\*\*Slide 1

Creating places of belonging for those living with disability: Going beyond diversity and inclusion in post-secondary education

\*\*Slide 2

Acknowledgement of Country

\*\*Get My Feathers On: Get my feathers on

When I’m asked the question of ‘who are you’, things could get complicated;

But for me it is really quite simple;

‘I am an Aboriginal woman living with the disability of vision impairment working with a guide dog’;

I am also an academic but we’ll get back to that lateron;

My Aboriginality always comes first;

I did not know of my Aboriginality heritage until my early to mid-20s;

My Kamilaroi mum passed away when I was four and for a myriad of reasons, my Aboriginality was kept a family secret that I learned about by accident as an adult;

Since this ‘discovery’, I have gone through a process of ‘growing up Aboriginal’;

Learning the Aboriginal ways of knowing, being and doing;

It is a way of making sense of the world that to me feels quite nurturing;

On this slide you will see the map of where Kamilaroi Country is…north of Sydney and inland;

Around Tamworth, Moree and Tingah;

I am Freshwater and very much connected to river with the Gwyder River being where I am connected;

On the right side you will see my three totem birds;

I won’t go through all of them now, but Crow at the top right is my most dominant force;

Crow is the Trickster; Crow is the one that tells me I need to disrupt;

To ask the difficult and uncomfortable questions;

Getting my feathers on, as I have titled this slide, is about put on my armour and taking on my responsibilities;

\*\*Slide 4: My Story

Here we have two photos;

On the left is me in 1974, aged eight;

You can see my fabulously fashionable glasses!

I lost most of my eyesight aged seven following the measles;

It took the adults a while to figure out that I had glaucoma and I didn’t get properly diagnosed until I was about nine;

Following surgery on both eyes, I was sent to Sydney to get my education;

This consisted mostly of learning to type, learning braille and mobility;

All skills I use on a daily basis as an adult;

But I did not get to learn a curriculum of English, maths and so on, to a standard of my sighted peers;

You see, when I entered the institution I was put through an IQ test which I failed because it wasn’t adapted for low vision or for the fact that I had not been at school for about two years;

I stayed in the institution between the ages of 9 and 16, getting myself expelled so I could finish high school and go on to university;

I didn’t know what ‘university’ would get me but I knew it was important;

On the right you see a photo taken earlier this year;

I’m walking with my new guide dog Topaz in front of the Great Hall at Sydney Uni.

But getting from the institution to the academy has been a twisting and winding journey;

I first entered higher education as a student seven years prior to the enactment of the Disability Discrimination Act of 1992.

My technology was black texta and loads of paper;

many of my essays were submitted orally;

In my second year I took two buses and a train toeach week get to my vocational counsellors office so I could sit in his office and type up my assignments;

he was blind too and would tell me he had it tougher as a uni student in the 70s then what I was having now!

No sympathy but plenty of care;

I had lecturers threaten to do ‘harm’ if I quit!

When I graduated in 1989, it took over one hundred job interviews before I was finally successful;

As a vision impaired person, I was meant to be the client and not the welfare worker;

Since this first paid job, I have had a multitude of jobs from counsellor to project manager to youth worker and more;

I’ve worked in NGOs and government;

I’ve been back to uni a few times and 2016 I finished a PhD in Aboriginal education;

Five years later I am Australia’s only known Aboriginal female academic with a vision impairment;

It’s been a rough ride;

It requires me to be persistent and innovative;

What I have found that works is collaborating with allies, those savvy people who ‘get it’;

But I’ll come back to that;

Let’s first look at the inclusive and exclusive world I, and others with disability need to navigate;

\*\*Architecture of exclusion and inclusion

For me there are three architectures or ways that exclusion, and in turn inclusion, happen;

First we have the The architecture of the built environment (e.g. buildings, public spaces, kerbside, signage, wayfinding)

Second we have the architecture of the digital environment (e.g. websites, email, PDFs, PowerPoints), something that has become even more important in COVID19 times and working from home;

Finally, we have The architecture of people’s minds (e.g. low or high expectations, intersectionality, strength-based, curiosity, willingness);

Think about it this way…when we design a building we need to adhere to building codes, the DDA, Universal design;

Would we build a building with say, ramps or lifts?

Now apply this idea to digital and mindarchitecture;

How do you build that website or PDF? Are you embedding the ramps and lifts, wayfinding for accessibility of all kinds?

Do you have a mindset that enables or disables? How do your words, actions and beliefs create accessibility?

You would think in 2020 we would be a long way down the path of delivering on promises of accessibility, navigation, inclusion and diversity;

We are seeing these terms and others like equity, social justice and human rights in legislation, policy, strategic plans and graduate qualities;

And don’t get me wrong, we have come a long way since the days of poor education in institutions for the disabled and a long way from only providing textas and paper to a low vision university student – actually I had to buy them myself;

But experience would tell me we have a long way to go.

\*\* Anita Sands tells us:

**Diversity and Inclusion aren’t what matter: *Belonging* is what counts**

**Now when I read this earlier this year, bells went off in my head;**

**Anita tells us that:**

***Diversity is a fact (the numbers are what they are);***

Look around Zoom today and the fact is we are all different;

So what about inclusion?

Again Anita’s words are enlightening:

***inclusion is a choice (you decide whether to include someone or not);***

But, as she states:

*belonging is a feeling that can be enforced by a culture that you can purposefully create.*

Let me give a couple of example;

By law my guide dog and I fit the diversity/numbers category;

Legislation and policy means we are to be included;

But do we belong?

Café story;

Meetings;

\*\*Inclusive Playgrounds

**Earlier this year when I was looking at the idea of creating inclusive playgrounds, playgrounds in which all children and parents belong, I cam across the NSW Government guidelines called Everyone can play: A guideline to create inclusive playspaces, released in 2019;**

**It has three key principles:**

an we get there?

Can we play?

Can we stay?

This got me thinking about higher education

Can we get there -