

## Intercultural Story Sharing in Guam

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*This paper evolved from an artistic residency entitled *The Stories Within* that took place at the University of Guam in February 2017. *The Stories Within* intercultural research was led by independent creative artist Sarah Jane Moore and represented a collaboration between Moore and Assistant Professor of Education at the University of Guam, Dr Dean Olah. Oceanic Comparative International Education Society (OCIES) Fellowships and Networks Program small grant, the University of Guam and Adjunct Professor Joseph Franquez, Professor of Education, Dr Una Nabobo-Baba, and Fine Arts and Education colleagues at the University of Guam supported it.*

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Stories are transformative; they heal, connect, transmit culture, and embody personal and community power. Sharing stories nourishes us. It brings us together and connects the oceans within (Moore, SJ 'I am Mountain, re-thinking equity through the creative arts' OCIES Conference paper, Nov 2016).

### INTRODUCTION

The case-study presented here investigated student understandings of the potential of story sharing in tertiary classrooms. It focused on the impact of an artistic residency that took place at the University of Guam in 2017. The residency introduced intercultural story sharing activities as vital curriculum tools to pre-service teachers in Guam. The research set out to discover whether involvement in story sharing through creative arts learning modes enhanced teacher training at the University in Guam. It encouraged higher education students to consider the activities modelled within the residency as an integral part of their teaching practise.

The focus on arts based innovation is growing globally. The recently published text *Arts based methods and organisational Learning; higher education around the world* by Chemi and Du (2018) mapped and explored a variety of arts based methods (ABM) and contexts. This study sits alongside Chemi and Du's mapping of the field and aligns theoretically with the understandings presented. Indeed, the intercultural story sharing modelled in the artistic residency at the University of Guam was based on participation in the arts, but not necessarily subject to professional or amateur art making (Chemi & Du, 2018).

*The Stories Within* intercultural research was led by independent creative artist Sarah Jane Moore and was funded by an Oceanic Comparative International Education Society (OCIES) Fellowships and Networks Program small grant. Assistant Professor of Education at the University of Guam, Dr Dean Olah, then Professor of Education Dr Una Nabobo-Baba, Adjunct Professor Joseph Franquez and the Fine Arts and Education Departments at the University of Guam supported the research.

The research focussed on a single case study that took place in Guam. In examining the ways in which intercultural story sharing could be used as a curriculum tool, the qualitative case-study approach (Tartaglia, 2011) was selected because it enabled numerous sources of data to be collected, analysed and represented (Creswell, 2007; Stake, 1995) and this approach gave opportunity for in-depth insight (Yin, 1989, 1993, 2003). This approach enabled data to be represented through narratives. The narrative format chosen was embedded in an arts-informed approach in all its messiness (Cole & Knowles, 2008). The artful representations discussed (Coles & Knowles, 2008) included images created in make-up, poetry, and paintings. Their inclusion allowed the case study presented to be enriched with arts-informed perspectives and characteristics.

### **BACKGROUND STORY: THE CONFERENCE SPARK**

Our imaginations are fired by a deep need that can only be satiated by being curious; by exploring, singing, dancing, creating and gathering together to tell our stories (Moore, 2016).

The research was sparked in November 2016 when Moore met Olah at the OCIES Conference at the University of Sydney. Olah attended Moore's performance art paper; *I am Mountain: Re-thinking equity through the creative arts*, that presented story telling as a transformative curricular tool in primary school contexts. Moore suggested that if education was to be equitable and transformative in nature then local community cultural funds of knowledge (Moll, Amanti, & Gonzales 1992) and their stories must be included. Bagnall's (2012) research argued that the need to belong is one of our deepest human needs; Moore suggested that our need to tell stories is deep too. Olah reflected:

Dr Moore's presentation sparked an idea in my head with my Fine Arts Education course. What if we could collaborate and provide a cross-cultural perspective to teacher education students? I realised that if I could implement Moore's pedagogy into my educational methods course I could create a great opportunity for my students (Excerpt from personal email correspondence with Dean Olah, May 2017).

