Journeys West to Menindee

Collation of the Reports from 2010-2012
Dedication

These reports are dedicated to Yungha-dhu, who has given us permission to use the images taken on Ngiyeempaa land
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There have been four trips to Menindee by CSU staff since 2010. In total 20 CSU staff (and sometimes their family members) and Wiradjuri Elder, Gloria Dindima Rogers have gone to Ngiyempaa country. Since the first trip in 2010, Aunty Beryl has been very keen for members of the University Executive to consider ‘coming to country’. In 2011 on behalf of Aunt, this invitation was extended by me to the Vice Chancellor and all members of the Vice Chancellors Forum (VCF). Sadly, the response was not overwhelming. Signalling strong intention at this time, however, were Vice Chancellor, Professor Ian Goulter and Executive Director, Shirley Oakley (who shortly after became Acting Deputy Vice Chancellor (Administration) and delayed her visit until April 2012). Professor Andy Vann was also invited given his appointment as the next Vice Chancellor of CSU (and consequently travelled with this group in 2012).

Professor Goulter wrote of his time in Country in November 2011 in the following way:-

The weekend will stay with me forever, thanks to the contribution of Aunty Beryl. I was moved by receiving the name, Mukuparrin, at the time and feel even more honoured as I understand the significance of Aunty Beryl’s actions. Please pass on my best wishes to Aunty Beryl, and her family and friends who made the weekend such a special occasion.

These journeys would not be possible without the generosity, warmth and spirit of Aunty Beryl Philp Carmichael, Yungha-dhu, Ngiyempaa Elder. We have been greatly moved by her acceptance, candidness, humour and wisdom. Julie Philp Cleesteen also provides practical help and insight into life and community which complement her mother’s teaching. Without Julie (and her husband, Bruce) the well oiled operation that saw us fed, watered and cared for the days we were there is testimony to great generosity and skill.

In 2010 the team that returned from Menindee made several recommendations. I am pleased to say that some of these have been enacted upon. Some still remain and perhaps a
conversation needs to be had as to whether they are still current and necessary. They revolve around four major areas.

- That the University explores accepting protocols that acknowledge the institution’s wide footprint (for example the Wiradjuri, the Eora, the Ngunawal, the Ngiyeempaa, the Gundungarra, and the Biripi - given CSU’s new campus in Post Macquarie). It is suggested that the University begin forming respectful partnership with all these Nation groups.
- That Indigenous community engagement and collaboration be built into the performance management descriptors, not so that it is forced on staff, but so that those who do engage are rewarded and encouraged.
- That those staff leading in this area be encouraged to mentor junior staff to facilitate their journey of cultural competence. This where possible needs to be enacted at the school level so that sustainability of cultural competence as a staff resource grows and with it discipline specific teaching and research which is culturally engaged and appropriate.
- That CSU advocate on behalf of local Indigenous communities.

I would like to thank those who made the journey in April 2012. In honouring my given traditional name, Ngooringah, I act as messenger between Yungha-dhu and Cleesteen and Charles Sturt University and hope many more opportunities arise for CSU staff and thank my colleagues for the following reflections, for their friendship and camaraderie, for their music and laughter.

I have made a decision to include all the reports from 2010 to the present day. I thank the people who have made the journey and trust their words will leave a lasting impression on any reader.

Dr Barbara Hill May 2012
As with lived experiences, my reflection on my time at Menindee is not ordered and sequential nor easily translated into a narrative. But it is rich and round and inter-connected, a recollection of relationships and shapes and ideas that now surround and inhabit me and pop up to surprise me at unexpected moments. The photographs taken by my fellow campers have brought some structure and lucidity to my memory of the weekend and so I am grateful for their visual record...

There is a theme of vehicles and roads that speak of the vast distances, the landscapes, and the journeys that were taken to bring us all together. It is a theme that also speaks of the journeys we all took to return to our homes but the return had new memories and new friends to share the journey with, whether by having a new passenger in the car or a new young friend communicating via text message. There is a theme of music and storytelling and funny poetry. How many guitars are too many? Our memories were stretched as we struggled with our own oral ‘histories’ in the form of popular song lyrics. I was honoured hear Aunty Beryl’s stories and pleasantly confronted by the challenge of accounting for my presence there and the struggle to know what it was that I could bring to the camp. I was surprised to be serenaded to sleep by the campfire sing-along, only being disturbed by it stopping.

There was food and fires and friendship (and frogs in all sorts of places). The hospitality of Aunty Beryl – Yungha-a dhu, and Julie – Cleesteen, and their family was generous and complete and overwhelming. I arrived to find my tent pitched and mattress placed inside, welcoming and ready for my arrival. The campfire was constant and warming, an energy source for cooking, a
gathering place for friends. I learnt about names that carry meaning and significance and was challenged by the complexity and range of Indigenous languages and how they might be sustained into the future. The Ngiyeempaa welcome was simultaneously new yet familiar – it called to mind the greeting I had extended to my nephew earlier in the year when he came to live in my house “Welcome, but follow the rules or you are out!”

There are images of message sticks: new ones being clumsily ‘crafted’, small, noisy high-pitched messages, deep messages from big rainforest sticks, and exquisite new sticks brought as gifts; different voices from different places, gathered in one place. Trees were ancient dead sculptures, haunting the lake, at once symbols of life and death, of past and present. Emus, the Ngiyeempaa totem, went about their business as if we weren’t there, reminding me of my irrelevance in that place: on the outward journey I thought of them only as dangerous and annoying obstacles on the road; on the way home I thought of them as a source of food and, despite the insurance issues associated with damaging a rental car, I was sorely tempted to hit one and take it back to camp for a feast. An odd way for me to connect to nature?

My time at Menindee was rich in metaphors: it was impossible to ignore the messages told by the land; Aunty Beryl’s stories brought Indigenous history and law and sociology and politics alive. There was always the sky, the sun, the sunsets, the stars. Under the sky was the lake, full of life and sustaining life, a constant reminder of the beauty of reflection and now a focus of my mental reflection. When I went swimming, I delighted in the joy of being immersed in another world regardless of the shallowness of my immersion. During the homeward drive to Broken Hill, John and I shared stories of some of our favourite lessons we had delivered as teachers – John used the story of Goldilocks in microbiology, I used the Cat in the Hat in computer programming – we had both drawn from the stories of our popular culture to convey bigger messages and those had become some of the concepts best remembered by our students. It has since made me marvel at the wisdom of the passing of precious Indigenous culture and
history through the oral tradition of storytelling. It now makes me reflect on omissions in how we are teaching our new teachers to teach...

Now back home, I am challenged to keep in touch with the experience, to follow through on the ideas of making authentic connections between CSU and Indigenous communities, to maintain the friendships, to offer the same hospitality in return, to go back to Menindee and to encourage others to do likewise.
Reflections on Menindee April 2012
Report by Shirley Oakley, Deputy Vice Chancellor, Office of Administration

I feel extremely privileged to have been part of this CSU visit to Ngiyempaa Country at Menindee. The warmth of the welcome by Aunty Beryl Yungha-a dhu Carmichael and her extended family, and the hospitality shown to us particularly by her daughter Julie Cleesteen Philp and partner Bruce was humbling. We talked, laughed, made clap sticks under Aunty Beryl’s instructions (not very well) and shared her hopes for the future of Ngiyempaa Country and its people. Our visit coincided with a group from the Coorong led by Ngarrindjeri elder Uncle Moogy (Major Sumner) who were singing the river from Queensland to the sea in order to restore health to the Murray Darling systems and its lands. This too was a privilege to see and be part of.

Aunty Beryl asked us all to say why we had come, what we hoped to gain from the experience and what we could give back. I feel I took more than I brought or can ever give back. I have travelled extensively through inland Australia, but never before have I had the honour of seeing Country through the eyes of its people and hearing their stories. Aboriginal Australia and non-Aboriginal Australia live parallel lives and only rarely do we have the opportunity to come together in this way. I think this is a great pity. The more we can interact and build understanding and relationships, the better our society will be.

We all had a tremendously good time in Menindee in Ngiyempaa Country. We need to give something back. What can CSU do? Aunty Beryl wants to preserve language and culture, record
stories. There are only five people left who have the language. This desire is common to all Aboriginal Elders I have met and they are all acutely aware that time is running out. CSU has the skills, the technology, and the will to help. We need to act. We can make a significant and lasting contribution to the peoples of our region but we need to do it now.
Menindee Reflection

Report by Ruth Bacchus, Lecturer, School of Humanities and Social Sciences

I’d been hearing about Menindee and Aunty Beryl - Yungha-dhu - and her daughter Julie - Cleesteen - for a long time and from a range of people.

For me the trip was in some ways a personal one. Apart from wanting to meet Aunty Beryl and Julie my hope was to find some new ways to perceive and experience a particular situation – and life more broadly. Travelling does always seem to do this at least a bit and, as is often the case, the journey itself was almost as important as the destination. So … the journey … that drive through flat bare country – but never nothing or nowhere – the sight of Narayan kicking up dust as he ran ahead to stretch his legs, the placenames … Lake Cargelligo, the Gypsum Palace Inn at Ivanhoe … a dead emu with its family gathered nervously around, road-kill we wondered whether to carry on to camp, the camp itself, the warmth with which we were greeted and cared for by Aunty Beryl, Julie and Julie’s husband Bruce, and the amazing vision of the lakes like a dream. Walking out and out and out into water that deepens so gradually, so flat and calm, punctuated by long-dead trees, black at sunset, the silhouettes of our children, so far from shore, the silty sand almost impossibly soft underfoot.

It was good to meet and get to know, even just a little, the other campers – some new or newish to CSU, others I’d been sharing a campus with for decades. It was great to witness a group led by Uncle Moogie from the Coorong who were travelling south, singing up the river as they went. It was fantastic to hear some of Aunty Beryl’s stories.

Perhaps most important in the long term was the thought that CSU could be vital to preserving some of those stories by helping to preserve the language and knowledge of the Ngiyeempaa – language and knowledge that could be so easily lost – and what a tragedy, almost a crime, that would be in 2012. We have the means to do it and it would provide great experience for CSU students involved in filming and recording.
And my own job after Menindee? ... The trip, the camp, the lakes, Aunty Beryl and Julie, can seem a long way from the office I write in now. Yet several of the subjects I teach or have taught, particularly Politics of Identity, but also some Sociology and Justice Studies subjects, involve challenging students to rethink their beliefs about ‘race’ and culture, and often their attitudes toward Indigenous people. This work is supported by workshops like ‘Working with Racism in the Classroom’, run by LTS, where we discussed ways to do this. In turn this exchange of ideas and collegial support is underpinned by the experience of Menindee.
Ngiyeempaa Country Reflection

Report by Dr Barbara Hill, Indigenous Curriculum and Pedagogy Coordinator, Division of Learning and Teaching Services

Menindee, this year, is all about water, about flow about sustainability – sustainability of rivers and river systems, Culture and Cultural practices, personal and professional practice and all this coming together in a location that gives the lesson geographic impetus, a riparian underscore and an added emphasis. It is workplace learning with a deep twist and given all the water possibly even a double pike. The years of connection I have felt to this Country, to Yungha-dhu and to Cleesteen, sustain me and once we reach those wide open spaces where you can see the curve of the earth – something happens. The Country sings and calls and we arrive in time for Ringbalin – the River Country Spirit Ceremony – the age old Ngarrindjeri ceremony that involves the singing of the rivers and the river spirits – this piece of synchronicity is not lost on any of us.

Ringbalin is an ancient ceremony. It involves a pilgrimage of over 2,300 kilometres from the headwaters in Queensland to the mouth of the Murray-Darling in South Australia. We have made our own pilgrimage to meet this pilgrimage in Ngiyeempaa country (the last time ceremony was done like this, Aunt tells us, was in 1947) – to meet with Aunty Beryl and Uncle Moogie (Ngarrindjeri Elder, Major Sumner) and the Ngarrindjeri – as if by some time-honoured agreement, signed long ago.

Meanwhile at our base camp, Julie and her husband Bruce stoke the fire, nestle the billy, and cook for us without fanfare, without fuss. Our tents are pitched; our mattresses are soft and comfortable. The cooking is done with heart, with care and with pride. There is much laughter and there is the sound of music and singing everywhere.

While organising the night’s event by the Pamamaroo Creek, the water covering where we camped last year, I listen to Aunty Beryl and Uncle Moogie speak about cultural mapping of
Country, of travel to First Nations People in Canada, the journey of the seasons on the land and
the seasons in the stars and sky. We talk about working together; moving on together; listening
to our Mother Earth, as earthquakes – one in Indonesia the other in Pitjantjatjara country –
rumble the unease, and water dammed in China is thought to put pressure on tectonic plates –
the same plates that are still sung in creation and Dreaming stories all over this country. These,
and other things, are spoken about. All point to a need for more respect and reciprocity; a need
for still deeper understanding.

What I am left with is a deep, and in some instances, disturbing contemplation of where to go
next with this work; as messenger between Aunt and University.

