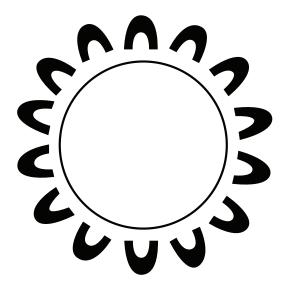
# Yearning to Yarn

The Artefact in Research Simon Munro

Yearning to Yarn – The Artefact in Research ISBN: 978-0-7259-0038-0

The University Gallery Museum The University of Newcastle University Drive Callaghan NSW 2308 Australia



# Yearning to Yarn

The Artefact in Research

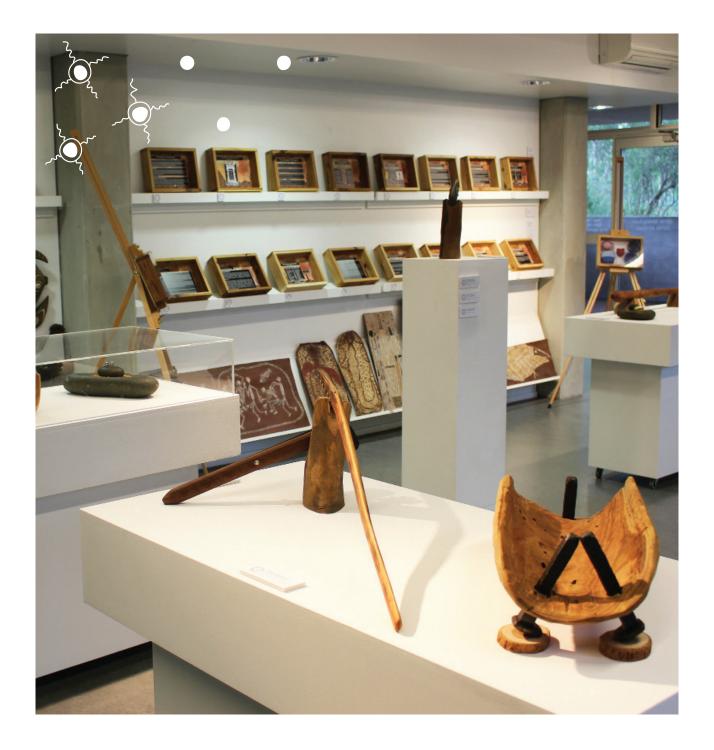
Simon Munro

The 'Yearning to Yarn: Artefact in Research' exhibition at the University Gallery Museum (the Senta Taft-Hendry Museum), is an extension of a 2017 Centre of Excellence for Equity in Higher Education Excellence (CEEHE) funded project, 'Yearning to Yarn: Using Aboriginal ways of knowing to support clinical placement experiences of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health professional students'.

The exhibition features a creative display of research materials—drawing on the practice of artefact making into the process of capturing and analysing the qualitative research data—and Simon Munro's own beautifully crafted artefacts. As a key element of the research output for this project, the exhibition is documented, and forms part of the final research report.

Special acknowledgment should be extended to all 'Yearning to Yarn' research participants without whom this project would not have been possible. The collaborative work of the research team Dr Leanne Brown, Dr Anne Croker, Dr Karin Fisher, Dr Julie Burrows and Lorrelle Munro has been a key inspiration behind the exhibition.

Yearning to Yarn – The Artefact in Research The University Gallery Museum, University of Newcastle November 2018 – May 2019



The University of Newcastle respects and acknowledges the Aboriginal Nations on whose traditional lands the university has presence, the cultural significance and history of the land, and its Custodians and Elders past and present, and into the future.

# From the artist

I graduated from the University of Newcastle in 1997 with a Bachelor of Visual Arts (majoring in printmaking and photography).

I have always maintained a close connection to my formal training as an artist. My inspiration and subject matter is drawn from a connection to the natural environment and my Anaiwan and Gomeroi heritage.

No more is this demonstrated than through this body of work associated with the Yearning to Yarn project.

I would like to extend special acknowledgement to the Tamworth Yearning to Yarn project team, Leanne Brown, Anne Croker, Julie Burrows, Karin Fisher and Lorrelle Munro from the University of Newcastle Department of Rural Health and the team at the Centre of Excellence for Equity in Higher Education (CEEHE) for enabling this aspect of the Yearning to Yarn project to come to fruition.

