

"Remember, this basket we have made, it holds stories and knowledge to share. I hope that as we wove this story together you gained knowledge and stories that you can pass on to your daughters, your granddaughters and to the world... Through weaving the basket we brought it all together. Now that it's made it's a big, big beautiful basket. The final step is to put the handle on it to hand it over to you, the reader, in the hope you will carry the knowledge carefully and share it with others."

BURARRWANGA ET AL, 2008, P. 37



Our Story

The Bawaka Collective is an Indigenous and non-Indigenous, more-than-human research collective. The Collective consists of Bawaka Country including Laklak Burarrwanga, Ritjilili Ganambarr, Merrkiyawuy Ganambarr-Stubbs, Banbapuy Ganambarr, Djawundil Maymuru, Sandie Suchet-Pearson, Sarah Wright and Kate Lloyd. We author as Country to acknowledge the critical role Bawaka Country plays in guiding and shaping our work. Bawaka Country is the diverse land, water, human, and nonhuman animals, plants, rocks, thoughts, and songs that make up the Yolnu homeland of Bawaka in North East Arnhem Land, Australia. Laklak, Ritjilili, Merrkiyawuy, and Banbapuy are four Indigenous sisters, elders, and caretakers for Bawaka Country together with their daughter, Djawundil. Sarah, Sandie and Kate are three non-Indigenous human geographers from The University of Newcastle and Macquarie University who have been adopted into the family. The Collective has worked together since 2006.



"We say more-than-human to emphasise that animals, places and things are all part of us, and also that they are themselves able to think and act. It is not just humans that count."

BAWAKA COLLECTIVE

Purpose of this Handbook

In this handbook we share the key themes related to intercultural communication that have been important in our work as a Collective, including our interactions with university students, student teachers, visitors and tourists at Bawaka. These themes emerge through our relationship with and as Bawaka Country; they are not intended to be a formula for successful communication that can be rigidly applied in all situations; indeed, a one size fits all approach to communication is not appropriate. Rather, we share these themes to prompt careful thought about intercultural communication not just as an exchange of information and ideas, but as an entry point into more profound and ongoing relationships, connections and transformations. The seven themes described here are all connected and related to one another.



"Yes spirals, they go up and down, round and round, forever. They twist and turn. This is like all our songs. It lets you talk about the contemporary, the new, and also brings together the old songs. The spiral is good because it shows how it can all keep going."

MERRKIYAWUY GANAMBARR-STUBBS



In Appreciation of Country

Country is an Australian Aboriginal English term used to refer to specific places or territories that are Aboriginal peoples' homelands. Australia is made up of many, many different Aboriginal nations, peoples and Countries. Country is rich and intensely meaningful. Country includes people, and it is also more-than-human as it includes winds, currents, animals, rocks, laws, custom, movement, song, knowledges, relationships, histories, presents, and futures. Country is alive, sentient and communicative, it encompasses tangible and intangible forces that connect, shape, create, mutually care and become together in, with and as place.

"So you see knowledge about Country is important because it's about how and where you fit within the world and how you connect to others and to place."

BAWAKA COLLECTIVE

This handbook is based on learnings from Bawaka Country, in north Australia, the land and people of the Burarrwanga family. This handbook is authored by, with and as Bawaka Country. The more-than-human beings that make up Bawaka Country enabled the design, implementation, writing and sharing of this work through its human authors. This is a co-production of knowledge in which Yolŋu authors, as well as Country itself, choose what to share and the terms under which this might be shared in order to advance their own work of intercultural teaching. Everything shared in this handbook comes from our work together. In doing so we also want to acknowledge Darug, Gumbaynggirr and Awabakal Country, where Kate, Sandie and Sarah live and work. We thank these places and their custodians for nurturing and supporting us. In sharing our learnings we respectfully extend a relationship to you, the reader, and acknowledge the laws, stories and histories of your own places.



