

The Wilful Character of Indigenous Educational Research

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In her recent work, Sara Ahmed explores wilfulness as a negative charge made by some against others, thinking about the relationship between ill will and good will, the particular and the general, and the embeddedness of will in a political and cultural landscape. In Ahmed's reading, wilfulness is a characteristic often ascribed to those who do 'not will the reproduction of the whole' (2011, p. 246) — those who are deemed wayward, wandering, and/or deviant. Using Ahmed's discussions, in this paper, we report on the successes and failures of a research project exploring mentoring programs in enhancing the recruitment and retention of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander preservice teachers. We think about the tensions always present between two faces of such a project: the need to reproduce modes of compliance to the expectations of a Western academic institutional regime; and the wilful pursuit of the kinds of wayward resistance and critique that may be potentially undermining and self-sabotaging as well as wholly necessary as attempts at decoloniality. We report on both the successes of the program and the continuing failure to address issues of colonialism. In doing so, we position Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander research as a performative doubleness which needs wilfulness in order to 'stand up, to stand against the world' (Ahmed, 2011, p. 250) of colonial reproduction in neo-liberal times.

■ **Keywords:** Coloniality, decoloniality, Indigenous education, mentoring, Sara Ahmed, wilfulness

This project *will* evaluate the use and effectiveness of a mentoring program as a positive intervention for building and sustaining Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander initial teacher education students.

The project *will* align with national, state and local imperatives and initiatives to 'Close the Gap' in educational outcomes for Indigenous Australian students.

A positive and practical contribution *will* be made.

This project *will* build upon existing work in the field.

This project *will* be critically reflective and strengths-based.

This project *will* take one year.

The project *will* take place in the School of Education.

This project *will* involve a Project Leader and Project Manager, two groups of research participants and a Reference Group.

Participants *will* be selected, invited and participate in training, mentoring, interviews and video diaries.

The project *will* be continuously evaluated.

Meetings *will* be held.

The researchers *will* report the results of this project to the education research and higher education communities, and in particular, at one (or more) national conferences.

And here we are. Doing the wilful work that we said we will do. In this paper, we discuss the successes and

failures of a mentoring project developed to enhance the recruitment and retention of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander pre-service teachers. In her recent work, Sara Ahmed explores wilfulness as a negative charge often made by some against others. She offers a way of thinking about the relationship between ill will and good will, the will of the particular and the general, the embeddedness of will in a political and cultural landscape, and how such wills are embodied, controlled and socially mediated. In Ahmed's reading, wilfulness is a characteristic often ascribed to those who do 'not will the reproduction of the whole' (2011, p. 246) — those who are deemed wayward, wandering, and/or deviant. Using Ahmed's discussions of 'wilful' characters and subjects, in this paper we report on the successes and failures of a research project exploring the effectiveness of mentoring programs in enhancing the recruitment and retention of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander preservice teachers as a response to the reform and research agenda of improving educational

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outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students. We think about the tensions always present between two faces of such a project: the need to reproduce modes of compliance to the expectations of a neo-liberal funding regime; and the wilful pursuit of the kinds of wayward resistance and critique that may be potentially undermining and self-sabotaging as well as wholly necessary. In doing so, we position Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander research as a performative doubleness which needs wilfulness in order to 'stand up, to stand against the world' (Ahmed, 2011, p. 250) of colonial reproduction in neo-liberal times, but also recognises that such wilfulness remains unsettled and unsettling, always particular and always subject to the general will.

