

## **Grounded in country: Perspectives on working within, alongside and for Aboriginal communities**

**Elizabeth Jackson-Barrett, Anne Price, Norman Stomski and  
Bruce F. Walker**

*Murdoch University*

This paper presents the experiences of four researchers working within, alongside and for the Gumala Aboriginal Corporation in the Pilbara region of Western Australia. The focus of the research was a health and education needs analysis of Gumala Aboriginal Corporation members that would inform future education and health planning in the region. The research project was a collaboration between the Gumala Aboriginal Corporation, Rio Tinto and Murdoch University. The research comprised a combination of paper and pen surveys, interviews, focus groups and meetings with elders. What we learned about researching in Indigenous contexts through these experiences is the focus of this paper. Building on Indigenous research methodologies, theories and ways of being and doing, we explore the need to be build trust and relationships, respect Indigenous protocols, understand what it means to be 'on country' and perhaps most importantly to learn to sit and listen. Based on our research and experiences, this paper discusses key elements of the emerging 'grounded in country' framework we are developing in response to our experiences.

### **Gather 'round people, let me tell you a story [.....]**

**Vignette:** During our research travels, xxxx and I have always taken the time to 'connect to country' to which our research has taken us. We were informing our other colleague of this and it was his suggestion that we stop at a creek 'just up the road'. We found ourselves in the Pilbara for this research, in the creek bed of Bellari Springs, all looking for one rock that we could take home. We all thought about this in relation to the research method (which is where the title for this paper comes from), all connecting to and feeling the 'country'. Interestingly, there were two backpackers at Bellari Springs. They were in their van reading, with the doors open immersing themselves in the 'country'. Upon our arrival and when we began our rock quest they looked up with quizzical expressions on their faces, before eventually going back to their own solitude. We found what we came for - a special keepsake. Ironically, the rock never left 'country'. It never got through the airport scanners, it stayed where it belonged because we had not followed the protocols associated with 'country'. For you see, it does not matter who you are or where you come from, whether you are Aboriginal or not, everyone has to understand and follow the protocols that are associated with 'country'. As for the rock not leaving 'country', 'country' tells you as it told us and this is ultimately the power of 'country' — hence the reason for this paper.

### **Introduction**

When writing an article, to begin with a vignette is a way to capture the attention of an audience — that is you, the reader. For Indigenous researchers the world over it is also a

way of sharing knowledge centred on oral traditions (Bessarab & Ng'andu, 2010; Wilson, 2008). A story, whether heard or told, has allure for everyone. Stories are a way of organising our experiences and thoughts into yarns of important happenings. It is through the telling of stories that readers like yourself relate to and find a connection in the yarn. Storytelling represents an Indigenous epistemological way of doing things — an oral tradition; a way of connecting to each other's experiences regardless of time, place and culture (Jackson-Barrett, 2011, p. 21).

This paper is about appropriate research methods when working alongside Indigenous [1] communities, Aboriginal corporations and mining companies. Although the approach taken may “transgress conventional academic forms [...]” it is done with intent and with the purpose of highlighting an Indigenist way of doing and knowing, whilst engaging in the phenomenon of the research (Jackson-Barrett, 2010, p. 71; Martin, 2003; Rigney, 2006). Our vignette encapsulates something that we learned through our research journey in the Pilbara, which we wish to share with others through this paper. Smith (1999, p. 3) speaks of our type of story as being a “cautionary tale” where the “surface story” in this case the vignette, highlights underlying issues of “cultural protocols broken, values negated and small tests failed”. Our story of the rock represents a breach of protocols, a test failed. Whilst we had permission to be in the Pilbara, we had not been given permission to take away something that was not ours to take. The rock belonged in the Pilbara and this is legitimated in the sanctity of land for Aboriginal peoples. We were researchers with some experience working in Indigenous contexts and we approached our task with some knowledge, sensitivity and good intentions. However, when we reflected on how we had gone about our research, we realised we had a lot more to learn.

