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Leading against the odds: understanding Indigenous women leadership from around the ‘campfire’

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Abstract
This paper employs the metaphor of storytelling “around the campfire”, used traditionally by Indigenous cultures to pass on knowledge, values, and norms to the younger generation. Drawing on my own perspective as an Indigenous African woman and my experience working with female Indigenous principals in remote schools in the Northern Territory in Australia, I will provide a series of vignettes as personal professional reflections on leadership drawing on journal entries made at the time of students’ views. The women were contacted to check the journal entries were accurate and suitable for inclusion. These stories and experiences have formed the basis of my doctoral research and have led to the development of key questions for investigation.

While numerous empirical studies have been generated over the years on the subject of educational leadership, it has, in most cases, some how failed to address the complex needs and realities of Indigenous female school leaders. Constructs of leadership have largely been prescribed by western and male orientated world views. In contrast to their non-indigenous counterparts, it has been my experience that remote Indigenous women leadership functions extend far beyond the confines of the school environment. It is critical that in any debate or research on educational leadership that indigenous female voices’ are represented.

Introduction
The paper intends to reflect a leadership perspective from an Australian Indigenous culture that many historians and researchers have widely described and referred to as the ‘world’s oldest’ surviving culture. The choice of using the ‘campfire’ metaphor to describe the processes and practices of such a distinctive culture is both symbolic and significant in a number of ways. The campfire has always had a significant place in most aspects of cultural activities. Traditionally in most indigenous cultures, story telling holds both a public and sacred significance- those for men only, women only, ceremonial, and initiation ones. Hence specific persons either earn the role or are born into it; others are being educated into it., and the storytellers of that nation are carrying out an obligation to pass the stories along. The elders of a nation might appoint a particularly skillful and knowledgeable storyteller as ‘custodian’ of the stories of that people.

Symbolically, the camp fire metaphor has been used by Batchelor Institute of Indigenous Tertiary Education (BIITE), an Indigenous institution at which I worked. The logo is the ‘campfire metaphor’ which came about as a result of an Institute wide student competition in 1986. Isobel Windy from Central Australia, a teacher education student at the time, emerged the winner. Her winning design symbolises ‘… (the) coming together
of Aboriginal people, and the logo itself represents four people sitting around a campfire telling stories to each other and in doing so, sharing knowledge’ (BIITE website) with the all encompassing Institute vision of ‘a unique place of knowledge and skills where Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders can undertake journeys of learning for empowerment and advancement while strengthening identity’ (BIITE website). It is against this backdrop that the both ways philosophy takes a central stage in teaching and learning.

Methodology
The proposed study will utilise a qualitative methodology with action research as the overarching paradigm that will require the researcher to involve the participants as co-researchers. As opposed to traditional research which takes a more distance approach (O’Leary 2004), action research focuses on turning people involved into researchers with the research participants working collaboratively with the principal researcher and taking control of the research, design, and methodology (Herr and Anderson, 2005). As an antithesis of the experimental research, action research is carried out in the real world (Walliman, 2005, p. 121), ‘a form of self-reflective problem solving, which enables practitioners to better understand and solve pressing problems in social settings’ (McKerrnan, 1988, p. 6 in Herr and Anderson, 2005).

Participatory action research is best suitable for the proposed study for a number of reasons. Firstly, the study will investigate key issues relevant in Indigenous community school contexts. Under this broad paradigm participatory action research as a systematic process of inquiry is most suitable as it utilises the full and active participation of research participants. Paulo Freire’s concept of ‘conscientisation’ with the powerful theme of combating the ‘culture of silence’ makes this approach most suited to Indigenous Australians and other oppressed and marginalised groups elsewhere. As a result the researcher and participants together produce critical knowledge aimed at social transformations (de Schutter & Yopo, 1991, in Herr & Anderson, 2005). The following methods will generate data that may lead to positive changes locally and nationally in Indigenous education; interviews, focus groups, participant observation, journal entries, document analysis, and narratives.

Development of Graduate courses at Batchelor Institute
Over the past two decades schools in the Northern Territory experienced a major restructuring in management and governance. It paved a pathway for the establishment of school councils and a significant shift in the way schools were managed. Batchelor Institute in the Northern Territory has been in the forefront in providing teacher education especially to Indigenous Australians in remote communities. Because of the great successes of the programs there are more and more Indigenous teachers than ever teaching in their own community schools. The push towards Aboriginalisation and localization of these schools enabled some Indigenous teachers working alongside non-indigenous senior staff in school administration and management positions. Not long after, they started to aspire to full leadership positions in their schools.
In 1995 Batchelor Institute introduced two new post-graduate education courses, the Graduate Certificate and Graduate Diploma in Educational Administration. The development of these courses was in part a community initiative and a response to changing needs. I was employed in the second half of 1995 to teach the courses. It was a great privilege and opportunity to work with Indigenous Australians with a freshly brewed Master of Educational Administration from Flinders University. I was very confident I had been given the perfect opportunity to teach students using both western discourse and indigenous knowledge, when Indigenous people were still battling with Australian colonial imperialist practices that were the antithesis of their way of life. There were three specific aims for developing the courses:

a) provide students with practical knowledge to work more effectively with people, resources, tasks and processes within schools
b) develop understandings of bureaucratic processes and communication at the systems level
c) allow students to develop and explore their self understanding as educational leaders within a specific cultural context (Marshall & Kamara, 1997, p. 9).

Historically, women are the nurturers and caretakers of children in the home. This role extended to the school environment when the mission schools were established. Over time by nature of this motherly role they outnumbered Indigenous men in the area of teaching. Subsequently, the majority of aspiring school leaders were female, an imbalance that created some exciting workshop debates. Listening to their stories, relating mine and setting it within a western ‘campfire’ – classroom environment (which to my surprise one student described as a ‘frightening setting for learning as it was reminiscent of the incarceration of Indigenous people’) brought memories of my African context. This comment was an initial shock in the very early stages of my teaching as it clearly explained the extent of damage, deep hurt, and resentment most Indigenous people still had. Though I carried my own British colonial legacy, parts of which still needed to be dealt with, students saw me as mentor with all the answers to beating westerners at their own game because of a similar yet different colonial past. I could see us all as political players in a classroom setting with me as facilitator chipping through the ‘brick walls’ that surfaced and surrounded us time and time again. This was no enviable position to be confronted with as an outsider and another Indigenous minority in multicultural Australia. I needed to draw on all my knowledge, diplomacy, and, spiritual strength to bring a unifying yet unique discourse in the area of educational administration. I had a passion to see these students succeed in gaining the required knowledge and skills to operate effectively as leaders in their schools only if they were equally prepared to earn it.

The Administrative Environment in Indigenous Community Schools
My first workshop in the unit Administrative Environment in Indigenous Community Schools was captured in this context of storytelling. I was eager for answers to questions that surfaced during my stay in Adelaide, South Australia. I started by relocating the workshop environment outdoors to tell individual stories where we introduced each other. In most indigenous cultures trust comes with establishing relationships, which was of
paramount importance in my journey with this group of women leaders. From these stories I could relate to the complexities of their daily lives.

There were visible negotiations to be done at various levels: their identities as women in a male dominated Indigenous culture; their identities as ‘bread winners’ and wives; their identities as women within an ethnocentric educational cultural domain; and their identities as black minority women. These layers of identity negotiation will create ‘paradoxes and dilemmas associated with shifting educational landscapes’ (Dimmock & Walker 2004). Some of the women were already confirmed principals in their schools and others were aspiring to the position and already being mentored. They all seemed to be clear about what they wanted for their schools and how they should be governed. The community and especially elders had a significant role to play in processes and procedures from appointment of principals to curriculum to be taught. I was taken back to the traditional storytelling ‘around the campfire’.

A student from New South Wales explicitly acknowledges the uniqueness of this learning. She was privileged to get a mainstream education and enrolled in the course after completing a master’s degree at one of the national universities on the east coast. We had an informal coffee conversation during a short tea break. I was keen to know why she had chosen to study at Batchelor when she could easily study at any of the mainstream universities in New South Wales. I recorded her words in my journal at the time. She addressed an important point that is significant in the campfire setting.