A Note on Positioning

We are white-settler-colonial-non-Indigenous teacher educators who believe in the importance of Indigenous Australian education for all Australian children and are implicated in various and multiple ways in the wilful work of this project. Indeed, as Ahmed reminds us, our positioning as colonial and White wilful subjects doing particular kinds of wilful work in Indigenous Australian education requires discursive attention to the ways coloniality and Whiteness in and of themselves might readily 'be described as an ongoing and unfinished history, which orientates bodies in specific directions, affecting how they take up space' (2007, p. 150). Mackinlay grew up on Watharung country in Western Victoria, but was 'properly grown up' as a non-Indigenous academic by her husband's Yanyuwa Aboriginal family at Burrulula while researching there in the early 1990s. Since then, she has been on an ongoing journey to 'unlearn' the power and privileges of her coloniality and engage in an ethico-onto-epistemological kind of performativity grounded in a material, affective and discursive relationality which seeks decoloniality. It is this sense of relationality which led Mackinlay to consider the ways in which she might work more wilfully towards such decoloniality in her work with Indigenous pre-service teachers and the mentoring program began to take shape. Bright grew up on Bundjalung country in northern New South Wales, but did not know this until much later. Living and working in South East Asia provided the incitement for him to confront questions of his own coloniality, and he remains uncertain of his place in Australia. He has taught undergraduate Indigenous education programs for preservice teachers and managed the day-to-day operations of the mentoring program. Both authors might be described then as 'diversity workers' inhabiting the 'diversity world' (Ahmed, 2011, p. 3) because of their involvement as non-Indigenous educators within the space of Indigenous Australian education. As we write this paper, we are keenly aware of the two kinds of diversity workers that Ahmed (2011, p. 3) describes —

those who are institutional appointees charged with transforming and diversifying the institution itself, and those who do not quite fit the norms of the institutions. The following question sits uneasily beside and behind this discussion as we ask, what kind of diversity workers are we in relation to 'wilful work' that might be considered decolonial?

The Program

The graduation of more Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander teachers and the increased placement of Indigenous teachers in Australian classrooms are seen as integral factors to improving the educational outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students across early childhood, primary and secondary schooling contexts (Mellor & Corrigan, 2004; MCEECDYA, 2010.). In order to put in place positive strategies to improve the preparedness and resilience of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students to undertake study and find employment in teaching, the School of Education at the University of Queensland, in collaboration with the Office of the Pro-Vice Chancellor Indigenous Education, entered into a partnership with the More Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Teachers Initiative (MATSITI), implementing a mentoring program that represents one small step towards fulfilling that agreement by taking up MATSITI's recommendations to target improvements in the ways that cultural understanding and safety is fostered during the professional practice experiences of preservice teachers (Patton, Lee Hong, Lampert, Burnett, & Anderson, 2012).

Funded jointly by MATSITI and the Office of Learning and Teaching, the aim of this mentoring program is to use mentoring as a positive intervention for building and sustaining Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander initial teacher education students' participation in tertiary education programs, their self-efficacy and professional identity as teachers, and their readiness to teach, resulting in a positive and practical contribution to the central goals of MATSITI regarding the retention, graduation and entry into the workforce of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander teachers.

The mentoring program was developed in 2013 in consultation with a reference group of Indigenous and non-Indigenous educators. It operates in partnership with two schools — one primary and one secondary — in south-western Brisbane, both with enduring practical and research relationships with the School of Education and a demonstrated commitment to current Indigenous education agendas. Preservice teacher mentees are recruited from enrolled education students through personal contact by the project team. Teacher mentors are selected by the principal and deputy principal in each school, based on an assessment of their performance, interest and suitability to mentor across cultural and racial differences.

These teachers are those considered by the principals to be excellent educators and with an interest in working in the field of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander education. Mentors and mentees are then matched by the project team in conversation with the principals based on program orientation, academic interests and any stated personal preferences such as age, gender and so on.