Taking Respect Seriously

In Australia, acknowledgements of Country have become an important and much overdue recognition of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples' connections to Country. Acknowledging that all Country has traditional Custodians and Elders who have cared for, continue to care for, and will always care for it, and that all Country carries with it diverse histories, presences and futures, is a critical starting point for intercultural communication. However, it is also important to deepen engagements and move from acknowledgement into genuinely respecting the human and non-human beings (plants, animals, water, winds, lands) which have shaped, enabled and nurtured, and will continue to shape, enable and nurture, place. Everyone in Australia lives on Indigenous land with its own Indigenous culture, knowledge, law, language, stories and connections. For effective communication, it is critical that Indigenous custodianship and ownership is understood and taken seriously, including in areas where Indigenous ownership is unacknowledged. Alongside this respect comes an understanding of what can be learnt, what can be shared and also what cannot. This includes not assuming the right to do things without a clear invitation and it also means respecting refusals and times when people do not want to engage. Taking respect seriously means taking responsibility and going beyond a tokenistic lip-service, to real respect and understanding. This can change the ways people know and act.



"In the real world, they only listen to politicians but how do we get them to understand? When we talk, talk, talk, they don't learn. To teach them, to get them to understand, we need to keep our culture by doing what we have to do. We need to get other people coming to walk with us so they can touch, feel and hear our world."

LAKLAK BURARRWANGA

"I think I always thought of it as separate back home [Indigenous Australia] and I think that it [this trip] has challenged that and that it is a lot more connected because this land that I live on, and that my house is on, is Indigenous land and I have never really thought about it that way and the way that they look after the land up here and watch the land up here is how it used to be back home as well and I've never really thought about that connection much."

STUDENT

"I'm often trying to understand what it means to live on stolen land – and how to make sense of migrating to Australia to participate in and benefit from the economy of the settler colonial state, and understanding that this economy works through the continued dispossession and denial of Aboriginal rights, territories, and cultures. Is it possible to relate to place differently – even as you participate in (and benefit from) systems that dispossess? How do you transform understanding that the settler colonial state in which you participate works through the continual dispossession of Indigenous peoples into actions and connections that undermine the settler colonial state?"

MATALENA TOFA



"I didn't really know what
Country meant. I knew
Country means land but it is
about much more than that,
which I learnt when I got there
[to Bawaka]. Country is not
just about the land it's about
how people interact with it and
it's about family and it's about
culture... It painted a more
broad picture of Country."

STUDENT

Whose Country are you living on/gathering on/moving through/visiting?

Which people, which non-humans, which histories, which stories should be respected in your situation?

Who should lead the interactions?

How are non-humans (animals, weather, plants, water) present in and influencing your interactions?

Who/what might be invisible or missing, and why?

What are the histories of this place and your relationship with it, including histories of colonisation, dispossession and diverse Aboriginal ways of being?

How are your interactions shaping these histories, and what is possible now and in the future?

What losses and violences should be taken seriously in your situation?

What presences should be taken seriously in your situation?

What do you know, what can you share, what don't you know, and what shouldn't you know?

Theme 2

Relating, Belonging and Knowing Your Place

To communicate sensitively and well means knowing from, and speaking from, your place. It's not about going away from your own culture, although sometimes it will require questioning or challenging it, and it is not about getting someone else's culture or knowing all about it. Rather, it is about understanding where and how you fit in and being aware when not to talk for someone or something that you are not. We come from and relate to different places with different histories and relationships with land and people. For the Bawaka Collective, even though we are different, we can still relate deeply. Communication is fundamentally about relationships and connections. Seriously respecting Country means connecting with other humans and with a range of non-humans, as part of sentient Country. It means honouring the ties of kinship, the relationships which bind a more-than-human world, and recognising that all humans and non-humans are part of these ties. It means embracing vulnerabilities and opening up to new physical, emotional and spiritual connections, obligations and responsibilities. And with these deeper connections and relationships can come an opportunity to know better who you are, where you are, where you fit in. It can also enable invitations for placebased belongings.