#### Simon Munro

# **About the Project**

*Yearning to Yarn:* Using 'Aboriginal ways of knowing and learning' to support clinical placement experiences of Aboriginal health professional students



The 2017 project 'Yearning to Yarn' explored using Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander ways of knowing and learning (Yarning and storytelling) to support Aboriginal Health professional students on their rural clinical placement with the University of Newcastle Department of Rural Health (UONDRH) in Tamworth.

Contributing to a program of building praxis-based research in teaching for equity in higher education, the project team explored barriers to equity and inclusivity in higher educational domains, and the importance of understanding Aboriginal students' cultural, social and emotional experiences in teaching practice. A methodological approach of collaborative dialogical inquiry was used to capture student and educator experiences and perceptions throughout the study. Acknowledging the potential, that the introduction of new thinking (Aboriginal ways of knowing and learning) might be seen as an antithesis of Western organisational efficiency, we explored the questions, "What makes Yarning? What it is for us?" and "How can we create 'space' and 'time' for Yarning, within the broader institutional higher educational structures as an accepted teaching practice".

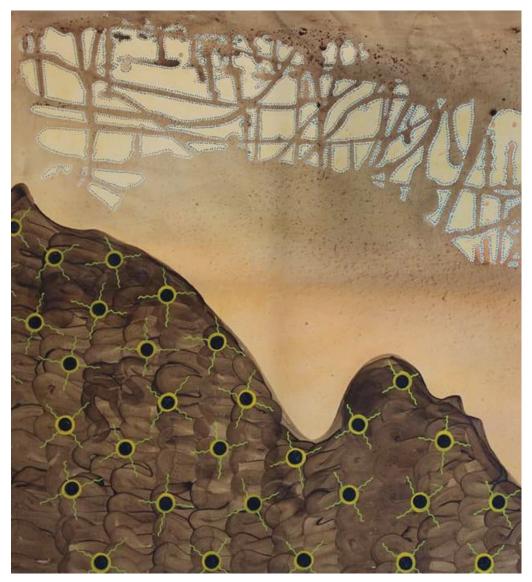
The 'Yearning to Yarn' project has established that integrating new ways of knowing and learning, while not straightforward, is integral to constructing a complementary approach for understanding the Aboriginal experience in higher education. A new perspective on knowing and learning within higher education was developed; grounded in a set of 'protocols' drawn from the traditional Gamilaraay word "Winanga-li" (hear, listen, know, remember). The set of draft Winanga-li protocols developed through this project has been integral to building participating educators' engagement with Aboriginal students. The protocols are an important outcome and allow us to move between research, policy and practice to challenge current institutional frameworks and practices.

Yearning to Yarn enabled us to ask constructive questions of institutional thinking on inclusive and equity teaching principles embedded in policy to explore "What happens next?". The project aims to Yarn policy off the bookshelf - moving from policy to praxis – and seek the embodiment of the intentions that sit behind institutional policy on equity and inclusivity. Moving forward, the Yearning to Yarn project has identified scope for supporting educators to grapple with Aboriginal ways of knowing and learning for 'teaching for equity' and explore the implications of this for their practice, to:

- be responsive to students' personal situations;
- be mindful of their cultural considerations;
- transform educational practice for 'teaching for equity'.



Detail image: Spears tied with handmade paper raffia twine.



Detail image: Underground aquifers 2015

# Yearning to Yarn: The Artefact in Research

# Introduction

As an Aboriginal researcher and chief investigator on the 'Yearning to Yarn' project I have struggled on many levels. The core of my struggles stemmed from being an Aboriginal researcher researching an Aboriginal target group (students). Growing up Aboriginal in Australia, we, at different stages of life, become aware of our people's histories, and an aspect of that is claiming an awareness that 'we are the most researched people on earth'.

Smith (2012) recounts, "I heard an Aboriginal elder in Cairns welcome researchers to his country and refer to his people as 'the most researched in the world' – which I interpret as the perception of research as something that is done to people by outsiders and from which there is no apparent positive outcome". For some 'time', Aboriginal people have not been in control of and respected as agents of their own knowledges and perspectives in the research domain. The stark reality for me being an Aboriginal researcher was the fear of being cast in the same light by my own people as those outsiders responsible for the histories of research conducted on Aboriginal people that result in cyclical patterns of no change and broad inaction.

Anecdotally this view can most certainly be reflected in opinions of numerous members of my own family and broader community members on not just the researcher as an individual but government and non-government institutions that represent research: Education, Corrective Services, Departments of Natural Resource Management and Health Services.