We had underestimated and would perhaps always underestimate, the complex navigation between and across Western research approaches and Indigenous community protocols. Our research team consisted of one Indigenous academic, who was not from the Gumala area, and three non-Indigenous academics. We had been contracted by the Gumala Aboriginal Corporation, Rio Tinto and Murdoch University to undertake a health and educational needs analysis of the Gumala members in the Pilbara. When we went to Bellari Springs to pick up a rock souvenir we thought of ourselves as researchers with a sense of knowing and belonging but in many ways we were just like the backpackers visiting the country, enjoying the vista but not really understanding what being ‘on country’ means and the responsibilities it brings for we were “outsiders to this particular country” (Martin, 2008, p. 9). Our aim is to provide the beginnings of what we call a ‘grounded in country framework’ which will help others to conduct appropriate and ethically responsible research in such contexts. The lessons we have learned and wish to share are articulated in the following sections. As we continue to work in and alongside Indigenous communities we hope to develop and refine this framework which has as its essence understanding and respect for ‘country’.

Historically since colonisation, research in Indigenous contexts has been fraught with contentious practices — practices that have often seen the majority of Aboriginal contexts, peoples and communities ‘researched on’ rather than with, only to have their voices and ways of doing and knowing excluded (Martin, 2008, p. 25; Smith, 1999;

Wilson, 2008). It is well known that Indigenous peoples the world over, have been researched more than any other people (Smith, 1999, p. 3; Martin, 2008, p. 25; Wilson, 2008, p. 15). Tuck (2009, p. 409) suggests further that research in Indigenous communities and contexts has operated on a 'flawed theory' and 'damaged-centered' approach which has 'reinforced' and 'reinscribed' Indigenous communities and their people as 'depleted', 'ruined' and 'hopeless' — deficit. All the while the outcomes of much of this research has resulted in little improvement in Aboriginal communities. There is substantive theory on how to generate research within and alongside Aboriginal communities. However, after several decades Aboriginal peoples and communities are still suffering severe disparity in health and education outcomes as well as lack of access to service provision compared with the remainder of Australia (COAG, 2012; MEECTYA, 2001).

Perhaps the disparity is due to a lack of regard for the culturally safe methods and sensitivities that researchers need to use. Moreton-Robinson and Walters (2009, p. 1) affirm that "contemporary social research practice has changed little" and that "coherent methodologies informed by an Indigenous interpretive framework are absent". Other leading Indigenous scholars support this view (Martin, 2008; Nakata, 2008; Rigney, 2006). However, Hart (2010, p. 1) contends "that things are changing in the realm of Indigenous research" and to support this, draws on the "ontology, epistemology, methodology, and axiology" framework of Wilson (2008). Wilson's framework is not dissimilar to Martin's (2008) theory of 'relatedness' in which Martin connects researchers to Aboriginal ways of 'knowing, doing and being' as a basis for developing their research approaches and methods. Much of the literature on Indigenous research that exists for the Pilbara centres around the Australian mining industry (Barker, 2006), native title, employment strategies, educational and health issues and anthropological studies. This project consisted of a health and education needs analysis for the Gumala Aboriginal Corporation. As Indigenous interpretive frameworks are still developing, my colleagues and I believe we have an obligation to 'share' the experiences of our research methods, especially as the sharing of knowledge is fundamental to Indigenous ways of 'knowing, being and doing'.

### **Experience by doing: An Indigenous way of learning**

The aim of this paper is to provide a starting point for researchers when undertaking research within Indigenous contexts and alongside Indigenous peoples. Such research requires the acquisition of shared critical knowledge and understanding. This takes time to build and only comes with experience and reading about the knowledge systems that Aboriginal academics are representing in their theorising. Experiencing and reading for critical understanding and meaning will allow the space for researchers to re-structure their own knowledge bank and to consider alternative ways of knowing and doing. Further, this paper aims to develop and highlight Indigenist theoretical concepts, supporting techniques and useful methodologies to assist with research methods in Aboriginal contexts, alongside Indigenous communities, Aboriginal Corporations and mining companies. Such knowledge is, in many ways, transferable to any context, but only as a starting point as every Aboriginal context is unique and may require you as the 'visitor' to adhere to different protocols. This requires knowledge and specifically, knowledge that is embedded in place.