The program itself comprises a professional development day, followed by an eight week program of in-school mentoring which includes one day a week in-class observation and participation, as well as out of class opportunities for feedback, discussion and broader involvement in the schools' community and activities. The professional day consists of cultural-awareness training for both mentors and mentees provided by a number of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander educators with a strong working relationship with the School of Education. This training is focused on helping mentor teachers explore the complexities of working with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander preservice teachers, and on helping Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander preservice teachers explore the complexities of working in mainstream Australian schools. Following this all participants have an opportunity to explore the complexities of mentoring, the nature of the mentoring relationship and the potential benefits and challenges of entering into a mentoring relationship. This also operates as an opportunity for mentors and mentees to spend some initial time getting to know each other and negotiating how their particular relationship might proceed. The overriding aim of the professional development day is to provide a space for 'relationship' to occur across a number of areas as follows:

- for the mentors and mentees to meet and begin to establish their personal relationships;
- for experienced and less experienced educators to listen to the voices and experiences of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander educators in relation to what the experience of becoming, being and belonging in the teaching profession might be like;
- for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander education students to form broader networks among themselves;
- for teachers and principals to form broader networks within the school system
- and for all involved to work together to develop and map out what the practical activities of the mentoring program might look like.

Following the professional development day, mentee preservice teachers are accompanied on their first visit to the school which involves an orientation and initial observation. After this, the practical nature of the mentoring itself becomes the responsibility of the mentor and mentee in the relationship with one another, with the project team remaining available to provide support and assistance as required.

Evaluation

We should very much like to report on the success of the project. To claim that it was effective, that it assisted in the retention of those preservice teachers who participated, that it means they are now more likely to successfully finish their degrees, to graduate, to seek and find employment as teachers, and to teach new generations of Australian school children as Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander teachers or teachers who are Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders. That as such the project represents reform and innovation, progress and development, outcomes, deliverables and milestones, partnerships and engagement, differentiation, value-for-money and sustainable outcomes. And we base this evaluation on the voices of those who participated, the preservice teachers who commented that they found the program successful:

Yeah, it was really good. You had the teachers were all quite welcoming and not only that you had the students as well which I wasn't expecting so much. I expected the kids to play up a little bit with someone new in the classroom but no, they were all very good, very polite, things like that. It was quite a nice environment to work in. It was really good.

It was really quite empowering.

It feels good to be a part of it. I really enjoy it.

It was all very good experience for my first time.

We actually had the principal come and ask me about a few of my experiences at the school and how it's all going and yeah - very lovely and very involved which was quite good.

The students are really getting to know me and I think it's good. They all seem to like me, which means I'm relatable. But they don't seem to abuse that power, which is really good and I enjoy being there. It's a really nice atmosphere and it's just a really great school overall and I really want to teach there.

I got to go in on a lot of different things which was pretty good.

It was all really good.

It's really been good because it's helped me reinforce the fact that I want to be a teacher and it's also helped me get back into art as well, which is good.

This whole thing has given me a lot of confidence, which is good.

The mentoring relationship provides preservice teachers with a different kind of space in which they can be comfortable 'just getting comfortable' and *being* in the classroom while developing an understanding of how things work. What this affords students is a chance to confirm and reinforce decisions to *become* a teacher which can be seen in these responses:

There isn't really much else that I can say about yesterday other than it was more about just me being in the atmosphere, just getting comfortable with being in the classroom.

I'm gaining a lot of confidence and it's really good. I think it's just really I guess confirming that I want to be a teacher. It's making it just easier and I know when it comes around me to me doing my prac this experience is phenomenal. I'm going to be so far ahead of all of my peers at university.

I'm gaining a lot of experience and a lot of confidence and I guess I never thought I would have that. But it's doing wonders for helping me just confirm that this is what I want to do and it's great.

I think it was really successful. It really set in stone that I wanted to be a teacher, just being in the classroom. Like having students come up to me and actually talk to me and just kind of giving me more confidence so definitely very successful in my eyes.

We read in these reflections that the mentoring program provides a space for students to *be* in classrooms in safe and comfortable ways, which in turn provides preservice teachers with an opportunity to build confidence, and confirms and validates their decision to *become* a teacher. Participation in mentoring also provides preservice teachers with an opportunity to observe and gain a better understanding of what a future of being a teacher will mean to them personally:

I actually asked a few questions about towards the end of term about how it all works with time management and things like that. She was quite helpful with her advice and telling me how things work around the school, different approaches teachers take.

Preservice teachers get to ask teachers questions, to see how teaching and classrooms work, and to see, ask and discuss the different approaches that may be available to them as teachers.

We also see in preservice teachers' reflections a developing sense of rightfully *belonging* in the classroom and to the profession, stemming from the understanding, confidence and sense of comfort gained from the mentoring relationship:

I know I won't freak out the first time I have to go into a classroom and teach because even though I haven't been teaching per se, I know what to do. I have confidence in myself.

They know that they now know what to do and that they would not be out of place in the classroom. We argue that the opportunity to work with an experienced and excellent mentor in a culturally safe environment provides preservice teachers with an opportunity to develop a sense of belonging that is enhanced by the close relational nature of the mentoring pairing, and that this, in turn, contributes to the retention, graduation and employment of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander teachers:

So yeah, I'm really looking forward the rest of the term, learning some tips from [my mentor teacher] . . . so far he's given me a lot of information and been really enthusiastic and it's made me feel less nervous and more optimistic for my future as being a teacher.

In addition, teacher-mentors report how mentoring helps them gain confidence and inspiration. For example, one teacher said mentoring:

. . . helped me to have more confidence in my methods of teaching. It inspired in me the belief that a simple one-on-one conversational approach based upon anecdotal references to classroom experiences is an appropriate way of conveying my thoughts and ideas about teaching and my concerns about behavioural issues in the classroom.

And how they learn as a teacher from participating as a mentor:

I have found being a part of the program really helpful. I have also learnt from the student regarding teaching Indigenous topics. It has been a pleasure to work with him.

Meanwhile, school principals see concrete benefits for the school in mentoring through the development of teachers quite apart from the development of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander preservice teachers:

So at the end of the day, [the mentees] will come and go. We might see them come back but the reality is they'll do their time with us, they'll graduate, they'll go and get a job. But the skills we're giving the teachers to stay on in the school.

An added bonus to the school is that as long as that teacher remains at the school . . . I'll be able to keep those teachers with those skills in the school. Aside from working with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander pre-service teachers, it's just a good skillset and knowledge base to have so that's probably another bonus that we may not have reported on in the past.

And benefits for school students through the presence of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander mentees in the school:

The original concept that I had as a principal being self-centred was around an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander presence in the school putting out their role models for not only our very small Indigenous population but for our non-Indigenous students just to see well this is what Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people can do in education.

I think that's really great, particularly in prep, that there is a non - I think the term we've used in the past is a non-sliced white bread person - in the school who is being seen and kids, particularly in prep, are prepared to ask the question, you know, where are you from? Or whatever the case might be. Where they might expect the answer to be Indian or Asian, which is the population here at the school, to be able to say I'm an Australian and talk about that and I'm an Aboriginal Australian, I think that's gold.

What would be a good outcome for me? I'd love to have a presence across every year level, every year, which now would only be seven people if we were to aim at that. If you look at all the people that have come and gone, if they'd all stuck around we'd have six.

And so we will evaluate the program as effective and successful, arguing that it will make a positive and practical contribution to improving outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students across primary and secondary schooling contexts. We will, and we have done, and we will have done so freely, for it was and it will be; this is the character of the project: it is effective and successful.

Will

Ahmed (2011) draws on Rousseau's (1911) *Émile* to consider the ways a child's will can be directed without being compelled. In *Émile*, the narrator describes a capricious child, 'accustomed not only to have his own way, but to make everyone else do as he pleased' (Rousseau, 1911, p. 86). As Ahmed (2011, p. 237) describes it, 'The narrator arranges for the child to experience firsthand the unpleasant consequences of insisting on his own will' by arranging for people to oppress and tease the child when he insists on going out, and by these means succeeds in 'getting him to everything I wanted without bidding him or forbidding him to do anything' (Rousseau, 1911, p. 89). The child thus, as Ahmed (2011, p. 237) describes, 'comes to will what the narrator wants him to will, without that will being subject to a command'. Ahmed concludes:

The subjection of will can thus take place under the sign of freedom. It is quite clear from the example how freedom of will is preserved as an idea that works to conceal the work of its creation. The child is made to will according to the will of those in authority, without ever being conscious of the circumstances of this making (2011, p. 238).

