



**+1 Podcast**  
*Season 1: Episode 2*  
*Melissa Laird*

Medo Pournader:

Hello and welcome to the +1 Podcast where we discuss diversity and inclusion in our workplaces at the University of Melbourne. I'm your host, Medo Pournader, Senior Lecturer in Management and Marketing at the Faculty of Business of Economics, University of Melbourne. In this episode we host Melissa Laird, Associate Professor, Academic Director Curriculum and Transformation, and Deputy Head of School at the Melbourne School of Professional and Continuing Education or MSPACE. I talk to Melissa about her work at MSPACE across the university on Diversity and Inclusion, especially indigenous affairs and including them into curriculum design. This episode was recorded on the land of the Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung and Bunurong peoples. I hope you enjoy the conversation. Alrighty. Hello Melissa, how are you today?

Melissa Laird:

I'm well, Medo. How are you?

Medo Pournader:

Very well, thank you. Did you have a good week?

Melissa Laird:

I had a great week. I always have a good week.

Medo Pournader:

Awesome. That's so good to hear. Did you get much done this week? What was the highlight of the week? If you don't mind sharing?

Melissa Laird:

I think the highlight of the week has been working with my co-chair, Indigenous, of the Reconciliation Network Committee, planning a hosting event on Monday about the Indigenous History of Melbourne,

which is a contested, tricky, history. So that's been a highlight this week, planning what our questions will be, and so on.

Medo Pournader:

Oh, wow. Cool. So I gather you'll brief us through that as the conversation goes on, right?

Melissa Laird:

I'd love to.

Medo Pournader:

Awesome. I look forward to it. So for myself and the audience, please just provide a brief introduction or an extended, however you would like to do it, and then about your background types of activities you have been doing. I understand you have been doing a lot of art-related activities, so let us know about that and your diversity and inclusion activities and roles.

Melissa Laird:

How long have we got? Thank you. So I'm Associate Professor Melissa Laird, and it's a real privilege to be here on what is effectively Sorry Day. My role at the university; I'll begin with, is as co-chair non-Indigenous of the Reconciliation Network Committee, and I work very closely with my warrior colleague, Indigenous Co-Chair Rebecca Quin. In that capacity, I have the privilege to be Acting Head of School at MSPACE currently, (the Melbourne School of Professional and Continuing Education), where I really engage with how we can transform learners' experiences in a lifelong learning capacity. I believe in the power of education to change our lives, and as you say, I do have a creative and performing arts background. I'm also Academic Director of Curriculum and Transformation, and in that role, I work across faculties to support academics, to build learning assets that are fit for purpose, that are connected to industry, and that really engage with creative and performing arts for embodied learning, that 'sticks'. So learners are really in the space, feeling stuff, doing, 'making, becoming', (as Dewey says), the best possible versions of themselves, and for their own skills uplift in their industry and career trajectory. So a lifelong teacher from seven generations of Scottish teachers before me. Yeah.

Medo Pournader:

So you're Scottish.

Melissa Laird:

Education's powerful. I will begin with my positionality. So I acknowledge that we're On Country wherever we are in Australia, and I pay respects to the Wurundjeri Elders past and present on whose land I engage and share knowledges and stories as we are this morning, adding to the complex stories and dances, and songs that have been undertaken On Country well, since the dawn of time, for more than 65,000 years. And in acknowledging Country, I also acknowledge that I bring respect for Indigenous knowledges, creative practices, and diplomacies to my work and through my communities. And I've forgotten your question.

Medo Pournader:

You mentioned something about that you have got a Scottish background.

Melissa Laird:

Scottish background; positionality. Thank you. I have settler origins from Scotland, and so I come to country with an art practice, visual communications practice, a material culture scholar, practitioner, they call me. So I look at objects that tell stories in my work and education.

Medo Pournader:

That's fantastic. Can you give me a bit more information about, you told me that your background is in arts, how arts and objects in arts are relevant to diversity and inclusion matters, and how it would translate in your different leadership roles that you have in the university?