This paper provides reflections on how my colleagues and I went about conducting research for one of Australia's largest Aboriginal corporations, in a research project funded by one of the world's largest multinational mining companies. Entitled A Health and Education Needs Analysis of Gumala Aboriginal Corporation Members, the project was co-sponsored by Gumala Aboriginal Corporation (GAC), Rio Tinto and Murdoch University. The project aimed to identify gaps in the health and educational needs of Gumala members, particularly those in the Pilbara region of WA, and importantly, to offer practical solutions to reduce the gaps. The project involved three phases:

1. A paper and pen survey of Gumala members
2. Interviews with:
  - a) Gumala health and education stakeholders
  - b) Gumala members
3. An elders' meeting.

A final written report was completed in late 2012 and submitted to the Gumala Aboriginal Corporation and Rio Tinto. In keeping with Indigenous protocols, it is important to acknowledge that much of the research was conducted on Banyjima, Innawonga and Niyaparli lands and was largely written on Nyungar land and to acknowledge the Traditional owners, elders and custodians, past, present and future of these lands.

This paper is not primarily concerned with discussing the research findings from the study. Rather, the paper is written with the intent of discussing the processes of the research, the successes and failures, what worked well and what did not work well. More importantly, we have identified significant key concepts that we feel researchers need to understand before entering the research space with Indigenous peoples or on Indigenous country. Upon reflection, and in light of our readings, conversations and other research projects in related areas, this research provided us with knowledge that was gained through direct experience and therefore in keeping with Indigenous ways of learning. Additionally, we understood that we were just like the backpackers described in the vignette at the beginning of the paper □ visitors to the 'country' and as such there were things we needed to acknowledge. The first of these acknowledgements is the need to understand and respect 'country'.

### **On country (in country): Off country (out of country)**

Country is a place that gives and receives life. Not just imagined or represented, it is lived in and lived with. Country in Aboriginal English is not only a common noun, but also a proper noun. People talk about country in the same way that they would talk about a person; they speak to country, sing to country, visit country, worry about country, feel sorry for country and long for country. People say that country knows, hears, smells, takes notice, takes care, is sorry or happy. Country is not a generalised or undifferentiated type of place such as one might indicate with terms like 'spending a day in the country' or 'going up to the country'. Rather, country is a living entity with a yesterday, today and tomorrow with a consciousness, and a will toward life. Because of this richness, country is home and peace: nourishment for body, mind and spirit [...] (Bird-Rose, 1996, p. 7).

There are things about 'country' that all researchers need to take into account when conducting research in any Aboriginal milieu. Aboriginal Australia has many 'Countries'. It is not the single entity we have come to know as 'Australia' □ a geographic space comprising six states and two territories. Aboriginal 'Countries' are numerous; in fact there are some 300 distinct Aboriginal 'Countries' (Horton, 2000). Many researchers have had few opportunities and very "little exposure to Indigenous research methodologies and epistemologies" through which to know and understand these 'Countries', resulting in a fundamental knowledge gap (Moreton-Robinson & Walter, 2009, p. 1). Because of the absence of Indigenous ways of knowing and doing in much of the Indigenous research previously conducted in Australia, contemporary research now demands a surety that "research on Indigenous issues can be carried out in a more respectful, ethical, correct [...] and beneficial fashion" (Porsanger, 2004, p. 108). Therefore, it is of vital importance that researchers understand the connection, relationships, and significance of 'country' for Aboriginal peoples. More importantly, it is imperative for researchers to come to terms with the fact there are protocols that preside over each 'country' and that these protocols govern the way in which they are able to work 'on country (in country) and off country (out of country)'. This is something that we neglected to do ourselves, as highlighted in the vignette at the beginning of this paper.