We are more than willing to report on the successes of our project. It was 'our' project and it was good. But here Ahmed and Rousseau cause us pause to consider the extent that our will to will this certain way is already willed. That the power that shapes our desire to report these successes is a form of force that cannot always be experienced as force, in that it might operate in the way of Rousseau's narrator, making unbearable the consequences of not willing that which we are being willed to will. That we 'will "freely" what someone wills [us] to will' (Ahmed, 2011, p. 245).

Wilful Work

What are the consequences of not willing what we will? Of questioning what we are willing or not willing to do as a wilful part of the whole? Of not reporting on the successes of our project? Of wilfully dwelling on its contradictions, inconsistencies and failures? Of what went wrong? Or will go wrong? Of what we did or will do wrong? Will our project continue to be funded if the kind of wilfulness we are suggesting here compromises the very capacity of this wilful subject to survive? Is it at this point that will becomes wall (Ahmed, 2012), because our failures become a problem — the 'problem' of Indigenous education — that will not be heard? Ahmed writes that:

Wilfulness can be attributed to those who refuse a command, or who refuse to be commanded. Note that a command is not always explicitly given by someone to someone. A command can be given in the very sharing of a direction. We can think of social experience as an experience of flow. We all know the experience of "going the wrong way" in a crowd. . . . The wilful character is the one who "stands out" in the force field of the social, which is to say the field of the familiar (Ahmed, 2011, p. 245).

We might view the university and funding and reporting regimes within which we operate as a body with parts which embodies particular kinds of direction, or flow, of familiar social forces. To go with the flow is to become part of the whole and willingly submit applications, attract funding, report on project outcomes, publish results and so on. For this project our funding partners have willingly provided reporting templates, the sharing of a direction of how to report, what to say, what counts in the success and successful reporting of the project. These are the parts that make the body whole, and to become part, we must will what the institutional body wills (Ahmed, 2012, p. 7). In becoming part of the whole, our reporting on the success acquiesces to the whole's demand for obedience (Ahmed, 2012, p. 6). To not submit to this direction and command, to go against the flow, to go the wrong way, could be thought of as wilful. Not just to refuse to report, but to refuse to report and obstruct the directions shared within the template: reform and innovation, progress and development, outcomes, deliverables and milestones, partnerships and engagement, differentiation, value-for-money and sustainability outcomes. The consequences for getting in the way of compliant happiness, we suggest, would mean becoming the obstacle unbearable — the wilful part which Ahmed (2012, p. 6) suggests 'would cause the unhappiness or ill health' of the institutional body. Standing out against the flow of forces in such a way as to be excluded from the process itself. Standing-out that will not attract funding. That will not be successful. Ahmed argues:

This is why some forms of force might not be experientiable as force, as they involve a sense of being willing. Force can even take the following form: the making unbearable of the consequences of not willing what someone wills you to will. A condition of bearability would then be to will "freely" what someone wills you to will. (2011, p. 245)

It is thus that we are forced to 'freely' will what we are willed to will.

Wilful Parts

And perhaps it is our own force, unbidden, and neither bidding nor forbidding anything, that wills our participants to 'freely' will that which we will: that the project is successful and effective; that it is good. Perhaps the consequences of participating in and constituting an unsuccessful project are unbearable, for it would mean to have failed, and to have failed to have willingly succeeded in that which you are willed to will. Perhaps this is why everything is 'good': because it must be, for if it is not good it must be bad. A wilful reminder that whispers in our hearts (after Reynolds & Hodder, 1999) long after the templates are filled and reports written, of histories and complicities that have already been 'willed away' in the wilfulness to close the gap and become part of the whole (Ahmed, 2012, p. 13). And here the kind of wilfulness that

Ahmed suggests begins to take a different turn, a resistant and defiant turn that will remain. This is the wilful work of ‘un-forgetting, of un-silencing, of un-earthing, of un-blinding oneself and of un-deafening oneself’ (Cixous, 1979, p. 78) that enables the wilful subject of Indigenous education research to keep ‘turning up’ (Ahmed, 2012, p. 16) and to keep getting in the way of the general good and institutional will.