How fluid can we be? How can we help? We can film, we can record, we can help map Country,
we could even try to have a physical presence and build a replica of Aunt’s school house on the
old Menindee Mission where her journey in Education began (which is what she wants). I can’t
find the answer, not alone anyway. Instead, I keep listening, I keep communicating, and I keep
hoping. In my work as the University’s Indigenous Curriculum and Pedagogy Coordinator I was
reminded while I was on this trip of the time I began in this position. I said to myself then, like a mantra, “I can only bring my humanity to this work”. Sometimes that is not enough, but it is a start.

I wish all our staff could go to Menindee; I would wish them that experience. It is a huge privilege. The rich dialogues that I have had with “returned” Menindee staff have been overwhelming and the wonderful things that have emerged in peoples teaching, their own learning and their students learning and their research has been fantastic and ground breaking. The difficulty is how to squash the huge vision of those skies, those watery vistas, the timelessness and the challenge of the journey to cultural competence into one’s head; with all the daily demands that come. In other words how do we bring the campfire, with its rich experience, home and into our work lives? How do we keep the glow, the fire going?

We are on borrowed time, we know it – we need to imagine and investigate our legacy and see if it accords with a practical vision. We need an institutional leadership that values this experience; a leadership that is not shy of making a firm commitment to the Ngiyeempaa. We need to honour those who continue to call us, to sing to us, to invite us and who share with us their stories and future hopes. To Aunty Beryl and Julie I am indebted; forever grateful.
Menindee Reflection

Report by Andy Vann, Vice Chancellor and President, Office of Vice Chancellor

You asked for our reflections on the trip to Menindee and here are mine. It was a powerful, interesting and beautiful trip. For me the trip had many strands of significance.

The first of these was simply that the timing was good. It came at a very useful time for me as it more or less marked the end of my initial three months at CSU. In fact, on checking more closely, the Thursday on which we started the drive from Bathurst marked my 100 days at CSU. In one strand of leadership mythology (to which I do not subscribe) this is supposed to be when you have made your mark. Whilst not feeling I had to have made all the changes by then, I had signalled to the senior staff and the Council that I would take three months to live in CSU and its systems before making any significant comment. I finished my paper summarising my strategic thoughts for SEC on the drive out to Menindee. Needless to say, I have been reasonably consumed in those three months so it was delightful to have an opportunity to decompress and kick back a little in a wonderful outback environment with a warm and supportive group of people and to travel in the company of my lovely wife for several days.
The second strand was a feeling that I had in some sense returned home. I mentioned at the camp that we had travelled Australia in a caravan with the kids a decade previously. This was a wonderful and very special time for me when I had a previously unknown opportunity to be with the family 24/7. (At least wonderful apart from trying to persuade the kids to do their distance education.) We spent nine months on the road, most of it in the outback and had been in Broken Hill and at Lake Mungo in the middle of February 2002. After this trip both Ruth and I felt that we were much more located and at home in Australia than we had been previously. When I returned to work at CQU in Rockhampton, for many weeks I would look out to the West and wish we could be back in the red dust and wide open spaces of outback Australia and that feeling has not completely left me. As we traversed the country, we had mostly fine weather and clear nights and the Southern Cross was our constant companion. It was not until we returned to the light pollution of cities and the stars dimmed that I recognised I had lost my point of reference in more senses than simply navigational. As an immigrant I have no right to claim a spiritual connection to the Australian landscape but that is how I feel it calls to me. I find it very easy to understand that Indigenous culture is intimately connected with the spirit of the land, water and stars - how could be there any other kind of response?

The third strand, linked to the previous, was to consider my place as a tiny actor in the sweep of human history. I recall visiting Kakadu on our trip and walking down from Ubirr Rock past tourists from Italy, Germany and France whilst passing the aboriginal rock paintings. It struck me that all those European languages and cultures, which were deep and hugely significant to my life story, had grown up in the twinkling of an eye compared to the depth of Indigenous culture. This gave me a Zen-like appreciation of at once how immeasurably greater our cultural traditions are than ourselves and also how important we are in propagating and sustaining those traditions. This fits with Aunty Beryl's sense of responsibility and weight as the last
custodian of her culture. Some of her concerns are perhaps the generic frustration of a
generation with those that succeed them and this would be very familiar to my own mother in
considering her descendants, but given the colonial impacts on Indigenous peoples there is a
very genuine potential for complete loss of culture in Australia at this time. Some of this must
have happened with the successive waves of invasion into Britain and some of the
disconnection is still evident in Anglo culture. These hurts cannot be undone nor all the wrongs
righted but we need to find ways to preserve and propagate cultural traditions and wisdom.

The fourth strand was to hear Aunty Beryl talk about how the lore was transmitted and
consider the lessons of Indigenous culture and pedagogy for us; in universities we affect a
written technocratic culture but the truth is that oral traditions, stories and ceremonies are
hugely important to us too. So are the considerations of power, authority structures and social
status with the deference and respect that comes from that. It was particularly interesting to
hear Aunty Beryl talk about how decisions were made in her culture. It seems to me there are
very clear parallels between the gender separation in decision-making structures in traditional
Indigenous society and governance structures in modern Western institutions. I think through
her stories she spoke very powerfully about the need for individuals to inhabit those structures
and traditions and live them well too. Sometimes we imagine we can protect ourselves through
management algorithms alone and that all we need do is write policy and statutes to create a
healthy organisation or society. When it comes right down to it we all know we need good,
wise, skilled and passionate people to operate those systems effectively. I have long reflected
on my job as a leader in helping the culture to hone its stories and traditions to stay healthy and
sustainable. What stories do we need to tell ourselves? Who are the custodians of culture?
Who deserves respect and how is cultural pressure brought to bear on those who transgress?
One of the discourses that has emerged in higher education is a supposed tension between
managerialism and collegiality coupled with a sense of anomie because there is a view that
economic rationalism is driving us all to wrong behaviour. To quote Adam Savage from Mythbusters, (according to Google, actually Doctor Who originally) "I reject that reality and substitute my own". It seems to me that in the contemporary university we have a critical need to nurture a sense of shared culture owned by all parties and to retain a sense of agency in the face of what is admittedly a very competitive environment. I think there might be things to learn here from Indigenous cultures.

The fifth strand was in relation to culture and environmental sustainability. Indigenous peoples lived in equilibrium with the natural environment for many thousands of years and their cultural traditions enshrined ways of living and being that supported this. To be in the outback, appreciate its power, and that we humans must to a large extent submit to the environment, was again an important reminder of where we truly sit in the scheme of existence. Western culture has embraced progress and economic growth to the exclusion of all else and we are now facing the limits to that. What can we learn from the Indigenous worldview in this space? I liked the fact that the meaning for 'ngunyah' in Nguyeempaa equates owning nothing with being free. Very Zen.

The final strand was to hear the operational reality of people's lives at CSU and reflect on the little, and big, frustrations we all have in our lives. There is human tendency to assume that the folks 'up there' must be responsible for allowing the world to be in such a mess. For me it would be the Federal Government, for academics it's their Heads of School or the Senior Executive. Leadership, as opposed to caretaking, is about promoting changes in focus and practice and inevitably this is discomfiting, and there is a lot of pressure on staff in the modern workplace. To hear the niggles that people were experiencing with good and well-intentioned changes was a healthy prompt to be mindful of the impacts of decisions. I hope, of course, that
my leadership overall will have positive impacts but this is not something to be taken for
granted.

So, overall a wonderful magical trip and a great opportunity. My deep thanks to Aunty Beryl
and her family for their hospitality and to you for organising it. If it’s not a misuse of the term,
ngupaula. I hope we can return before too long.
Menindee 2012

Report by Dr John Harper, School of Agricultural and Wine Sciences.

I have been to Menindee three times now since 2009 which is in Nguyeempaa country, home of the Emu spirit. The latest trip was a real flying visit and I was compelled to go because two women I hold in high regard asked me too! Barbara Hill (Ngooringah) and Aunty Beryl Philp-Carmichael (Yungha-Dhu). Each time I have gone there I have felt a sense of stillness and oneness with the Elders and travellers that has really strengthened my resolve to make a positive difference in cultural competency where I can, in my teaching and in my relationships with others.

On this trip the flight to Broken Hill I marvelled at the changing landscape and how the saltbush made the ground take on a blue-green hue. I was collected from the airport by two of Aunty Beryl’s grandchildren. The one hour journey from Broken Hill to Menindee went fast as we talked and joked. Della, granddaughter and teacher-artist, demonstrated her fun imagination talking about pigeons with buckets of water. I thought it must be fun to be in her class! And then we arrived!

It was great to see Aunty Beryl and her daughter Julie again at the camp site. This time Julie’s partner Bruce was there too and it was nice to meet and talk with.
I sat around the campfire and got acquainted with the other travellers, some there for the first time. I hoped that they would take away the wonder of the place and a resolve to help bring about changes. Barbara had brought her son and daughter along too and they really got into the spirit of the adventure. It was great to see things through their eyes.

That night we had a special treat and went to the banks of Menindee Lake to see an Indigenous dance troupe, which were travelling and singing up the river. The Ngarrindjeri Dancers were lead by Uncle Moogie (Ngarrindjeri Elder, Major Sumner) and his wife.

It was quite a spectacle and what made it all the more special for me was that the audience was invited to join in the dance. How could I refuse! It was great and I felt more a part of the ceremony by being taught some of the ‘dance moves’ of a Kangaroo or clapping as the women danced as Emu’s.

Later that evening we sat around the campfire and sang Beatles songs, which was a lot of fun. I took a photo of Aunty Beryl and sent it to Marian, a previous traveller to Menindee who E mailed back and said she really felt connected to us there. It made me think of all the mobile technology and how if we use it with ‘heart’ we can really achieve a lot.

The next day I headed back to Broken Hill with Pam and managed to get a photograph of the Counties totem an Emu on the road.

At the airport I recognised some Aboriginal people that had been at CSU for a conference on Indigenous health a couple of years ago. As it turned out they were all on their way to CSU, Wagga Wagga to a residential school!
Menindee reflection

*Report by Ruth Vann*

When I heard about the trip to Menindee I was very excited and keen to experience it. I also felt very honoured to be invited as I am not a CSU employee. I knew it would be a wonderful opportunity to help me feel settled in this new part of Australia and to connect with it. It would also mean that I would spend some time with Andy, which had not happened very much since our move from Queensland 3 months ago.

I was also excited about meeting Aunty Beryl. I had been fortunate enough to spend some time with Indigenous elder Gracelyn Smallwood in Townsville and the opportunity to meet somebody of similar standing was exciting, especially someone involved in education.

Travelling to Menindee was part of the experience. Before we arrived we were already in touch with our fellow travellers and a feeling of camaraderie was established. Driving through the flat red land under the wide blue sky was beautiful and instilled a sense of calm that was particularly welcome after our recent upheavals. Andy and I also reminisced about the driving trip we had taken 10 years ago around Australia. The area around Menindee is very like Lake Mungo which is one of the many special places that I remember.

On arriving at the camp Aunty Beryl and Julie made us feel very welcome. It was also lovely to meet Julie’s partner, son and daughter.

Being at Menindee was even better than I had hoped. Being able to spend time in such beautiful surroundings with amazing people and to have no distractions was a wonderful gift.
The trip was personally beneficial for me as it gave me time to stop and take stock of being in Bathurst and this new chapter of my life. On my return to Bathurst I felt I had a new perspective and had made a connection with NSW. I had also made friendships and connected with people in a way that normal busy lives don’t allow.

My trip may have been short but it has left a lasting impression. I feel enriched by the time, knowledge and experience that Aunty Beryl and her family shared with me. It was an amazing and insightful experience that I would recommend to everyone. Every second was enjoyable but some of my favourite moments included –

- Talking with Aunty Beryl about the mission she lived on until she was 15
- Stories and songs around the campfire
- Making clap sticks
- Watching a traditional singing up the river ceremony
- Watching the sunset over the lake
- Watching the bird life on the lake
- Catching green tree frogs from the toilet and freeing them down by the lake with 7 year old Esther
- The stars
- Reading the booklet they use in local schools to teach the Ngiyeempaa language
- Being around the kids and witnessing their natural curiosity
- Spending time with people who had a similar outlook and a belief that things can change
- Visiting Aunty Beryl’s home and looking at photos of her family past and present
Menindee in September

Report by Elise Hull, Indigenous Resource Officer, Division of Learning and Teaching Services

The temperature climbed as Barb Hill and I left Bathurst on a cool Friday morning and made our way out west. After 6 hours of sealed road, and 4 of red dirt interspersed with cattle grids, we finally arrived in Menindee at Aunty Beryl’s house. Aunty Beryl was looking remarkably well compared to four months ago when I’d last visited, and welcomed us, as usual, with open arms and home. Deb Evans arrived soon after, with John Rafferty and his sons and Ian Goulter hot on her tail.

We decided to camp near Pamamaroo Lakes although our usual spot wasn’t available, and set up camp near “blocked dam”, and Burke and Wills base campsite.

