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Editorial

Aileen Moreton-Robinson, Mark McMillan, David Singh

The articles in this special edition attempt to capture the key learnings and the legacy of the Australian Research Council 'Special Research Initiative' funded by the National Indigenous Research and Knowledges Network (NIRAKN). NIRAKN is a national, inclusive, multidisciplinary hub-and-spokes-model network of Indigenous researchers at various stages of their careers. The significant research problem that the network sought to address was how to harness the power of diverse Indigenous knowledges to build a strong, sustainable cohort of linked, qualified, Indigenous researchers across disciplines and fields, and how to weave that cohort into the very fabric of Australian research.

NIRAKN maintained two key functions; devising and delivering a research capacity building program, and instituting a collaborative research program. It trained, supported and engaged new and emerging Indigenous researchers across disciplines and institutions, and facilitated collaborative research among established Indigenous researchers. The goal of this process remains to be closing the Indigenous research gap by developing extensive and skilled networks of Indigenous researchers who are empowered to ask new questions of old problems.

NIRAKN's activities, led by Director, Distinguished Professor Aileen Moreton-Robinson, were organised through the hub, and the work of four interdisciplinary, multi-institutional, virtual research nodes worked with community partner organisations to focus on key areas of concern for Indigenous researchers.

The first article, by Aileen Moreton-Robinson, outlines the historical and policy contexts of NIRAKN, and, further, surveys the Australian higher education sector's efforts at Indigenous research capacity building. The article concludes that NIRAKN, although representative of a welcome commitment to Indigenous research, cannot compensate for a more sustainable sector-wide commitment to Indigenous research and capacity building. Additional suggested initiatives include the development of Indigenous research strategies and ring-fenced training funds.

Harnessing the experience of being uniquely placed as members of NIRAKN, the second article, by Roxanne Bainbridge, Bronwyn Fredericks, Kathleen Clapham, Clair Anderson, Rowena Ball, Marlene Longbottom, Dawn Bessarab, Len Collard, Michael Adams, Yvette Roe, Ngare Wilson and Carolyn Daniels, examines ways in which support for Indigenous researchers can be improved in higher education institutions. The authors propose a NIRAKN-inspired model that "should be cross-disciplinary, have national and international reach and be characterised by connectedness, cultural safety and self-determination, and be located in a resource-rich environment."

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The third article, by Karen Martin, discusses the role of NIRAKN in advancing the scholarship of Aboriginal early childhood education through the network's collaborative research program. Martin believes NIRAKN to have been instrumental in raising awareness of Aboriginal knowledges in higher education, particularly in the area of qualitative research methodologies.

The final article, by Roxanne Bainbridge, charts her professional journey from researcher to research leader against the backdrop of her membership of NIRAKN. Using autoethnography, Bainbridge provides an assessment of what facilitated her career progression and suggests "that the unique 'Indigenous space' and Aboriginal mentorship provided by NIRAKN was critical in her successful transition to a research leadership position."

Book Review

The Last Blank Spaces: Exploring Africa and Australia by Dane Kennedy, Harvard University Press, Presidents and Fellows of Harvard College, United States, 2013, ISBN 9780674503861.

Reviewed by Greg Blyton, Senior Lecturer, University of Newcastle.