Editorial: Ethical relationships, ethical research in Aboriginal contexts: Perspectives from central Australia

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How do protocols, ethics and values intersect in the quest for meaning-making in multidisciplinary and intercultural central Australian research settings? The practice of establishing and developing ethical relationships in these settings is a complex dance, involving interactions among individuals and contexts that are not always reflected in the intellectual processes of the academy's ethical procedures. Such relationships are, however, vital to the success and validity of the research undertaken. In this special issue, we share the experiences, the challenges, the positions and the reflections of researchers from diverse backgrounds who are working in a range of discipline areas in central Australian Aboriginal research contexts. What emerges from these different perspectives is a map of the ethical terrain across which researchers and research participants traverse, and which will, we hope, inform both the academy and those embarking or engaged on journeys across this terrain.

Werte. The idea for this special issue of Learning Communities arose at a symposium hosted by Batchelor Institute of Indigenous Education at the Desert People's Centre campus just south of Alice Springs in the autumn of 2017. The Knowledge Intersections symposium was convened to bring together researchers working in central Australia to explore the concept of "Crossings – Iwerre-Atherre" that was NT Writers' Festival theme for that year. The significance of the local Arrernte language term, iwerre-atherre, lies in its more nuanced meaning of two roads that cross without blocking or erasing each other. The conference papers explored areas as diverse as education, the arts, ecology, and service provision. One rich thread, or "knowledge intersection," that wove its way with increasing vigour through the presentations, question sessions and informal conversations was the question: How do we work to ensure our research in central Australia is responsible and responsive to the ethical codes and practices of all those participating? The attention I'm giving here to describing the geographical and language contexts that inspired this special issue is intentional. It embodies a central answer to the ethical question above that all the authors in this special issue address: as researchers in these intercultural settings, we have a relational–ethical imperative to work on understanding the particular cultural, language and relational elements which shape the content and the processes of our context-specific work.

Many of the papers in this issue draw on case-studies, narratives or reflections on particular experiences of research in these contexts: in such forms, they emphasise the "lived" and situated nature of undertaking research in intercultural contexts, and how the embodied forms of thinking that narrative offers allow us to better encounter these complex, ambiguous and shifting spaces.

The first three papers explore the different elements of ethical practice that these authors determine as essential to the success of their research relationships and processes in the contexts in which they have worked.

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Lisa Hall's paper, co-written with five Aboriginal teachers who were her research co-participants, is both an analysis and a depiction of the intentional dialogic process she and her co-authors adopted to ensure the research methods they chose when working together left them all with a "good feeling" at the end of the project. Moving between the voices and perspectives of all its authors, the paper makes a strong case for the importance of attending to the process of working together as equally important as the research aim or *product* of that work. Hall et al. contend that it is only by focusing on these processes and relationships that we can develop the necessarily responsive ethical research practices. The paper offers a valuable picture of the important methodological choices the authors made and highlights the ways in which good communication, ongoing negotiation of consent, trusting relationships, and reciprocity enabled the group to ethically navigate the research space together and, by doing so, achieve outcomes that were satisfying to them all.

In their paper, "Ngapartji ngapartji ninti and koorliny karnya quoppa katitjin (Respectful and ethical research in central Australia and the south west)," Jennie Buchanan, Len Collard and Dave Palmer use a similar dialogic form to Hall et al. They present a series of conversations between themselves, as Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal researchers and long-term colleagues, about the ethical challenges of working with Aboriginal communities in the central and south-west regions of Australia. They reflect on building ngapartji ngapartji and karnya birit gnarl Noongar, broadly translated as reciprocity and respectful and authentic ways of working together. In choosing to use a dialogic form and to move between the languages of Noongar, Pitjantjatjara and academic English, the authors intentionally unsettle the western conventions that, they contend, limit intercultural understanding. They demonstrate the value of the back-and-forth rhythms of "yarning" as a way of collaboratively constructing knowledge and understanding of the complexities involved in undertaking ethical intercultural research in Aboriginal communities. A central point of their paper is the necessity for researchers to recognise that ethical behaviour shifts from place to place. And so, the authors turn to the discourses of the Noongar people of the South West and the Anangu people of central Australia: through these discourses they articulate how the cultural value and practices of these two groups, such as birniny (digging and scratching), kulini (being and listening) and dabakarn dabakarn, wanyu (steady and steady) can inform and guide ethical research in these contexts.