The first night saw us dining out at the Maidens Hotel, where Burke and Wills also camped in 1860 before setting off on their journey. The pub grub was just what we needed to settle in for our first night camped out under the stars, and we all slept well.

I rose early the next morning, and went to a little spot near the Main Weir to watch the sunrise. It was a beautiful morning, and by the time I got back to camp some of the others were up and I
could smell the coffee brewing. Soon Aunty Julie and Aunty Beryl arrived with breakfast and a few other provisions.

We left for the mission mid-morning, driving along the back road until we came to the Old Mission sign. We stopped just inside the fence, and Aunty Beryl pointed out the damage done to cultural camp facilities, as well explaining that the rocks used as monuments for were “bad spirit” rocks.

We walked along the track further, where I found a bush tomato on a tiny little vine poking out of the red dust and noticed the large variety of animal tracks everywhere. We sat for hours at the mission, while Aunty Beryl told us stories of mission life, answered questions from the group, and reminisced. Aunty Julie brought up lunch: cold meat and salads on rolls, which we all tucked into. Funny how fresh air and camping can make everyone ravenous!

As we came back into the lake area, we swung along a back road to see our camp from the opposite side of the river. It was here we found some quandong trees, branches heavy with fruit which we raided. Back at camp, the quandongs were de-seeded and boiled with a bit of sugar to enjoy after dinner with a slosh of custard. My favourite!

While dinner cooked (roast lamb with veges, including Aunty Julie’s legendary roast potatoes), I headed down the river to try my luck at fishing, but those who’ve read my account of the last trip knows I’m not too good at it... And this was demonstrated yet again. But it was nice to sit in the cool as the sun went down and think about some of the stories and knowledge which Aunty Beryl had passed down.
The next morning, Aunty Julie arrived with a huge breakfast – burgers, bacon, sausages, tomatoes and toast for the travellers leaving that day. While brekky cooked, Aunty Beryl showed us photos from previous camps she’d run, and an example of a polishing stone (?) stuck in the fork of a tree. She also shared with us her sacred emu feathers and stones, which was quite a big moment.

After breakfast, Ian presented Aunty Beryl with the University’s Reconciliation Statement. Aunty Beryl then called us all around the campfire and gave us traditional Ngiyeempaa names. For Ian, she named him Mukuparrin, meaning New Moon. Barb got Ngooringah a beautiful flower symbolising beauty and strength. Deb received Ngurri Winue, meaning camp woman – because of her motherly attitude and camp ways. John was given Thayi Marri, meaning expert teacher while Declan got Bimbi (Woodpecker), and Daniel: Parpa (Rock Wallaby). I got given Bugdli Winue, meaning happy woman. The significance of being given these names is something so immense, and I feel so honoured to have been trusted by Aunty Beryl. As she said, it is now our job and responsibility to make sure Ngiyeempaa culture doesn’t die, we are tied to them now.

At this point, the camp was packed up and we were ready to wave everyone off – John and his sons going onto Adelaide, while Ian flew out of Broken Hill, and Deb going to family in Wilcannia. But over the past days, someone had taken the towball on John’s ute which was towing his campervan so Aunty Beryl’s son, Harry (Graham) came down with Aunty Julie’s husband and between them got a spare towball fitted and they were on their way.
Reports from May 2011
Reflections on Menindee – a cultural experience camp 16-20 May 2011

Report by Dave Ritchie, Lecturer, School of Biomedical Sciences

Being invited to Menindee was a huge privilege in my view. It was the culmination of a sequence of conversations with Dr Barbara Hill, Indigenous Curriculum and Pedagogy Coordinator, Division of Learning and Teaching Services and Dr Jillene Harris, Lecturer in Psychology. A number of CSU staff had travelled to Menindee in 2010 to visit with Aunty Beryl Philp-Carmichael, also known as Yungha-dhu, an elder of the Ngiyempaa people (see http://trove.nla.gov.au/people/524964?c=people Accessed 220511). My anticipation of the trip was huge as Barb had allowed me access to an Interact site, set up after the first visit, which had a video record of the reflections of the first group of participants. It was clear that the initial cultural experience camp had a significant impact on those participating.

The trip out to Menindee was not without adventure. The 4WD I was driving, accompanied by Sarah McCormick and Elise Hull, got bogged 18km from Wilcannia on a dirt road heading to Menindee. There had been quite a bit of rain in recent times in this area rendering many of the dirt roads impassable. I drove past the first of several detour signs that had been placed around areas where water had been across the road as the road looked OK to me. When we encountered water across the road I stopped rather than enter the water as I did not want to get stuck. I reversed up the road a little before attempting to drive about 30 metres across ground to the deviation track. I did not, at that point, appreciate just how fragile the soil was, or the fact that there was a lot of fine silt mixed with it as well.

I drove slowly off the road but we quickly sank up to the front axle and as the mud was so fine the tyre treads clogged quickly. Stepping out of the car it was clear that the sticky gluggy mud
was going to create some issues for us. However, walking back up the road it became clear that a number of other vehicles had become bogged on this stretch of the road recently. As we looked around us for anything that might be of use in digging ourselves out of this mess we were able to retrieve a road sign, a section of corrugated iron and also a section of steel grate. Placing these under the tyres was challenging as we needed to clear some of the mud away to enable an unencumbered exit. Sarah (background), Elise (foreground) and I worked as a team to coordinate the resources required to extricate ourselves. Elise had been able to get a one or two bar signal on her phone, mine was useless, and had rung the NRMA. Our card, supplied with the CSU vehicle folder, had lapsed in 2010 according to the NRMA and they were not going to be of assistance to us. It was insufficient to use just the metal under the wheels as there was not enough traction, and as the bushes in the vicinity were thorny, we had to walk back up the road and find some that weren’t. We managed to pull apart a salt-bush and place that under the wheels, but on top of the metal. After some 45 minutes we were able to extricate ourselves. As the tyre tracks reveal, we were not able to exit the way we entered as there was a small channel beside the road that the mud sucked us into. The clump of salt-bush in the channel is where we were able to exit the mud.

My reflection on this incident was to accept the mistake was mine. I wanted to get to Menindee and was “rushing”. I was feeling weary and was not as attentive as I should have been. I was very much more alert once we were back on the road. I took this as a sign that the country was telling me to show some respect, to slow down and look more closely at the environment, and to recognise not only its strengths but also its fragility. We successfully followed all subsequent detour signs.
We arrived at Menindee and made contact with Julie Philp, Aunty Beryl’s daughter who was coordinating the camp. Julie gave us instructions on how to find the camp, located on an island next to the main weir of Menindee Lake. Julie met us at the locked gate and guided us into the camp. We were introduced to all those present, as we were the last to arrive. Julie and her brother Ken, and then Jill Harris and Matt Thomas (the pilot) who had flown from Bathurst, and John Harper and Catherine Maxwell from Wagga Wagga.

As we were camping the first job was to complete the erection of tents. While two of the tents had been partially erected, we needed to erect a third before we could settle in for the evening. Two tents had two of the women in each, while the three men shared the last tent – with John sleeping in the vestibule. Matt assumed responsibility for the barbeque that evening and cooked up a fine meal of sausages and chops.

The hub of the camp was the campfire. Matt is sitting on the left and John on the right. John is toasting some bread for breakfast. This fire was kept going for the duration of the camp. A large piece of timber was placed on the fire at night to keep it going and so the first person up each morning just needed to add some smaller sticks and breathe life back into it. The addition of gum leaves from time to time added an incredible edge to the smoke. There was much talking around the fire, from first thing in the morning through the day and into the evening. Given the general coolness until the middle of the day, it was a warm meeting place where we all congregated while drinking the numerous cups of Billy tea.

Our first morning’s activity was to construct a gunya, a traditional shelter comprising a timber frame covered with bush, to protect from the elements. The addition of a “post box” was evidence of the banter and joking that was constant. The tomahawk used was OK but
somewhat blunt. In my wanderings I came across some clay pipe and I thought I might be able to use that to sharpen the tomahawk but it was not particularly easy to use. I then found some broken concrete that was in a useful shape and began the task of sharpening the tomahawk. Sharpening knives was a skill I had learned as an abattoir worker in my teens and it translated well to the sharpening of the tomahawk head. Over several hours, on different days, I was able to sharpen the tomahawk to be comfortable in using it safely. A sharp blade is safer than a blunt one because it digs into a surface rather than sky off it. Later on, as we started to exhaust the firewood supply Julie had provided, I was able to chop through a red gum log and carry three sections, about a metre in length and about 30cm in diameter, back to the fire. That tomahawk wasn’t too bad at all.

Aunty Beryl, who was suffering a chest infection, arrived later in the morning. Given her health this mid-morning arrival became the pattern for the rest of the week, and she also left in the late afternoon before the chill set in. Aunty Beryl welcomed us to country and began to share her knowledge and wisdom with us. She has an amazing presence and a very quick wit. Her humour was balanced by the seriousness of her convictions. The impact of the forced removal of children, who became the *Stolen Generation*, was deeply felt in regard to the disruption to the development of traditional knowledge and language and we shared in the pain.

As Julie had to leave the camp to go into Broken Hill, some 104 kms away, she instructed us on the menu for the evening. There was a cool room on a trailer with a large amount of food, and a fridge in the shed, which also housed a toilet and shower. A large table for serving/preparing food was there, as well as a large gas burner for cooking, in addition to the barbeque. If the weather had been an issue we would have been able to comfortably cook and eat in the shed but we were fortunate in being able to sit around the campfire for meals. I decided to prepare the evening meal as it was to be a simple meat sauce with pasta meal. After rummaging
through the provisions I was able to find two trays of mince meat, two large bags of pasta and more than enough vegetables and sauce ingredients to feed the group. I began preparing the meal around 1600 as I wanted to slow cook the meat sauce in a camp oven. I was able to get the meal under way without distracting the others, and then resumed the campfire conversations with them. I was enjoying the campfire camaraderie a lot, and sitting on a log or on the ground close to the fire was very relaxing. The fire itself was mesmerising and so there were plenty of quiet moments to reflect. The days just seemed to fly by, with a balance of activities, exploration of the campsite and island, conversations and quiet moments.

I did not truly appreciate the significance of sunrise and sunset in this place until Wednesday morning. The stillness of the island, with just the occasional bird noises, meant that it was conducive to reflection about many things. I had been wandering around the greater campsite and had found a nice sandy knoll that was perfectly positioned to capture the sunrise. I did not miss the next two sunrises given just how spectacular they were.
Someone, possibly Julie, mentioned how much Aunty Beryl enjoyed yam (sweet potato). I had found some of the purple skinned sweet potato in the cool room and that was the closest thing I have found in Australia that compared to the New Zealand kumara. There was some aluminium foil in the kitchen provisions and so I wrapped up a yam and placed in the campfire ashes for Aunty Beryl’s lunch. It was a pleasure to be able to present it to Aunty Beryl. Later on Ken and I cut some timber for use in making clap sticks, and other objects, from a Wilga tree. On the Wednesday afternoon, after Aunty Beryl’s conversation with us, Matt invited us to fly to Broken Hill so that he could refuel the plane for the return flight to Bathurst. John and I were the only ones to take John up on the offer. Meant the men were away from the camp, a traditional issue I’m sure, and this meant that the women were able to talk differently about matters of mutual interest.

The countryside was amazingly green, although not surprising given the amount of rain that had fallen out this way recently. The flight also provided a different perspective to country and I was able to understand how traditional dot paintings provided a mapping of country. Interesting that I needed to be in a plane to sense the perspective and yet aboriginals have been dot painting and mapping their country for thousands of years.

On Thursday morning I woke early again to get up for the sunrise. It appeared that I had made enough noise to disturb others because shortly after I had settled on my patch of sand Jill walked out to where I was sitting, knowing that I had risen for the sunrise as well, and asked if she could share the spot with me. Given just how special this time of the day was, let alone the place, I was pleased to be able to share the moment with another like-minded spirit. We were not disappointed by the sunrise as the following image shows. While we were quietly talking, and appreciating the moment, I could not help but take numerous photos.
Later in the morning we collected Aunty Beryl and headed off to the old Menindee Mission site. I had cooked another yam for Aunty Beryl’s lunch, but only remembered it as we were heading out the gate. Others had already packed our picnic lunch and so it was only while checking that the yam was remembered. Julie had pulled it out of the fire to allow it to cool enough to handle.

The visit to the old Mission site was very poignant. Aunty Beryl told of the impact the removal of children had on families, in disrupting their connection to country, family and language. Some people had never been reunited while others had only managed to do so after almost a lifetime apart. The manner in which this occurred remains one of great shame on Australian governments and the public officials involved. The impact on indigenous Australians is generally poorly appreciated and from Aunty Beryl’s telling there are few elders with the knowledge left that are capable of passing on traditional ways. The telling of dreamtime, of the connections between tribal, moiety, family and personal totems, of respect for neighbouring groups and traditional law when moving from home country into other tribal areas has diminished. Some of the linkages might never be reconnected and Aunty Beryl was clearly frustrated by younger Aboriginals who were not elders but who were claiming country that was not theirs to claim. There was a significant misrepresentation and lack of respect for known elders in the contemporary drawing of tribal lands and in the manner in which individuals involved with Land Councils and other legal bodies had manipulated claims to their own advantage.