Working as a researcher in an Indigenous context is multifaceted; there are many things that need to be worked through and considered. It is complex work regardless of whether you are an Indigenous or non-Indigenous researcher. As an Indigenous researcher, unless I am working within my own 'country', I am working 'off country' or 'out of country', and these concepts extend to non-Indigenous researchers, and require negotiation. They require connecting to the Aboriginal organisations or the Land and Sea Councils to establish who the elders are within the particular 'country' where you are intending to work. If you have no connections to Aboriginal peoples from that particular 'country' then this is the first protocol that has to be observed. You are required to let the elders know what the intentions and purpose of the research are so that they, in turn, can guide and assist you with appropriate protocols, approaches and methodologies. As Yunkaporta (2009, p. 1) states "this stage involves negotiating a system of permissions and protocols that grounds you in who and where you are [...] determines the purpose of your product (in this case the research) will serve in the community and how it is related" to the people of the 'country'. What is needed here is the understanding that this process takes time. Unless you are entering 'country' with the endorsement of fellow 'country' people, then you will need to allow time to build relationships. This relationship building is about you as the researcher listening and connecting to the elders and the community more than it is about your research. What you are building is trust, and this also takes time — something that is often poorly understood.

A secondary aspect of this protocol is to acknowledge and pay your respects to the elders and traditional owners, past, present and future when speaking to any audience about your research. If you are Indigenous then this requires that you follow your own cultural protocols and declare 'where you from'. If you are non-Indigenous you must also declare 'where you from'. The 'where you from' protocol gives the elders or community people with whom you are meeting time to connect with you through an existing relationship that

they may have — directly or indirectly — with your family, your country, your organisation or the area in which you work or live. This protocol allows you to navigate the ‘multiple protocols, obligations and responsibilities’ (Yunkaporta, 2009, p. 3) again. Regrettably this protocol is often also not well understood and as a consequence, effective engagement with Indigenous elders and community/ies is hindered because appropriate cultural protocols that respect and recognise the researcher’s understanding/s are not reflected in their actions.

Thirdly, working ‘in country or on country’ also requires a protocol for listening to what you are being told by elders or Aboriginal peoples with whom you are working. Miriam-Rose Ungunmerr-Baumann (n.d.) describes deep listening in her language as ‘dadirri’ (Southern Queensland) and believes that ‘dadirri’ is in everyone — it is not just an Aboriginal thing (Creative Spirit). It is important to note whether one is Indigenous or non-Indigenous it is a deeply respectful protocol to sit and listen. When you sit and listen you begin to get a sense of awareness of connecting to the ‘country’ on which you stand and also to the people you have come to ‘yarn’ with. By listening, you learn much by not asking questions: watching and listening, waiting then acting (Miriam-Rose Ungunmerr-Baumann) — another Indigenous methodology.

Another standpoint to keep in mind in considering ‘country’ is timeframes. Indigenous timeframes are not as rigid as the Western concept of making an appointment and inappropriate timeframes are often imposed. Further, research timelines placed upon Indigenous communities by western institutions such as universities are not responsive to community protocols. Research timeframes are generally implemented to meet funding rather than cultural requirements, thereby creating a gap in understanding between the parties. To close this gap, as a researcher you need to negotiate appropriate timeframes, bearing in mind that communities are not static entities and if particular situations arise and these situations take priority over the research project. It is important to be fluid and flexible with what comes along before, during or after your meeting. Working ‘in country’ or ‘on country’ calls for reciprocity. As a researcher working ‘in country’ or ‘on country’ there is a requirement to be flexible.

### **Yarning on country: Shooin snakes and swishing spiders**

An example of flexibility lies in the following yarn.

At one point in the research we went back to country so that we could yarn with the interviewees on a one to one basis. Before we could begin our yarning sessions, the town’s local snake handler had to be called to remove a snake nestled around the power point where we wanted to plug in our computer. Later in the day, sitting under a central pergola in one of the communities we had to swish (gently) away a nest of massive, poisonous Red Back spiders before we could sit down.

As the context that we were working in was diverse, we had decided that one of the best ways to unearth the voice of the community and what the community wanted and needed in relation to the research was to sit and yarn with them ‘on country’. Yarning as a methodology has only recently become acceptable practice within western institutions and

yet Indigenous communities the world over have utilised this practise for centuries. Yarning reflects a formal process of sharing knowledges that is reliant upon relationships, expected outcomes, responsibility and accountability between the participants, country and culture, a process that is valued by many other Indigenous nations (Dean, 2010, p. 6). Yarning 'on country' can/will be less intimidating and intrusive for Indigenous people and is far more culturally appropriate than other research methods. What is more, 'yarning is undervalued and underutilised as a potentially rich source of data collection' (Dean, 2010, p. 6).