"For us, kinship lies at the heart of everything. A world with no kinship is a world that does not have a true existence. Kinship gives everything meaning, order, balance. Wetj [kinshipbased sharing] tells us about kin, about respect and duty, about who is close and who is distant. Sometimes we share to make those who are far away come close. It is important to our identity as Yolnu."

BURARRWANGA ET AL, 2013, P. 25

Theme 2	Relating, Belonging and Knowing Your Place	Reflection
INTERCUI		

"He [Timmy Burarrwanga – Laklak's son] emphasised this multiple times – Bawaka was our home now and we were all part of his family and part of Country too... This concept of being part of the family from the beginning, being all connected and sharing was something that emerged again and again throughout the trip. Looking back, I believe this was one of the most important and valuable lessons: that all of us, living near and far are spiritually, biologically and intrinsically connected to the land and the sea, through plants and animals – we are all family."

STUDENT

"I feel I am learning so much about relating and understanding my place. It has helped me realise that the intercultural context and Country are everywhere and we are each a part of it. I do feel weird about the idea of 'belonging' in a colonising context though. I think 'belonging' is more place-specific and something that needs to be invited and determined in that context, whereas 'relating' feels more appropriate because we do, as non-Indigenous folks, need to learn to respectfully relate in all contexts."

LARA DALEY



Reflection

INTERCULTURAL COMMUNICATION HANDBOOK

"Kinship's a map for us of how to relate to people in the system of Yolnu relationships. Every child that is born is born into this system."

BANBAPUY GANAMBARR

Theme 2	Relating, Belonging and Knowing Your Place	Facilitating Questions
INTERCUI	TURAL COMMUNICATION HANDBOOK	

How can you relate in a relaxed and gentle way, without always asking questions? How can you put the imperative to 'know' aside and just 'be'?

What relationships are becoming recognisable, being made, strengthened, or renewed through your interactions?

How can you nourish and take these relationships seriously?

How might your sense of belonging be nourished and/or challenged by deeply thinking about your place?

How could you draw on your kinship relationships as a guideline for your interactions?

Theme 3 Co-Becoming Explanation

INTERCULTURAL COMMUNICATION HANDBOOK

Co-Becoming

Co-Becoming describes how everything is constantly made and defined by and through relationships. Nothing exists outside of relationships – between humans, with or between other beings, with/as Country. Everything comes into being together. Thinking about communication in this way is very different from two individual humans talking at each other. It's about what everyone and everything brings to the conversation, and how you can build a shared understanding and relationship from this. When we do this, we change who we are as individuals; we become together. This doesn't imply sameness but is an interactive process that supports difference. So, co-becoming involves the shared, ongoing emergence of active, sentient, dynamic, more-than-human beings, with nonhumans and place active partners that are able to shape and influence communication. Rather than speaking as an outside 'expert' to intervene in a situation, or exchanging information through a cross-cultural encounter, co-becoming focuses on co-creating knowledges and co-constructing shared understandings. It nurtures the ways in which everything, including big concepts, such as time and space, and small things, such as a phone conversation or the act of sharing information, are constantly emerging and transforming through more-than-human relationships.



Theme 3 Co-Becoming Reflection

INTERCULTURAL COMMUNICATION HANDBOOK

"Becoming together involves more than the sum of beings. There is something bigger at stake; an enchanted, mysterious, beautiful lightness of becoming, which is often within grasp, yet always alludes. It requires us to pay close attention to our emergence, to the relationships which enable us, and it requires that we do so with an ethics of care."

BAWAKA COUNTRY ET AL, 2013, P. 189

Theme 3	Co-Becoming	Reflection	
INTERCULTURAL COMMUNICATION HANDBOOK			

"It's about how to relate properly to people and to Country...
it's not about how to separate people, it's about how to bring
them together and to do it in the right way."