What I had the privilege of observing during the 'Yearning to Yarn' project was the acceptance of an Aboriginal standpoint, and acceptance of Aboriginal artefacts in research, and that being specific knowledge based on my own Aboriginal heritage. An important aspect of my development as a researcher in this project was being able to remain connected to the artefact and artefact making. The structuring of the Yarning sessions around traditional artefact and artefact making of a message stick and cordage, was just the first phase of challenging mainstream research processes. Parallel to the artefact in the project there emerged a great renaissance of my own connection to the metaphysical meanings of the artefact and artefact making by way of providing alternate way of engaging with data and a people's identity through this Yarning exhibition.

The 'Yearning to Yarn' exhibition was not originally identified as an outcome of the project but became a necessary process whereby I explored my duality of heritage (maternal Scandinavian and paternal Anaiwan Aboriginal).

The production of artefacts is done using materials (wood and stone) that would have been traditionally used and combining them with industrial metal fixtures associated with Western manufacturing (brass and steel). The juxtaposition of these contrasting materials presents an uneasy partnership but one nonetheless that demonstrates how two materials and knowledges can co-exist together to produce a workable result.

Yearning to Yarn then demonstrates a similar message that two knowledges (Aboriginal ways of knowing and learning and mainstream Westernised education) can work together to produce balanced cultural recognition and representation in pedagogical practice that reinforces social justice.

On behalf of the Yearning to Yarn team, staff at CEEHE, and all participants from the Yearning to Yarn project it is with great pleasure that I present the Yearning to Yarn exhibition.

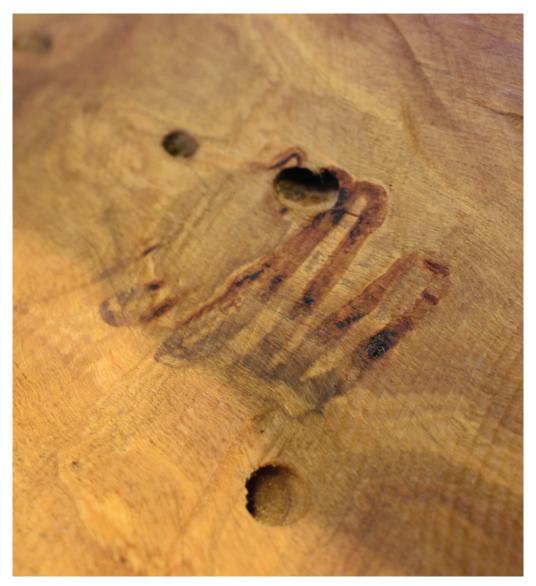
#### Simon Munro



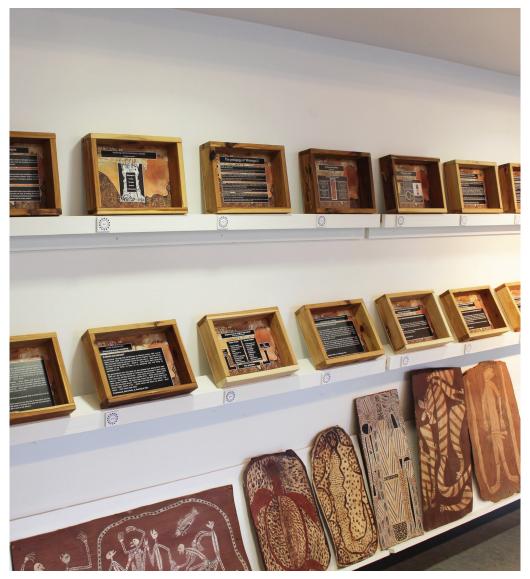
Detail image: Underground aquifers 2015

"Allow yourself 'time' to think and even be speechless, but then allow the newness of integrating a new culture and its people's ways of knowing and learning to transform you into a storyteller".

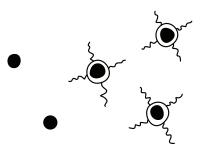
Simon Munro



Detail image: carved bin.guwi (coolamon with railway spikes)



Research boxes in situ at museum with bark paintings from Western Australia and the Northern Territory.



# **Framing the Findings**

Examining ways to disseminate the findings of the Yearning to Yarn project in the form of framing key points of interest and participant comments within wooden boxes is a unique way for the viewer to engage with snippets of the project's themes and findings.