Given the scale of this research project, it was necessary to also employ community members to assist with the data collection. Whilst these community members already had established relationships, it was necessary for us to be mindful that engaging community members is not always an easy process just because people are from the same place. Sometimes community members working in a research capacity can feel pressured and caught as a 'go between'. However, this pressure can be alleviated if you take the time to develop relationships with all stakeholders, coach and mentor the data collectors and conduct the data collection process in culturally appropriate ways.

Power (2004) contends that 'yarning' moves across the 'contact zone' (Pratt, 1992, p. 4 cited in Power, 2004). In the Australian context the 'contact zone' would create a third space in which the research is decontextualised. It is this 'third space' that is a vital place to reach, as it is the "cultural interface" of which Nakata (2007, p.p. 7-14) speaks and further links knowledge to the emerging currency of the research data through direct experience. Additionally, it is 'yarning' that brings significance to research in Indigenous contexts through being a way of relating to a particular experience. Bessarab and Ng'andu (2010) state that 'yarning' is not only a legitimate research method, but they further contend that 'yarning' is a culturally safe way of engaging with Indigenous peoples. Some academics in Western academia are still challenging the legitimacy of 'yarning'. However, much research in Indigenous contexts has not been conducted as well as it should or could have been. Therefore, serious reflection and consideration must be given to Australia's leading Indigenous scholars (Moreton-Robinson, 2000; Moreton-Robinson & Walter, 2009; Martin, 2008; Nakata, 2008; Fredericks, 2011; Smith, 1999; Foley, 2002) who are speaking back to the academy on what are and are not appropriate collection methods when conducting research in Indigenous contexts.

### **To survey or not to survey**

The first stage of our Gumala research project was the development of paper and pen surveys for dissemination via mail to all Gumala members. There are a number of problems with this method of dissemination that researchers need to be aware of. Receiving mail takes time in rural and remote Australia and there are also issues around mail delivery locations because people transit from place to place on a regular basis. Ensuring delivering of the survey to Gumala members was not the only issue. Using the post to deliver surveys could be seen as impersonal and, given some of the literacy issues, perhaps not all members would understand what was expected of them upon receiving the package. Face-to-face delivery would have addressed these issues and built

relationships. Given the vast area of the Pilbara, to deliver face-to-face could be accomplished with a well-executed plan, but the cost would have been prohibitive. We used two strategies to overcome these problems. We began to SMS people and we used local radio to let members know that they were about to receive the survey. What is interesting here is that a high proportion of Gumala members had access to a mobile phone and sending an SMS did not require a response and reached everyone, even those who did not have credit.

What we learned when analysing the data for the key themes is that people interpret the questions differently. For example, we asked the question, “Does your child attend school on a regular basis?” One response we received was, “Yes they regularly go one day a week.” What this highlighted to us was the fact that the participant had in fact understood the question but had a different worldview relating to the concept of regular. Having different worldviews around language and meaning is an issue that needs continual exploration on the part of researchers. Does the response point to a mistake on our part? We do not think so, as our goal was not a referendum on issues, but an exploration of issues that may be synthesised into themes to allow us to construct questions for the next phase of our research i.e., one-on-one interviews. The questions for our survey were developed in consultation with a reference group that included the researchers as well as the Aboriginal project officers provided by Rio Tinto. In fact, the response gave us insight into how words are interpreted differently and we learnt through the project experience □ experience by doing is an Aboriginal pedagogical practice.

The issue that the response to the question about regular attendance at school has brought into focus is whether surveys and questionnaires should be written in Aboriginal English rather than Standard Australian English. Aboriginal English is a recognised and legitimate language that is formally used all over Australia by Aboriginal peoples. Therefore consideration must be given to using it more frequently if researchers are serious about working alongside and with Aboriginal peoples and communities. It is our experiences on this project that have led to the initiation of what we will call the ‘grounded in country’ framework that will be a starting place for researchers undertaking research alongside and with Aboriginal peoples and communities.