STUDENT, INTERVIEW

"I have realised during my time at Bawaka that I am never an outsider, I am always influenced by and influencing my surroundings through my actions, thoughts and words. I will never forget Bawaka and what it has taught me about connectivity and cross-cultural communication."

STUDENT

"We've talked about what it means to bring all of ourselves into interactions, it's not automatic or always clear to us, and it's something we need to continue to work on. What we realise is that we are not separate from what we do, we see ourselves growing and being changed through the things we do together. Our collective identity is a real thing for us."

THE BAWAKA COLLECTIVE



Theme 3 Co-Becoming Reflection

INTERCULTURAL COMMUNICATION HANDBOOK

"By working together we would help build long lasting relationships that could continue through the generations. The children, grandchildren and great grandchildren of the women both from Bawaka and the universities could grow up together, teach each other and all lead together."

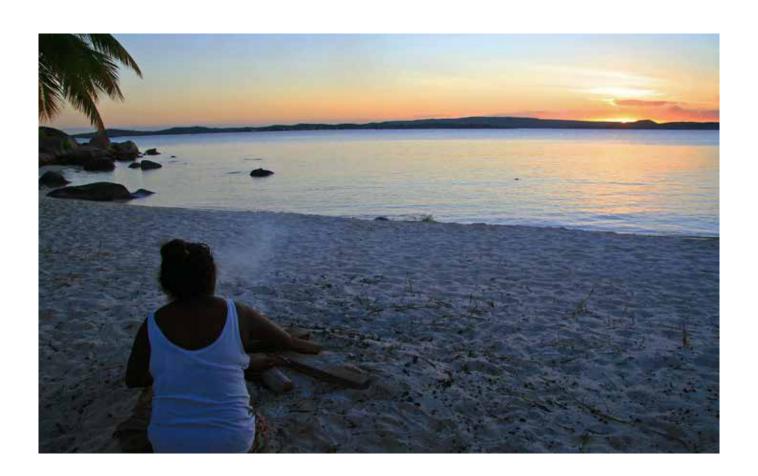
LAKLAK BURARRWANGA

Theme 3	Co-Becoming	Facilitating Questions
INTERCULTURAL COMMUNICATION HANDBOOK		

What shared knowledges and understandings emerge through your interactions?
What would a focus on co-creating and co-constructing (knowledges, understandings, policies, programs, curricula) in your interactions look like?
Who do you co-become with? Which humans and non-humans are you emerging with in this particular time and place?

Sensing, Attending and Being Patient

Sensing, attending and being patient requires slowing down, pausing, and taking time to listen, look, feel and learn. Seeking to activate and use all our senses to relate as part of the world. This involves learning through relationships, through actions and through careful attention, not just through asking questions and talking a lot. Being patient and humble enables recognition of the myriad of messages that humans and non-human beings are always sending out. It can help us attend carefully to human and non-human communications like noticing when the yellow wattle tells us the fish are fat and it's time to hunt. In this way, we can be open to multiple ways of understanding, being and communicating. We can pay careful and respectful attention to the human and non-human beings who we all share the world with, to the connectivities and kinship relationships everyone is an integral part of, and to the messages sent by Country.



"It is easy to learn when you learn in place. When we teach children the Yolyu way, we take them out and show them. We walk them through. They learn the seasons, the winds, they learn what to feel and how to do.

For example, when it is the season Rarranhdharr, they see how dry everything is, they feel the hot sand and learn to feel the fruits ripening. This is how we teach and how we learn. This is how we will help you learn too."

LAKLAK BURARRWANGA

"I think the main things I've learnt here is about time and Yolnu time. The days feel much longer and I think that's because we appreciate each moment as it comes and our activities are decided by what the weather is like and how hot we are feeling and those kinds of things."

STUDENT

"We need patience to allow the right time for the lessons to arrive."