It is true I could have chosen to study at any of the national universities and the current one I work for. My decision to study at Batchelor Institute has cultural and identity significance. I grew up in an environment where I learnt about Indigenous culture in books as an Indigenous woman and had never had the privilege of learning about my culture first hand. Their strength empowers me as the realities of their struggles can only be understood by such close interaction. At the national universities Indigenous units are enclaves where one is still searching for identity within a dominant western culture. At Batchelor, one feels comfortable and has an ownership and an identity. We get together in groups and sit around a ‘campfire’ and tell stories of the dreaming. This is where learning occurs. You learn in this informal setting about kinships, leadership, and ceremonies. This is a privilege that I will never get from any of the national universities. I’m pretty sure this resonates with you as you may have felt the same at university.

Author journal entry

I gave her a witty smile in acknowledgement and I knew there were similar episodes to be played out in years to come. She has symbolically placed the ‘campfire’, the Institute’s logo, and vision in context.

As one of the women clearly indicated in a workshop I delivered and consistent with the voices of others who studied later,

For me to be appointed principal was a community initiative. The selection procedure is very different to that of appointing European principals. You have a
standing within the community and elders; if this happens only from the
department’s perspective, leading the school and getting community support will be
very difficult. Leadership defined through the eyes of the Balanda (European) is
borrowed leadership and as a Yolngu (Aboriginal) my identity is a vital component
of this appointment. I have a culture, a set of beliefs and values that have been
passed on to me through storytelling around the campfire that informs my role as
leader as well as identifies my role as an indigenous woman. I define leadership
through these lenses in agreement with the elders.

Author journal entry

One of my students, in a piece she wrote reflects on the reasons for introducing the
mentor program.

The mentor program came about because the community was dissatisfied with the
Balanda (European) principal and the Balanda culture of the school. We wanted to
see a Yolngu principal of the school, bigger numbers of Yolngu teachers and the
development of a school curriculum which reflected and celebrated Yolngu culture.


This was compelling evidence for me that as elders appoint the storytellers symbolic of
knowledge of culture and custodian, here too in the education of children in ‘school’ the
cultural protocols take significance.

There were clear challenges in trying to cross-fertilise dichotomous cultures in employing
a both ways philosophy. Consequently, on many levels I could easily relate to their plight
since my education journey took a similar yet a very different direction. My reflection
took me back to Africa when I studied for my Bachelor of Arts degree. Paulo Freire’s
Pedagogy of the Oppressed had taken central stage in our Philosophy of Education
courses. He had a preoccupation with the oppressed and dispossessed especially in third
world nations.

From my colonial experience students needed to go through Freire’s ‘conscientization
process’ in order to deal with ‘colonization of the mind’. To do this successfully they
needed to unlearn what has been ‘deposited’ in the past. If there was no room for
contestation in the teaching/learning process then the conscientisation process would be
stifled. Freire’s ‘education for oppression’ and ‘education for liberation’ practices which
he discusses at length. In his viewpoint

The raison d’etre of libertarian education lies in its drive towards reconciliation.
Education must begin with the solution of the teacher-student contradiction, by
reconciling the poles of the contradiction so that both are simultaneously teachers
and students.

Freire, 1970, p. 59
Reflecting on studies at Flinders University for my Masters in Educational Administration had some exciting episodes. During weekly seminars constantly and with subtlety I challenged some of the concepts which were all too often on the western paradigm end of the continuum. I clearly remember in one such seminar during an informal conversation with a colleague who was eager to know the extent of adaptability or adoptability of the western context in which I studied to an African setting. Over a cup of coffee I explained my colonial background, the benefits of my strong African culture and the blending of western knowledge that has produced a stronger identity. Not only did I narrate my educational journey but also reminded her of the importance of recognizing and acknowledging various cultures within multicultural Australia, and, set in the school context, practicing administrators in studying educational administration must do so with the intention of embracing diverse cultures and their world views, a paradigm shift being embraced in empirical research on educational leadership.

 Barely two years after completing my studies, through a tough interview process, I won the position at Batchelor Institute to teach Indigenous leaders challenged with a similar journey. By all standards, this was an iconic moment as I had a philosophical interpretation to the timing of my appointment.

