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Changing listening frequency to minimise white noise and hear Indigenous voices.

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Figure 1 provided as appendix

Abstract

“Listening... can involve the listener in an intense, efficacious, and complex set of communicative acts in which one is not speaking, discussing, or disclosing, but sitting quietly, watching, and feeling-the-place, through all the senses.... In the process, one becomes a part of the scene, hearing and feeling with it.” (Carbaugh 1999: 259)

To listen this way involves much more than providing a chance for words to be spoken; it includes tuning in and getting the listening frequency clear. As a non-Indigenous person seeking to conduct qualitative research that listens to Aboriginal people, I need to ask how I can tune into the “active attentiveness” described by Carbaugh (1999) in order to listen in a manner that is appropriate, respectful and minimises my inherent white privilege. In addressing this question I draw on the work of Indigenous authors and academics, critical whiteness studies and my own experiences learning from Aboriginal people in a number of contexts over the past ten to fifteen years.

History in Australia since colonization has created a situation where Aboriginal voices are white noise to the ears of many non-Indigenous people. This paper proposes that white privilege and the resulting white noise can be minimised and greater clarity given to Aboriginal voices by privileging Indigenous knowledge and ways of working when addressing Indigenous issues. To minimise the interference of white noise, non-Indigenous people would do well to adopt a position that recognises, acknowledges and utilises some of the strengths that can be learned from Aboriginal culture and Indigenous authors.

This paper outlines a model of apprentice, allied listening for non-Indigenous researchers to adopt when preparing to conduct research alongside Indigenous people. Such an approach involves Re-learning of history, Reviewing of the researcher’s beliefs and placing Relating at the centre of the listening approach. Each of these aspects of listening is based on privileging of Indigenous voices.

Introduction

While listening is centrally important in Aboriginal cultures (Atkinson, 2002: 16; Carbaugh 1999: 259; Stanner 1979: 143), literature written by Indigenous academics is very clear in noting that not all past research by white people has listened effectively. As the “most researched group in the world” (Fredericks 2008: 114) much has been done that has hurt people and, at the very least, not helped them (Castellano 2004). What has been presented as research has even been known to be abusive (Smith 1999: 175). “Until recent times, research conducted in Aboriginal lands was done so without permission, consultation or involvement of Aboriginal people... To be seen but not asked, heard nor respected.” (Martin 2003: 203).

In this paper I use the term *white noise* to refer to the interference created by dominant colonial-centric world views and practices that leads to fuzzy, indistinct reception of Indigenous voices by non-Indigenous

researchers. Such white noise leads to situations such as that referred to by Martin (2003: 201). The goal of my journey as a novice researcher in Indigenous studies is to seek ways to minimise the white noise created in my ears by the power and privilege of my whiteness and dominant colonial world views so as not to replicate mistakes of the past. Reducing the level of white noise in my research practice begins with hearing the voices of Indigenous people themselves. Pat Dudgeon (2008: 14) laments that some academics and authors “appear to dismiss the need for Aboriginal authorship and authority, stating that this is only mediated through European thinking and language in any case”. My challenge, as a non-Indigenous Australian, is to find a way to conduct research and listen to Aboriginal people that is not purely colonial and Western in nature. In the words of Williams (2007: 137), “it’s all about hearing Indigenous voices. For our worldview to find non-tokenistic space within mainstream the people within mainstream have to respond in a positive and committed way.” My way of seeking to respond in a positive and committed way is to learn to listen and minimise white noise by re-learning what I know, reviewing what I believe and adopting behaviours that promote the importance of relating.

Re-learning and opening listening channels

Whiteness is invisible yet all pervasive, establishes conditions that privilege non-Indigenous people (bell hooks 1994; 2009; Gillborn 2009; Ladson-Billings 2009, Moreton-Robinson 2003; Riggs 2004: 2007) and leads to a cultural deafness that does not consider the legitimacy of other worldviews. Whiteness can be an invisible norm (Aveling 2007: 35) and white ears deaf to any voice other than that of the privileged non-Indigenous soundtrack.