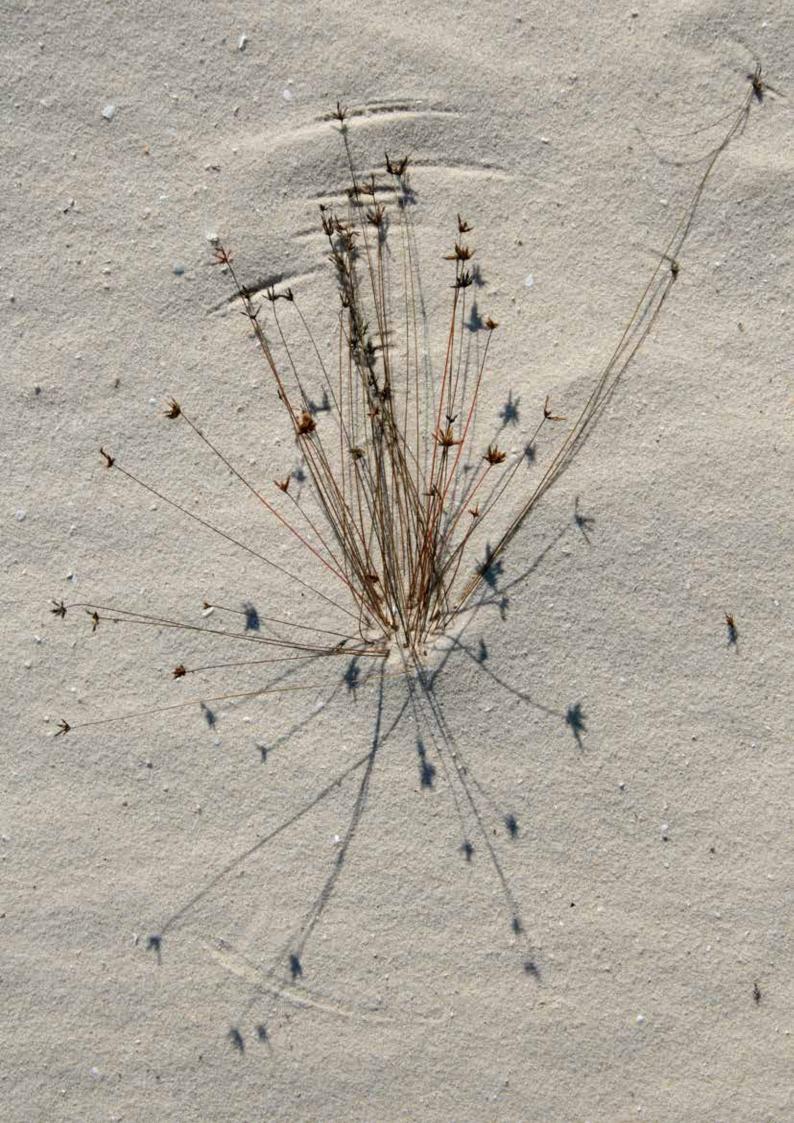
STUDENT

"In the Yolnu world we learn by listening, listening to each other, listening to the land and listening with our body, eyes, ears and heart. It is an embodied experience that involves being present in the moment and on Country. Listening and learning is also about silence – it is not rushed, it is paused – Yolnu language is paused and filled with silences – silence is part of language, it is part of communicating."

STUDENT

"Not interrupting when we're learning, which I find difficult... being patient because I think that's also a big thing here. They said their language is patient and I think their actions are also patient, **waiting for when it's the right time** and I've been trying to be more patient and waiting to speak to someone when they are not busy and when they are not resting as well."

STUDENT



Theme 4

Reflection

INTERCULTURAL COMMUNICATION HANDBOOK

"But certainly, especially in the weaving, it became watching; watching Laklak or someone taking your weaving off you and then you watch people's hands. So I think one of the things about that is much more about being immersed in activities and patience... The hardest thing for me is to stop thinking about it and let the body take over, because if you watch, the body knows what to do but the head will interfere with that".

