort of privileged knowledge, the kind much more accessible to White scholars. hooks (2014a, p. 78), whose pivotal writing has been so influential, writes of the university’s longstanding practice of establishing a “select intellectual elite, reinforcing and perpetuating systems of domination.” We would like to claim that our co-mentoring is a way of challenging what Frankenberg calls this established “white turf” (Frankenberg, 2001, p.418).

For First Nations peoples in Australia, the spaces where Indigenous and non-Indigenous people come together are “fragile, and the university remains a difficult place to exist within, dominated by western practices and principles” (Dudgeon and Fielder, 2006, p. 399). We need to guard against paternalistic practices and “transform unjust societal structures in solidarity” (Phillip et al., 2013, p. 176). In the kind of two-way mentoring we propose here, we think of each other as scholars and see “coequal, mutual” or reciprocal relationships’ as ways of resisting historical power relationships in the academy (Alarcón and Bettez, 2017). This reciprocal relationship comes with responsibilities to each other informed by First Nations ways of being, whereby “you give to me and I give back to you.” This involves such things as “attempting to understand each other’s worldview, exerting efforts to trust each other, and making relations stable through transparent obligations and expectations” (Lalas, 2016, p. 120). First Nations leaders Martin and Mirraoopa’s (2003) discussion of Indigenous ways of Knowing, Being and Doing emphasize this relational ontology, including genuine reciprocity that must be reflected in any partnerships claiming to be in line with Indigenous protocols (Rigney, 1999). They remind us that “no one person or Entity knows all, but each has sets of knowledges to fulfill particular roles” (Martin and Mirraoopa, 2003, p. 209).

While recognizing privilege in the academy is crucial to this new configuration of two-way mentoring, it is also useful to consider the very term, privilege. In some respects, normalizing ideas about who is more privileged only accepts White versions of privilege, such as status or money. It is worth noting here that even this notion of privilege is culturally bound. We have had conversations around this complexity. As Kath says, *I would think that not being brought up on Country is a lack of privilege, or not knowing about your own culture.* We have become wary of the taken-for-grantedness of assuming Kath, as the First Nations mentor, aspires to the same things as Jo, the non-Indigenous mentor. In some respect this is a big leap; that Indigenous colleagues may not need or want to be mentored into positions of “privilege.” While life in the academy is not easy, and Indigenous

scholars encounter racism and other barriers on a daily basis, this hierarchical, western notion of privilege can also be critiqued. Kath says, *from my perspective I don’t think anybody is better than anybody else. I don’t think that way at all. I’ve watched important Indigenous leaders have to stroke the egos of people who think they are better than anyone else. Who earns the right for my respect? Truth talkers, those who have a relationship with Country, those who are brave enough to talk from the heart. Those who don’t do what they do for their own personal gain or ego.* This re-orientation toward what we mean by privilege at all, or whose definitions the word itself represents is not insignificant and may arm us against what Indigenous scholar Hogarth (2018) calls “discursive trickery,” whereby terms are used without critique.

Explaining that there are other ways to understand privilege does not negate the very real power imbalances (and racisms) that exist in academia. One discussion we have as co-mentors is whether in fact we even desire the same things, are looking for the same outcomes or feel similarly about why, when, or how we do academic work at all.

Kath: People are very protective of me. They don’t need to be. I do things for a reason, even if they aren’t the same as your reasons. I know what I can handle, and I am honest. I can handle more than other people can handle. I’ve had experience with pain, trauma, laughter and love and as Indigenous people our boundaries are different. Sometimes I think it is condescending or that people think I’m not aware. There are reasons I say yes to things. It’s not because I feel privileged that I’m in this space. So, are people protecting me because they don’t want to lose me, or they think I’m not aware? I’m doing things for my own reasons—not just to make people happy. I have my eyes wide open. It’s a two-way thing—I get things back too but maybe different things than you do.

Jo: I think I do actually feel protective, not because I think you can’t do the work but because we have been so exploitative of Indigenous scholars who are genuinely asked to do so much more than non-Indigenous faculty. And the burn-out and despair is so high. But this is a very good reminder for me, and the truth is, I feel you are also protective of me. I happen to know you shield me from criticism all the time. I feel like maybe this is part of the reciprocal arrangement—you protect me, I protect you. But it’s a good reminder that this can come across as patronizing.