## **Meeting with elders**

Over the course of the project we conducted a particular elders’ meeting. This day we were given some time so that we could sit and yarn with the elders. What we didn’t know was everybody had been there all day sitting and listening and were keen to get along as there was a big funeral happening in Roebourne the next day for a very distinguished Elder. We had our agenda planned and we began our time with an Acknowledgement in the language of my people. This came as a complete surprise to the audience as the colour of my skin gave no indication of my Aboriginality. I was asked to give a repeat performance to the delight of the elders. Whilst not everyone can speak in language, it was the whole essence of what I said that broke open the space to yarn. On behalf of my team I thanked and acknowledged everyone past, present and future and spoke of how privileged we were to be on their ‘country’. We had come full circle.



It is important that researchers working in Indigenous contexts understand and use protocols that acknowledge elders, past, present and future, as well as acknowledging the 'country' which they are on. In our research context, protocols at the elders' meeting took on a new meaning, a different sense, one of personal responsibility. We had started our session well, people were engaged 'yarning' about what would take place over the afternoon. However, it was not long before we hit our first stumbling block. The next section of the paper discusses the challenges that we faced and what we learnt that will assist you in your research.

### **Issues with ethics and gaining consent**

Informed consent of participants is an essential aspect of ethical research (Fletcher et al. 2011; Gower, 2012). The consent process, however, is particularly challenging in the context of Aboriginal research. Ermine (2007) believes that researchers and ethical boards need to find the 'ethical space' where solutions can be developed, particularly in a setting where oral consent is considered more meaningful. University consent forms are paper-based and serve to reinforce regulatory mechanisms rather than necessarily ensuring the ethical conduct of the ongoing research (McDonald & Cox, 2009). In particular, they do not encompass the necessary protocols that accommodate time and relationship factors when researching in Aboriginal contexts. As such they serve to emphasise that a signed consent form is the base measure of establishing a consensual relationship. As Fletcher et al. (2011) highlight, such consent forms present the expectation that participants have an understanding and will answer a series of questions.

The requirement for written consent also presents challenges. Regrettably, many of the elders we met with were not able to read English or sign their name - not because of any lack of understanding or cognitive ability, but because of an intergenerational legacy of being marginalised, excluded or truant from education. While there is flexibility for researchers to read consent information to participants and sign on their behalf, researchers should give necessary thought to ensure that consent forms are worded in plain everyday language so that participants can readily comprehend what is being asked of them before agreeing to participate. Quite often consent forms are too formal, too long and written in academic jargon that is not easily understood. This contravenes the ethical guidelines of voluntary consent. National documents such as, *Keeping research on track: A guide for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples about health research ethics* (NHMRC, 2005), and the *Guidelines for Ethical Research in Indigenous Studies* (Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies, 2011) give appropriate and clear guidance in relation to obtaining consent. Another solution could be to film participants' verbal consent, if given permission.

The wording of consent forms is also problematic. Despite the fact we sat with a reference group who advised us on the language of the consent documents, we did not realise the complexity of the situation, which is why we conducted the research. University language is a language all of its own. The elders at the meetings spoke many languages, but academic language or terminology is not a part of their everyday language, and because of this, if you are not very careful you can marginalise your participants. What we

experienced firsthand was that these types of written consent forms highlight the fact that literacy levels amongst the elders is not high. Instead of facilitating the conduct of ethical research, they instead can serve to 'put off' and embarrass elders. More specifically, there are many examples of inappropriate terminology within ethics consent forms. One in particular example that was drawn to our attention by an interviewer was the use of the term 'Chief Investigator'. We learnt that for some Aboriginal peoples this term is aligned far too closely to the police and the term 'Chief Protector' that was used in the days of the 1905 Act that saw the removal of Aboriginal peoples from their families and lands. As recent history for the people, it is raw and it has left an intergenerational scar across the 'country'.

In relation to data collection methods such as surveys and questionnaires, and to ethics permission forms, it is important to note and to understand that not all community members are literate in the written sense of words. What we learnt in our time 'on country' was that university ethics forms and questionnaires use 'academic speak', and this is inappropriate. When engaging in meetings with the elders and community members, researchers must take the time to talk through these forms with the elders, 'yarn' with them about what it all means so as to give clarity and understanding of why you require their signatures. This will help to alleviate or quell any fears they may have. It is important to recognise and take on board why these fears exist in the first place, as fear and mistrust have the tendency to snowball and this could undermine the whole research project.