Melissa Laird:

So my work has been quite interesting in that I have a background in material culture and art practice, but I've held senior academic leadership roles, and quality assurance and governance roles. So I sit on the academic boards of the National Arts School in Sydney and the Australian Institute of Music in Sydney. So my practice, I guess, and my background in creative thinking and making means that basically I'll make making lunch a creative practice if given the opportunity to do so. And I think that those approaches to thinking broadly, thinking in an embodied way, thinking about how your actions and beliefs, the things you make are empathetic reactions and responses to others, certainly drives how I work at MSPACE, how I work with our Diversity and Inclusion Committee, which I'm co-chair, with the wonderful Sam Hastie.

So yeah, I think being an artist and an academic together is quite a beautiful way to see the world. I think I'm quite lucky. I think we've got a Scottish enlightenment background where scientists would bring the artist into the room, and I like being a sort of strategic disruptor. If there's someone that's going to blow up the academy, our colleague sitting in the room with us, and I would be probably fairly strong advocates for the role. Yeah, seeing the world differently and inclusively is important to me in my work.

Medo Pournader:

Yeah, I could imagine that. And in your role, you mentioned about you are going to have an Indigenous event, an Indigenous-related event soon. Can you elaborate on that? What is that about, and what in particular type of indigenous activities you do?

Melissa Laird:

For, Sorry (Day), Reconciliation week, this week we're showing the film *In My Blood It Runs* for our staff and holding a Q&A afterwards. As learning designers and people that create learning assets, that film is particularly pertinent, and I'd suggest, if you haven't seen it or anyone listening hasn't seen it, to engage with that film and really deeply understand the differences in ways in which we can educate young people, particularly, but right through our university sector as well, by decolonizing the structures in which we create learning opportunities. So one of the projects that I'm doing down at MSPACE is trying to decolonize the place I spoke about, 'blowing up the academy' in the nicest possible way, but rebuilding it with more access to Indigenous knowledges, creative practices, looking at the diplomacies required when dealing with our Indigenous colleagues and friends, and families, thinking about how we learn, where we learn, what case studies we're using, being inclusive of Indigenous case studies, Indigenous businesses when we are holding conferences, and to be led through that with Indigenous consultations.

So we are working with a young, sorry, I shouldn't be... one thing I will say, I will self-correct my language, and if listeners would like to engage afterwards about words, or terminologies, or approaches, or attitude, I'm really open to that. So I will self-correct as part of my philosophy for continuing to learn. So I won't say a young PhD, because everyone's younger than I am. A PhD student, Justin Wilkey, who'll be helping us guide the decolonizing project for MSPACE and indigenizing curriculum project, where we are just looking to be more inclusive for without culturally appropriating Indigenous knowledges, but being more open to the beauty and power of what's there that can be offered from our Indigenous colleagues and friends in that space. So in that way, I am an ally, so I work beside our Indigenous colleagues and an advocate, when given permission to do so.

And interestingly, when you've been in leadership roles, especially as a woman and in creative arts, we've really had to fight for everything, to be welcomed into the academy as a creative practitioner, as a woman in a leadership role, all of that.

Medo Pournader:

That's a good point. Yeah.

Melissa Laird:

So many battles. That's right. So I have big energy, and my colleague Rebecca said; "When you're in an Indigenous space, you need to pull your energy in, like step back, be quiet." And so my learning in that space has been to deeply listen and to be still, and not jump to the decisions - the creative thinker comes up problem solving. That's not my place to do that. And I have to listen deeply and be still, pull my energy in, and give the space for the Indigenous 'voice' to be, of which I'm a supporter, as is the university, (of) the Voice to Parliament. So that's been a lesson too, a personal-professional lesson in engagement in this space as well. So there's many other things we're doing at MSPACE in terms of our decolonizing, well, curriculum and the environment.

We are looking to make MSPACE a culturally safe space, so working with our Indigenous colleagues to create that by thinking; is the reputation of University of Melbourne sound by Indigenous community? Is MSPACE seen as a safe space to be? And these principles have been, there's five principles that we're working to articulate through MSPACE that have been based on the work of Dr. Christine L. Evans and Jolene Hicks. So yeah, we think we're doing good work, but we continue to step, think, ask, inquire, change when we get feedback, take one step back, take two steps forward in a different direction. So my self-correcting language is also self-correcting as I try and navigate spaces that aren't my spaces. This is not my Country. I'm a settler from Scotland, Scottish descent, and I tread carefully and with respect. And it's not always easy to get it right, and I'm happy to be told, "No, it's not like that. You can't do that." "Ah, cool, thank you."

