PhD Pathways

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PhD Pathways

- Australia.
- Me, who am I?
- Research – some realisations.
- Me, undertaking research?
- My PhD.
- Research – Post-PhD.
- Working in research environments.
Who are we?

- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples are the Indigenous people of Australia.
- Aboriginal peoples are the Indigenous people of the mainland. Torres Strait Islander people are the Indigenous people of the Torres Strait Islands to the north of the mainland.
- Aboriginal people have been in Australia for at least 50,000 years.
- We became human in and on the land now known as Australia.
Aboriginal people have been in Australia for at least 50,000 years.

When the pyramids were built Aboriginal people were living self-determining lives on Country.

When the Great Wall of China was built Aboriginal people were living self-determining lives on Country.

When the Parthenon was built 2500 years ago Aboriginal people were living self-determining lives on Country.
We lived on our own Country and had personal autonomy over ALL facets of our lives including the economic, political, social, health and well-being, law, spiritual and ceremonial domains. We were living self-determining lives on Country.

Country means place of origin in spiritual, cultural and literal terms. It refers to a specific clan or a tribal group or nation of Aboriginal people and encompasses all the knowledge, cultural norms, values, practices, stories and resources within that particular area.
• The invasion of Aboriginal lands and the subsequent colonisation of Australia had a disastrous effect on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, including on-going dispossession and disempowerment.

• The system of colonisation deprived Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people of land and personal autonomy and restricted the economic, political, social, spiritual and ceremonial domains that had existed prior to colonisation. It also involved the implementation of overriding patriarchal systems.
Past Research in Australia...

From *The Sorry Wall*, by Pamela Croft (1998), Australian National Museum Collection
Me and Research?
Taking a Risk...

- I had moved away from the place I knew and from where I had family and where my family are known.

- I was working in Rockhampton, Central Queensland – where the ‘beef meets the reef’ and the lands of the Darumbal, Woppaburra and Gungalu.
Model of Research

I was living in the Rockhampton community.

I wanted:

- to work with Aboriginal women’s issues.
- it to be empowering.
- to support Aboriginal women in the process.
- be educating for us together.
- to ensure sharing and giving and learning.
- the work to be linked to political needs.
- the work to be linked to improvements.
Issues for Me…

- A lack of understanding non-Indigenous colleagues / peers, no Aboriginal people with PhDs around me. Supervision was going to be an issue.

- Difficulty accessing opportunities from a regional community.

- Difficulty accessing texts and articles and papers written by Indigenous peoples – not many written and what was written was not available in the library.

- I had to answer: What is a PhD any way?

- Being an Aboriginal person in a system that saw me as ‘Other’/’the researched’ and not as researcher. In 1997 there were only a handful of Aboriginal people in Australia with a PhD. Remember that the 1st Aboriginal person awarded an undergraduate degree was Charles Perkins in 1965.
I had to ask - ‘did I really want it’ & ‘was it worth it?’ & then…
I had to make it happen
“Pathway, a structural metaphor, combines with the process of journeying to form an active context for learning about spirit. Pathway is an appropriate metaphor since, in every learning process, we metaphorically travel an internal, and many times external, landscape. In travelling a Pathway, we make stops, encounter and overcome obstacles, recognise and interpret signs, seek answers, and follow the tracks of those entities that have something to teach us. We create ourselves anew. *Path* denotes a structure; *Way* implies a process”.

Gregory Cajete’s (1994) work allowed me to see that the research methodology was like the laying out of the Path – a firm structure or plan. It also meant that the Path included the external landscape of the site in all that it was.

The Way, being the process, involved enabling a clear, thought out process for me to follow and also one for me within my Self.

I travelled an internal landscape –

the journey of the Self –

becoming an Indigenous researcher.
Pathway
developing my story

The Pathway enabled me to:

- follow the tracks of others (literature, narratives, processes)
- make stops (think, critique)
- recognise and interpret signs (patterns, see/hear/know)
- seek answers (question)
- overcome obstacles (issues)
- cross gullies (confirmation seminar, admin)
- listen to guides (Elders, supervisors)
- fill up and go through my dilly bag (data)
- keep the secrets (confidentiality)
- keep going (momentum)
- imprint the journey (write)
- honour the journey (ceremony)
Processes...