While this relationship has become friendship, this is also inherently scholarly and political work. Like (Alarcón and Bettez, 2017, p. 27), our experience is that “traditional mentoring practices allow the academy to maintain the retrenchment of status quo power relations and power differentials.” While a thorough examination of these power relationships would require a much lengthier discussion, mentoring relationships (and decisions about who is the mentor and who is the mentee) are very much dependent on privilege. Drawing on theory from Critical Whiteness Studies, the term “privilege” can expose the institutional, cultural, and individual practices and structures that produce and reproduce white supremacy (McIntosh, 1997).

Two-Way Learning, “Yarning,” and Deep Listening

Defined by Purdie et al. (2011, p. xx), two-way or both-way learning infers “a partnership relationship between First Peoples and Settler cultures in Australia...a negotiated space...‘third space’, to imply that, like the cultural literal zone where land and sea meet.....it is dynamic and fluid, like that of a coast line.” The “two ways” implied by the two-way mentoring we discuss in this paper seek a tentative space where Indigenous Relational Standpoint and the White normative standpoint can co-exist. In recognizing our worldviews or standpoints, we reflect on the fact that “our perspectives are constructed within intersections of multiple positions in power relations” (Zipin et al., 2015, p.15). The two-way mentoring we advocate must be constantly negotiated as a new way of working.

In our two-way mentoring we find it important first to determine our standpoint, cultural lens and beliefs on how we see the world, and to use Indigenous methods to conduct ourselves. Our co-mentoring conversations and the collaboration itself are founded on our knowledge of these standpoint theories. These include the foundational feminist standpoint theories, such as Smith’s (1990), that gave credibility to women’s personal narratives as true and valid and the standpoint theories that come from Critical Race Theories. The ground-breaking work of scholars such as hooks (2014b) exposed the political hierarchies of personal narratives in different ways, such as examining how White knowledge claimed empirical validity as opposed to “storying” which was dismissed as more subjective and less scientific. These theories are central to our methods, serving as a constant reminder that our own relationship should not reproduce these biases and how we shift privilege. But most significantly, we draw on Indigenous Standpoint Theories, such as Moreton-Robinson’s (2000) which re-think the unique, primary place that Indigenous (or “first”) narratives should play and conduct our conversations using what have come to be known as “yarning methodologies.”

“Yarning”

Bessarab and Ng’andu (2010, p.38) explain that “Yarning . . . is an informal and relaxed discussion. . . that requires the researcher to develop and build a relationship that is accountable to Indigenous people participating in the research.” Yarning is always collaborative, involving “sharing information, exploring ideas in explaining new topics, leading to new understandings” (Bessarab and Ng’andu, 2010, p. 40). These collaborations can involve intellectual conversation, heart talking, and both communicating from the heart *and* mind. Within the Indigenous worldview this is “yarning”; it is communicating on an intuitive deep level within one’s self. Communicating on this level allows for a “shift” in belief systems to create change, and to be able to move into a third space or “new” space where two people can work and be understanding of different truths. This requires the right environment, good timing, establishing a personal connection to start up the topic/yarn, keeping each other on track, and knowing when and how to draw the yarn politely to a close, which is what we were able to do on the plane. Yarning facilitates in-depth discussions in a relaxed way and provides rich

data. It matches an Indigenous way of doing things. One of its strengths is in the cultural safety that it creates for Indigenous people participating in research. “Yarning is a process that cuts across the formality of identity as a researcher. . . both are learners in the process” (Bessarab and Ng’andu, 2010, p. 40). A shared dialogue is the core component in the chosen methodological approach.⁴

