

This Special Issue for the *Australian Journal of Education* has arisen from the intersection of an announcement and an idea. The announcement from the National NAIDOC Committee (National Aborigines and Islanders Day Observance Committee) that the theme for 2018 would be '*Because of Her, We Can*' coincided with an idea from Dr Melitta Hogarth to celebrate this event through the heralding of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women in a collection of articles that would come to acknowledge and praise our work and raise relevant issues as a result of knowing, being and doing within the university and our agentic efforts for change.

To test the worthiness of her idea - to produce scholarly work from the contributions of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women about Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women's work within the university, an email to her networks and to our scholarly community received overwhelming support. Her idea started to take shape with a title - *Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Women of Higher Degree: Standing on the Shoulders of Giants*. This title represents a play with words and captures both our professional locations whilst speaking about what many Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women will intimately know, namely that these locations are the result of the many Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women who have come before us - making way for those who follow.

It was Associate Professor Gawaian Bodkin-Andrews who then connected Melitta with the editorial team of the *Australian Journal of Education*. In pitching her idea to the editorial team of Petra Lietz, Katie McDowell and Juliet Young-Thornton, Melitta received instant support to go ahead. Melitta's generosity of spirit extended an invitation to Professor Tracey Bunda to co-edit. A proposal for the Special Issue was written, followed by a call for contributions and a crazy schedule for submissions was determined in order to publish the Special Issue during 2018's NAIDOC celebration of *Because of Her, We Can*. It is important to acknowledge that there were more applications for contribution than could be supported within this Special Issue and being self-conscious of our own need to support the Tiddas (Sisters), we offered alternate journals for those who we could not accommodate in this publication. Our selections for this Special Issue also aimed to represent a range of positions including Elder warrior women's scholarship, younger women who are research Higher Degree students, Aboriginal as well as Torres Strait Islander women with a mindfulness that being an Aboriginal woman could not stand for being a Torres Strait Islander women, a representative spread throughout the nation to counter tendencies to be east coast centric and support for writing that was not only traditionally academic but could also move to the poetic.

The theme for this year's NAIDOC '*Because of Her, We Can*' was a cause for celebration for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women throughout our communities and across nations. Here, for the first time, was a specific acknowledgement of the hard work and perseverance spent over generations undertaken by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women in upholding our communities. This theme has been instrumental in shaping our discourse, being heard in our communities, and making visible the contributions and achievements of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women. The opportunity to celebrate the work of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander warrior women researchers was a natural extension.

Hence, in this Special Issue, we offer a collection of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women's scholarly work that raises an historical understanding of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women's engagement with the academy as academics and professional staff characterised by trials and tribulations. An Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander feminist standpoint positioning that enables a speaking back to the institution of the university – which itself is bound in colonial and continuing colonising practices - is proffered. A depth of understanding in the educational journeys of generations of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women in the academy draws on our way of speaking and sharing knowledge in the methodology of yarnin'. The intergenerational transfer of knowledge is considered to make a

new research practice within the academy so as to better align with our own knowledges practices and thus ensuring that we maintain our own cultural authenticities. Therefore, we pay homage to our grandmothers, mothers, aunts, sisters and our own daughters for believing in us and giving us the strength for our knowing, being and doing in the academy. The contributions to this Special Issue are truly the scholarly expression of *Because of Her, We Can*.

Tiddas Bronwyn Fredericks and Nereda White's important contribution provides an historical outline of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women's employment and engagement within the academy. In acknowledging Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women's achievements there is a purposeful regard for our education work as a key contribution to self-determination agendas linking back to our communities. The authors respectful nod to the first Aboriginal woman graduate of a university, as well as the Aboriginal women who are recognised as Distinguished Professors and a number of other warrior women scholars heralds further achievements within the academy. However, these few gains are situated against many more challenges and the Tiddas make an important knowledge contribution in naming the 'black glass ceiling' to raise the question how it can be broke. The Tiddas critically examine structural impediments to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women's employment value and promotability and, in doing so, identify inherent weaknesses in silo and stratified approaches of the academy. In order to meet parity, as inscribed in university Indigenous (Education and Workforce) Strategy, the Tiddas hold a firm, penetrating gaze on the university and the work that this institution must do to shift its practice.