I also recalled from the video reflections from the 2010 group that Aunty Gloria had found a button, possibly from an item of clothing, and she had wondered what story might be told of the child it may have belonged to. She gave it to Aunty Beryl. On our visit John also found an
object, a marble, and gave it to Aunty Beryl. The coincidence struck me that even after the Mission officially closed in 1946 that there were still objects being found that provided evidence of its presence. All the buildings, including the two-roomed huts that the men had built, had long been demolished and all other evidence obliterated. There was a grove of bamboo that had been planted around the Mission Manager’s house that was still there but you would not have known it otherwise. Aunty Beryl was also able to tell a story about one of the floods that had occurred a long time ago, and that on hearing the noise of the flood waters coming down the river bed the adults present had linked hands and stood in the river bed to welcome the waters.

I asked Aunty Beryl whether there was any Mulga bush around. She didn’t think there was. My question arose because I had asked Julie earlier about the different materials used for the clap sticks. We had used Wilga but Mulga and Acacia were also used – different coloured timber and different sounds when clapped. On return to the campsite in the afternoon I headed off to cut a piece of Acacia so that I could make a new set of claps sticks. I had decided that I wanted to make a pair as a gift to Barb, who was unable to attend for personal reasons. I decorated them using the hot tips of a couple of pieces of fencing wire heated in the fire to burn dots and lines in the shape of an emu, the country/tribal totem of Aunty Beryl. As we were relaxing around the campfire listening to Aunty Beryl’s stories Ken called out to me to come running. Not knowing what he was so excited about I grabbed the tomahawk and headed off in his direction. Ken had been checking a water line for leaks and had just seen an echidna emerge from a rabbit hole. The echidna was a sought after food source, and it was known for its many healing properties. Once I found him Ken said we needed a stout stick, so I dropped the tomahawk and ran back for a stick we had just cut. The echidna was bailed up against a fallen tree. We were able to prise it free and roll it onto its back. Ken said we had to do this to be able to grab a hold of one of its feet as that was the only way to carry it without being injured by one of its many
spines. We finally managed to get it into a position where a foot could be grabbed and Ken triumphantly carried it back into camp. Aunty Beryl was most impressed. Not everyone in our party shared that sentiment and after Ken had placed it into the discarded bowl of an old washing machine to prevent it from escaping Aunty Beryl then told us the story of Thikapilla, the lazy man and thief, who became the echidna. My crude recollection of this engaging story was that it concerned a lazy man who would not go out hunting with his group, but instead feigned illness. The hunting group caught an emu and had prepared it for cooking in the traditional way, burying it in the ground and covering it with coals for several hours. While the hunting group retired to talk at the riverbed, Thikapilla waited until just before the sun went down, rose and took the emu out of the ground and cut off the best bit of meat, the back rump. He then replaced what was left, mainly the ribs, under the ground. He carried off the meat to his family, who were camped nearby, and they quickly ate the meat and had the fat running down their bodies. Thikapilla returned back to the hunting camp and resumed his moaning and groaning. When the hunting men came back and discovered that a thief had taken their meal they spread out to try and catch him. They hunted far and wide but could not find him. When they returned to the camp, the leader asked Thikapilla had he seen the thief. Thikapilla denied seeing anything, but when the leader asked how was it that Thikapilla’s family looked healthy and well, while the hunting men were growing thin from only eating the ribs, they decided to punish the thief. Thikapilla ran off and hid in some bushes, and using a ventriloquist voice tried to trick the men that he was some distance away. The leader grew wary of this and surrounded the bush where Thikapilla was and ordered the men to kill him with their spears. This is why the spines of the echidna are different colours as the spears of the different tribes rained upon Thikapilla. As further punishment, to ensure he would not look for food to steal, he was made to look only at the ground. That is why Thikapilla is restricted to only eating ants for food.

Knowing that the echidna was shortly going to be prepared for cooking I headed off so that I
could capture the sunset over the lake. I sat on my own for about 30 minutes just watching the sun slowly drift lower and lower. Again the intensity of the colours was amazing and the scene was only occasionally disturbed by fish jumping in the water and birds flying past. While I have enjoyed sunrise and sunset in many different places over the years there was just something special about this place and this time that added a depth. Others have spoken of fast time and slow time, and how important slow time is. This was definitely an incredibly moving slow time. We seem to be trapped in our Western ways where speed is of the essence and everything has to be done right this minute. There is much beauty in nature that requires time to truly appreciate. The stillness of Menindee, and the relative absence of the sound of machinery and the presence of others, allowed a calmness to infuse your body if you were open to that experience. Others have spoken of the spirituality of the place, and I have previously felt that in Nepal, high in the mountains, but it does require you to slow down and be attentive to the time and place, to open yourself to the environment you are in.

I walked contentedly back into camp only to be greeted with some concern about my absence during the initial preparation of the echidna. I arrived in time to assist with the final preparation. The only available knife wasn’t quite sharp enough to do some of the required preparation. I gave the blade a few rubs on the concrete block I had found and under Aunty Beryl’s watchful eye and careful instructions proceeded to complete the gutting. The stomach cavity was filled with gum leaves and then the echidna was placed feet down in a hole scrapped out in the ashes. The echidna was then covered in coals and left to cook. Elise is on the left, Aunty Beryl in the middle and Ken wondering how he might complete the preparation of the echidna just as I was arriving back from the sunset over the lake. I had offered to cook the steak and chops for the evening meal, so once I had cleaned up from the distinctive smell of the echidna, it was all go. Julie had earlier prepared the vegetables to place in the camp oven on the side of the campfire.
Normally Aunty Beryl would have left the camp at this point, but knowing that the echidna was being cooked there was no way she was leaving. She wrapped up in a warm coat and sat closer to the fire for warmth. When dinner was ready Aunty Beryl steadfastly refused all offers of steak and vegetables. After sufficient time had passed the cooked echidna was removed and Aunty Beryl instructed how to check to see that it was cooked enough. She then cleaned the ashes from it by flicking it with gum leaves. I then used the knife to peel the skin off and scrape away the fat. All of the echidna had some meaning and much of it had medicinal properties, including the fat. Aunty Beryl was then able to pull pieces of meat off for us all to taste. The meat had the stringy texture of well-cooked mutton but with a gamey flavour and a rosemary taste. Quite a surprisingly good flavour. Having allowed us all a sample, and despite Ken’s best efforts to get a larger piece, Aunty Beryl happily wrapped up the rest of the echidna and asked to be taken home. I truly hope the medicinal properties of the echidna had the desired effect.

All too soon the camp experience came to its conclusion. I woke early to experience the sunrise on my own. The night had been cloudy and it was one of the warmer nights. The sky looked like it was on fire. The radiating glows of the orange and red colours were enthralling to watch. The birds were quite active with cockatoos, crows and other birds singing and flying around.

Words cannot convey the intensity of the experience just a few days at Menindee had on me. There were questions that I still have but I did not feel a pressure to ask them all at once. Menindee had the effect of encouraging a slowing in time, of taking the time to talk and interact with other, to show respect for the knowledge held by Aunty Beryl, Julie and Ken, and to appreciate the stillness, calm, and to reflect on the entire experience. I seem to have acquired a greater awareness of some of the issues confronting the traditional owners and custodians of this country. While my learning has only just begun I look forward to the opportunity of returning and continuing the many conversations that were started and developing the friendships that were made.
Menindee Cultural Camp 2011

Report by Elise Hull, Indigenous Resource Officer, Division of Learning and Teaching Services

My expectations of going to Menindee for a cultural camp or experience were pretty high. The group who attended last year had presented such a fascinating report at CSUed 2010, and as a result of that I had desperately wanted to attend any future adventure learning activities! I was not disappointed.

Apart from a brief foray into our very own bush mechanics moment where we rescued our Landcruiser out of some unexpected mud, we arrived at our camp in good time and right at dusk on Monday. In the last hour of travelling, we had seen plenty of native animals and it was beautiful to see the full moon so bright and steadily rising while the sun was still making its retreat. I was excited – I was keen to learn more of Aboriginal culture, traditional dreaming stories of the Barkandji/Ngiyeempaa people, and hear of how mission life was for Aunty Beryl.

In our talks with Aunty Beryl, she regularly spoke about the battle for many language groups in keeping land which is traditionally theirs – more and more elders are passing away and language group territory is becoming hotly contested as less knowledgeable people dictate where tribes are situated. She is also concerned that there is no-one left to pass her vast array of knowledge onto – young Indigenous people are moving into cities to find with little time left to take on the more traditional roles in the community.

Menindee Mission was an experience – to try and describe it would do no justice at all. Aunty Beryl pointed out the Ruby saltbush plant (the berries ranged from yellow to orange to purple to hot pink to red), as well as blackberries, old man weed, and a few other plants which are used for healing.
It was confronting when Aunty Beryl spoke of the children being removed, some learning to hide down by the reeds at the riverbank to escape being taken. You can only imagine what these children must have felt: not really understanding why they were being taken away, and the fact that their parents couldn’t protect them from this threat. I cannot imagine what the parents would have gone through either.

She also told a story of a young boy who was in charge of writing a shopping list one day for the ladies on the mission. The women told him they needed bread, sugar, tea, and a few other staples and when he handed over the list to the shopkeeper there was much confusion – he had written cat, hat, sat, mat because they were the only words he had known. But, in his mind, each of those words stood for the items the women had wanted.

The children on the mission were fortunate enough to attend the school which had been built there, and elders would take it upon themselves to educate the children in traditional ways also. Granny Nancy would regularly hold bag weaving classes on the riverbanks for the girls while another elder would teach weapon making. It is because of this, Aunty Beryl is knowledgeable about her ancestors and the traditional ways of the Barkandji/Ngiyeempaa people. She also talked about people from the government coming and many of the children would run and hide down in the reeds by the river to avoid being taken.

I was also fortunate enough to be able to make some clapsticks to take home with me – a true lesson in patience. After putting in the hard work rubbing the
back, I then started to burn patterns into the sticks. It is apparent that I am no artist, because my designs were horrendous and I did not do the clapsticks justice. However, they did serve a purpose – when I came home, I showed them to my children and that opened up a discussion of what they were, what I did when I went camping and (to quote my 4 year old) “why some people are different colours”.

It made me realise that although my knowledge of my own groups’ dreaming stories and language is slight, I haven’t passed any of that onto my children. Because of the clapsticks, I have been reminded to tell a Dreaming Story to my children that my Dad taught me when I was younger, and have continued using some of the language which I know in sentences everyday. Preparing and eating an echidna was a fascinating learning experience for me. Seeing Kenny (Aunty Beryl’s son) and Dave come back to camp with it was a bit confronting, but you only get these experiences once in your life - I hung around to watch the echidna being prepared for cooking.

After killing the echidna the tongue is usually tied and it’s placed straight onto hot coals – quills down. It was left there for a few minutes while the quills are burnt off, complete with thick smoke and the most awful smell ever, similar to burning hair. Meanwhile, a flat surface was covered with eucalyptus leaves to prepare the echidna on. After being taken off the fire, the echidna is scraped with a knife to remove the quills and the innards taken out. The cavity is then stuffed with more eucalyptus leaves, and the middle of the echidna tied together (in this case, with fencing wire). The echidna is buried paws down in hot coals and covered – cooking for about 3 hours. The taste is quite something else – it’s a stringy meat, but still quite oily... I tried it, but I don’t think I’d ever crave it.

In all, the trip to Menindee for me was a truly wonderful experience. It was interesting, as a descendant of the Arabana and Adnajamathanha tribes, to listen to another language group’s
dreaming stories, and to hear Aunty Beryl’s speak her traditional language. I am so fortunate to be welcomed into another group’s country and I feel very privileged that she had agreed to share so much of her knowledge and stories with all of us.

In relation to my current work with the Division of Learning and Teaching Services, it has highlighted how important liaising with communities is in regards to their resources, as well as cultural protocols, and the importance of collecting unique resources which otherwise might just disappear. This trip has given me a dream to one day be able to help Indigenous people record their knowledge and language, keep it safe and pass it on to others. Universities could so easily host online ‘keeping places’ for Indigenous knowledge – we certainly have the technology and the opportunities to do it.

I hope to be able to call on Aunty Beryl in the future for her wisdom, and to gain feedback as to how my work at CSU can be made more culturally appropriate.

And after a week of throwing a line in while reflecting each day, I learnt that I cannot fish to save my life.
Acknowledgement

This journey would not have been possible without the generosity, warmth and spirit of Aunty Beryl Philp Carmichael, *Yungha-dhu*, Nguyeempaa/Barkandji Elder. Your acceptance, candidness humour and wisdom will remain with us. Thanks also to Julie Philp whose practical help and insight into life and community complemented hers mother’s teaching. Willy, Auntie Beryl’s nephew of Haythorpe Station where we stayed, provided us with hospitality and much fresh lamb – thank you!

We would like to acknowledge those who were committed to this journey but could not make it; Ms Wendy Nolan, Kay Nankervis, Dr Joy Wallace, Professor Jeannie Herbert, Associate Professor Jenny Kent, Associate Professor Jo-Anne Reid and Ray Rogers, we kept you in our heart.

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Lastly, we would like to thank Professor Ross Chambers for his commitment to the Indigenous Education Strategy and for whom we have written this report.
Introduction

On the 25th April 2010 a group of CSU staff travel with Wiradjuri Elder Aunty Gloria Dindima Rogers to Haythorpe Station (30 km out of Menindee) South East of Broken Hill to visit Aunty Beryl, Yungha-dhu, Philp Carmichael, Ngiyeempaa/Barkandji Elder and to walk her country. This was an Indigenous cultural competence professional development initiative aimed at building leadership capacity at CSU in developing learning, teaching and research resources at CSU through collaborative partnerships with Indigenous communities. We identified that the immediate challenges for CSU in implementing the cultural competence framework is the need to engage with Indigenous communities to establish collaborative partnerships and ensure the development of culturally appropriate curriculum involves the need to build capacity in staff in faculties and divisions to lead and influence the development of Indigenous cultural competence in learning, teaching and research.

As Ranzijn, McConnochie, and Nolan of the Psychology and Indigenous Australians: Teaching, Practice and Theory Carrick Institute project team suggest, five broad groups of issues emerged from their research (cited in CSU Indigenous Education Strategy, p.23) and the later two of these and their importance became very apparent in the experience to Menindee. In discussions with the Elders it emerged on very profound levels that there has been a failure of the professions to engage in broader issues of justice and human rights, including advocacy and the development of strategies to challenge prejudice, ethnocentrism and racism and that indeed
this leads to a need for individuals to be aware of their own values, assumptions and expectations and how these impact on their interaction with Indigenous people and Indigenous communities.

The group’s time was spent in a yarning circle around a fire that was lit at the start and burnt for the whole time we were on Ngiyeempaa/Barkandji country. This yarning involved student learning, personal narrative, assessment and staff development and included environmental stories, history and mission life and how to work with Indigenous people. Aunty Beryl also invigorated discussion and talk about ongoing dialogues between the University and her community.

The experience that facilitated the professional development of staff in terms of Indigenous cultures and contexts, also served as a trigger for potential research. Developing networks and respectful collaborations between staff members was an intended outcome of the journey, as well as the possible development of ALTC grant applications, research papers and conference presentations.

Ryun Fell from LTS filmed the trip as appropriate and these resources will be added to the resources already being developed by LTS and that will be stored on the DOMS in one of the pilot collections – The Indigenous Education Strategy (IES) Collection. These will be made available to the University community through the Indigenous Curriculum and Pedagogy website and Interact. Although we discussed the option of a live direct link back from Menindee to CSU as a ‘virtual classroom’ for interested staff, in the end this was considered inappropriate for a number of reasons. The resources that were collected for example; photo stills, video and audio clips are used as a part of this report to showcase the journey and to discuss and model potential ways of forming partnerships and having intercultural dialogue and exchange.
How the Exploratory Framework worked

When thinking about the changing roles of teacher and students the model of adventure learning (AL) proved to be useful where Aaron Doering suggests in his article *Adventure Learning: Transforming Hybrid Online Education* (2006) that “AL encourages transformative learning (Mezirow, 1990, 1991); learning that occurs through dialogue based upon collaborative opportunities, authentic experiences, and interpretation of the AL experiences (Doering, 2005).

Palloff and Pratt (1999) assert that transformative learning is the result of intense collaboration and reflective participation in a learning environment; transformative learning seeks to enable learners to understand why they see the world as they do while understanding the impact of prior knowledge on their newly constructed knowledge (p.199 or see [http://st2c2mno03.connectria.com/ALPublications/CDIE.pdf](http://st2c2mno03.connectria.com/ALPublications/CDIE.pdf)).

As Associate Professor Jane Mills elaborates in her report (following) James Gee’s notion of ‘affinity spaces’; those spaces ‘characterized by the sharing of knowledge and expertise based on voluntary affiliations can also be useful lenses (Gee, 2004). She goes further to elaborate that Gee argues because of a common interest, affinity spaces are able to bridge barriers of age, race, socio-economic status, and educational level and allow each user to participate as she or he is able and involve the mutual recognition and valuing of formal and informal knowledges and skills (2004).

Additionally, ‘yarning’ methodology (Power, 2004) was a framework adopted here. Yarning has been recommended by the Centre for Indigenous Studies at CSU as a culturally appropriate method of exchange to foster respectful partnerships based on deep listening, empathy and understanding. Narratives that emerge through yarning provide accounts of events, experiences and emotions that engage non-Indigenous staff and students with issues of identity and relations of power and privilege. Narratives are also a proven tool of organisational analysis that can mobilise personal, professional and institutional change processes (Rhodes, 1996).
Thus these narratives (as is evident in the following audiovisual and written reports) can provide exemplars that are richly situated yet with the generality and flexibility to trigger ideas and challenge beliefs, attitudes and behaviours far beyond their initial context (Riessman, 2008).

However we theorize this journey, what becomes apparent is that there is a reexamination of what has been commonly viewed as traditional learning environments and that this renewal in turn leads to a dynamism that engages individual learners in a powerful and transformative experience.

**Intended Outcomes**

There were four major intended outcomes identified prior to the journey:

1. Professional development of staff leaders around Indigenous history, culture and practice.
2. Identification of areas for potential research and grant applications.
3. The development of sustainable networks to facilitate ongoing partnerships with Indigenous communities.
4. The establishment of resources that can be used on the Indigenous Curriculum and Pedagogy website.

These outcomes are addressed in the following reports of those who attended the cultural emersion workshop at Menindee. Apart from the camp leaders Auntie Beryl, *Yungha-dhu*, Philp Carmichael, Ngiyeempaa/Barkandji Elder and Julie Philp, Ngiyeempaa/Barkandji Community member and Aboriginal Student Liaison Officer, Broken Hill Schools Office, there was Auntie Gloria, *Dindima*, Rogers, Wiradjuri Elder, Associate Professor Marian Tulloch, Executive Director, Division of Learning and Teaching Services, Dr John Harper, Senior Lecturer, School of Agricultural and Wine Sciences, Associate Professor Jane Mills, School of Communication and
Creative Industries, Dr Jillene Harris, Indigenous Teaching Fellow 2010, School of Psychology, Ms Mary O’Dowd, Indigenous Teaching Fellow 2010, School of Education, Mr. Ryun Fell, Media Technologist, LTS and Dr Barbara Hill, Indigenous Curriculum and Pedagogy Coordinator, LTS.

Their personal reports follow.
Menindee

Dr John Harper, School of Agricultural and Wine Sciences.

Part 1: A personal account

Background

I developed intolerance to avocado about 15 years ago. Among other things this gave me stomach cramps. I tried a number of remedies for the cramps but the best one was called Buscopan which cured my cramps very quickly. On the back of the packet of tablets is a small picture of an Australian native Duboisia bush and a description saying that Aboriginal people used extracts from this bush to cure stomach ailments. I checked out the website for more information and found that the bush has been grown commercially in Australia since the 1950’s. I remember doubting at the time that any Aboriginal elders ever received any royalties from the Pharmaceutical Company for their knowledge.

In 2009, when I was Subdean Learning and Teaching in the Science Faculty, the Subdeans were visited by Dr Barbara Hill, the then new Indigenous Pedagogy and Curriculum Coordinator. Barbara outlined CSU’s Indigenous strategy. I realised then that I could easily incorporate Aboriginal peoples and their uses for native plants into the first year botany subject I coordinated. This could then be used as an example of how to incorporate Indigenous content into Science Faculty subjects. Barbara had seen my comment and links on CSU’s Yammer website about David Bouds’ Assessment Futures model; Barbara chose this as a way to engage our students in embracing Aboriginal knowledge and culture and so move towards cultural competency.

Collaboration

At AusSakai in late 2009, Barbara introduced me to Wiradjuri Elder Auntie Gloria Rogers (Dindima) who gave the Welcome to Country ceremony. I asked Auntie Gloria could she help me incorporate Wiradjuri peoples uses of plants into my Botany subject and she kindly agreed. I
later met Auntie Gloria again in Bathurst in November and she gave me information that I have since incorporated into my subject. For Auntie Gloria’s invaluable assistance I paid a casual fee, for her time and expertise. The collaboration has grown since then and Auntie Gloria is providing further help with the development of a subject in Indigenous medicines and foods in the Faculty. I am having discussions with Barbara and colleagues as to the merits of applying for adjunct professor status at CSU for Auntie Gloria in acknowledgement and with respect for her lifelong learning and wisdom.

Menindee

At CSUED 09 Barbara gave a talk about a remarkable Aboriginal elder, Aunty Beryl Philp Carmichael, Yungha-dhu, who had been brought up at the Menindee mission in the 1940’s and who now, in her 70’s runs Aboriginal culture camps at Menindee. A Professional Development trip to Menindee was organised for Sub-Deans (Learning and Teaching) and other staff involved in leading the Indigenous Strategy to go “on country”. I was very fortunate to be invited to go along.

This was the first time that I had travelled overland further west than Narrandera. From a Botanical point of view it was amazing to see the flourishing flora with salt-bush fruits and bush bananas, bush apricots flourishing after the rains; and all around the contrast of the red soils.

To sit around the fire and talk with Aunty Beryl and Aunty Gloria and to see the land through their eyes was a special experience. It was also great to meet with other staff from diverse parts of the university and to forge connections with them and discuss opportunities for cross-Faculty collaborations to implement components in the Indigenous strategy.

I don’t think I appreciated the power of actually “being there” until I went and experienced being on country. To
greet the dawn with new-found friends and the sound of clap sticks echoing in the cool air. To hear the stories of the dream time and the lore that has at its heart a oneness with the land that has enabled the Aboriginal people to thrive in Australia for at least fifty millennia. The tragedy of the past, but also the stories of cultural harmony between the Irish and Chinese settlers and the Aboriginal peoples. With marriages between the peoples making, what Aunty Gloria described as “a bunch of flowers” There is hope for the future and Education is surely playing a pivotal role in this. But we must listen carefully to move forward with respect and a shared dream for a better future for us all. For me the Menindee trip was a beginning.

The effect of being with other like-minded staff from right across the University has opened up new possibilities and collaborations that are already sending positive ripples across the University and beyond. For example, Dr Mary O’Dowd, who travelled with me to Menindee, teaches Aboriginal Studies. Mary has lived in Aboriginal communities and has been adopted into an Aboriginal family. The 20 hour return trip enabled us to talk at length about Mary’s experiences and knowledge, which was a revelation to me. Mary and I are planning to work together on approaches that will bring cultural competency to Scientists.

I was born in Northern Ireland and spent my first 27 years there. Aboriginal people have a great love of singing (and humour), as do the Irish. To me singing was a way to cultural ‘harmony’. My impression is that Aboriginal people feel that singing is a powerful force and it can be used for good or ill. Since returning from Menindee I have witnessed a creative burst in my latent song writing skills that I have found to be enlightening. At Menindee I sang *Danny Boy* for Auntie Beryl who recalled that the last time she had sung the song was at Menindee Mission when she was a little girl. She remembered that her teacher got annoyed at them when they giggled because they couldn’t reach the high notes. So as punishment he sent them out to put soil at the base of some fences that needed covered after wind erosion.
When I returned from Menindee I wrote a song for Aunty Beryl that, with the wonders of modern technology, I was able to record the song and email this to Aunty Beryl’s daughter Julie. Julie works as an Aboriginal Student Liaison Officer for the Broken Hill Schools Office. I think the songs are a way to encapsulate aspects of my experience at Menindee. They are also a way of saying “Thank You” to Auntie Beryl and indeed to everyone who was there at Menindee. I have a lot of songs to write!

I would like to explore the transformative power of song in teaching in more depth and have begun collaborating with Dr Jill Harris, one of the Menindee travellers, to investigate this.

**Song for Aunty Beryl**

_The sun is rising Emu’s eye_

_It throws itself into the sky_

_On a new day_

_The world vibrates around me_

_I look around I see things in a new way_

_Connections without you, I would never have made_

_Thank You_

_The spirits they are here in everything_

_As I look around on a new day_

_The fire it sparkles as we talk_

_Eating Johnny cakes_

_and the laughter_
Bound to the land since the Dream Time

Singing your songs for eons

Walking now in two disparate worlds
Seeking a harmony
Helping us learn

Part 2: Ideas for the Science Faculty

Seamless incorporation of assessable Indigenous content into Science subjects.

(i) With help from Aunty Gloria and colleagues I have incorporated some Wiradjuri knowledge of plants and people into the Botany subject I coordinate. This is being assessed using the Assessment Futures model.

(ii) I have also recently been contacted by Dr Ester Khosa from the School of Biomedical Sciences who heard from Dr Rod Pope what I was doing. Ester is preparing a subject on Indigenous plants and is keen to consult with Aunty Gloria. I have asked Aunty Gloria's permission and she has kindly agreed.

(iii) Mary O’Dowd told me about an open day at Mount Erin School. Two nuns there have developed an Indigenous garden called Erin Earth which is a fantastic resource used to teach schools and the public about native plants and peoples. The website is vibrant with worksheets for schools and talks on native plants are presented at Erin Earth about once a month. I went along to an open day and invited Ester along and she was very impressed. Mary O’Dowd met me and my family there and we discussed with the nuns the idea we had around the fire at Menindee to have Wiradjuri name signs for plants along with the
English common names and Latin binomials. I also learned that other CSU staff have had an active alliance with Erin Earth and will endeavour to talk with these staff soon. (iv) Mary O’Dowd also gave me a paper by a colleague who has proposed that Aboriginal were probably the first people to develop Agriculture. This may be a useful topic for assessment in our first year subject AHT101 - Professional Experience in Agriculture and Horticulture.

Research partnerships with Indigenous Communities

In November 2009, Paul Prenzler and I were discussing ways to engage in Scientific Research with Aboriginal people. Paul told me about a colleague of his, Dr Joanne Jamie, at Macquarie University who had been working with Yaegl and Bundgalung elders to investigate Indigenous plant products and medicines (Vemulpad and Jamie 2008). Unlike the presumed Buscopan scenario, above, the idea is to respect and share the wisdom of the Aboriginal elders for the benefit the Aboriginal community and for all society. I was going to visit Joanne Jamie with Paul in March but the proposed date clashed with the Menindee trip. Instead Rod Pope went with Paul and it is hoped that collaboration will result. In recent talks with Paul a Science show for Aboriginal children was something that the Elders working with Joanne asked for. I have since met a science communicator from Questacon whose brief is to engage Aboriginal children in fun science activities. This avenue will be worth exploring further.

Associate Professor Jane Mills, School of Communication & Creative Industries

Personal Report

It is rare for an academic to be able to spend four consecutive days thinking about any one aspect of teaching and learning. In this instance, a situated or located learning experience that took us away from our workspace to another space entirely, it meant not just thinking but also experiencing and, importantly, learning from the relationship between teaching and learning and location. It is even rarer for such an experience to be so rich that it seems possible that one’s whole approach to teaching and learning might change for the better. I believe participating in this Indigenous Cultural Competence professional development initiative has had just such an impact on my teaching and learning as well as my approach to research. Having discussed this experience with my fellow travellers I believe I am not speaking only for myself. The sense of community that developed was an important outcome. So too was the recognition that an academic’s ideas about and practice of teaching and learning is so affected by ideas and experiences of place and space.

I do not wish to suggest that I returned from the journey with an idealised view of the future of Indigenous and non-Indigenous intercultural/academic relations, nor that all that needs to be done is for more such Journeys to take place (although I believe this does need to happen). Our journey did not result in starry-eyed unanimity: it was carefully delivered in such a way as to provide a shared experience resulting in a sense of community in which difference was respected. That so much was learned – not least about how much more there is to learn – is due to the organisers and participants. It was, I believe, a start for us as individuals and hopefully for the university.
I shall address first the intended outcomes and conclude with some thoughts on other outcomes from this Journey.

**Intended Outcomes**

1. *Professional development of staff leaders around Indigenous history, culture and practice.*

   Being able to take the time to think through the transitional process from Indigenous Cultural Awareness to Indigenous Cultural Competence – for myself, my colleagues and our students – contributed very considerably to my own professional development. Could I have done this from my desk? Perhaps. Could I have done it from my desk in such a way as to be able to make sense of the ideas of cognitive anthropologists, Lave and Wenger (1991), who argue that learning should be situated and viewed as a social process whereby knowledge is co-constructed? I think not.

   Situated learning means that such learning is situated in a specific context and embedded within a particular social and physical environment. Location is hugely important to our students but few of us think about the implications of location for our teaching and learning process. It is likely to be of significance to future Aboriginal students for whom we, as a university, intend to create pathways and a positive tertiary education experience. It is something I shall now be able to apply to my own understanding of Indigenous history and culture and incorporate into my teaching and researching practice.

2. *Identification of areas for potential research and grant applications.*

   Learning more about the existing Indigenous Research Fellowships from three of the current Research Fellows was invaluable. As was being able to spend time with two Aboriginal elders who have spent their whole adult lives teaching in the towns and outback.
areas that we travelled through, stayed in and visited. This encouraged me to think of ways, in which collaborative research could be done, for example, to expand James Gee’s notion of ‘affinity spaces’, i.e. spaces ‘characterized by the sharing of knowledge and expertise based on voluntary affiliations’ (Gee, 2004). Gee argues that because of a common interest, affinity spaces are able to bridge barriers of age, race, socio-economic status, and educational level. They furthermore allow each user to participate as she or he is able and involve the mutual recognition and valuing of formal and informal knowledges and skills (2004).

This suggests that valuable research could be conducted involving mapping ideas from the field of cultural geography on to our pedagogic approaches aimed at closing the education gap between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal Australians at CSU.

3. **The development of sustainable networks to facilitate ongoing partnerships with Indigenous communities.**

The journey brought home to me the urgent need for such networks and partnerships. Some of my fellow travellers have suggested that our Wiradjuri Elders should be offered Adjunct Professorships. I respect their views but would like this to be explored more fully as I am not convinced it is an appropriate response to the identified need to forge and support sustainable and ongoing partnerships with Indigenous communities. To create and support a community of practice in which a group of people who share an interest, a craft, and/or a profession learn together, there first has to be a mutual recognition that the knowledge, skills, experiences and learning are of value. This requires an infrastructure, possibly one that challenges existing parameters and understandings. And this, I suggest, requires a little more imagination than the existing system of adjunct professorships. As I have mentioned in other contexts, it would benefit from a structured and scholarly approach to community
engagement adopted by the University or, failing this, by individual Faculties and/or Schools.

In the context of ‘learning how to learn’ with Indigenous communities, it is worth noting that while Lave and Wenger coined the term ‘community of practice’ in the 1990s, this type of learning practice has existed for as long as people have been learning and sharing their experiences through storytelling (Wenger, McDermott, Snyder, 2002).

4. The establishment of resources that can be used on the Indigenous Curriculum and pedagogy website.

I suggest it is important not only to establish resources that can be used on this website (and elsewhere) but that we also establish a) the rationale for what is or is not included as a resource, and b) the means for communicating the existence and value of these resources to academics and other users throughout the university and beyond. A resource that attempts to be comprehensive but lacks the means to acquire everything can only fail. And we can learn from our experience as academics that our students cannot be expected to use a resource unless it is a part of their assessable work. I am more than happy to offer any assistance I can to the Indigenous Curriculum and Pedagogy Coordinator in Learning & Teaching Services to work out the often tangled issues of copyright and protocols for moving image resources.

Conclusion

This Journey was a rich learning experience for me, one that enabled me to fully apprehend the meaning of the concept of ‘transformative learning’, i.e. a process of ‘becoming critically aware of one's own tacit assumptions and expectations and those of others and assessing their relevance for making an interpretation’ (Mezirow, 2000, p. 4), as well as experiential learning in
the form of ‘adventure learning’, i.e. a hybrid distance education approach that provides students with opportunities to explore real-world issues through authentic learning experiences within collaborative learning environments (Doering, 2006).

It also encouraged and enabled me to think productively about my own current teaching practice. I supervise students in the Doctor in Communication research higher degree course in which the students study the links and dissonances between codified knowledge and vernacular, or non-academic, knowledge (Schön, 1983; Kemmis, 2003). By allowing me to experience a space in which the two types of knowledge met, sometimes clashed and at other times fruitfully conjoined, I was able to see very clearly the importance of acknowledging and valuing informal and non-codified knowledge – not just as a supervisor and subject coordinator of this particular degree but as a teacher, learner and researcher in general, and also in terms of implementing CSU’s Indigenous Education Strategy and our policy of Indigenous inclusiveness.

Upon returning I talked a little of what I had learned with a senior colleague whose response was that I should share my experience with another colleague whom we both knew was already interested in and highly informed about Aboriginal teaching and learning issues. I felt this was indicative of a fairly common mindset that believes Aboriginal Cultural Competence is only for the few who happen to care. This is possibly also indicative of a gender issue: I note that among my immediate set of colleagues, those who do care enough about introducing Aboriginal cultural competence into the academy to take action tend to be female.

I strongly feel that this Journey was just a start. I now need to share my enhanced knowledge and understanding of Indigenous Cultural Competence not only with colleagues who already know about the issue, but with those colleagues who have yet to embark upon their own journey from cultural awareness to cultural competence. It should, for example, be an essential aspect of a mentoring system for all new and emerging academics.

Thanks
I would like to thank the following who in various ways made this Journey possible and so very productive: Aunty Beryl Philp Carmichael (Ngigeempaa/Barkandji) – and family; Aunty Gloria Rogers (Wiradjuri); Dr Barbara Hill; A/Professor Marion Tulloch; my fellow Menindee travellers; A/Professor Margaret Woodward; Professor Anthony Calahan; Professor Ross Chambers.
When I was asked if I wanted to go to Menindee, I couldn’t believe my luck. The idea of immersing myself for four days with like-minded people, to visit Ngiyempaa/Barkandji land, spend time with Auntie Beryl Philp Carmichael, listen to stories and learn was something I would have had to be dead to miss! Departing at dawn, while the rest of the country was celebrating Anzac day made the trip all the more appropriate. We seemed to be honouring traditions much older and more authentically Australian; travelling to learn more about the original custodians of our land.

On the first day we awoke to watch the sun rise. The big eagle hawk rising was magical across the plains. No hills or trees to get in the way. But it was not just the spectacle. It was the beginning of slowing down to a pace that affords inner stillness. It engaged deep listening and understanding that is not cognitive, forced or rushed, but felt. We shared a camp fire, told our stories and listened to stories by Auntie Beryl and Auntie Gloria (our very own Wiradjuri elder who made the journey with us). We shared from the heart. It was open and honest, a giving of ourselves.

We swam in the lake, shared night camp fire and food, and rose the next day to travel to see the mission where Auntie Beryl grew up. We heard dreamtime stories. Auntie Beryl talked about growing up and about things that concern her today. We learned about bush tucker; bananas and emu bush, how to make Johnnie cakes and how to cook potatoes in a fire. We shared humour and song. So simple.

**Intended Outcomes**

1. Professional development of staff leaders around Indigenous history, culture and practice.
What did I gain from the experience? As this was felt, not thought, it is hard to articulate. I experienced what it is like to listen with an open heart, unhurried and uncompromised. I learnt that the busyness of life can often cloud the things that are important: Truth, fairness, commitment and consequence. It cemented for me a commitment to forge pathways that will lead to better teaching, better professional practice, toward a better, fairer, more inclusive society.

As a teacher in an allied health discipline, we often consider that Indigenous people have a need for services and equity that mainstream Australia can “provide”. I have known for some time that this is wrong. However, Menindee gave me the space to feel why this is incorrect. Indigenous people like Auntie Beryl and Auntie Gloria have so much knowledge and experience that could enrich our discipline and make it more humane and relevant. I have gained an insight into the way some matters can be explained and taught in a simple and uncluttered fashion, that opens minds and connects hearts: More than anything else it is this that I want to bring to my teaching, and, it is this that I want my students to experience. I believe that this is the Indigenous way of teaching, through lived experience and connection with learners.

The emergence of a reference group of staff and Elders was certainly one the greatest collective professional developments. It spanned different disciplines and viewpoints but the commonality was the connection to similar goals; engagement with community, education and institutional change around Indigenous history, culture and practice. I have no doubt that we will draw on each other many times over, and that elements of the experience at Menindee will be revisited. Regarding professional development of leaders, this amplifies anything that we as individuals personally gained.

2. Identification of areas for potential research and grant applications.

As Auntie Gloria says, the experience at Menindee was like throwing a stone into a pond. While there are immediate plans for projects, this is the start of an ongoing process. Here I think we
require a little institutional faith and trust that many worthwhile projects will come from this endeavour. Here are some fledgling ideas and plans:

With Mary O’Dowd, the development of ideas which present the Indigenous position as strength based and working through how the mainstream positions are problematic.

With John Harper; exploring the transformative power of song in teaching.


Thanks to contact with Auntie Beryl, I plan to spend 1-2 weeks in community at Menindee and Broken Hill in consultation. The idea here is to collaborate with community in developing psychology modules i) for Indigenous mental health workers who study psychology (i.e., it is the follow on from my teaching fellowship, which is about how to encourage Indigenous mental health workers to study psychology), and ii) a third year module to be offered as an elective in psychology degrees.