Non-Indigenous people do not readily tune in to voices outside of a Western image. Foucault argued that what we learn in schools and our culture “warps us into their own image, and forces us to see, understand, and know only a small, biased, individualised, singular and unique selection and ordering of what is in the world to know” (Jardine 2005: 80). Because non-Indigenous people work from a western colonial paradigm and way of ordering the world we tend to frame everything within those boundaries. It can become impossible to listen because “there is one voice only as the accredited source of knowledge” (Corradi Fiumara 1990: 19). Bell (2009: 42) echoes this in saying that “not all positioned perspectives are equally valued, equally heard, or equally included. ... some positions have historically been oppressed, distorted, ignored, silenced, destroyed, appropriated, commodified, and marginalised”. Amongst those voices not equally valued in Australia have been those of the First People of this nation. Stanner (1979: 214) refers to the first two hundred years of white settlement of Australia in this way; “what may well have begun as a simple forgetting of other possible views turned under habit and over time into something like a cult of forgetfulness practised on a national scale.”

Together the “cult of forgetfulness” mentioned by Stanner, the unawareness of the privilege whiteness brings, the distortion and exclusion described by Bell seem to combine to “warp us” into a space of patriarchal white sovereignty (Moreton-Robinson 2004) that creates white noise instead

of an open channel that receives a clear reception when hearing Aboriginal voices. The term white noise has been used previously to refer to the loud noise created by inappropriate Western responses during the Federal Government "intervention" in many remote Indigenous communities in the Northern Territory in 2008 (Mills 2008). Tom Montgomery-Fate (1997) also used the phrase when talking about cross cultural missionary work and the need to move beyond a purely colonial perspective.

The narrow auditory range that results from being "warped into the image" of the dominant culture easily distorts the voices of Aboriginal people into a blur of white noise; an indistinct, fuzzy static, similar to the sound of a radio station that is not quite properly tuned. No matter how clear the signal being transmitted, it is only the receiver who can ultimately ensure accurate reception of what is being said. It is those most privileged who provide the opportunity and means for voices to be widely heard.

To continue to place Indigenous voices as secondary allows us to "forget the difference and...to stay focused on our own situation without grappling with the other person's reality" (Grillo and Wildman 2000: 649). The body of knowledge upon which policy and research is developed still relies heavily on information often acquired by the inappropriate techniques such as those referred to by Fredericks 2008; Castellano 2004; Smith 1999 and Martin 2003. These techniques included such things as the researcher deciding in isolation upon the question and what was of value and importance, not seeking permission from appropriate community members, not giving anything back in reciprocity to the people and place of the research. To minimise the white noise in my ears I need to tune in to and turn up the volume of Indigenous ideas, academics and authors and adopt practices that honour and respect Indigenous ways. If I conduct my research from within the narrow range of white ears listening, I risk representing Aboriginal people's lives and experiences disrespectfully as little more than white noise in my own life and research career.

Hearing history in a new way

If, due to the 'cult of forgetfulness' (Stanner 1979: 214), ears have become closed and Indigenous ways of knowing, being, believing are easily "off the air" to privileged white hearing, where can I begin when starting to tune in to Indigenous voices? I start with looking to Indigenous authors to find clues. Many Indigenous authors such as Linda Smith (1999), Karen Martin (2003) and Aileen Moreton-Robinson (2000) begin with speaking of the history of colonization from their perspective. So this is where I begin planning and preparing to conduct this research.

The bias of white Australian history may well be obvious to many Indigenous Australians and to those who work in the fields of Indigenous, race and critical whiteness studies. The decision makers, academics and researchers in our country, however, have not all necessarily heard the same history. Their ears have often learned exclusively from "western knowledge [that] tries to frame the entire world and its history" (Corradi Fiumara 1990: 19). Colonisation as a global phenomenon may appear to be over but, as Yazzie (2000) points out, colonialism is still very much a daily reality for

Indigenous people. What has been created in just over two hundred years since colonization in Australia is a situation in which Indigenous world views are marginalised and Indigenous voices relegated to white noise.

So, it is necessary to repeatedly reiterate that Australia was the only colonized land to be declared Terra Nullius, unoccupied by civilised people (Atkinson 2002: 27; Eckerman et al 2006: 5; Martin 2003; Stanner 1979: 245). The reality was that there existed a complex and sophisticated web of families and communities who had occupied the land for tens of thousands of years (Atkinson 2002: 24-30; Stanner 1979). This is still unknown to many non-Indigenous people and is one reason why Indigenous voices and writers need to be privileged in research on Aboriginal issues by white researchers in order not to repeat mistakes of the past outlined earlier. Until this very basic information is heard, acknowledged, accepted by individuals, decision makers, researchers, organisations and governments listening will always have the buzz and static of white noise.