One of the greatest gifts has been in the last... since I joined the university in July 2019 was by Associate Dean Indigenous, Tiriki Onus, a Yorta Yorta Man, who gave me permission to step into space and make mistakes as long as I listened, and...

Medo Pournader:

That's beautiful.

Melissa Laird:

... I tried to correct, oh, Tiriki is close to my heart. And that really he gave that permission, if you like, to all of MSPACE as well, that one of the greatest tragedies of the last, say, 30 years is that we've been also scared of getting it wrong, that we've done nothing. So we've been driven to inaction. That permission

by a powerful Yorta Yorta Man and leader at the university meant that I could go into the space and try as the well-intentioned white woman, which is probably only marginally better than the well-intentioned white man. No offence, Russell, that's not a nice label, but that's what I am. I'm a well-intentioned white woman, is learning how to be On Country with respect by pulling in and listening more because we did invade this country.

Medo Pournader:

That's amazing perspective to have, and I think we are lucky to have you. Since you joined the university in July 2019, what do you think are some of the milestones that you have achieved in your leadership roles and in MSPACE with respect to Indigenous affairs? That you would like to share with us some ongoing projects that the wider university, the wider faculty, and the public audience that might listen to this podcast, can get involved in. Specifically, I understand that there is this discourse around the 'Voice' (to Parliament) and the broader Indigenous affairs in the community. So what would you like to share with us with respect to those milestones and ongoing projects?

Melissa Laird:

I think one of the most exciting things that we've been able to work on through the Reconciliation Network, which everyone would be really wonderful if you joined, jump onto the university link and hit apply to join. One of the most exciting things is that we've been working toward cultural training, or Indigenous cultural awareness and safety training, for university staff and students. So university-wide approaches to onboard people in Indigenous cultural humility because, at the moment, when we join the university, we know how to lift a box from a shelf, but we don't have any Indigenous training.

Medo Pournader:

I like that comparison.

Melissa Laird:

Cultural awareness training. That's something that's being worked through with Chancellery, and it's fantastic to be part of, albeit peripherally, but part of that project to get that onboarding happening because I think that's really, really important. I keep saying I'm a settler On Country that isn't mine, and the university is on Wurundjeri Country, on the lands of the Woiwurrung. The more settler, the more immigrant, understandings of our shared, complex, very disturbing past, is important. One of the other things we're doing in MSPACE, as I said, is about making the place a culturally safe place to work for an Indigenous colleague. And that is to understand what the history was, what was colonization. How did it happen? What is Terra Nullius? How can it possibly be that the Royal Society in Joseph Banks made a call that the land was free to colonise to solve their problem of (over-...I was going to say -housing. It wasn't housing) ...convicts, on the Hulks sitting on old shipwrecks on the Thames, and therefore bring them to Australia to develop a penal colony.

In the Endeavour Diaries from, I think, 23rd of January '78 or 1770, Joseph Banks writes that the Indigenous peoples 'waving their shields and their lances at us...to be gone .... (and) speaking in a harsh-sounding language'. There's a journal entry that speaks to the 23rd of April, 1770, (that) speaks to people being here. So Terra Nullius is untrue. Not no-one's land at all; people who'd been living here as the oldest living peoples on the planet!

Medo Pournader:

Absolutely, with respect to increasing awareness about the history of our Indigenous people in Australia at MSPACE. You mentioned some kind of training, or, for example, you have the movie that you're going to show. Are there specific trainings that you have designed or any mechanisms, and do you think that they could be also used across the university?

Melissa Laird:

There are many Indigenous-led programs in faculties that are remarkable. One of the projects that we worked on was to do an audit, of what Indigenous-led subjects were being taught. That work is remarkable. So it's not just happening in MSPACE by any means. There's terrific work going on. Dilan Duwa - Michelle Evans, down at Wilin at Fine Arts and Music - Tiriki Onus and Megan McPherson, tip of the iceberg. So there's many things going on. I am working currently with Chancellery as part of the Goulburn Valley strategy on an anti-racism course, which is going to be in a MicroCert format. And so that course will be freely available for university and externals to engage with racism, and approaches to being anti-racist. And the MicroCert offer is a really interesting one because it allows someone to come into training that's only 42 hours long, which is inclusive of face-to-face webinars or synchronous webinars, online learning materials, self-directed learning, and assessment, and you bring your workplace with you. I always think a student brings themselves into a room anyway, but in these learning assets, you really bring your workplace with you.

So we're hoping that that anti-racism training, alongside the work that's being done on Treaty through (Faculty of) Arts - there's four MicroCerts there and four MicroCerts from the Wilin Suite, Online Cultural Literacies - that that package of MicroCerts can really inform the broader community, the businesses, cultural organisations, universities, and individual learners that might engage with those.

Medo Pournader:

So these Micro Certificates are MicroCerts. Who are they designed for? Who can enrol in those for everyone?

Melissa Laird:

Anyone can enrol. We've had great success with Treaty (series). Currently, the Victorian Government has commitment, as we know, to Treaty. And so there's been a lot of work, a lot of courses have been delivered out to government departments in that space, but they're basically free (available) for anyone, you were able to enrol in them at a cost, and they are based on uplifting your own skills in your own industry. And of course, the Indigenous ones mean that you bring those knowledges into the space. So I've done the four Wilin MicroCerts, the Online Cultural Literacies; Acknowledgement of Country, Sharing Indigenous Knowledges; Indigenous Creative and Cultural Intellectual Property; and Indigenous Community Research, and they have really grounded my ability to begin to be active in this space; to consult, continue to consult, to continue to iterate your practises, to continue to consult, to self-reflect, to remember your own Country, to give back to community, to undertake work respectfully, to listen deeply, not to jump to conclusions and make my white privilege way out in front. I'm also tall. I'm big and white and tall and old and oldish - young at heart. And that privilege, I have to recognise that, and pull it back, and work on it, in this space.

Medo Pournader:

One thing I always wonder about, specifically for topics and trainings that are related to diversity and inclusion, is that how can one ensure that the topics that are taught are, to some extent, I'm not expecting fully, are going to be ingrained within oneself and practice. Do you think it is going to be

realistically? I'm hoping it'll at least raise awareness and also will be practice, but also what else can be done from our perspective in a university and also in the society in order to make sure that this will be in continued work from these MicroCerts and what you're doing at MSPACE to the broader community?

Melissa Laird:

I think it's up to the individual to be open. We need to be open and vulnerable to the history of Australia, and it's uncomfortable. And we have to tell our truths, and we have to listen, and we have to heal, and we have to commit to engaging with Indigenous peoples respectfully in the way they want to be heard. And I think, for me, the Voice gives us that. What's interesting about the Wilin MicroCerts that I undertook, as you spoke about embodiment and owning that, we undertook creative Indigenous creative practices as we went through the learning. So I learned to make string from reeds and grasses. I learned to make fishing nets and learned to weave. I learned to dye from natural plants, all led by Indigenous elders who gave permission for us to do so, understanding that these practices would be undertaken on particular Countries, whether it was water, saltwater country, freshwater country, and so on. Great privilege to have those knowledges shared with me. In some instances, I'm not allowed to share those with anyone else. It's not my job.

I was allowed to be a witness to practice, to engage with those practises, but not to teach them on. In other contexts, we were told, "Sure, share it", N'arweet Carolyn Briggs (AM). Dr. Carolyn Briggs said to us; "Learn language, go and speak some." I did give an Acknowledgement to Country in language; in language because she gave permission to do so. I'm not about to put an email signature with a Wiradjuri sign off because it's not my language. And my colleague, the beautiful Rebecca Quin, she said; "Many mob don't have language, so why should you be using it?" So even in my own experience, I've got two different, not conflicting, just different pieces of information that I deal with, but respecting both of them. And what we do have to remember is that Indigenous Australians are from over 300 different Countries and it's not one homogenous group. And so we have to respect and tread lightly, and continue to be alert and aware, and open to learning. And if we get it wrong, we get it wrong, but change, fix it. You're not going to get it (all) right.