Tiddas Sue Green, Jessica Russ-Smith and Lauren Tynan speak plainly about the challenges and name the university as a place of extremes - a place where, with relative institutional ease, the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander woman is positioned so as to suffer imposter syndrome complicated by senses of cultural unsafe-ness. Tiddas Sue and Jessica lean into Wiradjuri/Wiradyuri ontologies of Yindyamarra (deep respect) as the antidote to the colonial legacies of violence held by the academy. As the doctoral supervisor, Green embodies intergenerational knowledge exchange to support Russ-Smith and Tynan as the next generation of Aboriginal scholars who will be able to 'walk the talk' and to have greater securities in belonging within an academic home. Collectively, the three Tiddas demonstrate tenacity for being in the academy, bolstered by the ways and words of other Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander warrior women scholars, a sure-footedness that takes us all from the margins to the centre. The Tiddas' writing importantly identifies that relationships and solidarity with other Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women is invaluable and that, in spite of the challenges, a reclaiming of our (educational) sovereignties can occur.

The strength of relationalities with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities is signified by the supports offered by family and demonstrates the critical importance of assisting other Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. This is the agentic work that is taken up by Tiddas Janet Mooney, Lyn Riley and Fabri Blacklock in the article *Yarnin' up: Stories of Challenges and Success*. In mobilising the methodology of yarnin', personal insight is provided of primary, secondary and post-secondary systems of education. Making known our experiences of education systems from the positionality of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women is tactically important if transformation of systems is to eventuate. In this context, the Tiddas identify the need for resilience in order to counter inequality and by yarnin' up about the lived experience, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women's voices are spoken and hopefully heard.

Tidda Linda Payi embodies her Mak Mak Marranunggu traditions by preparing and writing with her next generations in knowledges and understandings of shared histories to write *Reimagining Aboriginal Leadership in Higher Education - A New Indigenous Research Paradigm*. Her family's scholarship offers Aboriginal corporeality as a framing for knowing how ceremonial cultural knowledge can be used to re-write processes of research. As an a

*priori* condition for transforming conventional research practice within the academy, Tidda Linda Payi and family hold to an unequivocal positioning of Indigenist research. This is logical given that Linda herself was taught by her mother/*ahla* in Country, about Country and there is a seamlessness in carrying this critical methodological movement into research. In order to be worthwhile, research must embody cultural traditions and practices; uphold relationalities by engaging with knowledges that strengthen the ties of families and communities and provide the platform from which to speak through other knowledge systems into the research space. It is a process that creates new ways for old ceremonies.

Tidda Doseena Fergie, a Torres Strait Islander scholar, in writing to disrupt the educative practices of the academy, asks the poignant question: how does one remain true to oneself when writing a PhD in a western system? It is a question derived from lived inter-generational experiences of overt racism. Her article, *I wonder what lies beyond that horizon?* reinforces the work of the other Tiddas in this Special Issue, speaking about her journey through educational systems. Tidda Doseena offers critical understandings in noting that when education is implemented in our ways, it takes on new meanings and demonstrates that our trustees of our cultures have made a positive difference within our communities. It is on the shoulders of giants that we as Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women work to a higher degree.

Tidda Michelle Locke in *Wirrawi Bubuwul-Aboriginal Women Strong* provides a creative intercept on scholarly writing and engages in dialogue with her ancestor, Bolongaia, who as a 14 year old was awarded the chief academic prize at the Native Parramatta Institute in 1819. Proud ancestry indeed. Tidda Michelle identifies the privilege of participating in the academy to 'speak the truth' though acknowledges that education is not confined to the academy and that responsibility, accountability and reciprocity to family and community are at the core of teaching and learning. Her scholarship takes up a common theme raised by the other Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women scholars in this Special Issue in that at the core of our work is the imperative to keep alive the spirit, knowledge and culture of our Countries. On the shoulders of Bolongaia and her descendants, Michelle writes this objective into being, both poetically and aesthetically.

We thank the authors for the valuable contributions to this Special Issue and stand with each of the Tiddas in praise of the generations of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women ancestors who have gone before, carved the spaces for going forward and on whose shoulders we stand. Collectively, the author's voices respectfully relay stories of denial, struggle and racism simultaneous to stories of fearlessness, intellectual warriorship and commitment. In each, there is deep understanding that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women's contributions are sustained and profound over generations. The scholarly contributions found in this Special Issue maintain this tradition. It has been our pleasure to bring this work to light.

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