The 8IATC received funding from the Australian Government.
Aboriginal creativity within making and seeing

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About the Institute
Non Indigenous perspective of Australia
Indigenous perspective of Australia
Aboriginal philosophies

Land – what does *Country* mean

Healthy Country, Healthy people
Aboriginal Health Philosophies

Traditional healers focus on relationships within a social and psychological context where illness is understood as an imbalance of relationships rather than just isolated events. We associate poor health to poor relationships – the relationship with self, others, the land and all living things.

Creativity is part of our practice

(Deliman and Smolowe, 1982).
Traditional healing

Traditional healing is knowledges and practices that incorporate transgenerational experiences based on individual and collective life understandings.

Institute of Advanced Studies Traditional Knowledge Initiative (United Nations University, 2008)
Defining Health and Healing

5 senses
- touch
- smell
- taste
- hear
- see

7 senses
- touch
- smell
- taste
- hear
- see
- ngara
- oolgna
Ngara

Imagination
Memory
Play
Dreaming

Oolgna

Gut feeling
Intuition
Deep insight
Alert signal
Sight/seeing

- Seeing - deep observations
- Seeing - filters greater insight.
- Visual experience – from an Aboriginal context – imagery that contains symbolic markings is knowledge rather than art; repetitious symbols are intentionally used to create a psychophysiological reaction (Laughlin et al., 1992) that creates transformative change (Turner, 1968).
Start of healing grounds
Imagery is personalized and highly detailed
Smell

Traditional practice:
• Smell is used as a diagnostic tool for illness, disease and infection - including secreta and excreta odours.
• Breathing in heated Sea salts mixed with animal oils - ritualised cleansing.
• Smoking eucalyptus and tee tree leaves - cleansing agent to redirect bad spirits.
• The blowing of grounded plants, ochres and stones holds antibiotic and antiseptic qualities.

Western theories:
• Some medical schools have reinstated smell senses within practices as a diagnostic tool by introducing medical students to odours associated with disease by the 'scratch and sniff' card system (Whitefield and Stoddart, 1984).
• It is now recognised that the sweet odour of acetone is associated to diabetes.
• The aroma of fleshly plucked chicken associated with the measles (Winter, 1976).
3

Hearing/sound

Using the senses when walking on Country
Taste
Panpooni - Pain is assessed as a blockage or obstruction through touch to relive pain.

Healing includes techniques such as observing, listening and touch. With massage and rubbing they release “blockages” from the body and apply various herbal tinctures and ointments where required.
Imagination

Aboriginal thoughts:
• Imagination (ngara) explores possibilities that go beyond personal experiences.
• The process of imagination clears the mind of structured realisms that allows for deep flow of emotional input.
• Imagination increases our endorphin (happiness) levels.
• Imagination - form of abstract thought, a process of creative thinking, called ’thinking through images (Potenza, 1990; 163).

Non Aboriginal thoughts:
• Imagination a form of dramatisation rather than an awakening of the unconscious mind.
• Imagination enters into the world of the unpredictable (Greene, 1995)
• Imagination is for children only.
Deep imagination

- Dreams and visions are considered an important component within healing.
- Through imagination, dreams are rational encounters with spiritual ancestors.
- Castellano (2006) affirms some artists also dream in vivid images.
- Stephen (1989) states that dreams and visions can deliberately raise conscious awareness.
- Dreams and visions within creativity are a way of problem solving and seeking solutions.
- Imagination within creativity can create illusions to altered states - ways of seeking new ideas by connecting with the inner world.
Intuition - Aboriginal thoughts

- Reliant on intuition (ways of knowing and sensing) as a trusted means for survival. Seen as felt internal vibrations that alert us to danger (see Castellano, 2000) or changes within the environment.
- Intuitive Centre (belly brain) - internal alert system of unconscious reasoning but when activated, becomes a conscious signal within our nervous system. Serves as a guide.

- The intuitive centre (Oolagna) is considered the core of knowing and is thus central to wellbeing. Located around the stomach area. This is primary focus in healing.

