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Aboriginal perspectives matter: Yarning and reflecting about teaching literacies with multimodal Aboriginal texts

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Reporting on a qualitative study, informed by Australian Government Indigenous education and literacy policies, this article unveils early career teacher reflections about infusing Aboriginal perspectives in the English curriculum using multimodal texts. Forging a praxis between the Aboriginal practice of yarning (Bessarab & Ng'andu, 2010) and Freire's (1974, 1996) frameworks for conscientisation and teachers as facilitators, the project overlays the work of Ladson-Billings (1995) and Foster, Halliday, Baize & Chisholm (2020), to unravel how culturally responsive pedagogy manifests in early career primary school teaching. We discuss teacher starting points and challenges to be culturally responsive educators, who use appropriate Aboriginal texts in classrooms. Results suggest that yarning is useful for meeting English curriculum outcomes and for collaboratively developing decolonising knowledge, which can impact multiple stakeholders. Recommendations for future research include co-designed projects to support teacher education through multimodal texts and yarning practices with Aboriginal Elders.

Introduction

Respecting protocols of Country, we highlight that this paper was composed on Nyungar Boodjar, land located in the south-west region of Western Australia, extending south of Geraldton to Cape Leeuwin, and continuing east to Esperance. We acknowledge and honour the Nyungar traditional custodians and Elders across the Boodjar. We use the terms Aboriginal and Indigenous interchangeably in respect and recognition of the diversity of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples of Australia.

Since 2011, The Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority (ACARA) has included Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander content as a cross-curriculum priority, aiming for young Australians to develop deeper appreciation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander histories and cultures, as well as their importance in Australian and global society (ACARA, 2013). Inspired by decolonising work, (Rigney, 2001; Tuhiwai Smith, 1999), our purpose in undertaking this study was to work with early career primary school teachers to understand how they infuse Aboriginal perspectives in the English curriculum (see Appendix for our use of 'infuse'). The significance of this topic is highlighted as the Australian Government endeavours to reduce inequitable educational and health outcomes between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians (Universities Australia, 2017). Further, the Australian Government unveiled a new national agreement on *Closing*

the Gap (2020), which stipulated improving health and well-being for Aboriginal children, including social, cognitive, linguistic and communication skills.

Concerns over the Australian Government's Indigenous education and literacy policies have been linked to a narrow approach to literacy, including high-stakes testing, without adequate consideration to students' sociocultural contexts (Ewing, 2016; Simpson Reeves, Dillon-Wallace & Exley, 2019). Introduced in 2008, benefits of the *National Assessment Plan-Literacy and Numeracy* (NAPLAN) have been cited as detecting learning problems and facilitating transparent academic reporting (Joseph, 2018). But some researchers have described the concept of accountability as unidirectional, such that, rather than building community trust, only teachers are responsible for the Government's aims of improved literacy and numeracy (Sahlberg, 2021). Given NAPLAN's comparative and public reporting, including from Aboriginal communities in remote Australia, Macqueen et al. (2019) deplored that meaningful engagement with the test demands first language proficiency in standard Australian English.

Incongruency: Official discourses and practices

Notwithstanding concerns related to standardised literacy testing, Australian policy, such as the *Mparntwe Declaration* (DESE, 2019) emphasises Australian Government commitments, such as supporting Aboriginal students, infusing Aboriginal history and cultures into curricula, developing relationships between schools and educational stakeholders, and promoting student diversity and well-being (Choi, 2020; see Appendix). Similarly, the Australian English Curriculum highlights communication, analysis and imagination for an informed, ethical and active society (ACARA, 2014). This linguistic and cultural knowledge is embedded in multiple strands of literacy. From early childhood to year 10, for example, classic and contemporary literature are offered in the English curriculum, including oral traditions of Aboriginal peoples.

Incongruously to this official curriculum discourse, which espouses appreciation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander literature, there is uncertainty about how the abstract goals from the *Mparntwe Declaration* will be implemented in Australian schools (Choi, 2020). Literacy researchers have also argued that in Australia and English-speaking nations overseas, educational institutions predominantly utilise monolingual and potentially culturally biased texts (Adam & Barratt-Pugh, 2020; Boutte, Hopkins & Waklatsi, 2008). The monolingual trend has been associated with a world-wide pivot towards free-market economies, high stakes testing, global competition and standardised curriculum (Carrington, 2017).

In this vein, encouraging literacy development is linked to power relations via non-hierarchical respect of languages to scaffold students' use of multiple languages (Cummins, 1986). For example, students' capacity to shift between Aboriginal languages, Aboriginal English and standard forms of English is facilitated by connecting classrooms to Aboriginal families and communities (Scull, 2016). Moreover, Mills et al. (2016) argued that to decolonise misconceptions, literacy approaches highlighting multimodal repertoires

of communication (e.g. linguistic, gestural, spatial, audio and visual) are required to unravel the landscapes of Indigenous knowledges.

