



‘Keeping Culture: Utilising Koori Elders Wisdom and Knowledge in Education’

YouTube video series, 2015–2021, 10 interviews recorded by Associate Professor Fabri Blacklock, UNSW, and Professor Janet Mooney, ACU.

<https://youtube.com/playlist?list=PLvW1evjftfvnVzjfweq3w5icwfYejrev&si=yhEh64Pui1nTO55M>.

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NOTE: UNSW includes a warning at the beginning of these video interviews – Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander viewers are warned that there are names, voices and images of deceased people in these videos. There is also some sensitive material included as noted by our reviewer below.

The importance of knowing who you are and how you are connected through kin to Country is a recurring theme in the series of 10 video interviews that, collectively,

form the YouTube repository 'Keeping Culture: Utilising Koori Elders Wisdom and Knowledge in Education'. Ten Aboriginal Elders from diverse locations throughout New South Wales were interviewed by Fabri Blacklock and Janet Mooney between 2015 and 2021, some on Country and others in their suburban homes, each generously sharing their deep knowledge and wisdom accrued over lifetimes of learning.

The interviewees were evenly split in terms of gender, with the first five videos featuring Aunty Zona Wilkinson (Mt Druitt), Aunty Judy Atkinson (Grafton), Aunty Sue Blacklock (Tingha), Aunty Beryl Carmichael (Menindee), Aunty Norma Ingram (Sydney), followed by Uncle Ralph Naden (Dubbo), Uncle Bud Marshall (Nambucca Heads), Uncle Charles Moran (Casino), Uncle Jimmy Miller (Sydney), and Uncle Mervyn Bishop (Dubbo). It is interesting how the resulting repository featured all the women's voices first.

ARC Indigenous Discovery Grant funding supported this research project which incorporated an Aboriginal methodology of yarning and deep listening. The funding likely facilitated the wide spread of geographic locations to which the interviewers and their film crew were able to travel, as well as associated pre- and post-production costs, with the broad range and depth of resulting materials being strengths apparent in this collection.

Not surprisingly, given the interviewers' focus on seeking to embed Aboriginal knowledge within the education system, another common theme was learning and education. All the Elders were highly respected knowledge holders within their communities. Their knowledge was accumulated through unique blends of learning from their own Elders, learning on Country, and learning through engaging with the Western-style education system that prevails across Australia. Some had left formal schooling early to pursue employment opportunities, while others had graduated from universities, including Aunty Norma Ingram who was the first Aboriginal person to graduate from Harvard University. All the Elders utilised their learning in myriad ways to support their communities.

Several Elders remarked how their thirst for formal education was sparked by a curiosity to learn more about the broader context of Australian history so that they might

better understand the ways in which Aboriginal people have been, and are, treated within society. Their understandings of past policies and practices and insights into current challenges saw them turn to environmental activism, art therapy, advocacy, and other approaches to working to promote healing or to promote greater insights into Aboriginal cultures and circumstances.

After highlighting the importance of Country, Aunty Zona Wilkinson shared her love for ceramics ‘because you’re working with the Earth and you’re conscious of what you’re doing at all times and how you build on what you’re doing within that structure’. She also stressed the importance of knowing from what Country the soil came and having permission to tell that story in your artwork. She has delivered art classes in jails. Aunty Judy Atkinson has likewise worked in carceral settings, taking a trauma-informed response to helping Aboriginal women heal and utilising painting to facilitate their accessing memories of being safe during earlier stages of their lives.

After ‘borrowing’ his mum’s camera from time to time, Uncle Mervyn Bishop went on to develop a keen interest, and considerable expertise, in photography. One of his most widely recognised images would surely be that iconic photograph of Uncle Vincent Lingiari and then Prime Minister Gough Whitlam as the latter symbolically poured soil into the hands of the traditional landowner at Wattie’s Creek in 1975 against the backdrop of a bright blue sky. As an Elder, Uncle Mervyn teaches children about various photographic images he has created, as well as his camera equipment. ‘Education’, he emphasises, ‘is paramount’. Supporting at least some young people to engage in further education is important both for themselves and in growing their capacity to help others.

Some Elders, particularly Aunty Sue Blacklock and Uncle Bud Marshall, reflected on the ways in which past generations had lived off the land and cared for each other within extended family networks. As Aunty Sue observed, however, numerous children were taken away as part of the Stolen Generations with Aboriginal children still being removed from their families at disproportionate rates under the present-day social welfare system. She discussed how, on realising that some children taken into foster care were being abused, Aunty Sue led an initiative to bring

Aboriginal children back onto Country to be looked after within their extended family.

While the 10 interviews are designed to be utilised as a resource in primary school settings, some of the materials are perhaps better suited to being viewed by teachers, other educational staff, and carers because of the sensitive nature of the content. Aunty Judy, for example, discloses how she was sexually abused during childhood and how learning about the rape of a five-year-old child in the context of a violent community motivated her to enrol in a PhD and then to engage in providing workshops and promoting healing. Collectively, these video interviews provide a rich resource connecting Aboriginal Elders with younger generations of Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people, promoting understanding and insights into what it means to be Aboriginal in New South Wales today, and providing opportunities to establish and engage in yarning circles across a range of formal educational settings.