I mean, this podcast itself is on a terrifying scale of about 10 because there's so many ways in which you can get it wrong. And so I'm open to feedback and to any listener's comment - like I'm willing to learn - but we have to be willing to learn and be in the river. The Wilin Suite was designed with the metaphor of the river at its heart. So I'm in the river, I'm not on the shore, I'm not standing there scared to get in. I'm in, I'm wet, I'm cold, I'm swimming, I'm struggling, I'm in the flow, but I haven't landed. I'm not out the other side. I'm running over the rocks at the bottom at times. Sometimes I stand, I slip on a rock, I get it wrong. So I think we've taken that metaphor of the river quite beautifully as we were designing the Wilin Suite. So I had the privilege, of course, to be part of designing it, helping it get it through its governance process, and then doing them. I'll tell you what, designing an assessment and doing an assessment, vastly different things. Just note to self.

Medo Pournader:

Nah, I hear you. And I think it's so important that one lets themselves to make mistakes and learn from them, and apply them. That's how we live. That's how we learn in life. So we make mistakes and we learn from them, and then we do it again. We might make mistakes again.

Melissa Laird:

That's my design background, because if you build the building without making a mistake, then it'll fall down. The iterative process means that you have to push yourself into places that are uncomfortable,

into liminal spaces where there's abstraction and a lack of clarity, find a way, and then iterate till it improves. I don't aim for perfection. I always aim just to improve a little bit from where I was before, or if I do go back and fail? Failure is wonderful. I used to give lectures on failure and how important it is. If you're going to fail, do it at uni, do it when you're studying, do it spectacularly here, and just try not to fail too much when you're in the workforce, where you've got commercial and employment ramifications. But experimentation! We're currently experimenting with AI at MSPACE, and we've created Tiriki's father's beautiful drawing of Kaptn Koori, which Lin Onus designed for Tiriki as a young boy because there was no black superheroes.

So we walking out of his door a few months ago, I said, "Kaptn Koori, can we have him to play with?" He went; "Sure, I own the copyright." And because there's a level of trust there, Tiriki said; "Yeah, sure, play with him." So our team at MSPACE have brought him into life through various programs using AI and Midjourney and ChatGPT to run scripts, and so on, as a testing space for Tiriki to see Kaptn Koori brought to life. So from a non-inanimate artefact on a wall to a 3D moving, talking figure and action figure. So we're right in the zone with Tiriki, currently designing Kaptn Koori's potential superpowers. Of course, he may not have a superpower, we can't assume, but he's really beautiful. Well, Tiriki is beautiful, but Kaptn Koori is really beautiful. So our artists and designers down at MSPACE have been working with that. Nathan Killoh and Jack Murtagh, and Dave Mazzarella, Patrick Jennings, Sean MacAlpine, and led by Lorna Morrow, and led by Sam Hastie. So we are really having fun.

Medo Pournader:

That's amazing. And the fact that you're using the latest technologies and developments, AI and ChatGPT, is pretty cool. So now, I'm really glad to hear that. And just for the reference, can you let us know the scale of the operations of MSPACE? How many employees are there? What is the goal and objective of MSPACE within University of Melbourne, and how engaged it is overall within the broader university and outside of university?

Melissa Laird:

MSPACE; we're a hundred people. We have variety of teams. We support the lifelong learning ambitions of the university, so the, drum roll, for profit, of the university where people come and upskill, undertake short courses, MicroCerts, and we do have some accredited courses that we also run out of MSPACE, but we're really blessed to have a video production team and a studio to draw on. We have learning designers who can engage with embodied learning, and we're currently working on an assessment project where we are really, my colleague Dave Seignior and I, are blowing up traditional assessment and recrafting assessment that's fit for purpose, connected to industry, and really engages with embodiment. That's unusual, I think, for the university working on that with Andrew Buntine and Mat Tinker, the Lead Learning designer, as well. So there's all of that. They've got student support team that really, really, truly care about students' experience and onboarding them into our courses, and caring for them.

Graphics teams, Project Officers, Project Managers, and then a series of Academic Directors. So I'm Academic Director, Curriculum, and Transformation. We have an Academic Director for Innovation, Associate Professor Josephine Lang; Associate Professor Tangerine Holt looks after our Commercial, and Associate Professor Femke Buisman-Pijlman looks after the Medical side of things. So we've got an inverse of the average faculty or school in that we have a few academics and much greater operational team with the General Manager Owen Shemansky, who works for Simon Bell, to look after that side of MSPACE. So we are makers; we make educational assets, and Kaptn Koori, therefore, in this innovation project that we're working on, will be embedded into the Wilin Suite learning assets.