While usual project reports and articles developed to provide a detail of method and experiences of both participant sets, a tactile and visual mode evolved as a way to generate dialogue and stimulate a different way of engaging with research data.

Each box is intended to be handled for reading, and so opens the senses to a new experience. Encouraging participation past the usual forms of written word and on to a connection with natural materials has played a pivotal role in engaging the project's participants in transformative learning.

Hands on Notice

Each artefact, spears excluded, in this exhibition is robust and visitors are welcome to handle with all care and replace after handling.



### The interface of methodologies

Yearning to Yarn has assisted in contributing, in part, to a clearer perspective and need for an Aboriginal standpoint in higher education and research by creating 'space' (physical environment) and 'time' (planning) where educators, professional staff and Aboriginal students can relate to each other through sharing Aboriginal ways of knowing and learning such as artefact making, traditional language and storytelling.

The learning principles associated with the traditional Gamilaraay language word 'Winanga-li' (to hear, to know, to listen and to remember) during the individual face to face Yarning sessions became the catalyst to binding all other aspects of Aboriginal ways of knowing and learning together.

'Winanga-li' originates from the traditional lands of the Anaiwan, Banbai, Bundjalung, Dhanggati, Kamilaroi and Ngoora nations North West and Northern Tablelands of NSW.

The collective meaning of 'Winanga-li' added context to the notion of Yarning as a pedagogical and research method in partnership with mainstream methodological approaches of collaborative dialogical inquiry and appreciative inquiry, creating an interface of methodologies.

#### Winanga-li

The collective principles of learning through Winanga-li (hear, listen, know, remember) created an Aboriginal standpoint in the research as an authentic Aboriginal methodology. Being mindful of the hear, listen, know and remember of Winanga-li allowed for respectful sharing during each interview phase of the Yearning to Yarn project.

#### Yarning and storytelling

Carrying forward the principles of Winanga-li (hear, listen, know, remember) allowed Yarning through storytelling to thrive as the key method of data collection. This method allowed for a flexible delivery of the orientation question "Where's your mob from?" and nine pre-set substantive questions that explored the higher education experiences of Aboriginal students and their educators in the context of clinical placement.

#### Collaborative dialogical & appreciative inquiry

Methodological approaches of collaborative dialogical inquiry with a lens of appreciative inquiry were used to grapple with both student and educator experiences and perceptions of each other to bring about new ways of knowing and learning within the educational space. These methods complimented Aboriginal ways of knowing and learning by positioning the research as a participatory process of dialogue with participants as equals in research and not simply subjects.



Interfacing with the Gamilaraay Language (Pedagogy of Winanga-li)



Winanga-li To Hear To Listen To Know To Remember



# The pedagogy of 'Winanga-li' (Language)

Hear

Hearing – the speakers. In other words, paying attention to what is being said and also reading the speakers' emotional and visual prompts.

While Yarning could occur using numerous mediums, it is the face to face interaction that gives it authenticity and pays respect to the traditional origins of oral communication and protocols therein.

Listen

Listening – to the speaker. Hearing and listening both relate to respectful attention to what is being spoken. In Aboriginal culture, key messages were usually conveyed orally by someone in authority.

Failure to listen would mean an important message, story or lesson would not be fully understood and so the continuity of knowledge would be compromised.

#### Know

Knowing – what is being spoken. Knowing something in a cultural context was often complex and multi-dimensional. For instance, Aboriginal lore (law) was linked to knowing storylines, song, dance, initiation, survival, food, medicine, natural environment and language.

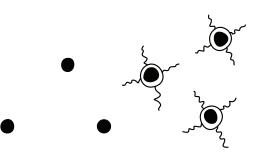
# Box 3 continued.

In a contemporary sense Yarning using Winanga-li weaves together knowledge important to adding context to identity, which is intrinsically bound to traditional ways of doing business.

#### Remember

Remembering – what has been spoken. Remembering is the process of putting into action what has been heard, listened to and known. In a traditional sense this often coincided with an individual coming of age and being entrusted with lore, knowledge and responsibility.

In a contemporary sense, Yarning using Winanga-li allows us to network with individuals, share knowledge, share experiences, establish kinship and establish connection to country.