TOURIST

Theme 4	Sensing, Attending and Being Patient	Facilitating Questions
INTERCULTURAL COMMUNICATION HANDBOOK		

How can you slow down in the work you do?
What do you notice in the quiet moments or if you take time to pause and pay attention to your surroundings?
How can you use your senses to connect with the messages are being sent to you?
What messages do you send out, to other human beings and to the non-humans you interact with?

Caring and Loving

An ethics of care and love is central to realising intercultural communication. This encompasses caring to listen, to sense, to pay attention, to be patient, and to wait. It involves opening up relationships to the possibility and vulnerability of love, opening our hearts and being true to connections and not just staying in our heads. It means caring to respect boundaries and limits to what can be discussed and shared. It means caring for others and it also means recognising that caring for human and non-human others also means caring for oneself as part of an interconnected web – caring not only for Country but also as Country. It means carefully considering the power relationships, histories, and contexts that shape, enable and nurture interactions and opportunities. It requires the humility to question your own assumptions and open oneself up to be cared for by Country and by other people. Critically, it also means caring about the responsibilities and obligations that come with any relationships and responding with care and love.



Theme 5 Caring and Loving Reflection

INTERCULTURAL COMMUNICATION HANDBOOK

"Living in two worlds is so hard. Sometimes it can be easy, sometimes it can be hard. But through all these struggles and changes, we are determined to keep the old as strong as possible. For the next generation."

MERRKIYAWUY GANAMBARR-STUBBS

Theme 5	Caring and Loving	Reflection
INTERCULTURAL COMMUNICATION HANDBOOK		

"Märr is the foundation for many Yolŋu matha verbs of emotion including to love, to be concerned, to trust and to treat someone respectfully."

CHRISTIE AND GREATOREX 1986

"Märr is both human and more-than-human. It is a Yolqu person's love for Country and Country for them. It is the ties of gurrutu, of kinship and responsibility. It is the foundation of singing, dancing, ceremony and songlines, the cycles of song and grief that bring people and Country into being through co-becoming."

BAWAKA COLLECTIVE



Theme 5 Caring and Loving Reflection

INTERCULTURAL COMMUNICATION HANDBOOK

"Attending with care to the myriad communications, presences and propositions as we co-become, not merely Caring for Country but Caring as Country, can contribute to a truly relational co-existence and produce more just, sustainable futures."

BAWAKA COLLECTIVE

Theme 5	Caring and Loving	Facilitating Questions
INTERCULTURAL COMMUNICATION HANDBOOK		

How can caring fo through your inter	n to respond with care and with love? or relationships with people, nonhumans and Country be embedded ractions? yourself as caring as not just caring for?

Responding with Responsibility

Even the smallest learnings should be integrated into life. Responding with responsibility means not only recognising but carefully responding to the obligations that come with human and more-than-human relationships. This includes a very respectful and careful sharing of knowledges and experiences — not just extracting knowledge. It may mean sharing what you have learned through interacting with others, and applying what you have learned in your personal and professional practice. It may mean being humble enough to realise what should not be shared or applied, and it certainly means always acknowledging the source and context of the learning. It may mean responding to something that you think is being done unethically or poorly and being part of the response to help change it. Being responsible means recognising the give and take of ethical and just interactions where reciprocity and mutual benefits are carefully discussed and nurtured.



"Our Collective is about giving and taking, not just take, take, take. That balance — bala ga lili — when the water flows from the land and when the water flows — the salt water — there is a balance there and that's where the knowledge is. Where it turns into the brackish water."

BANBAPUY GANAMBARR

Theme 6	Responding with Responsibility	Reflection
INTERCULTURAL COMMUNICATION HANDBOOK		

"Building that relationship changes you and it changes what you are researching and the change will go beyond just us."