So when a learner comes in, perhaps even from another country or from across Australia, they'll be able to engage with this Yorta Yorta superhero, who will be engaging with them in aspects yet to be defined by Tiriki. But it may be that he talks to us about what it feels like to be on Country or through the virtual world, takes us out to Yorta Yorta Country, and we get to stand on the banks of Dungala and Yorta Yorta Country, and so on, in a virtual way.

Medo Pournader:

That's amazing. I mean, when I first started my studies in Australia as an international student, obviously coming from Iran, I noticed that we weren't taught much on Indigenous affairs, and ever since I studied in Sydney, there has been this niche or this vacuum that us as international people and later on Australian citizens, obviously variant, very much taught about what has been happening. So I came upon some documentaries on SBS or scattered programs here and there online on broadcasting channels in Australia, but there wasn't anything cohesive to, as a student, let me know this is the history, this is the origins, Indigenous origins, and this is what has been happening. And it's really reassuring, at least for me, to know that MSPACE and university are taking this seriously for our cohort of the students to provide necessary learning for the students to know those origins. My question is, though, these teachings, are they specific to MSPACE students or can they be anyone from the broader university? Is it offered in the broader university? Is it offered in person or online? How accessible is it to overall?

Melissa Laird:

So the MicroCerts are available for anyone to enrol in, whether you're a full-time student, staff member, or member of the public. Each faculty is working on their own Indigenous plans and strategies. We have a RAP plan that we've been working toward, which is now being superseded by Pro Vice Chancellor Professor Barry Judd's Indigenous Strategy, which is a powerful document which continues with that work. And in that strategy, which I've had the privilege of being able to offer insights on, these cultural knowings are foundations for how we move forward. So the writing of the book about the Australian Indigenous history - well, the university's Indigenous Histories is part of the truth-telling aspects of the university's history - which is a contested one, and complex one. We have buildings that are currently named after eugenicists and race scientists, (which is Nazis among others), which is just completely inappropriate and makes walking into them for Indigenous students and staff, traumatic. And so we are working on that building name project.

The Indigenous Elders Advisory Group are working on that project, but my colleague Rebecca and I are supporting advocacy for that from grassroots positions. So there's a lot of work going on in the university in this space, which MSPACE is one of many faculties and schools that are working powerfully to drive Indigenous knowledges for all to understand them. But to understand the Indigenous knowledges, we first have to grapple with our own history and note that we're working inside of an institution which privileges the white person. It was built on white structures, it was built with policies and procedures that advantage non-Indigenous peoples. And I think we've got an opportunity to rectify and to reshape, and I'm just really thrilled to have a tiny part, tiny wee part, for the moment, while I'm co-chair non-Indigenous of Reconciliation Network Committee. To be part of that conversation is a great privilege. And yeah, I'll get it wrong, I'll continue to get it wrong, but to put my well-intentioned white settler person into the space bravely and say, "How can I... What do you need me to do?"

Medo Pournader:

That sounds great and encouraging, and thank you for that. Tell us about whether you have other initiatives with respect to Indigenous people or with respect to other diversity and inclusion topics at MSPACE or in the broader university that you would like to share with us.

Melissa Laird:

Well, I do, and we get a cup of tea and get your sleeping bag, but I'll try and be quick. So, with the reconciliation work, we're working on truth-telling, healing, and voice in the broader D&I space at MSPACE. We're lucky. We're a hundred people, and as Deputy Head of School, I've been given the people and purpose pillar (say that quickly), people and purpose pillar, to look after how we engage with our employees, our staff. And so the diversity and inclusion committee at MSPACE is strong. We are really keen, there's about 16 to 18 people who join. We've been working on a Glossary of Terms. We have these long teams debates about; "Is that the right word? Do we use it this way?" "No, no, no. I heard this. This article says this; "No, no, we can't use that word." "Yes, we can use that word." Oh, goodness. So we are finding our way through terminology.

My big thing at the moment is to de-stigmatise menstruation and menopause. More than half the planet can bear children, and yet the biological devices that... devices, wrong word...the biological frameworks into which those children are born, are highly stigmatised. And so MSPACE is keen to support the university's work with the EBA to try and get menstruation leave. Working with Melissa Stewart on those sorts of projects where we might get 12 non-consecutive days leave, and so on, even at MSPACE. So we were so lucky to have leaders like Simon and Owen who were like, "Yeah, we need to do more about menstruation and menopause." I mean, I've never heard my two bosses, my boss, and my colleague speak about menstruation before, but now we are! So these uncomfortable, well, what were uncomfortable topics, we're trying to de-stigmatise.