- When Oolagna is healthy, motivational levels increase along with creativity of thought and action.
- When Oolagna is imbalanced negativity occurs, creating internal stress and physical illness – Internal (behavioural changes, depression). External – (gut problems, constipation, poor immune system, pain).
Intuition (Oolguna)
The centre of life
The main brain
Real feelings
That alert us to change
Non Aboriginal thoughts:

- Intuitive knowledges is inadequately studied possibly due to structured westernised scientific logical validations (Weissman, 1987). Remains an ignored feeling, rather than a form of rational reasoning (Parahoo, 2006).
- “We scoff at it in scientific discourse” .... “to betray our uneasiness” (Simpson, 2001) (p. 136).
- Intuition ‘fall(s) outside the pale of what professional cultures are willing to accept’ (Claxton, 2000)
- Intuition is a form of spiritual guidance that encodes unconscious information (Epstein, 1994) into conscious abstract emotional experiences to enhance judgment and decision-making.

Have you experienced that gut warning sign and discounted it? Do you feel connected to Oolgna?
Cultural Brain Clash

Intuitive feelings provide accurate information about the past, present and future – related to emotional health associated with belly brain

**Cultural Clash: emotional imbalances associated with brain - mental health**

Intuitive hunches are attributed to forgotten knowledge and subconscious signals from belly brain

**Cultural Clash: subconscious signals only associated with brain – mental health**

The belly brain is the centre of wellbeing

**Culture Clash: wellbeing is associated with head brain – mental health**

Happiness is a deep connection of belly brain

**Happiness is achieved through sound mental health**

New research: The belly brain (Hanifile and Langbein, 2005) contains 95% of our serotonin levels and thus contributes towards feelings of wellbeing - pleasure, memory, learning and motivation

*Why do we continue to focus treatment only on the head brain?*
Aboriginal creativity within making and seeing

It's not art

It's visual knowledge

It's like reading a map
4 circles indicate 4 communities

Ceremonial ground meeting place

Emu hunting ground

Wombat lands

Tidal and depth water way

Tracks to each community

Long grass

Snakes

Women with children sitting

Sacred Healing place

Single Women sitting

Deep water large waves

4 circles indicate 4 communities
Aboriginal creativity
Visual literacies

• The use of symbols within healing act as guides for transformative processes - illness is transferred from the patient to the symbol as a way to restore health.
• This process involves repetitive rhythmical visual form that acts as a sensation to the minds and body in connecting individuals to self and the environment.
• Symbols of cultural content are unique systems of visual literacies that require a higher level of intellectual, intuitive and imaginative effort.
• Jung (1961) through self-experimentation and patient interaction believed symbols are a natural language of unconscious reasonings that have the ability to convey emotional reaction often too complex for verbal responses.
Visual literacies in healing

• The more we observe and absorb, more 7 senses respond. As visual observations (imagination) grow – creates sense of curiosity- desire to obtain and interpret narrative context.
• Aboriginal visual literacies play a prominent role healing followed by the verbal narrative.
• Visual literacies assists memory recall

• What do we tend to remember first – the story being told or the imaginative images we create in our heads?

That is why Aboriginal creative making is knowledge not ‘art’ as it contains valuable information.
Taking traditional visual literacy into contemporary practice

• Trauma experiences – visual flashbacks and nightmares
• Use descriptive language (metaphors) such as ‘the black hole’ or the ‘empty circle’, ‘a core of nothingness’, ‘feel like shit’.
• Perceive and interpret creativeness to match our emotional states (Ulrich, 1999). Therefore making and seeing (viewing) creativity can serve to regulate mood.
• As emotions belly brain often precede cognitive thought head brain (Cozolino, 2002), utilising visual literacies as a tool to examine emotional levels needs further consideration.
• Visual stories as a form of dialogue offers an opening for emotional expression and understanding.
“Making” (visual literacies) remains a prominent tool to verbalize (speak) about things that are often too difficult to say.
Visual literacy supports clients to express more deeply their understanding of their situation.

It serves to clarifying a client’s experience.

Often victims of domestic violence, find the impact of abuse too difficult to verbalize due to strong feelings of shame, humiliation, guilt, and fear around speaking. (Malchiodi & Miller, 2011).
'The intuitive mind is a sacred gift and the rational mind is a faithful servant. We have created a society that honours the servant and has forgotten the gift.'

Albert Einstein
Experiment

Imagery is responsive to emotion and express both positive and negative moods.

Emotions precede cognitive thought.
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