Tuning into a new frequency

Initially I was arrogant enough to believe that I could simply adopt Indigenous Research Methodologies outlined by Indigenous authors such as Kovach (2005), Martin (2003) and Smith (1999). While it seems obvious now, at the time it was a shock to my white ears to realise that there are parts of the Indigenous world view that are not open to my knowing. Investigating further I found that some think it inappropriate for white people to do such research at all (Rigney 1997). I cannot simply leave my whiteness at the gate as I enter the world of this research project and put on an Indigenous way of thinking, acting and doing. Who I am as a white woman comes with me, along with the inherent privilege that position brings. What is important to me is considering how I might minimise the impact of that privilege by listening with greater clarity and openness.

To find out how I might listen in a way that is based on respecting Indigenous worldviews and simultaneously acknowledging the historical power and privilege inherent from my position as a white person I return to Indigenous authors. Evans et al (2009: 895) pose such a “white studies” approach to research arguing for “refocusing the object of inquiry directly and specifically on the institutions and structures that indigenous peoples face.” So too do critical race and whiteness studies theorists and researchers, such as Aveling (2007), Bell (2009), Crenshaw et al (1995), Ladson-Billings (2009), Ladson-Billings and Donnor (2008), Moreton-Robinson (2000, 2004), Nicoll, (2004, 2007) and Riggs (2007),. These authors are concerned with bringing about positive change based on principles of social justice and consideration of the impact of colonisation on First Peoples. In this context the term “allies” is not unusual. Being an ally places me in a position to view the impact of whiteness on what I do.

The term “ally” best describes how I view myself in a research context. Tatum (2009: 285) believes that allies are necessary for oppressed groups to move beyond despair and that there is a history of such people; people “who have resisted the role of oppressor and who have been allies to people of color”. At rallies and meetings in Perth I often hear Elders welcome those

white brothers and sisters who are there to “walk beside us”. That is how I see myself as an ally; as someone who is walking beside my Aboriginal brothers and sisters united in our humanness and a common goal of social justice for all people.

Grande (2000 349) calls for scholars to “broaden their own theoretical scopes” and engage with indigenous ways of knowing in order to create new and exciting ways of discovering, thinking and working.” If I am to work in ways that transform oppressive power relations I will have to decentre myself (Sonn 2008: 164) and consciously aim to move from a world view that is egocentrically white. Being an allied listener strives to decentre a singularly white outlook and privilege Indigenous perspectives on Indigenous issues. I aim to become more an “apprentice of listening rather than a master of discourse” (Corradi Fiumara 1990: 57).

The next dilemma facing me in my journey as an apprentice allied listener is exactly *how* to operationalize this belief; what do I have to *do*? If, being warped into the image of the dominant culture is creating the white noise, what actions can assist in fine tuning listening to hear Aboriginal voices more clearly?

Reviewing beliefs and adjusting listening frequency

To find some clues as to how to minimise my own ‘white noise’ I need to know more about the frequency my white privilege tunes me in to and what this means for how I define some key research principles. The work of Moreton-Robinson and Walter (2010) provides clarity on key differences between ways of doing, being and working in Indigenous and non-Indigenous worlds. Shayne Williams (2007) also explores the unique attributes of an Indigenous outlook, views on knowledge, ways of being and relating. In summarising these key differences I focus on variations in understanding and reviewing my stance on three areas pertinent to my research; *defining outlook*, *defining knowledge* and *defining research*. My understanding in these three areas is likely to impact on my ability to listen. While my stance in each of these three areas is likely to contribute to the level of static, using information and teaching from Indigenous authors can assist in minimising white noise and improving my reception of Indigenous voices.

Defining outlook

My frequency as a non-Indigenous Australian is tuned to the linear, the positivist, the dominant Western paradigm. The Western way of thinking has an outlook based on the individual and a state with a law that is rational and regulates the life of the society’s inhabitants allowing “individuals to pursue their economic self-interest” (Smith 1999: 59).