One important aspect of working with communities is reciprocity. I believe that both as an institution, and as individuals, one thing that we can give is our advocacy. Auntie Beryl told us that one concern is that her area be mapped correctly. Currently that mapping is not entirely accurate and this worries her as it means that song lines cannot be handed down correctly. In trying to facilitate this, I am attempting to develop links with language researchers to accurately map the language areas of Auntie Beryl’s country, so that the song lines can be handed down.

I would like to add my voice to the recommendation that Indigenous Elders have recognition and status at CSU, and are remunerated for their work. This would mean that they could teach into our courses, which would be a powerful and first hand way for students to experience a little of what we experienced at Menindee. Formal recognition is important so that as an institution we model respect and equity in the spirit of reconciliation.
I believe that an opportunity for engaging the knowledge and experience of Indigenous Elders who teach, like Auntie Gloria and Auntie Beryl, currently exists in the CSU Degree Initiative. CSU is currently investing much in this project la to ensure that graduates emerge with a set of qualities and values. There are many people busily trying to determine what we need to do to integrate these principles in our curricula. The sorts of lessons learnt simply and easily at Menindee, the stories told, the modeling of respect, citizenship and sustainability, and the connection to all of us, led to the natural emergence of these qualities in the group. I believe that this style of learning will lead to ending qualities because it was felt on many different levels, and not purely a cognitive exercise. Could it be that our Indigenous Aunts could provide valuable expertise in these methods of teaching which engage these principles in learners in a straightforward down-to-earth fashion?

4. The establishment of resources for the Indigenous Curriculum and Pedagogy website.

From above, any resources that are developed will also be shared on the website. Hence, the development of teaching modules which present the Indigenous position as strength-based and the mainstream position as problematic; psychology teaching modules developed in consultation with Indigenous communities.
Experience of the Body-Eye: In-Land and In Country.

Mary O’Dowd, Indigenous Teaching Fellow.

I think this Outback country is the domain of many lost whitefellas. I saw a man ‘gone to the grog’. He sat on this landscape, bleached of trees by clean white men, drinking. He was watching the dust blowing the hands of the clock round and round and round – and time was laughing and pretending to pass, for the sake of the changing people.

At Menindee the ghosts of Burke and Wills came to greet us. They pointed to King who survived by the kindness of the Aboriginal people. The town, when the explorers got out of the way, just stared. Houses looked at us through dust stained exteriors as they lay in lawns of yellow red dirt, too tired, like us, to move. Ten years of drought had almost drunk the town; it sat there half stunned by endless sunlight.

From Menindee we took the Wilcannia Road and drove past a sign that was too small and faded, but somehow it registered and after miles we turned back as if being sung by the white faded sign. So we arrived. Aunty Beryl and her daughter Julie greeted us to ‘Culture Camp’. We were hungry. They fed us by sharing their meal. It was the first night and the moon was waking up for us.

For 3 days and 3 nights Aunty Beryl ‘yarned’ and a whole world was made. We sat around the camp fire being smoked as the wind, seemingly fickle, flew this way and that, but entering us all in turn. At first we felt victimised and then embraced its healing. Irish John sang ‘Danny Boy’, as the moon rose, was almost full; and we, we were all black and white in its reflection.

The next day we swam in one of the wide white lakes where the ghosts of trees rose out of the water. They, once living things, drowned, when the Whitemen dammed, and dammed, the lakes. The tree limbs strained like the hands of drowning men, stiffly imploring; their pleas still echoing. Frozen like that, they blackened as the years passed, and now in their frozen hope
scratch and scar the clear blue sky writing their message there. One day, sometime, they will fall; and until then we fell splashing in the water, as if we were here for all eternity, and our moment would never end.

Evening

Evenings of lamb chops sizzling tales to flavour the laughing moon. Listening to the moon we laughed too at songs we all almost knew. In little moments, we all breathed, as the earth breathed through us; and in dust, soil and smoke we were created as friends.

On the third day

Aunty Beryl took us to the ‘old mish’ (mission/reserve). This was where she grew up and where her fathers, mothers and uncles, aunties and elders were taken from their days of roaming; in Aunty Beryl’s words, ‘we were rounded up like the sheep and cattle’. Yet even so carolled she learned The Law from the old people. She watched, she told us, as her people watched, Them, take the children away. ‘One little girl has still not come back yet’, she said sadly. And we looked in the direction Aunty Beryl’s sad eyes had wandered.

It was there the land held our eyes, and then we saw her, the little girl, out there in the trees. She was small and slight, trying to hold on. Lost in the vision we called to Aunty Beryl, ‘She’s there! She’s there!’ And Aunty Beryl looked and looked. Her eyes had been straining for so long. Through the trees we saw the mother and child in fearful weeping. The child was crying, crying for her mother – one hand and arm outstretched. The mother was pinned to the earth by a white shadow. Their cries cut the day, the night and the land. The land was stained. Then we saw the man. The wind was angry at the man. We saw his white shadow growing large as he moved toward the black tree that was sheltering the child. The mother writhed. The tree groaned; it held on to the child, and held and held, until... The child was taken by the shadow, carried away, still holding part of the branch.
Grief wrestled in the wind; the child’s wailing cut the day til it bled. We wanted to soothe her. But what can we say? We knew it would not be ‘all right’.

The wind and earth hold the grief now. The tree is bereft. The mother is still bleeding into the red earth. We saw her blood. The sadness now was overwhelming us. We wanted to escape the grief. We thought, ‘the wind will carry it away’. But the wind looked at us as though we were fools and said, it could not take the land away. It was still too heavy. And so, lost for words, we fell silent.

Then time had returned for its moment and we, saw the separated years, and knew we could not bring the child back. We cried too and Aunty Beryl comforted us and the world went round and round.

*The trucks*

Aunty Beryl said matter-of-factly, ‘We thought the mob that had gone to Brewarrina were massacred’, and they did not know, until years later, that their relations lived. ‘We thought they had been massacred’. Her words, said once, said in simple explanation, spoken gently, spoken to us, echoed from the past, to the present, to the black pleading trees in the blue sky; words, spoken gently, spoken in explanation, matter-of-factly she had told us, matter-of-factly. And then we bled, not like they, for we merely bled in shame, only in shame, and the red earth blew and stained us. In the morning we would look for somewhere to wash. In this dry country we looked for water to wash the red, red earth.

*Au revoir*

Aunty Beryl came to Menindee with us to say farewell. Our culture camp was over and, merely showered, but not clean, we travelled south and east; for in the washing we discovered we had not removed the red soil, but merely revealed it; such is the mystery in which we are embedded.
And au revoir… my recommendation stemming from the powerful experience is as an educationalist in Indigenous Studies are:

We need to practice what we teach.

We advocate that teachers should engage in community development as part of their teaching and work respectfully with Indigenous people. Thus community development needs to be built in to the job description of lecturers in Indigenous education not an extra (‘extras’ are never enough and are not respectful).

There needs to be awareness that there is a non-Indigenous problem manifest in some students who are disengaged from listening to Indigenous history because of long stories and histories of racism. It is not just about ‘being told’; it is about feelings and passions to enable engagement – just as feelings and passions inhibit listening. Thus for some students a powerful positive personal Aboriginal experience is vital to engagement. Such pre-service students need to be identified and provided with this experience, otherwise we provide students with racist attitudes and values, who can complete assignments, with a false imprimatur that indicates they can and will teach an Indigenous perspective.

The importance of story as history, and history as story – the story does not die and history lives through generations – this is a hard lesson for some non-Indigenous students who will need to experience this. They will need a culture camp. Even then some will not change but we need to try to move beyond the lesson of words to the understandings of heart.
Journey West to Menindee
Ryun Fell, Media Technologist, Division of Learning and Teaching Services

When Barb first approached me about the possibility of a trip ‘out west’ it was never a question of if I would go but simply a matter of when it would happen and what I could do not only as a participant of the experience, but also as a conduit to further others understanding. I think the importance of this trip to me was something I could understand personally and professionally which I can only express as the main motivations for going.

Firstly I was compelled as a friend and colleague of Barb’s as I could see the passion and the ‘truth’ behind her dream to reconnect with Aunty Beryl written clearly on her face. I could also see the need and desire to share the reality of Menindee Mission and Haythorpe Station with others and this is something I think Barb felt very keenly. There was no doubting the need for this journey to take place or the massive impact and import the sharing of such an experience could have on us, our colleagues and through them cascading to our students to help shape a greater awareness of indigenous culture and the forging of a partnership, which hopefully can lead from strength to strength.

The second motivation for my participation in this journey was of a personal and somewhat selfish nature. I saw this as a rare opportunity to reconnect with my own memories and experiences from travelling to Kalumburu (formerly Drysdale River Mission) in the Ngarinyin Nation in the Kimberly where I documented the Gwion Gwion’s (Bradshaws) and the Wandjina rock art some ten years ago. I was keen to not only re-find this experience in myself but to also see what differences there may be in culture and history between Kalumburu and Menindee. I wasn’t expecting the primal ‘excitement’ of Kalumburu of being chased by saltwater crocs, seeing the local men wrestle with two metre leatherback turtles in a tiny dingy or being told stories as we walk through the beautiful yet alien landscape of the Kimberly of two hundred foot snakes, but I was very interested to see how the mission had impacted on the local
indigenous community in Menindee and how they had managed to maintain stories and language where the people of the north had struggled through constant invasion by other tribes and the coming of westerners particularly the events during World War II.

The third motivation for my participation was that I could clearly see how my role as a Media Technologist and member of the Media Development Unit was needed as a means to document and reconnoitre for future facilitation of learning through the use of educational technologies. The unique nature of this experience and proposed initiative was one that acted outside of traditional content production in that it couldn’t be shaped by process or follow the ‘default’ lines of planning and design but needed to be one of openness, an ability to observe and be ‘still’ while documenting as much as possible to help frame future developments.

The journey to Menindee itself is one that I think is ripe for many stories in years to come and is certainly an experience unto itself. The fact that nature conspired to create a monumental detour at the beginning of our journey created one of the most important steps forward that I can imagine. The physical reality of a sixteen-hour road trip with five other people really instilled the calibre of the people involved and for me a realisation of what great ambassadors CSU has in these people and that they are perfect leaders in what can only be the beginning of a far greater journey. The fact I got to spend time with our own Aunty Gloria a Wiradjuri elder, of the land that was home to her people well before I called it home, is something that I am ever grateful of. The fact I now have that connection and friendship means more to me then anything else that has come out of this trip.

Seeing the vastness of our country and knowing that you are passing through one dialect after another is quite an idea. Seeing the landscape slowly getting flatter and flatter, redder and redder yet knowing you are only hours from home via modern transport is also quite extraordinary. Passing through the lands of childhood memories and those of my grandparents holdings again created a personal connection for me the further west we travelled. The only
downside of this extended road trip is the dramatic deterioration of the quality of coffee from one roadhouse to another the further from major regional centres we travelled.

Symbolism is something that can’t be ignored on journeys such as this and when we finally arrived at Haythorpe Station at the end of a seemingly endless dirt track with only bats and birds catching the ever present locusts visible in our headlights I can only describe it as we had finally passed through darkness into warmth. The arrival was humbling and at the same time moving as we worked as one unpacking required rations and resources, meeting our hosts Aunty Beryl and Julie, sharing welcomes and stretching tired limbs. This was another example of journeys within journeys as we became acquainted with our home from home for the next few days.

The first dawn at Haythorpe is one that I think we will always remember. I am one who is awake well before dawn each day, checking emails, checking calendars and planning the day to come. The absence of technology created an environment where we were forced (though exceedingly willingly) to observe the world around us. The simple act of watching the sun rise over the low-lying hills, feeling its warmth on our faces and hands is something that you realise is so easy, so empowering, so right, yet we somehow forget about it in our regular lives and miss the reoccurring opportunity that happens every single day as we feel we don’t have the time to enjoy it or use it.

The events and learning of the actual stay at Menindee are something I struggle to document in any cohesive written format as it was personal yet completely communal, an experience that greatened ourselves by being in the presence of each other and listening and sharing with Aunty Beryl, Aunty Gloria and Julie. The welcome was unquestionable, there was a great sense of rightness not only in the landscape but coming from the people sitting around the camp fire. It was a first for me to sit and share so calmly around a campfire during the day with the sun full overhead, but again there was something so natural about it that it created the perfect
environment for stories and learning. This day we were able to experience the wonder of the lakes and put the Landcruisers to their intended use on broken ground and winding tracks. This journey within a journey is an absolute must for anyone travelling to Menindee, seeing the abundance of wildlife and the serene beauty of the lakes in all their glory following the rains.

The second night at Haythorpe was the ‘main event’ it was to be our first real listening to Aunty Beryl as she shared with us some of the stories of her people, of her life and the life of the land we sat on. It was also an opportunity to listen to Aunty Gloria and witness the joining of the two elders of different Nations. Sitting by the campfire listening while staring at the hypnotic flames at night is something I am more familiar with yet it was no more appropriate than the experiences of that day. The same fire warmed us bringing each of us closer and drawing us deeper and deeper into the world of Aunty Beryl and Aunty Gloria.