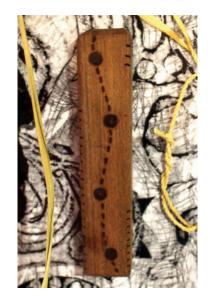




## Interfacing with Artefacts (Message Sticks)

#### The artefact (message stick) as an invitation

The notion of the message stick was referenced to the pre-colonial use by some Aboriginal nations of this artefact as a means of invitation to attend a formal gathering. In the context of this project, the message stick was used to formally invite each participant to attend their individual Yarning session. This added an authentic Aboriginal standpoint to complement other research recruitment procedures associated with ethics clearance and approved signed participant permission documents.



The **notches on the left** represent the number of *professional staff and educators* targeted for participation.

The **notches on the top right** represent the individual *Yarning session* 

The **notches on the bottom right** represent the number of *Aboriginal students targeted for participation.* 

The **circles** represent the cycles of the moon (4months) for the Yarning session to be conducted.



## Interfacing with Artefacts (Cordage making and weaving)

#### The artefact (weaving) as dialogue

During stage 1 of the Yearning to Yarn project artefact making was introduced as a voluntary activity prior to formal data solicitation through Yarning sessions. Each participant was shown a demonstration on how to make the cordage and then invited to participate. Without exception, each participant enjoyed the opportunity to practise cordage making and while doing so, the substantive questions aligned with the aims of the project were introduced, making the artefact central to dialogue.



Sample dilly bags from stage 2 Yarning and artefact workshop.





Sample dilly bags from stage 2 Yarning and artefact workshop.

"Traditionally, all the women and the children would sit down and make things that they needed (eel traps, fishing nets, dilly bags, cordage or rope.) As with traditional practices today we would be storytelling and sharing knowledge through Yarning while weaving. Traditionally we would use a range of natural fibres in a sustainable way. When weaving we say with the Stringybark and Lomandra is weak on its on its own. When you tie it through this process it comes together and it's strong which is the same with Yarning. When we come together through Yarning, it creates support networks and understanding, you come together and you're stronger".

Lorrelle Munro, Gomeroi weaver (2018)



# Learning through Artefact making (Artefacts influencing perspectives and practice of participants)

At the beginning, I saw the artefact as purely an item used by Aboriginal people. I thought it was quite ingenious after hearing of its potential uses. However, by the end of the day, I saw the artefact as much more than a tangible object.

I saw it as an example of Aboriginal traditional ways, of which I realised that I knew little about. From this realisation, I questioned my own understanding of Aboriginal culture and customs and the influence on their interaction with health professionals. In my clinical work ..., I have worked with and continue to work with a number of Aboriginal people. My interventions and interactions have been shaped by my thoughts to treat all clients the same regardless of their background or culture, but at the same time being respectful that they may be different to my own.

I have since considered my relationships with Aboriginal people I work with and feel that I have not taken the 'time' to consider their traditional ways of learning that have been missed opportunities.

(UONDRH Tamworth artefact workshop participant (educator), 2017)



# Learning through Artefact making (Artefacts influencing perspectives and practice of participants)

The traditional way of knowledge being handed through the generations is fascinating. Use of the artefact as a way of facilitating this discussion was unique but a great idea. I felt somewhat in awe of the significance of this artefact in Aboriginal culture but was also keen to create a piece of work that I hoped would generate discussion within my own family. Whilst I am no artist I was happy with what I created ....

The artefact was more than simply an artwork. Learning about the significance of it within Aboriginal culture and the means by which it is created was a great experience.

Understanding the importance of Yarning and the transfer of oral knowledge within communities and across generations gave me real insight into what I might be able to bring to my practice when communicating with the Aboriginal community. There is no doubt I will make changes that I hope are positive for all. I feel like this is just the start and I would love to continue to enhance my knowledge of Aboriginal culture.

(UONDRH Tamworth artefact workshop participant (educator), 2017)



### Where's your mob from?

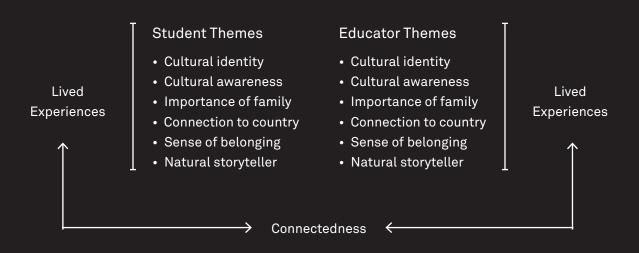
The overarching theme to come out of the data was the connectedness established by Yarning through storytelling and sharing particularly stemming from the orientation question "Where's your mob from". Introduced at the beginning of each interview "Where's your mob from" allowed for participants to become familiar/connected with the interviewer through common themes of identity, lived experiences, environment (connection to country), family, humour and cultural heritage.