Youngblood Henderson (2000: 72) explains that the ways of western thinking are “defined by polarities: the modern and the primitive, the secular and non-secular, the scientific and un-scientific, the expert and the layman, the normal and the abnormal, the developed and the underdeveloped, the vanguard and the led, the liberated and the saveable”. While western ideologies propose theories based on such binaries and the rights of the

individual, Indigenous theories are represented as beliefs, stories and myths (Iseke-Barnes 2005: 153), the importance of community and inter-relatedness of all things (Harrison 2009). Collectivism is so central to an Indigenous way of being that it has been described by some as the most significant core value of Indigenous people (Williams, 2007: 159). This is a more circular way of being in the world and requires time for thinking, musing, reflecting as a way of doing business.

Defining knowledge

Knowledge, in Western, non-Indigenous culture, and the academy, can be discovered or invented (Moreton-Robinson and Walter 2010: 4-5). Whoever does so owns that knowledge. All knowledge is open to those who pass through the educational process and seek to find it. This view is upheld by copyright and intellectual property laws which assign ownership of knowledge.

Knowledge is not open in Aboriginal communities (Moreton-Robinson and Walter 2010: 4-5) and is only passed on when it is deemed that people are ready to know it. It is not owned by an individual but by the community. Social relations determine who has the right to know. Research based on “discovering knowledge” therefore can very easily become disrespectful of the voices of Indigenous people by taking knowledge and using it as a commodity. My research “findings” will not “belong” to me; they will belong to the community from which they are developed and divulged.

Defining research

Aboriginal knowledge has always been informed by research, “the purposeful gathering of information and the thoughtful distillation of meaning” (Castellano 2004: 98). This is not, however, done in the linear manner of our western scientific method. It is done by being in relationship with all living things (Martin 2003). Non-Indigenous research is based upon strict guidelines and usually has an object, issue or problem as the focus (Moreton-Robinson and Walter 2010: 4-5). Indigenous research is based on observation of the world and learning experientially from it. For me to work and listen with respect I need to be prepared to share the process of research with the community, being mindful of an experiential, collective and relational way of being, doing and believing.

An ongoing challenge is to balance such cultural and academic rigour. Cultural rigour necessitates having trust and relationships at the centre. My university’s academic rigour demands a timeline, notions of research design, confidentiality and ownership of knowledge. I am not the first to encounter such conflict. Writing in 2007 Williams, for example, details such conflicts that occur as a result of an academic process that requires ownership and a degree of certainty and cultural rigour that requires relationships to be at the ethical core.

As yet I have found no clear or easy way of effectively and simultaneously meeting the often diametrically opposed demands of traditional cultural rigour and traditional academic rigour and there is an

ongoing conflict between the two. Openness to cultural rigour, however, is assisting me in minimising the white noise of the requirements of academic rigour and forcing me to reconsider exactly how I conduct research.

Relating as central in minimising white noise

Over the years I have been provided with opportunities to learn from Indigenous people in very subtle ways rather than through a didactic lecturing type style. What I have learned can be summarised as key actions or ways of behaving that seem central to relating to Indigenous people and communities. I see these as *putting relationships at the centre, closing mouth and slowing down, interacting as a ceremony, opening eyes and seeing, opening heart and feeling/acknowledging spirituality*. Each of these key actions are summarised here in the context of available literature as I seek to find out if what I learned in those informal ways is supported by the literature from Indigenous authors.

Put relationships at the centre

Aboriginal people often speak personally of the centrality of relationships, especially family. "All life is joined in a web of relationships, a web that exists both within and outside us" (Kwaymullina 2008: 10). In my life and work, I have experienced that the building of relationships takes time. Where relationship is central, not the timeline or outcome, there will be implications for any research or project. I have heard from community services workers in regional and remote Western Australia that one of their key difficulties was short funding time frames that did not allow for the time it takes to build trust with communities and go about things 'the right way'.

Non-Indigenous authors have also noted that research is, by its very nature, relational (Bodone and Dalmau 2005; Tipa et al 2009). Bishop (1998: 215) notes that the researcher cannot but be in relationship with the issue being researched and the people involved; that the knower is not 'seperable' from the known. However, the nature of that relationship is laden with assumptions of commonality (Carspecken 2005: 18) which may or may not exist in reality. Reflection in the research process therefore explores the assumptions of those involved in the relationships of the research. In a world of diversity, one size can and will not fit all situations, people or contexts.