**Theories of Educational Administration**

The wisdom of specialist theories over the past couple of decades has shed a wealth of knowledge in the area of educational administration. While such theories have been debated and undergone widespread reform, much of such reform has neglected to address leadership in the context of indigenous groups (Fitzgerald, 2003, Hallinger & Leithwood, 1998). Unfortunately, literature in this area is represented within a western ethnocentric, monochromic discourse with an expectation that minority groups will learn to cope with organization structures that are defined generic in all situations and in all contexts. This in my view is giving a parochial focus to the study of educational administration and neglecting the robustness that could enhance and sustain educational leadership globally. As we enter into a global economy, philosophies of organization structures, constructs, and paradigms must have room for many realities and visions (Fitzgerald, 2003). Realities of individual groups can only be visualized from a deep and unique cultural context. Quong & Walker (1998), however, contend ‘globalization has the effect of cloning organization structures and processes’ (p.83), a press toward reproducing standard globally diffused management approaches regardless of the local context. Paradoxically, globalization also calls for the need to value and learn from difference and valuing difference entails recognizing multiple perspectives. At the Fulbright Symposium, ‘Indigenous cultures in an Interconnected World’, held in the Northern Territory in July 1997, Smith and Ward (2000, p.1) reiterate this paradoxical view.

For many indigenous peoples, this era is a time of both opportunity and risk. Globalisation has the potential to provide opportunities for the empowerment of indigenous Australians through their becoming familiar with the quality innovations, successful strategies and conceptual advances used by groups in other parts of the world. Globalization, however, also has the potential to
undermine the traditional systems of power and authority that are the core of indigenous societies

Smith & Ward, 2000, p.1

At the local level, school leaders are still trapped in the comfort of western ideologies and apparently miss many untapped learning opportunities in their school communities (Quong and Walker, 1998).

Leadership, as Melendez cited in (Drucker, 1996, p. 294) clearly states, ‘is a set of behaviours, influenced, if not determined, by culture and one’s life experiences’, engages our values, and involves our self images and moral codes (Drucker, 2001). In the voice of another female student, Djayghurrgha (1996) at a time she wrote an assignment for me pointed out that…

Aboriginal leadership in community schools is a new phenomenon, but like all other leadership phenomenon, it is extremely complex which finds them thrust in an era of transformation, the boundaries demarcated by makers of a western ethnocentric bureaucratic paradigm.

She further contends

It is about innovations to alter school practices beyond the status quo. In other words they are attempting to dismantle the old system of traditional transactional management which is entrenched in the school system for at least three decades. But more importantly they are also confronting and addressing the problems associated with questioning western values, beliefs, and knowledge enshrined in the school curricula, as well as maintaining a thrust that recognizes Aboriginal cultural knowledge and conceptual renewal of the school system.

(Student assignment, 1996)

I worked closely and in partnership with staff in the Northern Territory Department of Education and the Catholic Education Office. There were constant calls at the systems level for these women principals to demonstrate leadership in their schools thus equating leadership with the individual who resides at the top of the educational hierarchy and carries the sole responsibility of orchestrating desired school outcomes. Interpreting leadership from this standpoint was recreating ‘a hierarchical and paternalistic form of organizational governance’ (Tierney & Foster, 1991, p.1). There is enormous complexity in this recreation when applied in Indigenous contexts. In order to navigate the almost always harsh waves of the ‘bureaucratic waters’ (Tierney & Foster, 1991, p. 3), it was time to contest this ethnocentric western construct through employing critical theory that involves ‘giving voice to the voiceless’ (Tierney & Foster 1991, p.3) and confronting the coloured empirical evidence that had existed over the past decades in the leadership debate. I will premise my doctoral thesis against this backdrop for clearly there were issues here that needed resolving and needed empirical research.

Together, we share layers of complexities as minorities, and, Indigenous black women. Clearly, we belong to a different category. In the feminist literature, ‘many white women
had taken a colour blind position’ Weeden, (2002) with the ‘pretence to a homogeneity of experience covered by the word sisterhood that does not in fact exist’ (Lorde 1894a: 116 in Weeden 2002). Moraga in Weeden (2002) argues

Some white people who take up multicultural and cultural plurality issues mean well but often they push to the fringes once more the very cultures and ethnic groups about whom they want to disseminate knowledge. For example, the white writing about Native peoples or cultures displaces the native writer and often appropriates the culture instead of proliferating information about it. The difference between appropriation and proliferation is that the first steals and harms; the second helps heal breaches of knowledge.