‘Yarning’ is an important cultural practice for First Nations people and is often non-linear, as much about listening as it is about speaking (Bessarab and Ng’andu, 2010) and is considered a suitable Indigenist method for collaborating (Rigney, 1999), in that it privileges the voices, experiences, and lives of Indigenous people. It is the Indigenous Relational Standpoint that creates a space for Indigenous ontologies to be expressed, including ways of understanding and beliefs about reality. Kath’s role as a mentor in this co-mentoring relationship maneuvers intellectual sovereign space for Indigenous ontologies, fields of knowledge, and intellectual processes as she fights back for space in a colonized world (Martin and Mirraboopa, 2003; McMahon, 2017). Without a recognition of both the personal and the political dimensions to yarning, “Indigenous perspectives and principles may simply become another ‘add on’ to the Western ways of knowing. . .” (Martin, 2016). It seems obvious to point out that currently Indigenous perspectives *are* in fact an add-on in all aspects of Western society. While yarning is reciprocal, we (Jo in particular) have to be constantly alert in resisting a slide back into taking over, falling back into the historically colonizing pattern whereby authority resides in Whiteness. Kath asks, *how can we move to truly live in a space where there can be many truths and many ways of seeing the world, where worldviews are truly seen as equals. Where Country, Community and Ancestors are as equal stakeholders in decision making. For us knowledge has always been held in Country. And the spirit, constantly cyclically moves. This connects us all. Many people talk about our generational trauma, but what balances this is others carry generational guilt. To move forward together we have to have a time to acknowledge and heal. And then move forward.*

Deep Listening or Dadirri

The collaboration described in this paper also utilizes the interpretive, First Nations approach called “deep listening,” which is the “process of listening with one’s ear but also with the heart”(Miller, 2014). This is associated with the aforementioned yarning, which is as much about listening as it is about speaking. While we reproduce some of our dialogues here, those included in this article are just examples from our regular “yarns.” We check in with each other often, and our conversations fluctuate between talking about work, catching up on each other’s personal lives, problem-solving, debating current events, clarifying our positions and occasionally agreeing to disagree. Listening is a non-negotiable part of the co-mentoring relationship. Atkinson (2000, p. 8) explains the deep significance of listening to First Nations people, in that it

⁴The authors’ institution did not require ethical approval for this component of the research project which consisted of dialogue and involved no human subjects beyond the two authors themselves.

“invites responsibility to get the story—the information—right and to be in right relationship. However, listening over extended periods of time also brings the knowledge that the story changes over time as healing occurs when people experience being listened to and [which include] having their pain acknowledged.”

In Australian Indigenous communities, *Dadirri* is highly valued as a method for listening to one another (Ungunmerr, 2017). *Dadirri* is an Aboriginal concept which refers to a deep contemplative process of “listening to one another” in reciprocal relationships. Miriam Rose Ungunmerr calls *Dadirri* a “special quality, a unique gift of the Aboriginal people. It is inner deep listening and quiet, still awareness—something like what you call contemplation” (Ungunmerr, 2017, p. 14). Similarly, another Aboriginal Elder Judy Atkinson advises that “. . . we first need to listen quietly, in order to gain trust and respect. I will listen to you, share with you, as you listen to, share with me. . . Our shared experiences are different, but in the inner deep listening to, and quiet, still awareness of each other, we learn and grow together. In this we create community, and our shared knowledge(s) and wisdom are expanded from our communication with each other” (Atkinson, 2002, p. 19). In Kath’s Yorta Yorta culture, this same listening is called *Gulpa Ngawal* (McMahon, 2017). Two-way mentoring involves the “process of listening and learning with the ear but also from the heart” (Miller, 2014).

THE CO-PRODUCTION OF KNOWLEDGE THROUGH RELATIONSHIP: IMPLICATIONS FOR TEACHER EDUCATION

In this particular example of two-way mentoring, our “business” is to better embed Indigenous perspectives across the teacher education program, and ultimately (though somewhat indirectly) to improve ways for our pre-service teachers—White and otherwise—to embed Indigenous perspectives in their own teaching once they enter the profession. We believe the model of two-way mentoring we describe in this paper “trickles down” to colleagues and pre-service teachers who can then develop their own productive Indigenous/non-Indigenous partnerships. If we model this as teacher educators, then Education students who will soon become teachers, will see this and the hope is that they will also feel brave enough to team teach in this way. This will then be modeled to students within a classroom. This modeling of equality can then change our classrooms into ones where individual belief systems can be countered. That is our hope for a better future. Something has to change. Kath writes: *What is happening at the moment is certainly not working for our mob or other students. Many crave to learn about the history and people of this land we live on. So many times, I hear, why wasn’t I taught this at school? So many crave this knowledge.*

We believe, as do many others, that for teacher education to be transformational (that is, to both transform the ways teacher educators work and to transform the kinds of teachers we graduate), teacher education must better and more authentically build collegial relationships that address the issues of *whose knowledge counts*. Extending theories of