Ahmed (2012) draws on the work of Blaise Pascal to consider the relationship between the will of the particular and the general will of the body. Pascal asks us to

Imagine a body full of thinking members. If the foot and the hands had a will of their own, they could only be in their order in submitting their particular will to the primary will which governs the whole body. Apart from that, they are in disorder and mischief; but in willing only the goal of the body, they accomplish their own goal (2003, p. 132).

The lesson to be learned from Pascal’s mischievous foot, writes Ahmed, is that ‘the wilful part is that which threatens the reproduction of an order’ (Ahmed, 2011, p. 243).

As an institutional body, the Westernised university and the parts that do its will exist as the order, logic and locus of coloniality (after Mignolo, 2011). The theoretical, philosophical, epistemological, ontological and physical parts which make up the university body, privilege, as hooks (2004, p. 17) describes, white supremacist, capitalist, imperialist and patriarchal systems of knowledge. Indeed, the established canon of the Westernised university, argues Grosfoguel (2013, pp. 74–75), is largely based on socio-historical experience and views of a few men located in the Global North, which he describes as ‘Western men epistemic privilege’ (p. 77). The way of Western men epistemic privilege that is willed then in the ‘modern’ university to enable it to keep going its way relies upon ‘colonial structures of knowledge as the foundational epistemology’ (Grosfoguel, 2013, p. 74) and the continued performativity of a ‘coloniality of being’ (Maldonado-Torres, 2008). A coloniality of being that wills away all those who cannot think, do and be according to its will. All of those subjects (including Indigenous peoples) and knowledges (including that of Indigenous peoples) that are already considered inferior are called into question as wilful subjects not willing to go with the way of the general or institutional will and by extension deemed not worthy of existence. Such wilful parts of the whole, Ahmed (2012, p. 9) suggests, can be blocked and banished in Grosfoguel’s terms to the ‘Fanonian “zone of non-being” and the Dusselian “ex-teriority”’ (2013, p. 87).

‘To be a thinking member of a body’, Ahmed (2011, p. 243) concludes, ‘thus requires *you remember you are part of a body*. Wilfulness thus refers to the part that, in willing, has forgotten it is *just a part*. Pascal writes:

If the foot had always been ignorant that it belonged to the body, and that there was a body on which it depended, if it

had only the knowledge and the love of self, what regret, what shame for its past life, for having been useless to the body that inspired its life...! What prayers for its preservation in it! For every member must be worthy to perish for the body, for which alone the whole is (2003, p. 132).

Might we suggest that the wilful subject of Indigenous educational research is that which, in willing, has forgotten that it is just a part of the distributed will of coloniality? In wilfully unforgetting coloniality, in unforgetting the white supremacist, capitalist, imperialist and patriarchal character of the institution, the funding regime, the social body, the discipline and the disciplining, we wilfully forget to submit to the whole, wilfully forget to reproduce the order of coloniality, of Australia, and wilfully seek to ‘compromise the preservation of the body of which [we are] a part’ (Ahmed, 2011, p. 243). And unforgetting coloniality, if possible, in a way that will remember that decolonisation is not a metaphor but is, rather, complete with incommensurability, anxiety and impoverishment (Tuck & Yang, 2012).