Moraga 1981a, p. xxi in Weeden 2002

In one of the workshops on leadership, a female principal, defines leadership from an Indigenous perspective.

I was mentored by the previous principal to take over the school. When I felt I was ready I proposed a structure which to my knowledge would be the most appropriate for Indigenous leadership. The system wanted to appoint a non-indigenous deputy principal. I advised against such an appointment and asked instead for four assistant principals. The four assistant principals would be appointed from each of the four clan groups representing the school children from all four clan groups. Together we form the leadership group with each one of us taking on different roles and responsibilities yet operating as one. It is the ‘Milimika’ –a dance where in turns we dance and give each one support. Our leadership is not the non-indigenous way where a hierarchy is created with one person given the power over others in the bureaucratic sense. From a very early stage we are taught these values of sharing and caring as a family unit. The four assistant principals are not appointed using the western criteria of western qualifications and academic excellence. We have a kinship system which guides relationship patterns.

Author journal entry

This proposal sent initial powerful shock waves at the systems level. The mentor who happened to be Sr Anne was confronted with this dance of leadership.

I was given the freedom to set out [on this journey] with Sita, the principal in training, as I thought best. Term 1 was almost a disaster—I couldn’t let go, we had no infrastructure and very little dialogue. I was principal and had very little time to train a Tiwi principal…. On one visit we were asked to draw up a structure as to who we thought could support Sita. This was authentic Tiwi way of leadership, i.e., group leadership… In my insecurity, I held on to the school in the only way I knew… Sita went ahead, she chose four local teachers and four elders each from the skin groups. This was in place, yet I was not coping…. Term two commenced and I was challenged by the Assistant Director to look at the infrastructure Sita had set up and to use it…. Physically, I left the room in complete pain (because) of my inability to let go…. Meeting after meeting
followed… we began to dance, i.e., to dialogue in a balanced harmony. Validity of another point of view became a reality.

Quong and Walker p.94

This dance had its teething stages as I witnessed on several occasions, tensions of dancing out of tune on both sides. On a particular occasion during a visit to the school Sita, the principal-in-training, was absent something I was not expecting. Sr Anne was there as usual holding the fort. Incidentally, there has been some conflict situation between herself and Sita; from Sita’s perspective the way to resolve this without resorting to damaging anyone’s personality was to walk ‘away from it’ for some time until you felt ready to come back. As she later explained to me

Yes, Sr Anne and I disagreed on an issue. I was very angry and I had to deal with my anger the Indigenous way….; walk away from the situation by going ‘out bush’ for some days. By the time I came back my anger had subsided and I was ready to sit and talk things over with her.

Author journal entry

Apparently real life situations such as this provided the perfect opportunity that brought out the best in my facilitating role and validate my teaching. I posed questions such as, • If the Principal has to go ‘out bush’ any time there is a conflict situation, who does her job? • Is the absence recorded as recreational leave? • What are other administrative consequences of this behaviour?

This and similar situations were opportunities to point out the importance of illuminating the ‘campfire’ in this western school setting by employing a “crosswalk” of these two perspectives (Awe, Portman, & Garrett, 2005 p. 1), Indigenous and non-indigenous, ‘not as a harmonious choir but as a cacophony of voices that celebrates distinctiveness’ (Fitzgerald, 2003, p. 12-13) in a cross-cultural learning environment.

Negotiating identities and partnerships within a school and societal culture
Developing community leadership begins with recognizing that both the practice of leadership and the situation in which it occurs need to be understood. In this Australian Indigenous context leadership is viewed as a collective relational phenomenon within the context of their own needs and experiences. In Tierney and Forster’s (1991) view the very concept of educational administration has become symbolic of hierarchy, of structure and of power.