From Indigenous writers I hear that time to build relationship is necessary to develop trust and establish where the community wants the researcher to fit in and how they can be practically useful in the community (Fredericks 2008a&b; Sheehan and Walker 2001: 13; Smith 1999). The researcher will be given a place in the community and should not assume what it will be, nor that it will be static over time. Academia tends to focus on issues/problems to be solved and hail the researcher as the centre of the project. It can be a shock to the system when working with a different world view where the researcher is no more or less valued than anyone else. In traditional Indigenous lives humans have been seen as one of the many threads in the tapestry of life, as equal and not more important than anything else on earth (Kwaymullina 2008: 9).

According to Corradi Fiumara (1990), listening and relationship go hand in hand. She describes listening as an act of holding the other person's thought so as to allow the development and expression of a new, unborn thought from our own mind. Gadamer says that listening requires openness and that, "without this kind of openness to one another there is no genuine human relationship" (Corradi Fiumara 1990: 28). To be a respectful allied listener requires me to relate in an open-minded way with others and see the relationship as important and valuable.

Open eyes and see

I remember talking to a colleague about my first visit, in 2002, to Halls Creek in the Kimberley. Before going there I had been warned of its dangers by my non-Indigenous work mates. While I saw things that were new to my white sensitivities such as the caged bar at the hotel and the obvious financial poverty for so many families, there was another side to Halls Creek. I was welcomed by local Aboriginal people and saw the closeness of family, the support and strength of Elders. I heard about Halls Creek from the voices of Aboriginal people and saw first hand some of the exploitation that was still happening at the hands of some of the non-Indigenous population.

My colleague had lived and worked in the Kimberley for some time. His response was "I am pleased you got to see that side of Halls Creek. So many people are in such a hurry that they don't see it. They assume everything is bad and go there to do good, to fix it without really looking first". So much harm has been done in the name of "doing good" and "being good white people" (Riggs, 2004), because there is an assumption that the only way to frame the world and history is via our Western knowledge (Corradi Fiumara 1990: 19).

Non-Indigenous privilege permeates insidiously at even every day levels. Peggy McIntosh (2007: 99-100) refers to the "invisible knapsack" that white people carry around with us, often totally unaware of its existence. In a list of twenty six statements, McIntosh asks us to consider every day issues that Indigenous people can face including such things as being asked to speak for all people of their race and learning from a curriculum that excludes their race being seen as a valued part of making the world what it is. She challenges non-Indigenous people to see what life might be like for us if we were to face such things each and every day. McIntosh assists us to consider the day to day insidious nature of "patriarchal white sovereignty" (Moreton-Robinson 2004). To be an apprentice allied listener it is necessary to open my eyes and see the world in a different way and from another viewpoint.

Close mouth, slow down; Interaction is a ceremony

Over the years I have found that, the more time spent getting to know others when I first meet them, the more smoothly things run later on, especially if conflict arises. When attending meetings among the Aboriginal community I notice that there is always time for people to catch up, to learn about what is happening and to put people into some kind of context before business begins. This observation is expanded on and exemplified by Shayne Williams

(2007: 1) who outlines such a process as a story dialogue rather than “simply a matter of stating the bare facts as is common in Western forms of communication.” As Miriam Rose Ungenmerr says, “We wait for the right time for our ceremonies and meetings. The right people must be present. Careful preparations must be made. We don’t mind waiting because we want things to be done with care.”

I cannot listen if I am rushing around to a rigid timeline or am constantly filling the air with the sound of my own thoughts and voice (Corradi Fiumara, 1990). One of the challenges to many non-Indigenous people is allowing room for contemplation, thinking and conferring with others so that a measured, clear and thought about response can be offered. To work this way “might be a harder process, take longer and may require giving up the taken-for-granted Western privilege and authority, but it can be done in successful ways” (Dudgeon 2008: 16). Attending to my interactions as a form of ceremony that takes into account Indigenous ways of working seems essential if I am to create a decentred space as an apprentice allied listener.

In our time-poor Western culture, we focus on the outcomes, the destination, the action and being seen to be doing something that can be quantified. It is easy then to forget the finer art of ceremony. I have had to learn to close my mouth and allow others to speak – and speak first. I have to shut down the expectations I have of where things are headed and how they will look and be brave enough to go where it leads.