“funds of knowledge” which are based on the premise that people “have knowledge, and their life experiences have given them that knowledge” (Gonzalez and Moll, 2002, p. 625), the notion of a third space goes further, proposing an equality of knowledges, both parties bringing both their personal *and* their theorized knowledges to the table, resisting the assumed superior status of White knowledge that Aboriginal woman from the Quandamooka Nation on Stradbroke Island Aileen Moreton-Robinson considers a form of colonization (Moreton-Robinson, 2000, p. 75–76). This equality of knowledges is important, because it refuses to label some knowledge as “authentic and personal” as contrasted with other kinds of knowledge that are book based and somehow more empirical or scientific. When First Nations worldviews, which are the oldest, most sophisticated and most scientific of all knowledges are respected, possibilities open up for new kinds of working, learning, being, and doing.

Finding authentic ways for teacher educators, teachers and community members to work together to educate all children requires us to think differently about what Zeichner et al. (2015) refer to as this “third-space”. This is more than just a physical location where people can come together, but an affective, intellectual, and methodological exercise where collaboration can take place. This kind of collaboration, Haddix (2015) argues, requires a paradox shift to enable the leadership around learning and teaching to be led by the community who have least often had a voice. This emancipatory aim is related to Nancy Fraser’s notion of “cultural justice” (1997) and the ability of certain groups to have a say in what decisions are made about them, or what happens to them. Trust is crucial—being trusted, being listened to, not being reactive straight away, and also patience in wanting to find out what a person is really meaning. In an Indigenous sense, as we learn to trust each other we each earn our place to speak.

The postcolonial theory of identity and community that is related to “third space” is generally attributed to Bhabha (1994, p. 4), who describes the possibility of a cultural space “that entertains difference without an assumed or imposed hierarchy.” While all communities accumulate knowledge, the hegemonic impact of colonization in Australia (and elsewhere) mean there are power differences in which of these knowledges are recognized and privileged. As Dudgeon and Fielder suggested (2006, p. 1), these “decolonized” third spaces are “ways of thinking and doing, as social and psychological, connected to individual agency and political action as part of making space within everyday institutional life.” However, what happens in this third-space is not necessarily predictable. Genuine two-way mentoring of the type we describe here become co-evolving relationships and are emergent rather than predetermined with prescribed outcomes (Cochran-Smith et al., 2016). It can be hard, and can involve tolerance, patience, and trust.

Alongside other collaborative work, our developing relationship usually involves counter-storytelling where we establish our common bonds, points of difference and enter the third spaces. In the type of co-mentoring we are proposing in this paper, we each bring to the table, our own “pedagogical capital” (Duckworth and Maxwell, 2015). Since social change

and personal transformation are . . . closely connected (Dudgeon and Fielder, 2006, p. 396), these dialogues, which sometimes cross-cultural boundaries can be transformative, not just for the work we do, but for ourselves as individuals.

While we theorize from a social justice perspective, we can argue that another “third space” is that space where the head meets the heart and where, as Phillips and Lampert (2012, p. 176) remind us, we interpret our experiences through our “eyes, ears, minds and hearts.” Some of our two-way mentoring involves counter-storytelling. Many Indigenous scholars, such as O’Connell (2005) believe story-telling and counter-storytelling, where we do our heart-talking, isn’t a question of choice. First Nations communities and cultural protocols demand that researchers explain who they are.

Since our co-mentoring relationship has implications both for us as individuals and for systemic change, we have also sought western theories that might help us in our understanding of how we can learn from each other. Scharmer’s systems theory, used in management and leadership, suggests that dialogue can move people from seeing the system as something outside to seeing oneself as part of the system. The system and each individual begins to see itself “through a crack or a moment of silence in which one begins to let go of “the script”—to develop a deeper space of presence and connection” (Scharmer, 2009, p. 173) and subsequently “move into a generative flow of co-creating and bring forth something profoundly new” (p. 258).

Our version of two-way mentoring relationship resides in the recognition that First Nations perspectives do not see the personal as separate from the professional. In the Indigenous relational worldview people are seen as a whole because, as Kath says, *when the humanness is taken out of the equation that’s when wrong decisions are made. People become lonely, isolated. There is empowering strength in being perceived as a whole person. The reason why Indigenous people keep trying to change the space is because it is important for everyone that it gets changed.* In accordance, we “deliberately include aspects of ourselves as the study, our personal and historical narratives” (Shay and Wickes, 2017, p. 109). The two-way mentoring we strive to achieve is based on trust, reciprocity, respect and a mutual sense of responsibility. These are what we might define as the ethics of co-mentoring.