Tessa Benveniste and Lorraine King's paper, "Researching together: Reflections on ethical research in remote Aboriginal communities," explores the ways in which the two authors, an Adelaide born non-Aboriginal PhD researcher and a Pintupi-Luritja Warlpiri Senior Aboriginal Community Researcher, developed research strategies to ensure ethical practices when working with remote Aboriginal families and communities. From an analysis of their joint experience, the authors identify a series of elements of ethical practice that may inform research in similar contexts. The key elements Benveniste and King explore comprise: addressing the past, transforming formal ethical requirements into practice, developing cultural contextual and language knowledge, approaching communities respectfully, and building trusting working relationships.

The "two types of ethics, Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal (western)" that Lorraine King identifies and the often-fraught relationship between these value systems are the focus of the next three papers. In "The dancing trope of cross-cultural language education policy," Janine Oldfield and Vincent Forrester tell a cautionary tale of how their use of Indigenous and decolonising research methods came into conflict with "the academy's ethical procedures and institutional gatekeeping." Both researchers, one Aboriginal and one non-Aboriginal, had extensive cultural and family ties to the participants in the two remote Indigenous communities involved: they analyse the ways in which this cultural knowledge and connection were disregarded by the academy and other institutions involved in the research. They describe their discomfort in the

ways the authenticity and validity of their research came close to being compromised both by the gatekeeping practices of the ethical and educational institutions and by the domination of western methods of "atomised" data analysis in the reporting of their project.

The second paper in this group, "Different monsters: Traversing the uneasy dialectic of institutional and relational ethics," is by this author and Lisa Papatraianou. It adopts an arts-based approach to better express and understand the frustrations of experiencing the conflict between institutional and relational ethical requirements. It also uses these methods to find a way forward that moves beyond these traditional conflicts between bureaucracy and researchers. Using a collage-cartoon that re-works elements of the artwork "Monstrous Breeches," the final paper in this issue, we caution against positioning ourselves with a deficit perspective of institutional ethical practice. We suggest that the chaffing of relational and institutional ethics would be better viewed as a productive friction that can offer a generative dialectical discourse through which meaningful change is made possible.

Judith Lovell's paper, "Research for social impact and the contra-ethic of national frameworks" also offers a vision of a more productive relationship between the bodies that commission and administrate research and the remote community contexts where such research can occur. She proposes the development of institutional processes that operate after the research is "complete." This would involve "research commissioners and administrators provid[ing] feedback as to the uptake or not of research findings." Such feedback would not only, she suggests, provide valuable records, baselines and metadata for future research, but would also support the researched communities in their use of the research knowledge generated. Lovell offers a strong vision of why and how such a process could function within the existing Human Research Ethics Committee structures. She recognises, however, that the implications of her proposal, which involve more "equitable accountability of the public investment in research" and a shift in power from government bureaucracy to academic institutions, mean that such a vision is unlikely to be realised in the current socio-political climate.

The final two papers of this issue focus on other relationships that sustain or constrain researchers' work. They also take the reader into two quite different research contexts, that of the sometimes-difficult relationship between an Arrernte researcher and non-Aboriginal institutions that hold significant collections of Arrernte cultural materials, and the very different collaborative relationship between an Aboriginal and a non-Aboriginal artist. Joel Liddle Perrurle and Barry Judd's paper, "Altyerre NOW: Arrernte dreams for national reconstruction in the 21st century," offers an insight into the perspective of an Aboriginal researcher engaged in research that focuses on his family. It raises questions about the ways western institutions exert authority and ownership over Aboriginal cultural materials and knowledge. The addressing of such questions becomes even more urgent when posed in the context of Aboriginal researchers using research as a "tool for cultural revival, the rediscovery of identity, the reconnection to Country…what might be broadly called Aboriginal national reconstruction."

Judith Lovell and Kathleen Kemarre Wallace's paper, "The making of Monstrous Breeches: An ethical global visual narrative" closes this special issue. It presents a previously unpublished collaborative artwork, "Monstrous Breeches," and a critical narrative that takes the reader on a journey across the relational, cultural and artistic landscapes that the authors traversed in creating their large-scale monoprint. The account of how the authors applied "artistry across artistic traditions" and the artwork itself offer us both an optimistic depiction of how intercultural arts-based research can work, and an invitation to become an ongoing part of this fruitful collaboration.

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