And the other things we're doing, of course, is for LGBTQIA+. I'm proudly wearing my trans lanyard. They / them again, getting it wrong, trying to get it right. We've got a Diversity and Inclusion Guideline that we're working through. One of our projects is the posters. So we've got a poster about how women benefit at MSPACE, what sort of leave obligations, opportunities are there for them. How many women? There's about 62% of women managers at MSPACE. So that's great. We've done one on trans. We're grappling with neurodiversity at the moment, and what is and what isn't neurodiversity. Are depressive illnesses connected? We think we've fallen on some ways in which to define neurodiversity, which is empowering. So someone can say, "Yeah, hey, I have autism, or I am *this*." If they want to identify, if they don't want to identify, then the place is safe to *be*. We want people in MSPACE to be able to come to work and be themselves. Bring yourself to work day.

Maybe not all of yourself, maybe not all of the time, but I'm a real believer in the fact that if you bring your whole self or can bring your whole self to work, then you don't have to be frightened, it's a fear-free place to work. And without fear, you can be creative, and when you're being creative and collaborative, you can be productive. And so that's our D&I framework that we are sort of-

Medo Pournader:

[inaudible].

Melissa Laird:

... working on for that. But there's about a million other projects which we may not have time for.

Medo Pournader:

We definitely would like to touch base with you again down the track later this year toward the end of this year to hear about how the care and projects that you've mentioned are fairing and also what are some of the other projects that MSPACE is doing on the DNI domain, specifically when you mentioned, I know that in the faculty, the committee for DNI is working on Indigenous affairs, LGBTQI, Disability Affairs, but neurodiversity that you mentioned is fascinating topic and is a topic that, at least in the faculty and probably the university that should be more focused on. But also one thing that I wanted to ask about is about the engagement of the broader community with MSPACE. Except for the Micro Certificates or MicroCerts, what are some other channels that anyone who is listening to this podcast today can express interest to get involved with MSPACE, and contribute or overall get involved?

Melissa Laird:

So MSPACE works for the university to create online learning assets. We don't necessarily have a front door. We don't have an externally facing context at the university. However, we do work with industry. So we've been working with Belong and with Telstra. We've been working with the National Indigenous Agency of Australia. We've been working with Unilever Indonesia. And so our external face is through those industry contexts. And so we bring, for example, at the beginning of every MicroCert, we now have a recorded Acknowledgement of Country and support systems for academics to do an Acknowledgement to Country based on their own discipline, which is being explored in the MicroCert. As that goes out to industry, we're therefore training others to see how you might create a fit-for-purpose, unique Acknowledgement to Country in which your own positionality is engaged with, where you're informed about the aspects of Country that might relate to your topic.

So our external face is threaded in slightly more unusual ways, I guess, and the broader faculties which have faces into research, faces into employment work, integrated learning, and so on. So yeah, we are in a slightly different space.

Medo Pournader:

Absolutely understand, but also you're working with other businesses-

Melissa Laird:

Yes.

Medo Pournader:

... in order to disseminate.

Melissa Laird:

Our influence is through business and through the Goulburn Valley Strategy.

Medo Pournader:

What does the future look like?

Melissa Laird:

Bright. I'm going to close by... I'm just looking down at one of the pages from the Diversity and Inclusion Guideline. I've seen "courage and kindness embodied through diverse voices", so that might be a place to stop.

Medo Pournader:

Yeah, thank you so much, Melissa.

Melissa Laird:

...or to start, to keep going; a place to keep going.

Medo Pournader:

Stop for the podcast, probably.

Melissa Laird:

And keep going with the work.

Medo Pournader:

Absolutely.

Melissa Laird:

Thanks so much for having me to talk to you today, Medo. It's terrific.

Medo Pournader:

Thank you for your great work. Take care, and talk to you soon. Thank you for listening, and please don't forget to subscribe to the podcast series. Please also reach out, let us know what you think and whether you'd like to contribute to Plus One podcast series.