



By Janine Dunleavy
Reviewed and updated by Dr. Stuart Barlo (2019)

Contents

Introduction.....	3
Dialogue.....	3
Yarning circles.....	3
Principle and protocol-based approach	4
Strengths-based approach.....	4
How yarning circles work.....	5
Story and learning.....	5
Our classroom.....	5
References	6

Cover Art by: Stuart Barlo (2018)

Introduction

In a yarning circle talking is focused on finding ways to grow sustaining places that are based in mutual understanding (Barlo, Boyd, Pelizzon, & Wilson, 2020a). Stories are presented in yarning circles. We express our lives through stories it is the creation of stories that helps us to make sense of the world around us and it is these stories that help us to relate to the people around us (Barlo et al., 2020a). In the weaving of our stories together enables us to speak respectfully from our differing world-views and contribute the knowledge that each of us brings to the circle.

Dialogue

The need for dialogue in our public life is less well understood than the need for debate and activism. Debate and activism are well-used tools in the repertoire of social justice and equity. It was and is largely through these forms of public engagement that social change is achieved.

Dialogue has a vital, if quieter, role to play in a culturally diverse society. It can build bridges across divides in the body politic. It can promote healing in small communities that are struggling with a controversy. It can also reduce hatred in the arena of public opinion, and potentially dangerous misrepresentations in our discourse saturated media (Herzig & Chasin. L., 2006).

Yarning circles

Yarning circles are a timeless way of learning. Ever since people first walked the earth, we have been sitting down together and sharing stories. Many groups have developed different approaches to yarning circles all of which are valuable because they are based in human processes of caring and communicating.

When we think of our stories we must recognise that stories are vitally significant in all our lives. These narratives reflect our experience, affirm our identity and allow us to share the significant meanings of our life and culture. Through sharing and interweaving our understandings we may see a way to grow healing spaces with individuals and find healing pathways for groups and communities (Sheehan, 2012).

In a yarning circle, all participants are provided with an opportunity to speak in a safe non- judgmental place and to share their strengths in an inclusive and collaborative learning environment. Yarning together is always focused on strengths not problem solving or criticism.

It is important to be present in the moment, to have respectful interactions, to be open and honest, to listen deeply, acknowledge other's strengths and offer your own strengths and knowledge in turn. In a yarn, all points of view are equally valid and all respectful verbal statements are equally valid. In a yarning circle verbal

statements can be a word, sentence or a longer explanation.

Principle and protocol-based approach

The yarning space is influenced by six main protocols that keep the participants safe while they are engaging in a yarning circle, and observance of these protocols ensures equality along with shared responsibility (Barlo, Boyd, Pelizzon, & Wilson, 2020b).

- Gift
- Control
- Freedom
- Space
- Inclusiveness
- Gender specificity

When these six protocols are observed, four understandings develop and flow through the participants, generating a sense of community. Firstly, *equality*, especially in the sense of rights and opportunities. Secondly, *responsibility*, as the state or fact of recognising the duty to deal with something. Thirdly, *integrity*, as the quality of being honest and having strong moral principles. Fourthly, *protection*, as the action of protecting someone or something, or of being protected (Barlo et al., 2020b).

In addition to the six protocols there are seven principles that need to be adhered to as they add a layer of cultural protection and safety. They also aid in the creation of a dialogue capable of generating knowledge and understanding in a culturally safe environment (Barlo, 2016; Barlo et al., 2020a).

- Reciprocity
- Responsibility
- Relationship
- Dignity
- Equality
- Integrity
- Self-determination

Strengths-based approach

A strengths-based approach recognises the resilience of individuals. It focuses on abilities, knowledge and capacities rather than on what people do not know or cannot do. It recognises that the community is rich in resources; assumes that people are able to learn, grow and change; encourages positive expectations of learners and is characterised by collaborative relationships. It focuses on those attributes and resources that may enable adaptive functioning and positive outcomes (Armstrong et al., 2012, p. 6).

How yarning circles work

- Participants respect each other's views.
- Participants sit in a circle
- The facilitator guides the circle
- No voice is of greater importance than another
- Talk proceeds around the circle in a clockwise direction
- Each participant speaks from their strengths
- Everyone listens to the speaker
- Participants talk in turn
- To question others, a participant's turn must come around again
- Sometimes participants may wish to pass their turn

Story and learning

Stories can nurture empathy and connectedness. Sharing stories can give us courage and empower us to honour our own and other's personal experiences. Our family and community stories shape our beliefs and identities (Anuik & Gillies. C., 2012, p. 74). Essentially, as human beings we express our lives through stories. It is the creation of our stories that helps us to make sense of the world around us and it is these stories that help us to relate to the people around us (Barlo et al., 2020a).

When we put ourselves into a story, it becomes experience and learning follows experience. We recognise the spirit of stories that teach us throughout the course of our lifetime. The learning journey that each of us travels to arrive at awareness of our strengths is largely the result of our learning spirit being invigorated, nourished, challenged and motivated by encounters between our own story and those of significant others (Kelly in Anuik & Gillies. C., 2012, p. 74).

Our classroom

Within and without the concrete and steel of buildings is Country. So, we are teaching and learning on Country even when we are located in university classrooms. Whilst there is much diversity among Indigenous people throughout Australia, a unifying theme is the knowledge that we are all connected to each other and all other entities through the ground upon which our feet walk daily. Thus, we have rights and responsibilities with regard to nurturing the quality of these relationships. To this end, the quality of the contexts in which our teaching and learning is conducted needs our careful care and attention.

Country speaks to this part of people. Knowledge also flows through and from Country. So, if we care for and nurture the ground (contexts) upon which our teaching and learning occurs, the classroom which is Country will take up the task of teaching from there.

References

- Anuik, J., & Gillies, C. (2012). Indigenous knowledge in post-secondary educators' practices: Nourishing the learning spirit. *Canadian Journal of Higher Education Revue*, 42(1), 63-79. Retrieved from journals.sfu.ca/cjhe/index.php/cjhe/article/download/1902/182507
- Armstrong, S., Buckley, S., Lonsdale, M., Milgate, G., Bennetts Kneebone, L., Cook, L., & Skelton, F. (2012). *Starting school: a strengths based approach towards Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children. A report prepared by the Australian Council for Educational Research for the Department of Families*. Retrieved from http://research.acer.edu.au/indigenous_education/27/
- Barlo, S. (2016). *Can the impacts of colonisation on the dignity of Aboriginal men be reversed?* (Doctor of Philosophy PhD). Southern Cross University, Lismore.
- Barlo, S., Boyd, W., Pelizzon, A., & Wilson, S. (2020a). YARNING AS PROTECTED SPACE: Principles and Protocols. *AlterNative, In Press*. doi:10.1177/1177180120917480
- Barlo, S., Boyd, W., Pelizzon, A., & Wilson, S. (2020b). YARNING AS PROTECTED SPACE: Why is Yarning Important? *AlterNative*.
- Herzig, M., & Chasin, L. (2006). *Fostering dialogue across divides: A nuts and bolts guide*. . Retrieved from <http://www.intergroupresources.com/rc/Fostering%20Dialogue%20Across%20Divides.pdf>
- Sheehan, N. (2012). *Stolen Generations Education: Aboriginal Cultural Strengths and Social and Emotional Well Being* (1 ed.). Queensland: Link-up (Qld) Aboriginal Corporation