In the White dominated academy professional talk and personal relationships would be seen as quite separate. In fact, some might even see becoming too personal as unethical. This is quite different in an Indigenist co-mentoring relationship, where professional talk cannot properly exist without the establishment of genuine relationship first. Thus, what could sometimes seem like digression to Jo, who is sometimes tempted to try to get conversation *back on track* is seen as central to Kath, who sees heart-talk as the main business. The more wholistic nature of Indigenous knowledges means the professional and the personal cannot be untangled in some compartmentalized way.

Jo: I would try never to look vulnerable in front of my colleagues. I would worry that it would take my authority away. My ‘real life’ and my ‘work life’ are not always kept separate, but I admit I feel like they should be—it would be more appropriate. I have

colleagues who have become good friends, of course, but I’m careful to maintain my professional identity.

At times, I tend to be overly cautious. Because respectfulness is so paramount to our relationship, I might sometimes hold back rather than speak my mind, and sometimes I am reluctant to dominate. I also sometimes get it wrong. I am very cautious about seeming bossy—hegemonic or dominating. We have both revealed our vulnerabilities at times but ultimately it is respect for each other’s knowledge and expertise that serves us most.

Kath: As I still hold trauma, I have to constantly assess my reactions to conversations. I find I have to take a deep breath and ask myself, did she mean it in the way I heard it, or through her world view could it be meant in a different way. I am getting better at this, but what I find hardest is other people’s belief in why we do what we do. As for us as Aboriginal People it is easier to just work with other Aboriginal people, but how would that create change for our kids? I have to be brave and hope that change will happen. Not through anger but love. Sure, it is really hard but it is my Ancestors that remind me of why I do what I do, as well as changing society for our kids. Pain and trauma are there to remind us, but not cloud us from seeing hope of a better future, a safer one, one where our children thrive. That all children have the opportunity to thrive.

The Western way sees vulnerability as weakness and humanity as weakness but it’s actually a strength and brings people together. I hate the pretend-talk more—I want people to show their truth. My emotional boundaries are wider—anger is more ok; anxiety and sadness are ok; laughter and joy are all ok.

We do have different worldviews, and bring different things to the table, at different times. While Jo has the institutional knowledge about how universities work, what is a normal workload, etc., Kath offers new ways of being, relating, new worldviews that disrupt these institutionally normalized ways of doing things. These are just a few of the ways we bring different experiences, knowledges, and ways of practicing to the relationship and into our collaborative work as teacher educators. The institutional knowledge, the often hidden curriculum and White ways of scholarship accepted as credible by universities are privileged insider knowledge Kath needs in order to be heard; the wholistic, historical and scholarly knowledges Kath brings to the relationship are crucial for Jo (and their Faculty) in developing new ways of thinking and working. While we believe that both ways are important, Kath’s voice is prioritized because it has been nearly entirely excluded in colonizing institutions such as Universities. In this respect Jo’s most crucial role is often as a White ally.

Kath: I see my views as relational. Ego is a Western way. As soon as someone starts talking in the “I” word and not the “we” word I start to worry. We belong to our Ancestors and Country. Aboriginal people lead in different ways. Because we don’t function in “I” it is a leadership role to build up other people in Community. You love and hold your Community in inclusive ways to feel they are nurtured and supported—people feel isolated and crave to feel part of something. In the Western world I feel people are very lonely. If someone truly believed in the Aboriginal relational way, they would see things this way.

I have two passions in my life, trying to describe how we see the world and working to support and change the school system for our kids. I have been working with ‘at risk’ kids for over 26 years and have not lost my passion for it. More recently a chain of occurrences happened in my life, I had been encouraged in my Community to ‘step up’ as our kids needed help. But what pushed me to start the work I do was having vivid revealing dreams from my Ancestors, and as my father was passing, he said to me that I was a wonderful mother of 6 children, but there was more I needed to be doing and it is time to do it. If someone asks you to do something you have to say ‘Yes’. So, I did. This is important as it indicates the ways I make decisions from my standpoint. It is the lens through which I see the world as an Aboriginal person.