While originating from different cultural and social contexts, the orientation question emphasised that each individual drew on experiences that could be understood and related to through Yarning and storytelling.

Notions of 'time' were identified as key to create space for these Aboriginal standpoints in research to thrive and challenge the norms associated with Western forms of research and education.

For instance, it was made explicit at the beginning of each Yarning session that the sessions would not be constrained by strict timeframes and that if required, follow-up sessions would be arranged according to availability. The establishment of 'time' as a fluid concept enabled for each Yarning session dialogue to occur in much the same way it does within Aboriginal communities as a process free from the question and answer associated with other forms of research data collection.

# Where's your mob from?





# Lived Experiences (Connecting through storytelling)

#### Q: Where's your mob from?

I am from ...(state), and a lot of the information that I have about my family has come from my aunties. Because of the traumatic experiences that my grandmother suffered, culture and Aboriginality wasn't spoken about and I think that sort of transferred to my father and then with us, where he didn't really want anything to do with Aboriginal culture or being identified as Aboriginal because of what he'd seen and what he'd experienced himself, as a boy growing up. So where I'm from it's sort of on the border of ...(town name) and ...(town name)..

So we know that my grandmother was born out towards ...(town name), and she had three younger sisters. We don't have any birth records. Don't have any information relating to that. We know that two of the daughters were taken somewhere and no one knew where they went, and then my grandmother and my aunty were moved into ...(town name), so I think they tried to find out where the sisters had been moved to but didn't hear from them.

#### Q: To this day?

Yeah, to this day, so my aunty has tried to find all those records and tried to locate them but we haven't had much luck.

I think my aunty wanted to sort of know and I think these are the little bits of information that she got from grandma but grandma didn't want to talk about it because from what we can ascertain it things had been pretty traumatic and she just didn't want to talk about it.

#### Aboriginal\_Student\_Partic\_15\_Yearning to Yarn



## Lived Experiences (Connecting through storytelling)

Q: Where's your mob from?

I'm patriarchal. My mob, they camped here on Gomeroi Country, 1860, in the Upper Hunter, NSW. Three brothers came out from England, they were miners. They (the three brothers) came out here for the gold rush at ...(town name) so if you look at the name places like ... Street in ...(town name), that's named after members of my family, so that's on my patriarchal side, that being my grandfather's line.

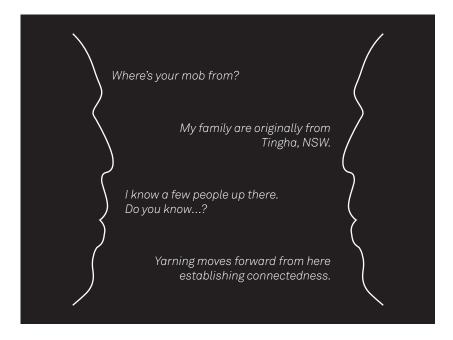
My grandmother's line, they came out and camped down around North West, NSW, so I use the term 'camped' in a temporary sense because we don't belong to this Country, but they are around ...(town name) and so the ...(family name) came to ...(town name). There are a number of the ...(family name) buried in ...(town name) Cemetery. My mum's side, there's two parts of the family there. One mob, they came around ...(town name) and down to ...(town name). The ...(family name), there's a few ...(family name) and they're up around ...(town name), ...(town name) area.

Professional\_Staff\_Partic\_3\_Yearning to Yarn

## A brief Yarn goes a long way (Connecting through storytelling)

This brief exchange based on Yarning dialogue enables the participants to connect through familiar association and establishes:

- Connection to Country (where you are from geographically);
- Extended family and friend networks;
- A sound basis to move forward in dialogue; and
- Genuine interest in each others lived experiences.