STUDENT



"It is important to share because it the Law. It is the system from the old people, going back thousands and thousands of years, forever. This system has been standing really strong. So our mob, we grow up, and we see those rules. We have been told, 'You must not be greedy. You have to share with everyone.'"

LAKLAK BURARRWANGA

Theme 6	Responding with Responsibility	Facilitating Questions
INTERCULTURAL COMMUNICATION HANDBOOK		

What responsibilities arise from your relationships, interactions and communications?		
How will you respond to these responsibilities?		
How can you develop your abilities to respond – your response-abilities?		
What are some limits to your sharing, your right to share and to your knowledge?		

Theme 7

Reflecting and Transforming

Reflecting in intercultural communication involves critically questioning one's own taken-for-granted ideas and assumptions, and beginning to understand how these assumptions shape what is thought and how one responds. Assumptions make some things, like reading body language, sharing priorities and understandings of time and place, seem natural and straightforward. But, really, these reflect specific cultures and worldviews. So, we find that intercultural communication is not all about learning about other cultures. Most importantly, it's about learning about ourselves, our own assumptions and sometimes beginning to question and shift them. To reflect deeply requires humility and openness to new or different ways of understanding issues and concepts, and different ways of working and being. As new relationships and understanding emerge, identities and issues become dynamic and are constantly transforming.



"I ask them, what's this? They say, 'It's a basket.' I say, it's not a basket, it tells a story. It is a story. Like you might write a story in a book. But without books, we have our hands and the basket – the colours and patterns in a basket are like letters, commas, capital letters. They are the message. With the different colours, the different stitchings, you start from small up and up and up. It's like going through the university."

LAKLAK BURARRWANGA

"I don't think enough attention is paid to how long those lessons take to really sit with us. Like the other day I woke up and I felt like I just knew all this stuff... finally something someone had said two weeks ago had made sense to me."

STUDENT

"In some ways I feel so relaxed at Bawaka. It is such a nourishing place and now we have been adopted into the family there is a level of acceptance there that is really profound. But with that comes responsibility too and that sometimes makes me anxious – are there things I should be doing, or shouldn't be doing as a granddaughter, sister or aunt? I know there must be. Kate, Sandie, and myself have often angsted over everything from how to talk about research, to money, to buying food (how much meat should we take?), to trying so hard not to ask too many questions. We are constantly challenged and are constantly learning how to be good research partners, open to and respectful of Yolnu ontologies, and good family members. Lucky Laklak and her family are very forgiving of our often klutzy efforts!"

SARAH WRIGHT



"I was very shy when we first met. We also worry a lot about how to get you to Bawaka, how to transport you. Even when Timmy's not here, he's worried too, nervous and worried about how to transport you. And when you're here, the whole idea of asking questions and responding is different and difficult for us. We're used to telling and being told. Listening to your questions and feeling like we have to answer has taken us a while to get used to."

LAKLAK BURARRWANGA

Theme 7	Reflecting and Transforming	Facilitating Questions
INTERCULTURAL COMMUNICATION HANDBOOK		

How can you make space for, respect, and be open to alternative ways of thinking and interacting?

What transformations are occurring through your interactions? Can you recognise ways in which you are changing?

What are some of the taken-for-granted ideas and assumptions that inform how you act/work?

How can you share your reflections and learning with others in ways that are appropriate and respectful?

How can you apply your reflections and learning through your interactions, work and life?

What have you learnt about yourself?

Have you questioned some of your assumptions and understandings?

This handbook was written by Bawaka Country including Laklak Burarrwanga, Ritjilili Ganambarr, Merrkiyawuy Ganambarr-Stubbs, Banbapuy Ganambarr, Djawundil Maymuru, Sandie Suchet-Pearson, Sarah Wright, Kate Lloyd, Matalena Tofa and Lara Daley

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Suchet-Pearson, Kate Lloyd

Document Design: Ali Wright

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VISIT

http://bawakacollective.com

https://www.facebook.com/bawakawelcomesyou

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