This project experience has also made us consider where should researchers really begin. Should they begin with Indigenous protocols or with Western ethical guidelines? It appears that many begin with the Western paradigm, that is, the national and their university's ethical guidelines for undertaking Aboriginal or Indigenous research. We are not advocating that researchers should disregard these processes in any way. We are, however, saying that consideration needs to be given to following Indigenous protocols in the first instance as a way of ensuring that research is conducted more appropriately and that we stop trying to fit square pegs into round holes. Once the protocols of the Indigenous context are understood and navigated, then the national and ethical guidelines can be completed with full knowledge these protocols. As the vignette about the rock at the beginning of this paper revealed, it was clear upon reflection that we had not fully understood neither the context of our research nor the protocols we should follow in the way that we should have. Ideally, a two-way model which addresses both Indigenous and Western academic protocols should be used. As it turns out, two-way models are yet another Indigenous methodology.

### **From little things big things grow [...]**

This paper has highlighted some of the lessons and successes that we as researchers experienced whilst working on the Gumala health and education needs analysis project (Walker, Price, Stomski & Jackson-Barrett, 2012). The story has been about the methodologies that we employed as Indigenous and non-Indigenous researchers whilst working 'on country' (in country) and 'off country' (out of country). The intention of this paper was to give you, the researcher, a starting point for thinking about issues in a way

that reflects shared critical knowledge and understanding before beginning your research within and alongside Indigenous contexts and peoples. As a researcher you have a responsibility to engage with Aboriginal peoples and their communities in ways that are not only respectful but show you have a grounding, an understanding and a comprehension about the following protocols and concepts: country; acknowledging and paying respects to elders; traditional owners and custodians; listening; timeframes; yarning as an appropriate methodology; issues with written surveys, questionnaires; and, issues with ethics forms, verbal and written consent. Importantly, working on this research project has seen the vision of a ‘grounded in country’ framework begin to emerge. The story of the rock in the vignette made us reflect that as visitors to ‘country’ we must be mindful and respectful, that whether we are backpackers or researchers, Indigenous or non-Indigenous, we are first and foremost visitors to the ‘country’ we stand upon. As such, we must remember that all ‘country’ has protocols. The knowledge that we have spoken about in the context of the Gumala experience has now become the starting point for our new project grounded in design-based research, which we are carrying out in collaboration with Aboriginal education workers. Finally, we hope that, alongside the actions of Vincent Lingari and in the words of Paul Kelly: from little things big things grow.

## Endnote

- [1] Please note that the authors use the terms Aboriginal and Indigenous interchangeably to refer collectively to the First Australians as a matter of respect and to evoke the right to self determine. Due to the problematic nature of using only one of these terms, we use both to be inclusive. Further, you will find that when we speak of the Gumala research project we are referring specifically to the Banyjima, Innawonga and Nyiyaparli peoples.

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**Elizabeth Jackson-Barrett** is a lecturer at Murdoch University, in the areas of understanding teachers' work and transitions into teaching. Her research interests include exploring factors that promote and develop successful outcomes for Indigenous students in education, and developing pathways into tertiary education for education support workers.

**Email:** e.jackson-barrett@murdoch.edu.au

**Dr Anne Price** is a senior lecturer at Murdoch University, in the fields of curriculum development for practioners and professional issues for teachers. Her research interests include educational policy and curriculum change at a national level, with a particular focus on the impact on teachers and the nature of teachers' work.

**Email:** A.price@murdoch.edu.au

**Dr Norman Stomski** is a Post-doctoral researcher at the Murdoch University. His particular areas of interest encompass enabling consumer participation in health care decision making, and the influence of non-specific contextual effects on health outcomes.

**Email:** n.stomski@murdoch.edu.au

**Associate Professor Bruce Walker** DrPH, is Head of the Chiropractic program and Associate Dean (Research) within the School of Health Professions at Murdoch University. He also teaches evidence-based practice and public health at Murdoch University.

**Email:** b.walker@murdoch.edu.au

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