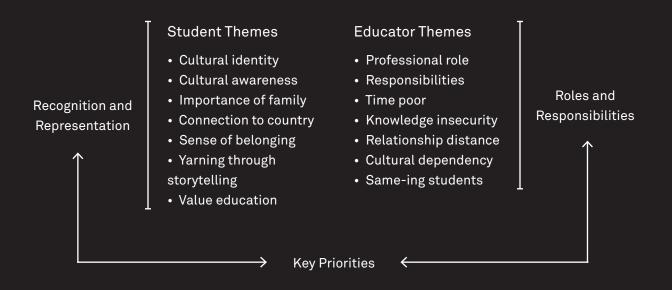
# Experiences in Higher Education (Rural Clinical Placement)

Substantive questioning was introduced un-sequentially and often combined with the orientation question of 'where's your mob from'. Nine questions were developed to explore the rural clinical experiences of Aboriginal health professional students and their educators during their rural clinical placement with the University of Newcastle Department of Rural Health (UONDRH), Faculty of Health and Medicine in Tamworth NSW.

As with the orientation question "Where's your mob from" the cordage making continued into and through to the conclusion of each of the Yarning sessions. Winanga-li principles while Yarning was integral to the honest and transparent data collected during this stage 1 and 2 of the project. Data here presented a clear difference between the Aboriginal students and educators (all non-Aboriginal).

Primarily these differences were identified as the Aboriginal students' desire to have better recognition and representation of their culture within higher education. For Educators and to a lesser extent, professional staff their primary roles within higher education were the priority over awareness and deep understanding of the Aboriginal students past their identity as students.

# Experiences in Higher Education





### Student's Educational and Clinical Placement Experience (Learning through storytelling)

Q: Tell me about your higher educational journey?

When I left, having everyone back in... (home town), I struggled with it a lot, my first year. Every night I was thinking about quitting, going home, quitting, going home, because I did feel that huge detachment, personally, from your family, you miss your family, and it's hard to explain to people that sort of don't understand it, but it's just that connection to your Country. Every time I'd go back there you'd get in the .... shire area and you're just like, geez I'm home.

What I really hated the most was you're not around a lot of Indigenous people when you go to uni, and what I really struggled with, especially when I come into ...., I don't know of anybody else in my year that's Indigenous, so you're around people that don't speak like you, they don't look like you, they don't do the same thing as you do, they don't have that same sort of connection you do with your family, with your country, so it's really hard.

Aboriginal\_Student\_Partic\_11\_Yearning to Yarn



# Student's Educational and Clinical Placement Experience (Learning through storytelling)

Q: How has your cultural needs and identity been supported on your educational journey?

I don't think that Aboriginal health and culture has been very well taught in our universities. I have talked with people about that before, and that was one thing that I learned in my third year when I went on that placement over in ..., for the different experiences over there.

I felt that there hadn't been a culture created in the university for students, no matter where they came from, to learn about my culture.

Student\_Partic\_13\_Yearning to Yarn



# Educators Experiences teaching Aboriginal Students (Learning through storytelling)

Q: If required, how would you meet the cultural needs of Aboriginal students?

I guess I could go searching for what was available. That would be where I would start. Whether that's to talk to other academics and see what they had. I don't know that I would approach outside of here, I don't know, I possibly could I suppose but any other strategies no, I'd probably ask around (fellow staff) would be my strategy and find out what everyone else knew or what was available.

But I'm more than open to being educated in that area because I know it's a weak point.

Educator\_Partic\_4\_Yearning to Yarn



Q: If required, how would you meet the cultural needs of Aboriginal students?

We want our (non-Aboriginal) students to come and have an appreciation and a respect for Aboriginal people and their culture and their connection to Country and connection to people, because if they've got that respect as their first step then you learn things with respect and you deal with them with respect, rather than prejudices, because I'd say they're the two faces, you've got respect versus prejudice.

Professional \_Staff Interview\_3\_Partic\_3



Q: How do you become aware of a student's Aboriginal identity?

I guess I don't want to go too far the other way and single them (Aboriginal students) out specifically and treat them differently. I guess I see everyone the same, and I guess my role I look at as a support person, so I guess I would only become aware of what support they (Aboriginal students) needed as their placement went on more than being told at the beginning.

Educator\_Interview\_4\_Partic\_4



#### Artefacts of two knowledges

#### Creating artefacts using two ways of knowing

I found the process of research to be a creative one that made more sense to me through exploring the practicalities of re-creating artefacts associated with my Anaiwan and Gomeroi heritage.

A great deal of these artefacts and knowledge to engage with them came through a combination of handed-down knowledge from family, and acquired through research into artefacts housed in many of Australia's museums.