One of the most common complaints I have heard from those who work and live in remote towns and communities is that white people from the city fly in one day, have a meeting and “consult” with locals and fly out that night. Similarly, as researchers it is tempting to enter Indigenous space by saying what we want, without first asking if it is alright for us to be there, introducing ourselves and taking time to ask about those around us. Shaun Wilson (2008) takes the view that ethical Indigenous research is a ceremony and, for me, this ceremony takes the form of greeting, establishing a connection, identifying the boundaries and limits. All of this has to happen before it is appropriate to move on into a place of action. As Karen Martin (2008) writes, *Please knock before you enter.*

So, to be an apprentice allied listener I need to have and show “good manners” and respect the process and listen to stories until they are told, not until I want to present some kind of solution.

Acknowledge the spiritual

As can be seen by the quote from Carbaugh at the beginning of this article, listening is not merely an intellectual action. It involves all the senses and the heart/spirit. The word ‘dadirri’, which describes the Aboriginal concept of deep listening, is from the language of the Ngangikurungkur people of the Daly River area but many other Indigenous groups in Australia have similar concepts. Miriam Rose Ungenmerr says that Dadirri “is inner deep listening and quiet still awareness - something like what you call contemplation” (Atkinson 2002:16). All matter has spirit that we can listen to. Deep listening happens with people, the earth, the animals, the plants, the rocks and

mountains (Carbaugh 1999). Deep listening does not always require spoken words (Harrison 2009).

Silence is an essential component of listening. It can create a space that permits the building of relationship, a sense of acceptance and guarantees more chance of actually hearing what is being said. It is an invitation to meet, or clash as the case may be and creates a place for connection (Corradi Fiumara 1990: 99-112). Silence allows a relationship focused process in which we honour and respect diverse ways of knowing, difference and togetherness and engage in contemplative practice. Such contemplative practice involves all of “Seeing the land ...the beauty; Hearing the land...the story; Feeling the land...the spirit.” (Harrison 2009; frontispiece).

To open hearts and feel is a huge challenge for a culture based on the “British stiff upper lip and not being over emotional” but, where there is loss and trauma such as that felt by Indigenous people as a result of the pervasive power of whiteness, there must be pain (Atkinson 2002; Atkinson and Woods 2008). Such pain cannot be dealt with in a purely objective, unfeeling way.

The non-tangible and unmeasurable nature of spirituality could be seen as a sign of research being subjective and lacking in academic rigour. Yet, spirituality is central to learning in Indigenous cultures around the globe and has been noted as a core element of Indigenous life (Williams, 2007). Based on Grande (2000:356) the table below clarifies the tension that can arise in research planning and design as a result of this difference.

Issue	White/Western	Indigenous
World crisis is	economic	spiritual
Education's central question is	democracy and greater equality	sovereignty self
determination		
Scholars focus on	intellectual-political	mind/body/spirit connection

Table 1: Tensions in 'white' and Indigenous approaches to research (adapted from Grande 2000: 356)

The literature written by Indigenous authors supports the central importance of what I had started to learn informally from Indigenous community members. *Putting relationships at the centre, closing mouth and slowing down, interacting as a ceremony, opening eyes and seeing, opening heart and feeling/acknowledging spirituality* are central to ensuring I can be an apprentice allied listener who is beginning to turn down the volume of white noise.

Privileging Indigenous voices as an apprentice allied listener

Together, the aspects of Re-learning, Reviewing and Relating provide me with a model for checking in on my own research listening behaviour (see figure 1). They interact in my life to provide me with a mechanism to focus less on my own world view and increasingly on appropriate ways of working with Aboriginal people in a research context. To be able to effectively Re-learn,

Review and Relate it is essential for me, as a non-Indigenous worker to base my approach on the Privileging of Indigenous Voices. If I fail to do this, I doubt that it is possible for me to move out of my colonial-centric way of working. Without privileging indigenous voices in all of my processes, reading, interaction and analysis, I am still working from a place of white noise.

This model of being an apprentice allied listener is the product of reading, privileging Indigenous voices and reflecting on what I have learned along the journey of research preparation. The facets of the model interact. Learning or behaviour change in one aspect will lead to changes in the others. There is no sense of a linear progression; it is more of an organic and three dimensional process.