### **THE UNIVERSITY OF GUAM**

The story sharing artistic residency discussion was facilitated by Moore in February 2017 and was based at The University of Guam.

The university is an open-enrolment institution with the mission to educate students through the region and the Pacific. 60% of our students are the first members of their family to attend college. The demographic makeup of the students is largely Chamorro, Phillipine, and various mixed races. As a cultural democracy, my students are aware of their roles both in their own cultural identity as it pertains to their family and as a part of the entire island identity. They know that once they graduate with their teaching degree, they will be serving children and families from a variety of socio-economic backgrounds. Some of their future students will not be native English speakers. Some may come from home without electricity or running water (Excerpt from personal email correspondence with Dean Olah, May 2017).

While the people of Guam have embraced the global community that has emerged from the rise of technology, many academics, parents, teachers, Elders and community members have vocalised their belief that it is increasingly important to preserve the culture of Guam's Indigenous Chamorro (Murphy, 2011, p 52). The story sharing focus of the research allowed contextual interaction with Pacific participants to occur, creating

a more authentic knowledge that has the potential to lead to solutions for Pacific issues (Vaiioletti, 2013). Moore sought to acknowledge the importance of Guam's First Peoples within the research. Manamko, Adjunct Professor, and Chamorro Language Teacher, Joey Franquez, assisted Moore to keep Chamorro stories present throughout her residency on Guam. Joey shared the Song of Sirena with her and told her the story of the beautiful, young Chamorro girl and her passion for swimming. Franquez spoke of how Sirena was tied to a forever life in the sea. Sirena was fun-loving and rebellious as a consequence of her reckless adventures and her family would always mourn her loss and lament her leaving her island home. In a welcoming ceremony at the University in 2017, Franquez shared insights into his childhood, his early life and the Chamorro stories that have sustained him throughout his life. He spoke of his deep regret that he let his language skills lie sleeping throughout his adolescence and urged Moore and the students, community members, teachers, and academics in attendance to keep seeking the Chamorro voice, to keep speaking the Chamorro language and to continue honouring the Chamorro through story. He implored those present to tap into Chamorro wisdom and connect to story, honour the wonder, acknowledge the joy, and persist with the pleasure of learning. He pleaded with those listening to his stories to resist the silencing of Pacific peoples and to gather together, connect, and continue *Talanoa* and its oral traditions. A digital version of Moore singing the Song of Sirena can be accessed at [http://www.sarahjanemoore.com.au/si\\_sirena.mp3](http://www.sarahjanemoore.com.au/si_sirena.mp3).

### **SEEKING TALANOA, STORY AND SILENCE**

Moore's residency work was grounded in the theory that arts informed classroom practise has the potential to be transformational in classrooms and support cultural capacity in a Pacific context. *Talanoa* is traditional storying practise embedded in communities in Fiji and across the Pacific (Vaiioletti, 2013). The objective of *Talanoa* is to share stories and build tolerance, compassion and understanding. In conversations in Guam, Nabobo-Baba (2006) communicated the importance of story in research involving Pacific worlds. She described, Indigenous Fijian silences that ran deep and were loaded in meaning. She encouraged Moore to seek out authentic Pacific stories in Guam but also to seek out silences. She described silence as a pedagogical response to learning and speech among Fijians (Nabobo-Baba, 2013). In discussions with Moore, Nabobo encouraged her to consider story telling as a mode of resistance to cultural silence. Equality in education is often based on the assumption that learners are homogenous cultural groups (Thaman, 2012). Nabobo-Baba emphasised the importance of resisting the collection of homogenous student stories in Guam. Moore wondered "could an artistic residency provide a culturally sensitive scaffold for teacher education students to share their stories?"

### **THE STORY SHARING ARTISTIC RESIDENCY IN GUAM**

The artistic residency placed Moore as a lecturer, workshop facilitator, and artistic practitioner. It involved workshop sessions and lectures to pre-service teaching students, a public lecture, and collaborations between Fine Arts, Language, and Theatre students and staff. Olah noted:

The experience of bringing in a visiting artist to the University of Guam expanded beyond my classroom. Guam is a small island with limited educational and artistic opportunities for students. There are outlets here but they are not available to

everyone, especially in the public schools. Dr. Moore not only worked with my teacher education students, but also coached vocal lessons and worked with the visual arts students too (Excerpt from personal email correspondence with Dean Olah, May 2017).

The story sharing residency research plan drew heavily on the work of Kieren Egan, the developmental psychologist whose 2005 book, *An Imaginative Approach to Teaching*, explained how the imagination can function in learning. Egan linked imagination with individuality, originality, curiosity, freedom, and self-expression (Egan, 1990; 1998; 2005; 2006; 2010). Egan's writings proposed that cognitive tools are sometimes suppressed (1997) with the development of literacy and he suggested ways to introduce literacy so as to encourage rather than diminish oral competences. Egan emphasized the use of imagination and learning through storytelling and suggested that a narrative approach to teaching and learning engaged student imagination and led to successful learning (Egan, 2005). The imagination can also be seen as the internalization of play and a high mental function (Vygotsky, 1986).

Egan (2008) cited Vygotsky and referenced the mind as a socio-cultural formation. He (Egan, 1997) identified five distinct forms of understanding: somatic (pre-linguistic, bodily, and sensory understandings); mythic (the consequence of learning to use an oral language where stories give significance to proceedings); romantic (a result of knowledge within the Western, Anglo-centric realm); philosophic (an outcome of learning the fluent use of abstractions); and ironic (the result of learning how to use language's reflexiveness for complicated interaction).

Moore modelled imaginative teaching and sharing strategies and introduced herself as an artist, performer, and teacher by singing, reciting poetry and chanting, dancing and performing in front of the group. She told stories and asked the students to tell stories of their own. Egan (1998; 2005) defined the imagination as flexibility of the mind and an ability to think in ways that are not constrained and Moore's workshops modelled flexibility of mind and the ability to think in ways not constrained. One of the students reflected in their feedback

It's always amazing when a guest speaker from a different part of the world comes in and teaches the class. We are able to open our eyes and minds to different perspectives of the world (Stories Within Student Evaluation Survey, March 2017).

One of the aims of the research project was to share learning and re-position the notion of a "content expert". Olah reflected on this after the project:

No matter how effective a teacher may be, students always benefit from hearing a new voice. As an educator who has taught at every grade level across multiple US states, I know the vast cultural experiences that await future educators. Educating future teachers on cultural differences moves beyond textbooks into opportunities to learn from those with whom we would not normally associate. The artistic residency was a collaborative learning opportunity that allowed me to learn new methods of creative teaching. Being able to observe an educational colleague weave together a remarkable collection of lessons both inspired and challenged my students to move beyond the lesson plan and take creative risks (Excerpt from personal email correspondence with Dean Olah, June 2017).

Moore planned a project that students could make, create, listen, and perform in a safe space. She sought to include and embrace the perspectives within the community in which she visited. Rather than position herself as a "content expert", Moore sought to carve out

a space for her student voices to be heard, acknowledged, and respected. Olah reflected on the importance of this culturally and personally safe space with his words:

Both Dr. Moore and myself have worked as professional artists at various points in our lives. We knew the dedication, struggles of the creative process, and preparation required to perform. I believe all performing artists share this connection. The challenge was how to provide opportunities for all students to experience this process. I found that my students were initially apprehensive about the creative process ahead of them. I prepared them for the activities ahead by modelling some activities. Once Dr. Moore arrived and they saw the ease at which she sang, chanted, and shared stories, the realization that this was a safe environment to perform without judgement (Excerpt from personal email correspondence with Dean Olah, May 2017).

The story sharing residency contributed specifically to creating wisdoms through stories for all parties involved. The students gained the experience of devising stories to share. Olah heard the hidden stories of his students and, in future, there is a possibility that the pre-service students will use the story sharing curricular tool within their primary and high school class rooms.