Indigenous women educational leaders are arguably challenged at multiple levels and have been artistically choreographed in leadership roles that ‘have not accounted for trajectories of ethnicity and diversity with an erroneous ‘claim that the functions and features of leadership can be transported and legitimized across homogenous educational systems’ (Fitzgerald, 2003, p. 9). Invariably, the rhetoric of empowerment, self-determination, and self management at both a socio-political level is compromised. In the
storytelling and dance around the ‘campfire’ they are aware of their roles and boundaries which are the antithesis of western interpretation and definition of leadership in schools.

Explicitly, at the systems level, women of colour are seen as having expertise in women’s issues or minority issues and, therefore, in their struggle to engage others in the exercise of leadership require ‘exceptional communication skills that transcend culturally influenced styles of communication’ (Melendez, 1996, p. 297). Incidentally, from observation and experience they can hardly be themselves as the dance of leadership is complicated by the sounds of piano and drums that exert so much energy spent on dancing to produce a balanced flow, leaving little time for leading. This view has been constantly confirmed in almost every workshop by most students who felt trapped in compromising the very values for which they stood in their quest for acceptance in a cultural climate that was colour blind to diversity issues.

At the community level there were other compromises and negotiations to be made. In a personal conversation that I recorded in my journal at the time, one of the principals in a polygamous marriage tells her story.

I was taking on a contract principal position that required far more responsibilities and accountability to the central office. My performance will be appraised at the same level as any other contract principal. From an Indigenous perspective I couldn’t accept the position without formally making my family very much a part of the process. So I explained to the bungawas (bosses) that as a Yolngu (Aboriginal) woman I would need not only the support of my husband but the entire family. We therefore convened a meeting with all the extended family present where in very simple language they explained my new role which would have to extend far beyond the normal school times. There were definitely negotiations at this level without it I couldn’t see myself succeeding. My role as a wife and mother is different to the role I play as a leader in school. Wearing these different hats from time to time can be draining not only physically but emotionally.

Author journal entry

This reflection is a notion that is more in accord with African perceptions of community that the Ubuntu tribe cleverly illustrates. ‘The cardinal belief of Ubuntu is that a person can only be a person through others. A proverb of the Shona tribe captures these concepts: ‘Chara chimive hachitswane inda’ (a thumb working on its own is useless). ‘It has to work collectively with the other fingers to get strength and to be able to achieve anything’ (Mbigi & Maree, 1995, cited in Kirk & Shutte, 2004, p. 242).

Consequently my role as lecturer extended later to mentoring female Indigenous principals. There were times when the African drum beats clashed with the sounds of the didgeridoo. Because my approach to teaching was more of a situated practical on-site one I traveled extensively to teach and support these women on the job. I was in full support of encouraging them to practice leadership from their sociocultural perspective; however I wanted a firm balance with western constructs which had enormous layers of bureaucratic discourse that permeates at every level of the system. To deny them this
knowledge would be compromising empowerment. Each time I visited a community I was keen on assessing students on presentation of the office environment, maintaining equipment, demonstration of curriculum leadership and a litany of other assessment tools. As it happened one day, I had to make a very urgent unannounced trip to one of the school communities. On arrival I sensed panic through the leadership team and I overheard this conversation.

A: ‘Martha is here’?
B: ‘Which one’?
A: ‘Yolngu – Balanda Martha’.

I was completely struck by this new identity. Obviously I asked for an explanation. At the end of the school day, during our reflection time in her office, the Indigenous principal, went on

We have to let the cat out of the bag. This is your nick name. You are Yolngu, meaning, black with a firm and proud African identity that resonates with us; yet you have strong Balanda (Western) views that you do not easily compromise. We sometimes wonder how you can demonstrate this so perfectly and not feel subsumed by the dominant culture. To be frank, sometimes when we are informed about your visit well ahead of time we make frantic efforts to do things right as you will never stop short of reminding us of the multiple roles we play and importantly we were also representing the voices of the minority group.

Author journal entry

Well, as I reflected on this episode on the flight back to Darwin, I felt an emptiness that engulfed me. I was proud they saw this as a collective struggle but on the other hand this has not been translated into real learning. Learning as we all know is a relatively permanent change in behaviour. I mulled over this for a few weeks without losing any sleep over it. This was a collective journey that was still thousands of kilometers away from the destination. Frankly I empathized with them and the pressures at the systems level where in their view these women needed to work leadership miracles overnight that reminded me of African women balancing a bucket of water on their fanciful plaited hair styles and carrying the baby on the back as well.