Some Challenges for apprentice allied listeners

At this stage I am proposing this model as something I have found to be of use to myself in preparing to conduct PhD research that requires listening to the voices of Aboriginal people. The model does, however, pose some challenges and questions for non-Indigenous apprentices of allied listening. I explore these briefly below. The model could also benefit from further application and development by other non-Indigenous researchers in a variety of contexts.

A way of being – not a “skill set”

It is quite likely that non-Indigenous researchers may think that allied listening is something useful for and limited to work “in the field”. I have found that, the longer I work with Aboriginal people as an ally who is open to learning from them, the less I am inclined to take on a new mantle in a work context. Rather, I find that this form of listening is becoming a part of my every day world, even out of the research environment. It is not merely a skill set to learn and use for “cross-cultural work”. To utilise the model in such a way would mean that I am still operating from that place of power and privilege; a place of patriarchal white sovereignty.

The dilemma of self-reflexivity

Carbaugh’s quote at the beginning of this article suggests that, to listen effectively we must look beyond ourselves. I argue that, to do this, we must first know ourselves and our stance on history, core values and viewpoints. Such self-reflexivity is however potentially a trap of self-indulgent navel-gazing that perpetuates the privilege of whiteness. It is important to be very aware of the motive for my reflexivity. I am white and as suggested by writers such as Peggy MacIntosh, Aileen Moreton-Robinson, Fiona Nicoll and Damien Riggs, my whiteness provides an automatic level of privilege. To reflect helps me to notice any backsliding into old habits of being less respectful than I need to be.

I do not reflect in isolation and that also helps avoid navel-gazing. Rather, I check out thoughts with others, such as Indigenous mentors when trying to establish where I stand as an allied listener. Aveling (2007) finds it

useful to think of a continuum from a state of unawareness to a state of consciousness at the other. She adds that few people are at either extreme, but somewhere along the continuum. I am reflexive for the purpose of moving myself along that continuum. I want to move along the continuum in order to muffle the white noise and listen more effectively.

Clash of academic and cultural rigour

When I set out to find how to work alongside Aboriginal people in a way that would mean I listen appropriately I found little to assist me in the Western academic literature. Where I find the greatest assistance is from the words of Indigenous authors themselves. And one of the key things being said by those authors (Dudgeon 2008; 2009; Grande 2000; 2007; Martin 2003; 2008; Smith 1999;) was the necessity of privileging Indigenous voices.

Until recently Indigenous World Views were absent altogether from the Academy. Fredericks (2009: 14) notes that “The reality is that universities can and do reproduce imperial attitudes and processes which marginalise and exclude us [indigenous academics] whilst proclaiming that they want to include and involve us”. As Fredericks’ comment reveals, Indigenous academics still struggle to be heard and have legitimacy in the colonial institution par excellence that is University.

The research referred to by many Indigenous academics that made research a dirty word for Indigenous Australians (Martin 2003; Smith 1999; Fredericks 2008a&b) now contributes to the body of academic knowledge the academy refers to on “Indigenous Issues”. As a student of the post-colonizing institution that is University, I am required to draw on this body of knowledge to legitimize what I say and to meet the demands established by western world views and standards. I am faced with the fact that the words of non-Indigenous academics from the nineteenth and twentieth century are seen as more valid and given more credence in this arena than the words passed down over at least fifty thousand years by Aboriginal people themselves.

