

## *Not every Classroom has walls: Reflection on leading an immersion educational to India*

I've been thinking a lot about identity lately. The interest was sparked by reading "*On Identity*," Stan Grant's rich insight into indigenous and Australian identity and all the complexity within that statement. Over the summer, I reflected further on this through the story-telling of Malcolm Gladwell in "*Talking with Strangers*" and his resounding thesis that most problems in the world emerge from our inability to relate to others who might be unfamiliar along some dimensions, whether it be race, gender, background, religion, political views or age, and our haste to blame when all goes awry. Which brings me to the educational immersion for 29 University of Queensland sports law students I recently led to India. Once again, the theme of identity emerged front and centre, when the president of our partner university, OP Jindal Global University, Professor Raj Kumar, explained so eloquently the vividness and energy of India. "It is about identity," he said, "... and we must remember that we have multiple identities and recognise this in each other and in ourselves." This resonated with me and reflected all that I had been reading of late from such different contexts. How can we judge anyone when they are so multifaceted? I'm a woman, a researcher, a teacher, a lawyer, a mother, a wife, a daughter, a sister, a friend, a neighbour, an Australian born from a patchwork of nations and the list goes on. And now an enduring identity for myself and our students- part of the Indian immersion cohort and travelling learners all over the world.



While the immersion was designed to provide an international context to the growing global landscape of sports law and governance, it generated much more in terms of personal development, deep experiential learning and strong networks across India and the profession. Our 29 young lawyers, soon to graduate, have returned forever changed and wiser for it. Forging 28 new, local friendships and many across India is part of the story, but the global understanding of wicked world problems such as inequality, climate change, access to justice, ethics and the importance of diversity was the real learning. One of the assessment tasks I asked of the students was to write a blog about some sports law issues in the context of the Indian immersion. Their reflections were all very different, but equally engaging and meaningful- all validating the importance of experiential learning.

That's not all that was highlighted. Through teaching, travelling and living with the students for two weeks, I witnessed our next generation leaders up close, and the future is certainly bright. These young people, aged on average 22 years, were open minded, curious, creative, thoughtful and empathetic. When the inevitable curveballs of travel (especially in India) emerged, they adjusted, problem solved and laughed. They supported each other and the faculty. They turned long bus trips into sports trivia games, storytelling and stand-up comedy. They interacted with locals with enthusiasm, kindness and compassion. They asked questions and listened. They were self-deprecating and self-aware. I learned that many were not just talented academically, but also in chess, maths, opera singing, sports, mooted, photography and writing. Many were entrepreneurs already, and almost all were working and volunteering in a range of organisations. And all had a genuine interest in the subject matter of the course, sports law and governance.



Sports law topics included anti-doping, corruption and match fixing, liability for injury, concussion, women's sport, esports, morality clauses, player contracting, racial vilification, intellectual property and broadcasting rights. I teach, research and work as an administrator in sport because it is a platform for social change, carrying lessons on ethics, fairness, access to justice and evidence built from science. Delay for anyone in a court of law is challenging; delay for an elite athlete could mean missing an Olympics or world championship and significant lost earnings. Good people can do bad things, as we are witnessing in all organisations. Integrity in sport and impacts of scandals are effective perspectives through which to understand the complexity of ethics, trust and governance. Concepts of vulnerable athletes, including minors, illiterate and less resourced athletes transpire to global notions of injustice, poor governance and outdated systems. Anomalies such as a WADA Code drafted in English and containing banned substances that even a pharmacist would have to look up, and a strict liability regime that effectively holds a standard of guilty until proven innocent tell a bigger story than governance in sport. The burgeoning problem of concussion in contact sports, its long-term causal effects and the nature of liability poses ethical, legal and scientific questions that cannot yet be answered. Why are some sports that have as an objective infliction of GBH and or concussion legal? And discrimination associated with human rights emerges as a critical discussion in relation to intersex and transgender athletes and their right to compete. Identity once again is at the epicentre of sport, as it embodies notions of the values of sport. Fair play? Equalisation? Winning at all costs? Or is the identity, the soul of sport safety for all athletes, transparency and integrity?

We visited the High Court and had a personal forum with the Chief Justice, an astute and energetic man who emphasised the complexity of the Rule of Law in India, the enormity of the caseload management in a country so populated and the role of artificial intelligence in the law. We met with former Australian High Court Justice, Michael Kirby AC CMG, who generously gave us his candid views on the law and broader life lessons on leadership and justice. We met with female icons of sport and philanthropy in India and learned of the issue of inequality through the powerful lens of sport. We experienced the colourful, vibrant and friendly culture of India, when we attended the wedding of the year, ironically between two lawyers, in Delhi. We are still processing all that we saw that evening, from fresh flowers wall to wall in a venue larger than an AFL oval, top chefs cooking every cuisine from around the world, drones and livestreaming, a groom arriving on white horses, a bride dressed in a gold, a Rockstar, a Bollywood stars and a Ukrainian orchestra of brides. The warmth and hospitality of the hosts was overwhelming for a bunch of strangers.

But here was a lesson of identity which Stan Grant and Malcom Gladwell would be happy to hear about. Strangers talking with each other and building a new identity through shared experience. It seems apt to quote renowned educator and human rights leader, Gandhi,

*“Literacy in itself is no education. Literacy is not the end of education or even the beginning. By education I mean an all-round drawing out of the best in the child and man- body, mind and spirit.”*

I’m writing this on International Women’s Day 2020- a time to reflect upon equality and wellbeing for women around the world. The young men and women I have had the pleasure of teaching and accompanying on a true adventure for education and personal development for many, leave me confident and optimistic of the change ahead for a better world, again to paraphrase Gandhi. When India appears once again on these students’ radar- and it will, as one of the most high-growth economies in the world- there will be a depth of insight and valuable, genuine networks to bring to the table drawn from deep memory and rich knowledge persisting well beyond our immersion. Whether they end up as practicing lawyers or not, the world will benefit from their understanding of another nation, culture and context. An understanding and hopefully identity as friends and not strangers.

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