### **METHOD/ANALYSIS**

The research plan focussed on strengthening creative teacher education and marked a change in the form of traditional research in education through a firm and focussed approach on story-telling and arts-based interventions. The case study approach gave the pre-service teachers the opportunity to engage in storytelling, visual arts making and writing. The research modelled ways in which creative perspectives and activities could foster wisdom within pre-service teacher training. It provided opportunities to develop networks, connections and audiences between students, researchers and educators across island cultures. It developed opportunities for safe, comfortable, and respectful collaborative art making and sharing.

Moore's premise that story had the power to transform the student learning experience was tested throughout her residency. She devised the project carefully and ensured that student stories, images, and writing were shared comfortably, safely, and respectfully. Some of the creative activities developed were designed to be experienced face-to-face and Olah documented and captured these workshops with a digital camera. The students were offered the opportunity to share the creative work that they produced for research and publication and gave verbal permission for this to occur. This data was stored for presentation, analysis, discussion, and sharing. Olah circulated a digitized, anonymized survey that sought student feedback from the residency. It was established that the participating students would own the creative copyright for their work and it was agreed that the digital images shared would not be used for profit, would be anonymized and that the students be given free and open access to the journal that their work was featured in. The students who wanted their work to be discussed and featured in future research provided digital copies of their images and written work to Moore and Olah.

Instructional settings characterized by frequent and meaningful instructor-student interactions have consistently been found to support student achievement and learning satisfaction (Cornelius-White, 2007) and Moore wanted to encourage authentic communication with the students that sparked their imaginations and fostered their

creativity. Moore shared resources and communicated electronically to students and staff through the University's Learning Management System. She wrote:

Dear students,

Next week I will journey the 6265 kilometres from Hobart, Tasmania to your beautiful island home; the island of Guam. I am excited for us to share, create, learn and explore together. Stories are transformative; they heal, connect, transmit culture, and embody personal and community power. Sharing stories nourishes us. It brings us together and connects the oceans within. The Stories Within project focuses on developing and sharing creative capacity and involves you participating in practical, creative arts lectures and story-sharing workshops. In preparation for our time please participate in at least one of the suggested activities and bring the materials that you generate to our sessions together;

Create a self-portrait

Write down a story that you remember from child-hood

Storyboard a story that has been told to you

Write a poem that explores your identity

Develop an image that describes what is important to you

Write a song that tells the story of you

Olah reflected:

The letter to students was a perfect prelude to Dr. Moore's visit. She laid out a clear directive that allowed my students to prepare for the visit and begin the creative process (Excerpt from personal email correspondence with Dean Olah, May 2017).

### **TRANSFORMATIVE LEARNING FOR PRE-SERVICE TEACHERS THROUGH STORY TELLING**

Throughout the fieldwork in Guam, Moore wondered:

Could a case study research project that provided pre-service teachers with the opportunity to write, tell and listen to stories, grapple, address and talk to Nabobo Baba's cultural silences? Could stories provide a key for teachers to understand, interrogate and support diverse student perspectives?

Moore designed the learning activities to be mindful of oral pedagogies. She planned activities that encouraged students to tell their own, personal stories, to share elements of their personal thinking and understandings. She elevated these ways of knowing and placed them as an authentic and rich source of learning for self and community.

We used dialogue and narratives to share our creative wisdoms. These individual narratives allowed the students to learn about family traditions, backgrounds, and how these differ among them yet also communicate universality. I found connection both personally and for my students through hearing and experiencing ways of knowing that I would not have otherwise had access to. I also found connection to my students through the work – in hearing personal stories and the emotional content within them. It heightened my awareness that my students have family histories and cultural backgrounds which greatly enrich the learning environment and that I can facilitate the opportunities for them to access and share this inner knowledge (Excerpt from personal email correspondence with Dean Olah, May 2017).