Kath has now been appointed as the first Indigenous Practitioner in Residence in a University in Australia, an academic position designed to bridge a gap between Indigenous communities and the academy.

The reason I took my position with the university is not because I felt privileged but because it was privileged to have the opportunity to make change. It’s also great to be acknowledged and financially secure, but that’s just the baseline”

Jo: I know there can be questions around why I have been involved in Indigenous education for so long. What’s the deal? Why am I, a White woman, so involved? It’s a reasonable question, especially against the long history of non-Indigenous Australian claiming to be ‘experts’, and the long line of White people who ‘profit’ from their relationships with Indigenous peoples one way or another. I do try to keep myself in check that I’m not just being a ‘do-gooder’, or even a gate-keeper. I’ve been pulled up on this and have learned a lot over the years. I’m sure I’ll be pulled up on it again, but I hope it’s not the case. I only ever got into Education at all for the social justice of it and to be honest the older I get the more I feel I can speak out. That does sort of come from my background, where my family just expected me to ‘make a noise’. But also, very early in my own career I was called out to put my money where my mouth is. An Indigenous colleague was very pissed off at me one day and told me I should step up or step out. This was a huge turning point for me, because what he was saying is that I could and should just walk away if I wasn’t going to really commit to working alongside and for Indigenous peoples. I didn’t have to do this work if I didn’t want to—now, sure that’s one definition of privilege. He told me if I was going to call myself an ally, I had to be willing to be told when I had messed up (he didn’t say it in these words), and that this would be hard. Tough luck. So honestly, those words always ring in my ears, and I do mess up and I do need mentoring. I think that’s why I stay in it. On the other hand, in other areas I take the lead. I’ve been an academic for a really long time now, so my experience in research, writing, publication, the general world of academia—these are things I can share. This is partly what I mean by two-way learning—sometimes I lead and sometimes I follow.

The ways Indigenous academics are commonly marginalized in universities are well-represented in other reports (Berendht et al., 2012). This work hopes to take up some of their recommendations. Some specific outcomes of our work together include the creation of a new Faculty position for an Indigenous

Practitioner-in-Residence (arguing for the recognition of community experience), the development and implementation of three new Indigenous education subjects across courses, a targeted strategy for embedding Indigenous perspectives across faculty curriculum (which was previously *ad hoc* and random). Imperatives are supporting Kath in what is often difficult and isolating work, making sure Indigenous staff are not exploited and overloaded and supporting her ongoing work with Community which is not extra to, but central to her role.

CONCLUSION

Kath: In a world where working at the cultural interface can be very hard and isolating I was determined to meet others like me. My belief in who I am and how I see the world has changed. Before I often felt there is only a them and us. But I have hope that maybe we can make change. I feel I have become more a translator between the two worlds. Now when I go into schools they treat me differently, because the University has valued what I am teaching. This has also helped with my lecturing, understanding how it has to be a process people go through to understand the two worlds. I teach now with less anger and trauma. I teach the hard history, but also the positive amazing history that others can learn from us. I am also teaching lecturers now as well. I have been at the cultural interface and advocating for many years, but I didn’t have to advocate with Jo like others. She was really listening to me. I could see she was actually learning from me. Since then she has trusted me, she is honest with me. She makes me feel safe. This is huge when working into a dominant worldview space you are not a part of and which is not your own.

We aspire in this two-way mentoring relationship to achieve a “non-hierarchical interplay between academic, practitioner, and community expertise” (Zeichner, 2010, p. 89). However, an honest and authentic co-mentoring relationship is not without its challenges and tensions and potential frustrations. Since we do hold different worldviews, we do not always see everything from the same perspective or hold the same priorities (Jo focusing on “work” priorities; Kath focusing on Community priorities, each with their own deadlines). Entering a new or third space means we are careful of each other’s feelings but have to be explicit about our needs and expectations to make ourselves heard and understood.

Our co-authorship deliberately represents what we hope is a new way of working in order to demonstrate a potential re-invention of academic partnerships. The significance of this research lies in its re-imagination of mentoring as two-way partnerships between First Nations and non-Indigenous scholars, posing both risks and opportunities. We hope to see the ripple effect of this practice into our teacher preparation programs.

AUTHOR CONTRIBUTIONS

As first author, KC provided all knowledge of Indigenous ways of being, knowing and doing in this paper (80%). JL provided guidance and contributed to content (20%).

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