At the level of decision making we did not always dance to a harmonious tune. At a senior staff meeting convened by the Indigenous principal I clearly stated my frustration at waiting endlessly for Indigenous staff to collectively agree on issues. We were dealing with funding issues here with clear cut out deadlines that would see them miss out on lucrative learning and teaching funding opportunities. I intervened to rush them into a decision as I was now clearly at the end of my patience. Surprisingly, the Indigenous principal reprimanded me very strongly.

I’m sorry if you want to get on the next flight to Darwin, you may do so now but we will not make a decision in a hurry. In the Yolngu way as is reminiscent of the storytelling and dance we take our time, so that we can dance together to a
harmonious tune and this comes only with practice, imitation, and direction from elders. The top-down decision making is not our way.

Author journal entry

Yes, I was reminded of my world view yet caught in the web of ‘walking between two worlds’ (Fitzgerald, 2006, p. 201). I needed to make a choice that unfortunately disadvantaged their practices and the struggle to voice their very existence.

In yet another episode struggling to maintain a school leadership identity, a Tiwi principal, during a personal conversation reflects sadly.

You know this is a very difficult job. One would expect that having an Indigenous principal would make it easier to run the school. You know the other day on a Monday morning there were hardly any Tiwi teachers at school. They had been to Darwin for the weekend and decided to travel on Monday by ferry. Here I was confronted with a problem which required swift disciplinary action involving my own people. As far as they are concerned I am just another woman in the community with equal standing and they find it difficult to accept the authority I had as principal of the school. Just as well I am single; having the added burden of negotiating my identity as an Indigenous wife in a patriarchal society would quickly bring on premature wrinkles.

Author journal entry

We laughed over very serious issues that have plagued most minority women of colour. Indeed, and as rightly pointed out by Fitzgerald

Indigenous women leaders face a triple bind… As Indigenous women leaders, they were placed in a minority setting according to their gender (women within a world dominated by men), their ethnicity (Indigenous women in a non-indigenous world) and as (women of colour) in a white woman’s world.

Fitzgerald, 2006, p. 207-208

May I add my voice to this all important debate that other women of colour face a quadruple bind; an African Indigenous woman within a multicultural Australian setting has a definition very different from an Australian Indigenous woman. Clearly, there are privileges that do not extend to the likes of this new generation within such a pronounced majority presence of male, white male, white female, non-Australian Indigenous environment.

Conclusion
In the present globalization debate where diversity has been given central stage, it is timely in present-day Australia to embrace Indigenous perspectives on educational leadership and more importantly those of the female Indigenous minority silenced voices that are currently at the cutting edge of providing leadership in Indigenous community schools. The literature in Educational Administration must recognize and embrace the contribution that Indigenous cultures bring to the debate. Denying them a voice would be
missing out on a wealth of knowledge that they can offer western ethnocentric leadership constructs that can no longer sustain the educational leadership terrain. It is in deed time to contest a world view that has been consistent with the “white out” of Indigenous history (Neille as cited in Gair, Miles, and Thomson 2005, p179) and the privileging of “white” knowledge (Gair et al 2005, p179) over indigenous knowledges.

Australian Indigenous women leaders in remote communities are struggling with multiple layers of realities that present clear research questions that need to be investigated inclusive of ‘social class, location, ethnicity, and cultural world view’ (Fitzgerald, 2003, p.9). Clearly trapped in the web of competing worlds, that of the school and community, both equally pregnant with power struggles, the dynamics of which they constantly struggle to define are represented in these questions.

• How do they define leadership from an indigenous perspective?

• How do they negotiate their identities as women in a patriarchal Indigenous community context paradoxically dominated by female Indigenous educational leaders?

• What communication strategies do they employ in the process of influencing followership and support from the school community in times of change that would ultimately produce desired school outcomes?

• In the school world, how do they negotiate and construct a world view that is predominantly prescribed by a dominant culture that defines them in a range of marginalizations and trivializes their very existence?

Investigation into the above might throw new light on the literature in educational leadership that embraces a diversity of world views.
References