During Moore's weeklong residency, a number of students shared powerful insights into the issues that affected their lives. One student responded to Moore's request to write a

poem that explored identity and presented a monologue entitled *Word Vomit*. Performed in two parts, *Word Vomit* narrated the student's experience of being "othered" in her culture. She explained that she was "adopted and picked up like garbage from a neighbouring island". The poem described her feelings of not fitting in, of regarding herself as "different", "excluded" and "ugly". In the monologue, she shared her anxiety about not being an "exotic beauty" and her discomfort of being of Chinese descent. In the poem, the narrator grappled with notions of identity and sought answers from her mother with tears that "prickled at the corner of (her) eyes" and emotions that "choked up in (her) throat". In her monologue, she related her mother saying to her: "you are Chamorro. You are Pacific Islander. You are my China doll". She spoke of the shame that she felt about being of mixed race and of the "racially biting comments" that she endured. She explained "even though it might not be intended to be hurtful it still cuts deep". Her monologue repeated the questions "what am I?" and "why don't I look like you?" and pleaded, "I appeal to you all to be more sensitive".

*Word Vomit 1* and *2* exposed the student's experiences of racism within her community on Guam and within her own family. The performing of *Word Vomit 1* and *2* externalized her secret story and was witnessed by a supportive group of pre-service teachers who shed tears as she performed. She explained later to Moore that feeling different and like a "Chinese doll" affected her everyday life as a young adult on Guam, and thinking through these issues, writing them down and sharing them in performance had helped her better understand how to show care to students who may be experiencing similar stories and emotions. The knowledge that was shared in the workshop session through *Word Vomit 1* and *2* transformed the understandings of those present. The poem enabled Moore to gain insights into the cultural practice of adoption on Guam, where islander children were informally adopted and raised with other families. Through the poetry curricular tool, insights into issues of adoption within Chamorro community were raised and racial inferiority complexes and racial anxiety explored. As a researcher, Moore's understanding of the dynamics within the racial groups living on Guam grew. The student filled the space with her inner dialogues and uncertain sense of belonging. The creative path that this student trod enabled her to describe her experience of living "between cultures" and strengthened knowledges and understandings of the difficulties of living within a "mixed race" family on Guam.

Alongside sharing stories through poetry, students were asked to develop self-portraits. Figure 1 was created by a student who had not had access to specific creative arts teaching in her own schooling. The student's experience of participating in visual arts practise was extremely limited; she created in makeup on paper because she did not own any art materials. She told Moore that she felt uneasy about her ability to complete the activity. Eventually, the student innovated and used blush, BB cream, lip stick, eye liner, eye brow pencil, eye shadow make-up brushes and sponges to blend, shade and contour and create her self-portrait. She stated that it was very important to her to depict her racial identity and the colour of her skin accurately. She told Moore that, through developing the work, she realized how important her identity was to her and how talking about it later to her peers helped her to understand how her cultural background could inform her future teaching practice. She commented that a visit from an outsider had given her the opportunity to reflect on her identity and the identity of others in her class. She felt awkward and ill-at ease with telling her story at first but gained an understanding of the importance of acknowledging the cultural backgrounds of her students.



Cultural wisdom is only obtained through experiences outside of one's own community. To grow individually as a culturally literate person, individuals must seek out opportunities, taking chances to grow through collaboration with others, and venture beyond their own comfort zone (Excerpt from personal email correspondence with Dean Olah, May 2017).

**Figure 1: Student self-portrait – make-up on paper**

## CONCLUSION

Intercultural story sharing can spark imaginations, fuel the creative research space and inspire the curious. It can also empower silenced populations, dissipate ignorance and remove blocks to understanding.

The island of Guam lay silent for me and I had no knowledge of Guam's Indigenous histories, cultures and stories (Moore's Diary reflections, January 2017).

The residency in Guam provided opportunities for Pacific cultural perspectives to be gathered and heard, and the arts informed research approaches modelled gave the participants the permission to share and the freedom to explore individual stories, approaches, and issues. It showed, too, the ways in which conferences and small network grants and exchanges can be transformational. The artistic residency carved out a research space for listening to local wisdoms and honouring local participants and stories. The intercultural story sharing project demonstrated the power of the creative arts to strengthen teacher education by empowering and listening to its participants. The approaches described can be replicated in variety of different higher education contexts and applied in different learning environments, including formal education and informal adult learning frameworks. The case study discussed contributes to the literature on Pasifika learners and ways of learning, and the intercultural story sharing approach can be explored with future case studies and partnerships.

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