• Discussions to explore what women wanted me to do –
  I attended women’s meetings/ gatherings, and inter-agency meetings.

• Development of the topic. The topic came from women in the community.

• Women wanted to =
  talk, have interviews, open-ended questions.
  share, use the power of witness.
  have on-going discussions, throughout.
  be involved in processes associated with the university.
  make it academically sound.

• A need to develop materials for use later. There needed to be on-going advocacy from the work.
Topic

- How the relationship between health services and Aboriginal women can be more empowering from the viewpoints of Aboriginal women?

- The assumption underpinning my PhD study was that empowering and re-empowering practices for Aboriginal women can lead to improved health outcomes.

- Re-empowerment was discussed from the viewpoint that Aboriginal women were once empowered as sovereign women who had control of all aspects of their/our lives.
Context

- What is the/our Aboriginal Indigenous women’s context?
- What is real and what is not?
- Looking through an array of lenses. e.g.
  - Feminist Participation Action Research
  - Discourse & Textual Analysis
  - Critical Theory
  - Indigenous Paradigm & Standpoint
  - Space & place
  - Disciplines of health, geography, sociology, education, history, (involvement of others).
Me Finding Solutions for Me…

- I found supervisors that I could work with.
- I took a stand for the work.
- I looked for opportunities and went for them.
- I attended the first Australian Indigenous postgraduate summer symposium in Melbourne in Feb 2000 and a couple of residential symposiums overseas.
- I found core support in the Indigenous community.
- I had to explain to my family exactly what I was doing.
- I had to withdraw from some commitments.
- I had to take responsibility and do the work required.
- I had to understand and enact the responsibilities I had with regards to the research and the scholarship/support given to me.
Making a work space & maintaining a work space = source of inspiration or procrastination.
Us Speaking about Women’s Health: Aboriginal women’s perceptions and experiences of health, well-being, identity, body and health services

Bronwyn L. Fredericks
2003
I had to ask - what now?
After the PhD...

- No academic/research job for me at Central Queensland University/in Rockhampton – where I was living.

- Worked as the
  - Area Manager for Anglicare Central Qld (2002).
  - CEO of Bidgerdii Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Community Health Service (2005).
  - Research Manager for the Centre for Clinical Research Excellence with the Queensland Aboriginal and Islander Health Council (QAIHC) (2006).

- I was seeking something more...
I had to ask - what now?
&
then...
I had to make it happen
Enacting My Vision...

- I had a small window of opportunity to apply for Post-Doctoral Fellowships & was awarded a NH&MRC Post-Doctoral Research Fellowship (2007-2010) (Brisbane & Melbourne).

- I sought a Visiting Fellows position with the Indigenous Studies Research Network at Queensland University of Technology (QUT) (2008-2010).

- I sought a Visiting Research Fellow position with the Victorian Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Organisation (VACCHO) (I spent 6 months at VACCHO’s offices in Melbourne in 2009).

- I gained a full-time research position at Queensland University of Technology (QUT) in 2010. I was successful in gaining a 3 year contract.
Some of my recent research involvements
National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Women’s Health Strategy

Launched on 21 May 2010

www.awhn.org.au
Social Determinants Research Roundtable Project

This project was a partnership between VACCHO & the Co-operative Research Centre for Aboriginal Health (CRCAH)

All 9 universities and all 24 ACCHOs in Victoria were invited to participate.

This project primarily sought to develop a research agenda which addresses the Social Determinants of Aboriginal Health in Victoria.

Launched on 10th March 2010.

Future

- Work with other Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, researchers and communities and other Indigenous peoples.
- Link research with our political struggles.
- Link research with change for us.
- Share our learning and rejoice in our learning of and about ourselves.
- Re-empowering ourselves / becoming self-determining on our Country.
“Aboriginal research is an opportunity for us to create innovation and change for our people. If we develop an approach to research which is unique and reflects our values and beliefs, we will be reflecting the spirit of our ancestors, the spirit of our people who are alive today, and the spirit of our Aboriginal children who are yet to be born”.

Carolyn Kenny (2000:148)
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Many papers by Bronwyn Fredericks are available at: