



Prospects, Protocols, Progress.

Prospects and Protocols for Indigenous Short Films in the Sydney Metropolitan Area

'Work Placement' is a final year subject for Communications, Social Inquiry at the University of Technology Sydney. It requires students to collaborate with government or non-government organisations to achieve practical research experience. Students need to negotiate a research project that will benefit the organisation by meeting key objectives. Some placements will offer students the opportunity to utilise organisational facilities whereas others may need students to work independently on their proposed project.

Contributors

Many thanks to the participants and organisations that contributed, time, resources and experiences to this report. Special thanks to Jumbunna Indigenous House of Learning Unit, UTS and Jason De Santolo, Uncle Hilton Donovan, Vincent McManus, Cristina Ho, and previous contributors to the industry movements of Cultural Protocol.

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Executive Summary

This paper maintains that cultural protocols bridge the gap between Indigenous and non-Indigenous communities. The disjointed way non-indigenous film makers, production companies and broadcasters have engaged in community or knowledge exchange has been detrimental to Indigenous awareness, cultural identity and community welfare.

This scoping report was originally for a non-profit organisation established to meet the demands of the underground Sydney short film industry. The organisation provides opportunities for less established film makers in the short film industry of Sydney. This project was to have been facilitated via UTS Shopfront.

The organisation wanted to expand their services and explore the possibility of incorporating a uniquely Indigenous Australian sector into the film festival. Research needed to ascertain the viability of an Indigenous focused inclusion into their current mentoring scheme and the film festival.

The research questions were to find out:

- Is there a need for increased support of indigenous Australian short filmmakers in Sydney?
- How can they assist to tell their stories, cultivate their skills and develop essential links to enable them in a competitive and highly skilled production industry?

This report investigates the second question.

Preliminary research into the Indigenous Australian film industry, existing mentoring schemes and film festivals for Indigenous works revealed the need for the organisation to understand three key insights for incorporating Indigenous Australian short films. These include:

1. Understanding the target market: Aspiring Indigenous film makers in Sydney and the culturally sensitive nature of working with this marginalised community.
2. Knowledge about existing film festivals and mentoring programs currently in private and public education and training institutions in the Sydney Greater Western Area.
3. Determine how the organisation wishes to differentiate their organisation, film festival and mentoring schemes from those already provided in the industry.

The need for a working knowledge of cultural protocols became increasingly prevalent in order for the organisation to gain access to their target demographic. Developing relationships with the community involves a more inter-personal, culturally sensitive approach. The organisation deemed this as not a priority to their organisation and requested to withdraw from the project proposal.

After seeking advice on the proposal from Indigenous researcher, Jason De Santolo, the significance of approaches to Indigenous community engagement became apparent. On discovery that the non-profit organisation had discontinued work placement, placement was renegotiated with Jumbunna under the supervision of Jason De Santolo. Jason has officially supervised and assisted in the investigative approach and findings of this scoping report.

The Abstract

This report examines the recent advances of ethical guidelines for filming and working with Indigenous content in film. By investigating existing or previous campaigns that promote Indigenous Australian story telling, this report will attempt to identify effective approaches to nurturing Indigenous short film in Australia for the increased expansion of this sector in the Sydney Metropolitan Area. This report will suggest the need for increased dissemination of information for Indigenous communities working on film projects and non-Indigenous film makers working with Indigenous subject matter. Data was collected from interviews, observation and participation to organised Indigenous events including Sydney 2009 Message Sticks Indigenous Film Festival as well as secondary research into Screen Australia's, 'Pathways & Protocols', (Janke, May 2009), 'The Greater Perspective: Protocol and Guidelines for the Production of Film and Television on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Communities 2nd ED' (Bostok, 1997).

Aims and Purpose of the Study

This research aims to develop qualitative data of the protocol in practice and is based on previous research undertaken with respect to Indigenous protocol in the film industry and additional research into the history of Indigenous to non-Indigenous communications.

The methodology included the conducting of interviews with individuals and organisations that work directly with the issues of protocol and film by facilitating programs in institutes of training and education or providing space such as festivals.

By attending and supporting a notable Indigenous film festival and correlating campaigns held at the University of Technology, Sydney; sufficient data was collected to suggest a re-imagining of how non-Indigenous organisations and individuals service the Indigenous film industry in Sydney. A total of eight informal, face-to-face interviews took place but fewer than this were expressly used in this report.

Even though the protocols asserted by Janke (2009) are for a national approach to film in Australia, the qualitative interviews and data collected are limited to the Sydney Metropolitan Area and may differ from area to area.

This report will investigate three examples of mentoring schemes in learning institutes and two film festivals that provide a platform for Indigenous film makers as well as modes of distributing Indigenous stories. The examples are specific to cultural protocols acknowledged by the Indigenous Elders of the western Sydney area.

Introduction

Short film is fast becoming a preferred form of alternate Indigenous history and knowledge exchange.

“Aboriginal people, who, in the past were overwhelmingly the subjects of films, have now gained a voice and are speaking back. Collaborative productions involving Film Australia and the Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies have long been recognised and celebrated for their role in devolving and sharing directorial powers.

Today, Indigenous filmmakers are at the forefront of the industry and they are successfully establishing a dialogue and creating images that are challenging and changing long established cultural attitudes towards Indigenous culture.”

(<http://www.screenaustralia.gov.au/showcases/8478/introduction.asp>)

Festivals, events and mentoring programs in the Sydney Metropolitan Area (SMA); facilitate Indigenous stories, encourage alternate discourses for the Indigenous voice and provide valuable opportunities for cultural expression.

A review of existing and potential film festivals, community events and mentoring schemes in the public and private sectors of education; reveal significant improvements to the implementation of cultural protocols and suggest models for opportunities to diversify and expand Indigenous film to a broader audience.

Cultural protocols aim to help close the gap between Indigenous and non-Indigenous communities. The disjointed way non-indigenous film makers, production companies and broadcasters have engaged in community or knowledge exchange has impacted negatively on Indigenous awareness, cultural identity and community welfare.

The diversity of cultural protocol for Indigenous People is extensive and Protocols as suggested by Janke (2009) Bostok (1997) and Hurley (2003) do not govern every situation for film making, rather provide examples that can be adapted to most situations involving Indigenous communities and content. Protocols in essence aim to maintain core values important to all Aboriginal and Torres Strait islander peoples. Values include spirit and integrity, reciprocity, respect, equality, survival and protection and responsibility (National Health and Medical Research Council, Australian Government, 2005, p.8). Understanding these core values demonstrates a respect for Indigenous people, and provides a foundation for ethical conduct on a film project.

Literature Review

The preservation of Indigenous knowledge, arts, rituals, performance and languages is essential to Indigenous culture and society. The diverse art forms for maintaining such culturally significant practices include music, visual arts, documentaries, television series and interactive media. As a contemporary mode of expression, film is a popular medium for Indigenous people to explore their own personal perspectives and experiences of relationships, landscapes, animals, political and social issues.

Film protocols educate and advise both Indigenous and non-indigenous people that seek to engage with Indigenous people or content. For the purpose of this report consider the following definition for protocols:

“Protocols can be classified as a set of rules, regulations, processes, procedures, strategies or guidelines ...ways to work, communicate and collaborate and respect the Indigenous community” (Hurley, 2003 p.3).

Short film is fast becoming a preferred form of alternate Indigenous history and knowledge exchange. Developing the Indigenous Australian experience as a genre in film has intensified the need for and significance of culturally sensitive frameworks for pre, during and post production of film making and distribution. Specifically, frameworks that enable both traditional and contemporary Indigenous story telling in a culturally sensitive way.

The developments of industry appropriate protocols for working with Indigenous people, communities and content can be seen as hindering non-indigenous support of and for Indigenous issues and cultures. Access to sacred sites, specific images or the use of Indigenous dialogue may denounce normative scope and practice. It is by understanding the inherently complex and multi-cultural diversity of Indigenous Australians, that this severely marginalised community can be more accurately and respectfully portrayed.

This report attempts to reveal the ways in which cultural protocols successfully represent Indigenous Australian perspective. In particular, how can these protocols cultivate passages to more profound awareness and understanding of the Indigenous Australian experience and their issues? How do recommended protocols deliver these problems and how they are contained?

‘Decolonizing Methodologies, Research and Indigenous Peoples’ (Smith, 1999) asserts the need for dismantling Eurocentric approaches to Indigenous research and the development of culturally appropriate counter-practices for research and methodologies.

Representation and identification of Indigenous content remain the dominant argument for cultural protocol in Indigenous film. With reference to these themes, Pihama (et Al Smith, 1999, p 35) maintains, “[Indigenous] people struggle to gain a voice, struggle to be heard from the margins, to have our stories heard, to have our descriptions of ourselves validated, to have access to the domain within which we control and define those images which are held up as reflections of our realities.”

It is these reflections and realities that Lestor Bostok explored. 'The Greater Perspective: Protocol and Guidelines for the Production of Film and Television on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Communities 2nd ED' (Bostok, 1997), has pioneered qualitative approaches to understanding Indigenous protocol. Bostok produced the initial protocol and subsequent guidelines published or commissioned by SBS have since been developed.

Based on his personal experiences of accepted misconduct towards filming Indigenous subject matter, Bostok established the first Aboriginal radio program on SBS, was executive producer of the SBS TV magazine program, 'First In Line' and was a documentary producer. In the mid 1990's Bostok developed an Indigenous Television training program for entrants to the industry. The Lestor Bostok Scheme accessed via Metro Screen continues to support the mentor based short film production initiative.

Indigenous Australians have been depicted in film as early as the 1890's. There are countless examples of mainstream and commercial television stations and production companies' disregard and contempt for Aboriginal communities, cultural values and codes of conduct. Entering and filming sacred sites, featuring individuals without prior consent, gaining access to Indigenous people and content under false pretences, using exploitative means to maintain community involvement are some of the many reasons that protocols need to be followed.

Bostok said of his personal experience with screen culture, "We have come a long way. From not being recognised to being given secondary roles with all of the racist and discriminatory attitudes, to now being accepted as part of the Australian landscape." (Et al 'Dreaming in motion', 2007, Australian Film Commission)

The capacity for film to harness Indigenous Australian heritage, knowledge and continuance of significant cultural practices, has extensive possibilities. Advances in the development of alternate strategies to break through to the essence of Indigenous Australian Peoples can be realised via adherence to frame works asserted by Janke's (2009) 'Pathways & Protocols'.

Suggested protocols are a means of creating frameworks that deliver both creatively and ethically. These protocols contribute to positive counter-practices that will more accurately embody Indigenous Australian storytelling.

With specific focus on the principles for protocols, implementing protocols within film practice and communication, consultation and consent; Janke has developed the suggested guide as used by Screen Australia and supported by the Australian Government. Janke maintains that protocols breach the gaps of production between conventional film-making towards culturally acceptable approaches.

'Pathways and Protocols', (May, 2009) is the most recent guide to Indigenous Film making in Australia that aims to ensure that cultural heritage is not "appropriated without proper consultation or sufficient acknowledgement" (Jankes, 2009 p.4) and that such productions break the stereotypical perspectives of Indigenous Australia and do not offend or demean cultural beliefs, knowledge or people.

Mentor Training Programs

Janke establishes 'Pathways & Protocols' as essential reading for Government departments, industry agencies and film organisations, broadcasters, educational and training institutions and Indigenous people approached by filmmakers to be included in a film (Janke, 2009, p6). Understanding if and how protocols are being practiced in the film industry contributes to discourse on "strategies for maintaining the silence and the strategies for breaking it" (Morrisson, T. 1992, p.51).

Knowing protocols prior to film projects can determine the success or negative after-math of inter-cultural exchange. Protocols educate and inform both Indigenous and non-indigenous people on ethical approaches to telling a story and how that story should be told. Protocols can also prepare non-indigenous people for dealing with the often sensitive themes and issues that can be misunderstood or misinterpreted.

Get to Know the Local Indigenous Community

A conference with a *Short Film Festival* Director that hosts an annual Sydney based short film festival, revealed that the film festival was interested in encouraging specifically aspiring Indigenous film makers in the SMA. The organisation was not well informed about ethical protocols in the Indigenous film industry neither had direct access or knowledge of community or Indigenous consultants or Elders. Protocol encourages individuals and organisations to know the identity and diversity of the local Indigenous people. The main clans (tribes) within Sydney are from the major language groups Dharug, Dharawal, Gundungurru and Kurrungai (<http://cityofsydney.nsw.gov.au/Barani/themes/theme1.htm>, accessed 4/05/2009).

Making initial contact with Local Aboriginal Councils, community organisations, health services and Indigenous education units of local universities and TAFE can direct non-Indigenous organizations to Indigenous project managers, council or community workers. These contacts can then assist and instigate work with the community.

Hurley (2003) emphasizes the importance of attending, participating and supporting Indigenous events. Developing ties with the community involves engaging in the community. Presentation and personal appearance should be considerate and appropriate to events and meetings. This is an important process for getting in contact with the local Indigenous community.

As most Sydney Film festivals provided a local, alternate podium for short films that would benefit Indigenous film and the Sydney community, these avenues of contact need to be explored. Increasing spaces for the Indigenous experience will enrich the lives of Indigenous film makers their audience and mainstream non-indigenous audience. The *Short Film Festival* could contribute significantly to empowering Indigenous film makers and increasing awareness for Indigenous Australian issues but needs to develop Indigenous alliances and build a rapport with Indigenous groups and individuals via practice of protocols.

Consult Local Indigenous Organisations/Reference Groups

Schools and community groups such as Redfern Community Centre and South Sydney Youth Services can advise on film protocols and Indigenous content as well as suggest valuable organisations or educational and training institutes for film makers.

Sydney Schools In Partnership (SIP) are schools that have been identified by the New South Wales Department of Education and Training (NSW DEAT) as those schools that have higher Indigenous student populations and would benefit from additional funding for extra resources providing additional teachers, Aboriginal Education Assistants and Indigenous tutors, computers, targeted programs and professional development community schemes to close the gap between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal students.

The Education Minister, Carmel Tebutt supported the SIP initiative stating, "Compared to the wider student population, Aboriginal students on average continue to record lower literacy and numeracy results, lower school retention and completion rates, higher level of absenteeism and higher suspension rates," (www.det.nsw.edu.au/newsroom/yr2006/ accessed 4/05/09).

Some SIP schools in the SMA have already offered a Short Film Development Scheme to their Year 8 and Year 9 students (Ages 14-16).

An interview conducted with an *Aboriginal Education Officer (AEO)* at a Sydney SIP school provided valuable insight into the various challenges for Indigenous education in Sydney and the benefits of film based community initiatives.

The AEO revealed that the NSW Department of Education has continued to fail Indigenous student's state and nation wide due to the lack of support from Indigenous staff. The SIP funding has provided for six Indigenous support staff and two Indigenous teaching staff. Success for the participant was to see students continue through to Years 11 and 12 as students from 'The Block' seldom complete their High School Educations.

The officer continued to relay the benefits of short film as a medium of creative expression for students in the development scheme.

"Aboriginal children tend to be apprehensive at first. When the non-Aboriginal students filled out their permission slips to participate in the short film mentoring scheme, all the rest followed. [Such initiatives] are beneficial to Indigenous school children without a doubt".

In response to the implementation of protocols the AEO advised that most organisations that offer mentor programs; do not necessarily have a working knowledge of Indigenous Protocol thus a brief brochure of these protocols to engage the community organisation would be beneficial. The benefit of being a SIP school is that there is always an Aboriginal staff member present to consult on "cultural sensitivities".

The AEO advised that a teacher, frustrated with a restless or disruptive student can refer the student to the AEO. The issue might be simple or complicated. Had the student been eating breakfast before school or had there been a recent death in the family. Respect, awareness and sensitivity to approaching common issues of substance abuse and difficult family life are realised through respecting protocols.

Operated as part of the 'Links to Learning' projects, students that participated in the film development scheme were required to return permission notes that were attached to an information sheet on the community group involved and the film production company. The scheme focused on developing digital and drama documentary film making, scriptwriting, sound editing, cinematography and production.

The AEO maintains that protocols are important but given their scope and due to non-Indigenous limited knowledge of film protocols, the AEO is essential to every mentor scheme. Only the AEO can ensure that culturally considerate practices are being maintained by the mentors.

Seven Indigenous students and three non-Indigenous students participated. Students were to develop the skill sets to produce a short film focusing on stories and issues that affect them. In the program workshop, students were required to watch short films made by other young students and then discuss their own stories and issues.

Over the period of ten weeks the students gained insight into the film-making process, improved their literary skills, were able to express themselves through short film, gained confidence and a sense of identity and pride, enhanced their employment opportunities, presented to their teachers, friends and families and were able to submit their films to festivals, short film programs on television and online portals.

This process provides an example of how protocol should regard 'Sharing of benefits' (Janke, 2009 p.17) Janke encourages the return of a benefit for cultural exchange whether through payment, through copy rights, skills development, the issue of copies to individuals, families or communities for cultural preservation.

Any organisation or film production company that work with young people need to ensure that they have the right cultural advisors to assist with protocol and be prepared for limitations that the Indigenous community deem sacred.

Director of a community film production company regards film as a means of healing and nurturing Indigenous young people in many facets of their private and public lives.

In a phone interview and e-mail correspondence the *Director* maintains that protocols are considered when working with Indigenous youth and encourages non-Indigenous organisations and individuals to develop interpersonal relations with Indigenous individuals as well as their families. He states that:

"Through my ten years experience working with urban Aboriginal communities in and around Sydney facilitating the creation of original stories from scripts to short films I have needed to liaise with Aboriginal groups, communities and elders to ensure cultural protocols are in place when relating to any story. I have developed strong ties and friendships with many families and individuals. I work closely with core groups of Indigenous young people on developing stories around issues that affect their lives. I am particularly aware of avoiding any stereotypical depictions of Aboriginal people and their culture. The stories developed in workshops are written by

the Indigenous participants themselves so are usually in line with cultural protocols.

The completed films are also influenced by the movies they watch. We often deal with strong issues with a light touch and inject comedy into the scripts (Aboriginal humour is particularly unique and very funny)."

"I have been continually disappointed with mainstream television writers' depiction of Aboriginal people and find it terribly frustrating that there are not more roles given to Aboriginal talent, and most roles are written as tokenistic or stereotypical. It appears that the writers need to be educated in Aboriginal culture, history and reality. Australia desperately needs more positive media stories that show contemporary Indigenous people and communities in a true light. Their portrayal is too often related to negative news stories. A great number of the young people I work with have limited opportunities and experience many barriers to success."

Cultural protocols influence on film as a medium of story telling is positive as it keeps the Aboriginal culture alive in it's most respected and original considerations'.

A situational analysis of the film festival and the mentoring scheme favours the community relationship the film production company has, compared to the film festival. An interview with *a participant of a notable Indigenous Community Centre* expressed concern for individuals or organisations that did not understand and learn about indigenous community protocols.

"not understanding us or our protocols signalled several issues with brokering community relations... one such instance meant that [he/she] became overwhelmed, frustrated and in the end lost interest".

The *participant of the community centre* went on to explain that ultimately the community project was poorly received and less successful in achieving target objectives of breaking negative community stereotypes and providing unique community services. The interview touched on the experience of the same annual event the following year that was successfully implemented as the organiser was of Maori Indigenous background and recognised the community perspective.

Despite the changes made through cultural consultations and limited government support, the annual community goals were achieved successfully due to the consideration of protocols, recognition of community, consultation and permission.

Like any well thought out expansion campaign, it is important to know the client, in this case, the local Indigenous community. Hurley (2003, p. 4) maintains that knowing the local Indigenous community is an "essential first step. Establishing trust and credibility is vital." Learning about the local Indigenous Community means participating and supporting community events and activities.

Gaining an awareness of how the community celebrate, mourn, communicate, live, work and dream will only increase rapport with the community and people creating valuable opportunities to engage in a vibrant and living Indigenous culture.

Film Festivals

Throughout this research project opportunities to attend Indigenous events such as The Launch of the ANTaR's Respect campaign at the University of Technology Sydney or The Message Sticks Film Festival; increased awareness, support for and recognition of the frameworks created by cultural protocols.

Get Permission

4.1 Of 'Pathways and Protocols', (Janke, 2009, p.51) states that "Consultation and consent in Indigenous communities are interrelated. Through consultation a filmmaker can come to understand what requires consent and the correct people to give it, and the people giving consent can more fully understand what they are consenting to."

Events that are organised by Indigenous Australians for Indigenous film makers will ensure protocols are practiced ethically. The importance for Indigenous film makers creating films in a context and environment that supports the development of counter-approaches to Indigenous film making is demonstrated in the longevity of the Lestor Bostok Scheme, run by Metro Screen and sponsored by the NSW Film and Television Office [NSW FTO]. The mentorship training program supports aspiring Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander screen makers as a registered training organisation by offering vocational training courses, issuing nationally recognised qualifications and providing industry professional mentors. The Indigenous Media Training Scholarship is offered to four Indigenous filmmakers and allows for the provisions on equipment, post-production facilities, budget and an industry professional (see <http://www.metroscreen.com.au> accessed 05/05/2009).

Screen Australia (formerly The Australian Film Commission) funded 'Bit of Black Business', a project that gave emerging Indigenous Australian film-makers the opportunity to submit short films that explored contemporary Indigenous life. Some of these films were premiered at the 2007 Message Sticks Indigenous Film festival. The chosen shorts were broadcast as part of a program on SBS television and are currently distributed via SBS as well as Flickerfest Distribution.

The short films were in the genre of Drama and covered significant contemporary Indigenous issues such as relationships (Custard, Too Late, Two Big Boys, and The Turtle), Indigenous unemployment (Days Like These) or the Stolen Generations (Back Seat, Bloodlines). The unique humour that Indigenous film-makers inject into film is notable in the shorts (Nana), about super Nana's, 'special' businesses (Done Dirt Cheap, Hush) or racial reservations (Jackie Jackie).

As more Indigenous film makers surge ahead in creating films that contribute significantly to national and international audiences, more examples of correct procedures for the pre, during and post production will occur. Instead of creating a story line then trying to integrate

Indigenous content, Indigenous film makers will do the correct research first as inspiration for films. Of enlisting the correct methods of research Janke declares, “Indigenous culture is bound by highly developed system of Aboriginal law and social organisation, so if filmmakers want to make films about us, our culture and our experience, they should do the work and find out about our law” (Janke, 2009, p.24).

The increased use of film as a preferred medium for alternate Indigenous Australian history and knowledge exchange is revealed by the increased participation by Indigenous film makers to film festivals and broadcasting that have screened Indigenous short films.

Message Sticks, the Indigenous film festival held over a four day weekend hosted at the Sydney Opera House, had its 10th anniversary in 2009. Message Sticks is an event that offers public screenings, live music, photographic art exhibition and refreshments free of charge. The festival is exemplary of how cultivating a cultural environment with Indigenous industry professions for aspiring Indigenous film makers can produce unique talent and stories that are gaining international acclaim. Warwick Thornton’s ‘Samson and Delilah’, winner of the 2009 Golden camera award at the esteemed Cannes Film festival was featured on the opening night of Message Sticks. Thornton uses majority body language and hand gestures to tell a love story between two Aboriginal teenagers growing up in a community outside of Alice Springs, Northern Territory. The film explores common challenges to rural Indigenous communities such as poverty, violence, boredom, abuse, life as an outcast.

In addition there were 7 world premieres of 7 Short Films by 7 new Australian directors including directorial debuts by Deborah Mailman and Leah Purcell. The audience had the opportunity to meet and talk with filmmakers after each session.

Message Sticks is a festival that differentiates itself as the works must be by Indigenous artists. There is a focus on excellence, performance, film making and a commitment to furthering the process of reconciliation. The two notable industry Indigenous curators Darren Dale and Rachel Perkins are committed to a festival that challenges market value driven approaches. The festival is free and open to all and the festival encourages audience interaction with the short film creators. This reiterates the importance of particular knowledge exchange being open to all and the rights of communal ownership, benefit sharing and consultation in Indigenous culture. This event maintains cultural material in an environment that sustains Indigenous cultural integrity. Access to the films and film-makers is open and free. This touches on the very sinew of Indigenous community and Indigenous being.

The Curators of the festival on the Sydney Opera House website:

Curators Message

Nothing is quite as exhilarating for a filmmaker than to sit with an audience as they experience the particular world you have painstakingly crafted, sometimes over many years, into a film.

Somewhere in the half light between audience and screen, a conversation begins that magically opens hearts and minds if you have told your story

well...We are proud to contribute to our ongoing cultural evolution, alive and kicking and free to all at the people's House.

Message Sticks is proud to bring together the best of Indigenous world cinema once again. The breadth and depth of films in this year's program demonstrates Indigenous cinema has firmly established its home on the global film festival scene as international standard work that speaks with a distinctive voice.

Darren Dale & Rachel Perkins
Curators, Message Sticks Indigenous Film Festival 2009

http://www.sydneyoperahouse.com/About/Program_Message_Sticks.aspx

Attending the 2009 Message Sticks film festival from May 7th-10th provided opportunities to meet local Indigenous film industry supporters and participants of the festival. I had the pleasure in meeting with Indigenous Doctoral students and staff, UTS graduate student Allan Clarke, currently working for SBS on the 'Living Black' program, Gill Moody from Screen Australia, Darren Dale the Message Sticks Co-Curator, and Dr Romaine Moreton. The community support systems were from all over Australia and from different vocational backgrounds but all people were unified to support Indigenous film in Australia.

Film and broadcast media is crucial to Indigenous economic and social development. The industry provides employment and modes of communicating that are more effective than often expensive, government or mainstream media campaigns. "A major obstacle is the lack of appreciation and understanding of Indigenous media by the media agencies that the Government contracts to manage its information and public awareness campaigns. They simply believe that Indigenous media is "not a good buy" and continue to engage mainstream media to broadcast Indigenous campaigns". (http://www.aph.gov.au/House//committee/cita/community_broadcasting/subs/sub72.pdf accessed 15/04/2009) This needs to change, and the film industry is leading the way.

Findings

There were three key findings in conducting interviews, observations at events and secondary research into protocols for working with Indigenous communities and in short film.

Communicate

1. Face-to-face communications are vital to gaining access to Indigenous community

Data collection using e-mail and phone conversations was majority unsuccessful. An initial e-mail and phone calls to gain information did not facilitate a rapport that would encourage additional information regarding protocols and the film industry. Phone and e-mail contact with Indigenous community groups, community council workers and the Aboriginal Education Officer was impersonal and limited the capacity to develop trust and respect.

As an Indigenous Maori researcher the inherently cautious nature of all Indigenous peoples means that face-to-face communication is imperative to forging relationships with Indigenous people. This has much to do with the historical and political reality of colonised Indigenous people. It is easier to get a true sense of a person from personal face-to face contact.

Whereas the non-Indigenous participant for the mentoring scheme was content with email as a way of making his official statements that did not deter from the issues mentioned, conversations with Indigenous participants conveyed a greater sense of dissatisfaction in simple direct language.

Making the effort to go to the preferred venues for interviews meant that participants knew who they were dealing with, were more willing to offer information, and felt more comfortable knowing they were speaking with an Indigenous researcher that would respect and acknowledge cultural common sense and sensitivities in the interviews.

2. Protocols in Film are an evolving process

The diversity of Indigenous Australia as people from different locations, different clans and different experiences from traditional to contemporary suggest that protocols in film can vary in location, development, and content. Despite this; evidence from the all Indigenous film festival, mentoring schemes developed by Indigenous film-makers, community groups and cultural advisors all maintain the need for protocols in practice. Protocols alter in practice but their significance, purpose and essence is the same.

3. Indigenous story telling is enhanced by the use of Indigenous protocols

Examples of short films by Indigenous film makers with often limited skills, budget and experience have and continue to permeate cultural boundaries that once limited the Indigenous experience. The distinct and unique qualities of Indigenous films resonate not just with Indigenous audiences but with mainstream national and international audiences.

Recommendations

The three findings relate specifically to the way that Indigenous and non-Indigenous individuals and organisations communicate, interact and create stories.

Though protocols are beneficial from a qualitative perspective many non-Indigenous would become challenged by protocols (relating to Copyright, Performers' rights, Moral rights and Indigenous communal moral rights) communication processes are more recognised.

To nurture and encourage the success of protocols in the film industry and for prospects of expanding programs and festivals or public platforms for Indigenous film I strongly recommend an update on the Respect, Acknowledge, Listen: Practical protocols for working with the Indigenous Community of Western Sydney (Hurley, A. 2003) booklet. This will encourage organisations to educate themselves to present new initiatives.

The booklet is a brochure sized 18 page hand out with simple comprehensive, concise steps to understanding the Indigenous Community relations and offers three pages of links to websites of protocol, organisations, and contact details that will assist in networking correctly.

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