The second day at Haythorpe presented us with the opportunity to witness Menindee proper and the site of the old Menindee Mission. This was a very moving event as we saw the remains of Aunty Beryl’s childhood and heard of the life that was the lot of an indigenous person when ‘whiteys’ dictated existence. Seeing evidence, in the form of fire remains and muscle shells, of indigenous culture that predated the mission and colonisation is something that is hard to absorb all at once but again we were lead through this journey by the Aunts and their stories.

The third evening was vastly different in atmosphere as we went from wide-eyed children listening in awe to a ‘mystic’ or semi-otherworldly spiritual being, to that of light-hearted friends, enjoying simple yet wonderful food, gaining knowledge and wisdom in a much more casual and communal way. Again a journey within a journey and a coming together that is extremely profound. Hearing Aunty Beryl singing Irish lilts and recounting personal stories made me realise that the supreme example of cultural competency was sitting before us. Here was someone that managed to live in both worlds, who respected each for its differences and
could bring them together in a single person. This left me thinking this is exactly what we need to achieve amongst our colleagues, our students and ourselves.

The next morning saw us saying goodbye to Haythorpe Station and Julie as we travelled with Aunty Beryl to her gallery in Menindee before departing on the journey home. The gallery was a world that we touched so briefly but could easily be worth the journey by itself. Here we were privy to more stories and sharing from Aunty Beryl leaving us realising that there is so much more to be shared, so much more to learn. Journeying home was a journey with friends, it was light-hearted and full of ideas and inspiration of the world we were going to help shape when we returned to CSU. It was also a time where the contingent that travelled from Bathurst were able to connect and share on a more personal level now that the barriers of our own experiences and expertise had been softened dramatically. When we hit a minor detour coming home it was to be laughed off as nothing but insignificant compared to where we had been and what we had done.

Where to from here? Well the journey has just begun, this was most evident to me when returning to the office the next day where there wasn’t a single person in the building who didn’t want to hear all about Menindee and our journey or want to see some outcomes put in place. I wasn’t expecting the level of interest that my day-to-day colleagues have expressed. This gives me great heart when thinking of the journey we are still to take in putting in place some of what we have learned and strive to share and educate those around us and the charges we have in our students. For me the aim is to make us all not only more culturally competent and aware but better people and citizens of our world through knowledge and sharing.
Reconnecting to the Dreaming Menindee April 2010.

Gloria Dindima Rogers, Wiradjuri Elder.

A group of academics from CSU Bathurst campus and two from Wagga Wagga campus and I set of on our epic journey to Menindee where we were to meet up with Aunty Beryl Carmichael whom I me at a Wiradjuri elders council at Mudgee some 15 years previously.

After an eventful trip Aunty Beryl and her daughter Julie were waiting for us at Haythorpe Station where we were warmly welcomed.

I was deeply moved by the generosity of our host. This is the great lady elder I had come to sit with. How can I explain in a few words the experience of deep gratitude and respect for allowing me into her country of Ngyampa peoples learning place. The land, the quietness, the stories, the songs, the people sitting around the campfire circle, Aunty Beryl with my clap sticks as we are invited to pay respect to Mulyan as he opens his eye and to give thanks to the Great Spirit for a new day.

Still today it is hard to describe my wonderful experience talking with Aunty Beryl, Julie and my travelling companions. She is generous in passing on cultural knowledge as an elder and educator.

The stories of mission life under the “Protection Act” has left no bitterness in her, only happy memories of those days when families were together caring and sharing resources, together.

Thank you Aunty Beryl for your words of wisdom when I needed them, you knew what I needed. I didn’t have to say anything – you knew I needed healing.

I also remember the small bone button I handed to Aunty Beryl where the school stood at the old mission.
The redback and her babies in the shower block,

The brilliant night sky, the serenity that felt like a contented sigh.

When I set out on the journey I was with a group of strangers, the only person I knew was Dr Barbara Hill from Bathurst CSI. But I returned with a group of friends.
Menindee Reflections

Dr Barbara Hill, Division of Learning and Teaching Services.

“I haven’t a clue how my story will end. But that’s all right. When you set out on a journey and night covers the road, you don’t conclude the road has vanished. And how else could we discover the stars?” (Unknown)

Roads

Our journey to Menindee began when darkness still covered the road and although the roads didn’t vanish entirely, they were at times too wet to cross. Our final arrival at Haythorpe station was on a slick red dust road with far expanse stretching to the darkness either side, on a night of a near full moon. For atmosphere it set the tone beautifully and you could certainly stretch this to incorporate the metaphysical.

Journeys are always surprising. It was Andre Gide who wrote "One doesn't discover new lands without consenting to lose sight of the shore for a very long time" and it is something of this consent that is so important about the group that travelled to Menindee. One cannot change or embrace something new unless there is personal consent involved. It then becomes a contract of sorts. It struck me that this wild leap in faith, this consent to journey – for all of us is about what we are trying to do at CSU - and how we build capacity and how we will build a community of scholars that supports cultural competency.

But this group is not just made up of the ones who went; it also embraces those who were actively a part of the group but for various and important reasons had to remain at home. We brought them, however, with a full consciousness to this journey and we still bring them with us in this report. They play an important role of witness and of grounding; and it helps us to wrestle this huge experience into some form of concrete application. Sometimes it is harder to
stand on the shore, waving, than to go; but both journeys are necessary I think, it just that one involves more physical movement.

On blue warm days with skies broad and high like a giant’s vault, we walk with Aunty Beryl around the Old Menindee mission. It is a place when Aunt approaches you can hear her signing, even though she is sitting quietly; it is full of memories, sadness and warmth. She was born here and although deserted now it comes to life under her charm, storytelling and expertise. Her gaze becomes our own. We learn about Indigenous pedagogy here and we are taught by very skilful teachers; the premise on deep listening – not just hearing but reflection and that feeling of being uncomfortable which comes before understanding. We are students in a place of learning – in the remains of the old Menindee Mission School.

Stars
When we discover the stars it is the wonder that lasts and sitting with the Aunts is like sitting next to oceans of stars. They dazzle, inform, inspire, and encourage more questions than answers. If the stars at night are the campfires of the old people then they also warm and welcome us. We have become learners again. Aunty Beryl says, “There is work to be done” and this work takes a community of travellers. Late on the last afternoon I read to the group part of a chapter of the Journals of John Eyre (1840-1) published in 1845. Chapter IX is entitled ‘Suggestions for the improvement of system adopted towards the Natives’ and it includes a letter from Charles Sturt. It tells of his journey through Auntie Beryl’s country some 180 years earlier. As we listen, the sun is setting in a blaze of colour and it is as if the past sits in the present. Auntie Beryl and her daughter Julie recognise the names of their kinsmen Topar and Toonda and laugh when they are referred to as “friendly”. “We still are friendly”, she says.
This brings to mind our University’s footstep; the University for Inland Australia. With us Auntie Gloria Dindima Rogers, a Wiradjuri elder has linked her country to the story of the Ngiyempaa/Barkandji and the whole time we journey we witness and observe these protocols and respect as the campfire smoke flies into us; into our hair and clothes (our hearts and minds) until we are washed with it. Transformation is an evocative act and like the Latin word for education, educare – it draws us ever out. Protocols are different for each nation and as we cross boundaries that can pull on Aunty Gloria’s heart; we must learn to observe them also.

We don’t ever conclude that the road has vanished, but we look to broader horizons that we trust will give us more direction, more questions and, in time and with tenacity, some pertinent answers. With a steadfast consent we will go forward.
My journey to Menindee (and back again)

Associate Professor Marian Tulloch, Division of Learning and Teaching Services.

At Menindee I think I grasped what it means to learn deeply. Menindee showed us that learning is not just about knowledge; understanding also involves feeling, relationships, empathy, humour and sharing. Educationalists talk about deep learning as making meaning: *A window through which aspects of reality become visible, and more intelligible.* On this trip we saw, we listened and we gained in understanding. I was forced out of my task-oriented mode focused on outcomes and a search for solutions. I had to take time to be still and listen deeply.

I was already aware of some of the facts of Indigenous dispossession but this is a long way from understanding their meaning for those involved or for those that hear the stories. I ‘knew’ about the stolen generation. It is quite another thing to stand on the site of the old mission where Auntie Beryl grew up and be told that this is where the truck had come to take the children away. The raid was carefully timed while Uncle George was out hunting. Word went out, however and he rushed back praying the truck would break down. It blew a tyre and Uncle George got back. He knew there was nothing he could do to stop them taking the children; he just wanted to say goodbye.

That evening one of our colleagues told of an interaction in a CSU classroom. A student recounted her mother talking of two girls in their country town who were part of the stolen generation. A classmate turned on her asking challengingly ‘and did your mother say they didn’t smile?’ Is one smile enough to invalidate all the claims of suffering? But more challengingly for us as educators, how do we understand and engage with these powerful student reactions? It is a stark reminder that teaching about the complex issues of Indigenous past and present is not just about knowledge but about feelings, identity and for some deep resistance.
To me thinking about identity was at the heart of the Menindee experience. I glimpsed what being a proud Wiradjuri elder meant to Auntie Gloria and something of what the journey meant to her. It was a privilege to meet Ngyampa/Barkandji Elder Auntie Beryl in her country and share a little of her deep knowledge of and care for her country and to witness her spiritual bond with her land. Each of us talked about ourselves around the campfire. For someone with a white middle class English upbringing who had gladly adopted an Australian identity, I ask myself, ‘What does that mean about confronting the darker side to our country’s history and the terrible legacy it has left?’

Most challenging for us as members of CSU is the strength of the belief these Indigenous women shared in the transformative power of education. For them it means opportunity for their young people. They contributed their stories and insights so generously with a hope that this may bring greater understanding as all our students engage, both as professionals and citizens, with Indigenous Australians. Can CSU call itself the University for Inland Australia and not make a difference to the descendants of its original inhabitants?

Yet our time round the camp fire at Menindee was not just about sadness and injustice; it was time for laughter, an admiration for the strength and wisdom of the people whose stories we heard and a celebration of survival. A group who barely knew each other before the trip came away from a powerful experience committed to action.

The journey from Bathurst to Menindee and back took many kilometres and two days on the road; yet that travel too was important. I had met Auntie Gloria Rogers over the years and had introduced her at more than one Welcome to Country. Now I have an insight into her warmth, rich life experience and wonderful sense of humour. I also got to know my colleagues better.
A final metaphor struck me. On the trip out we faced a major detour when rain closed a dirt road. On the way back a road closure sent us off at night down unknown country roads when we thought we were near our journey’s end. I began to see detours as part of this most challenging journey that CSU has embarked on. This will not be an easy task. It won’t always be popular with our students or comfortable for our lecturers. There will be detours along the way as we experiment with what makes for effective learning.

We came away believing that our experience was transformative and CSU in partnership with Indigenous Australians can make a difference. Otherwise Menindee remains just a wonderful shared memory!
**Recommendations**

As a group it was decided the following recommendations be made:

1. There were some powerful and differing voices about making Indigenous Elders adjunct Professors. Although some of the group suggested caution in this, and others disagreed, no one was opposed to giving the Elders some negotiated official role that recognised their part of the University learning community so that their time, effort and prior knowledge would be properly remunerated. It was believed this process modeled respectful partnership and the group although a chorus, spoke with the one voice, in the considering the importance of this. It us suggested that this be investigated by the University and that appropriate people be consulted.

2. As it is explored in the Indigenous Curriculum and Pedagogy Guidelines website “field trips or culture-immersion programs are potentially very valuable. More extended field trips, involving overnight stays, can be very beneficial, particularly if they provide an opportunity for students to interact with Indigenous community members in an informal context.” See for example [http://www.csu.edu.au/division/landt/indigenous-curriculum/guidelines/develop-content.htm#nine](http://www.csu.edu.au/division/landt/indigenous-curriculum/guidelines/develop-content.htm#nine) It was considered important for the University to explore the possibility of further Cultural Immersion Workshops for both staff and students. The Aunts in particular were very keen for members of the University Executive to consider ‘coming to country’ and Auntie Beryl in particular extended an invitation which can be formalised if necessary.

3. That the University explores accepting protocols that acknowledge the institution’s wide foot print (for example the Wiradjuri, the Eora, the Ngunawal, the Barkandji and the Gundungarra). These should be acknowledged publically and effort made to begin a
dialogue with these many nation groups on whose land University campuses and buildings sit. It is suggested that the University begin forming respectful partnership with these Nation groups as a first step to its promise of being a University for Inland Australia.

4. That Indigenous community engagement and collaboration be built into the performance management descriptors, not so that it is forced on staff, but so that those who do engage are rewarded and encouraged.

5. That those staff leading in this area be encouraged to mentor junior staff to facilitate their journey of cultural competence. This where possible needs to be enacted at the school level so that sustainability of cultural competence as a staff resource grows and with it discipline specific teaching and research which is culturally engaged and appropriate.

6. That CSU advocate on behalf of local Indigenous communities.
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_Aunty Beryl weblinks – interviews, stories, insights_

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