For the most part my reproductions stay as pure to the original artefacts as possible. Yearning to Yarn though evoked a desire to explore the idea of integrating another influence in my artefact making. My maternal Scandinavian heritage emerged as a deliberate design inclusion that became a celebration of both cultures (Aboriginal and Western).

For the main part, the Aboriginal artefact was comprised of wood and stone and the Western comprised of metal fixtures binding all elements together. I found this a very liberating process that produced the key insight that two ways of knowing and learning can work together to create an artefact that demonstrates a fundamental message of collaboration.

For me, the exercising of my paternal (Aboriginal) and maternal (Western) heritages was accessing elements unique to my identity that made the Yearning to Yarn project evolve into something that assisted me in making sense of the relatively new world of research.



Clap Sticks with copper and brass fittings 2018 Western ironbark, copper and brass



Yuundu (stone axe) with Metal Fixtures 2018 Western ironbark, steel and brass



Yuunda (stone axe) with Metal Fixtures 2018 tasmanian oak and steel







Bundi (Club) with metal fittings 2018 Whitebox eucalyptus, copper and brass

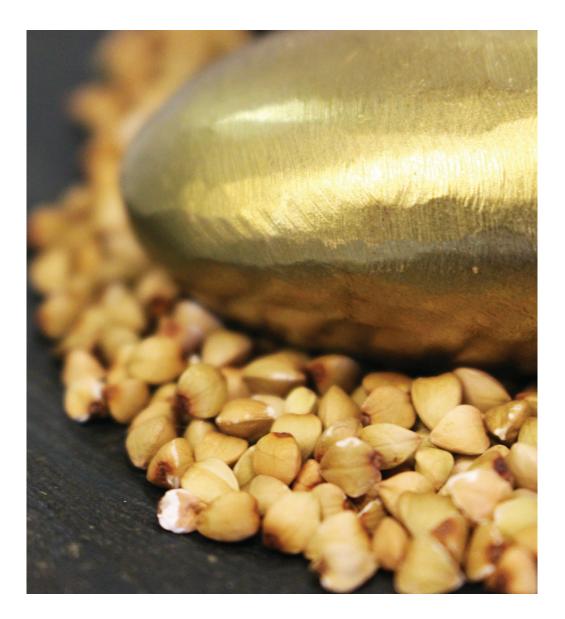


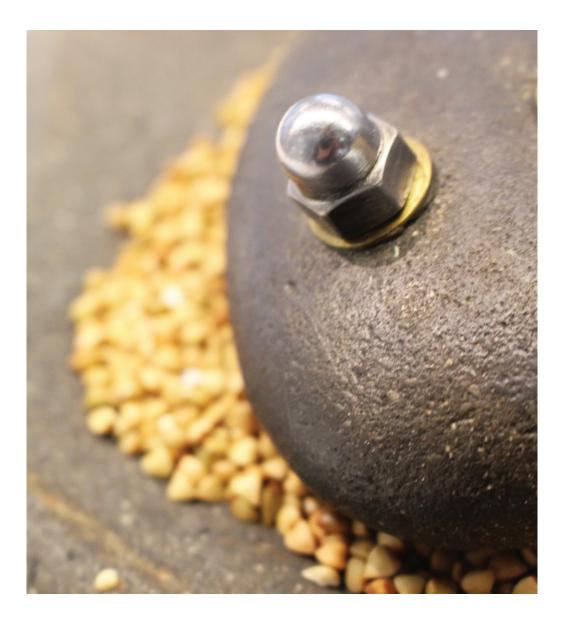
Wagarraa (throwing stick) with metal fittings 2018 Whitebox eucalyptus, copper, brass and steel





Giba (grindingstone) with stone and brass pestles 2018 River rock and brass







Giba (grindingstone) with metal fixtures set in stone pestle 2018 River rock, steel and brass



Installation in the museum Carved bin.guwi (coolamon) 2018 Whitebox eucalyptus



*Bilaarr, dhurri (spear) with Metal fixtures* 2018 Tasmanian oak (shaft), steel western ironbark, and copper



Detail image: Carved bin.guwi (coolamon) with railway spikes 2018



Carved bin.guwi (coolamon) with railway spikes Whitebox eucalyptus and iron 2018



Yuunda (stone axe) with Metal Fixtures 2018 Western ironbark, steel and brass





Yuundu (stone axe) with Metal Fixtures 2018 Western ironbark, steel and brass

All listed artworks by Simon Munro, except permanent museum items from Australia and the Pacific region.

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