How will we enact such wilfulness? Ahmed (2011, pp. 249–250) says we can read wilfulness as the potential to deviate from well-trodden paths, to wander, to err, to stray, to speak out about the injustice of what recedes, to keep going the wrong way, to announce your disagreement and be willing to be judged as disagreeable, as audacity, as standing against, as creativity, to stand up, stand against the world, to create something that does not agree with that which is given. Would that we had heroic stories of audacious creativity to tell you, but we will not. But to stand against we will tell you of that which will not be willed by the general order of the funding regime, or the report template, of the institution, of that which will not be good. And so we will tell you other stories in addition to the stories of those students who participated, and were mentored, and completed or are completing their degrees, and are employed or seeking employment as teacher. In addition to these success stories we will write of the students who never participated, the students who expressed interest before disappearing, for whatever reason, the students who attended our orientation sessions before discontinuing their participation, the students who began the program and failed to complete it. The students whose voices we cannot quote as data and whose experiences we cannot report as successes.

We will write, like Thomas, Bystdzienski, and Desai (2015), of the work to be done on critically understanding what mentoring entails, both how the mentoring relationship is successful, and how the mentoring relationship contributes to success in other areas such as academic performance and employability. We will write about how despite recommending mentoring as practical and positive intervention:

researchers who study mentoring have yet to develop comprehensive explanations to account for the contributions of

mentoring to academic success as well as discover contextual factors that affect the success of a mentoring relationship. For example, while existing literature has emphasized the benefits of informal mentoring, few studies have focused on how the context of the mentoring relationship and the characteristics of the participants, such as gender, are related to the need for different types of mentoring (Jones & Corner, 2012; Zellers et al., 2008), including informal or formal mentoring structures. (2015, p. 144)

We will write about the ambiguity of mentoring, the definitions ranging from the very broad to the very specific, incorporating giving advice to mentees, providing them access to resources, protecting them from harm and promoting and recommend them for challenges and assignments (Darwin, 2000). We will write about characteristics of mentors, like Mathews (2003, p. 316), who notes two common elements that appear in concepts of the mentor: '(1) a mentor is usually a high ranking, influential, senior member of the organisation with significant experience and knowledge, and (2) the individual is also willing to share their experience with younger employees'. And we will write about our mentor teachers, who are mostly more senior, more experienced, established and recognised as excellent teachers, who provide advice, and access, and protection, and promotion to mentees. But who also constitute something else entirely. We will write about the anxiety and nervousness experienced by these high ranking, influential, senior employees:

... looking back on it, I think that I was a bit overanxious about how today would unravel and I was really nervous, I suppose, about keeping her entertained or the interest that she would take in just being a passive observer of what goes on there. As it turned out, she was extremely involved in both of these classes and it was interesting for me to see the ways in which she really fully immersed herself in participating with what was going on there.

And their awkwardness and sadness, their hope that these younger preservice teachers will maintain contact with them, and continue seeking advice from them:

At the end of it, it was really, really awkward when [the student] left. I'd just gotten to the point where I was almost used to having her in the class and it was kind of sad to say goodbye. I hope she does keep in touch on some level, maybe for some advice.

Above all we will write of the general lack of will to speak about colonialism, and imperialism, and patriarchy, and whiteness, and race, and racialisation, and racism, in a program constituted as Indigenous Australian Educational research, a program which seeks to improve the retention of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander teachers in Australian classrooms because of all these things. We believe that there is still much work to be done on developing more critical understandings of what mentoring across racial boundaries entails. Mentoring retains

the potential to recycle the dominant colonial and patriarchal power relations present within Australian schools and classrooms, with powerful individuals potentially mentoring successors they identify as most like themselves, ignoring racial, gender and class inequalities and unchallenged assumptions implicit in traditional conceptions of mentoring which are framed around paternalistic and dependent relationships which reinforce dominant cultures and the status quo (Darwin, 2000, p. 197). We will write of our fear that even as we enact this wilfulness we remain as a wilful part of the whole that is Australia. And that as such we cannot be sure that our wilfulness, freely entered into, is not that which some unknowable narrator wills us to will, we like some capricious child unaware that we will freely that we should will, according to some general will, which is always a generalisation from a particular will, with the power to command and determine who or what is a part of the whole. And who or what remain always apart and always outside the social body and the general will, always Other, always Othered.

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