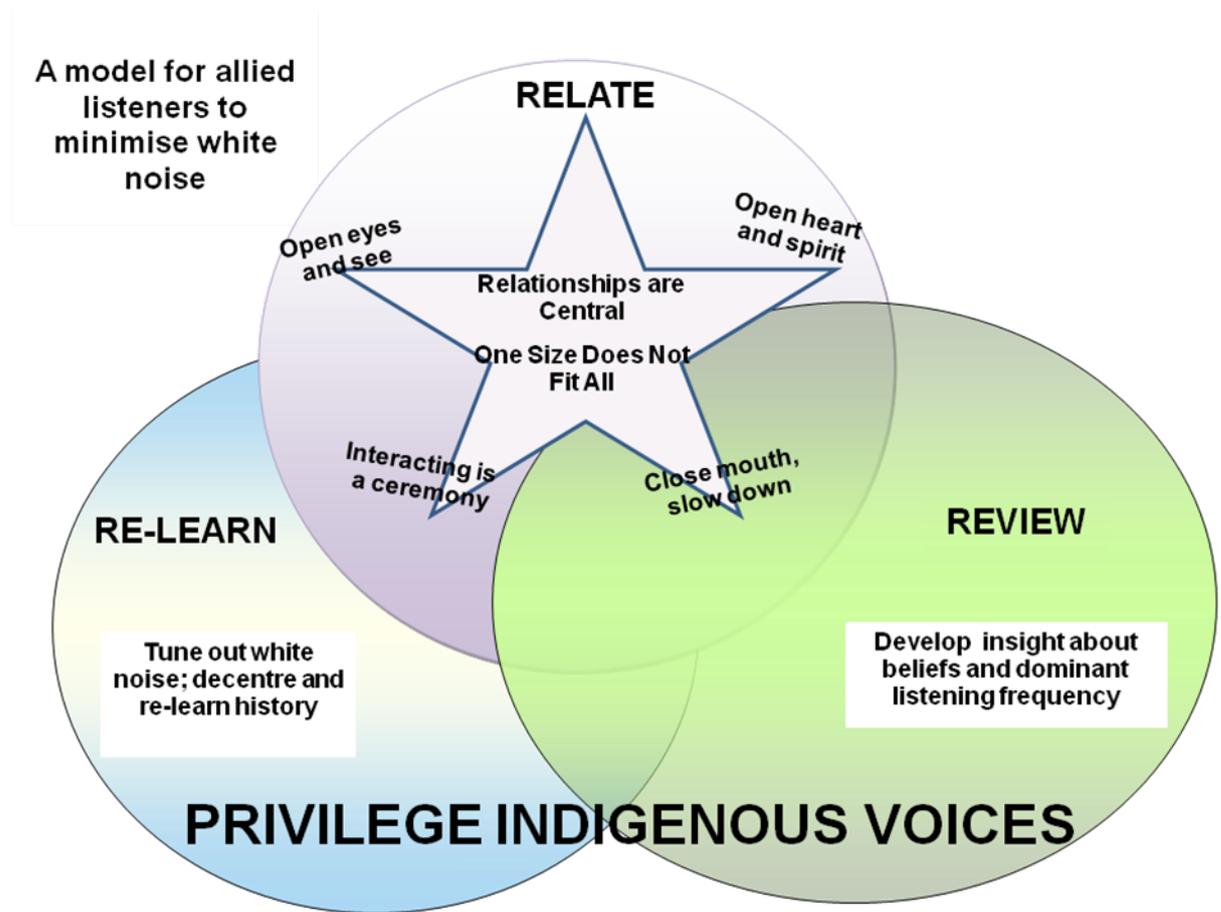
It is part of my role as an apprentice allied listener to challenge researchers and western institutions to broaden their research approaches to favour voices and practices that are based on Indigenous ways of being, knowing and acting. Many academic researchers have learned from knowledge based on colonial practices established by white Europeans and could well have unwittingly conducted research that did more to hurt than help.

Such considerations and challenges are, however, themselves extensive enough to be the subject of their own paper(s). I flag them here for consideration and to note them as areas in need of being further addressed. More than two hundred years of white noise has not created a safe, respectful space in which Indigenous people can meet with non-Indigenous people as equals. By engaging as an apprentice allied listener I aim to develop an ethical, de-centred and respectful research partnership with Indigenous people that is not totally dominated by a colonial white world view.

Conclusion

If non-Indigenous people can, within the research context, become apprentice allied listeners and privilege indigenous voices they can begin to retune their listening frequency. Given Australia's colonial history and the inherent power of whiteness in this country some interference and a degree of white noise is likely to be unavoidable. There are issues that impact on the ability to do this; issues that hang over from our colonial past and white power and privilege. The clash between academic and cultural rigour, for example, has yet to be resolved and much work is needed in this area by white people who are open to being apprentice allied listeners alongside Indigenous academics, researchers and communities. This does not mean, however, that we cannot aim to minimise the impact of white noise. If non-Indigenous researchers such as myself can become apprentice allied listeners by relearning history, reviewing our understanding of key concepts and beliefs about the world and begin to adopt ways of relating known and practice by Indigenous people for many millennia, there is a good chance of minimising the white noise. Perhaps then researchers can begin to listen more as "a part of the scene, hearing and feeling with it" (Carbaugh 1999: 259).

Figure 1



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