Although the General Capabilities of the Australian National Curriculum (ACARA, n.d.) aim to close the gap in literacy for Aboriginal students and the Aboriginal Cultural Standards Framework (Government of Western Australia, 2015) acknowledges the role of teachers in raising awareness about Aboriginal histories and cultures, the standards have yet to be adequately implemented, leaving a gap in teacher knowledge about infusing Aboriginal perspectives. In addition, little is known about how early career teachers, in a safe and scaffolded context, reflect about infusing multimodal, Aboriginal texts in the English curriculum.

It is therefore unsurprising, that in a Western Australian study, Booth (2019) concluded there was a lack of emphasis on Indigenous histories and cultures, as well as confusion about how to teach them. In addition, at a primary school in New South Wales, research examining non-Aboriginal teachers' perceptions and self-efficacy of teaching Aboriginal perspectives concluded the cultural competency of non-Aboriginal teachers must be improved (Turner, Wilson & Wilks, 2017). The National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Curricula Project (Australian Government, n.d.) also uncovered factors which hinder teachers from including Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander content, such as:

- fear of having limited knowledge;
- difficulty navigating existing resources;
- perceptions about the value of Aboriginal knowledges.

Teachers' work in this area may also be viewed as marginally important (Bishop, Vass & Thompson, 2019, p. 193).

Culturally responsive pedagogy, literacy and yarning

Morrison, Rigney, Hattam & Diplock (2019) refer to culturally responsive pedagogy as that which appreciates the cultural repertoire and intelligence students bring to learning. The work of Ladson-Billings (1995) represents a foundational example of culturally responsive pedagogy, which aims for equitable access to education, and includes the teacher-facilitator, who shapes learning around students' cultural references. Building a praxis between learning and classroom belonging, this work was born from anthropological traditions in which teachers observed home interactions, prior to incorporating aspects of children's cultures, such as language practices for African-American, Hawaiian and First Nation students (Au & Jordan, 1981; Erickson & Mohatt, 1982; Irvine, 1990). Although culturally responsive pedagogy has been successfully utilised for decades to engage marginalised students in North America, it has received little attention in Australia, particularly regarding theoretically infused and empirically substantiated approaches (Morrison, Rigney, Hattam & Diplock, 2019).

With respect to literacy learning and yarning circles, there is limited Australian scholarship for culturally responsive pedagogy, with some exceptions researching primary and pre-primary children. Mills, Sunderland & Davis-Warra (2013) used Yarning circles, which drew on message sticks and the Dadirri tradition, or profound listening of the earth (Ungummer-Baumann, 2002) to develop primary school students' oral skills. In contrast, Flückiger, Diamond & Jones (2012) recounted that in a remote Queensland pre-school, yarning spaces were co-created through productive family-school partnerships. Our study differed in that yarning was used to elicit teachers' reflections about diverse multimodal texts for infusing Aboriginal perspectives in the English curriculum. Because multimodal texts are viewed as important for engaging learners with audio, visual, written, gestural and spatial literacy, Mills et al. (2016) argued that more research is needed to assist educators in developing culturally responsive pedagogy, which respects multimodal learning embedded in Indigenous communication and knowledge.

Since the landmark texts of Ladson-Billings (1995) about culturally responsive pedagogy, scholars have developed many variations, such as culturally inclusive pedagogy and culturally sustaining pedagogy (see, Paris, 2012). However, Morrison et al. (2019) argued that for teachers to operationalise culturally responsive pedagogy, they must work with students regarding high academic prospects, cultural competencies and critical awareness. The timing is urgent, argued Foster et al. (2020), to develop culturally responsive pedagogy and inclusive curricula, so that teachers learn more about working with children who are 'different from themselves' (p. 69). To decolonise pedagogies, we acknowledge the importance of going beyond adding texts to interrogate broader systemic structures, which support racism and inequality, explicitly and inexplicitly. For example, there has been little evidence that Aboriginal perspectives have been included in the Australian curriculum (Harvey & Russell-Mundine, 2019).

Method

Our study is grounded in the work of Freire (1996), who opposed 'banking' approaches to teaching, whereby students, in the dominant language, mechanically repeat teacher-directed information. Viewing teachers as facilitators, Freire and Macedo (1987) argued that literacy involves a complex interplay between understanding the 'word' and the 'world'. Leading an adult education project, Freire (1974) developed cultural circles, which scaffolded adult learners by replacing teachers with coordinators, lectures with dialogues, students with participants and syllabi with modules. His concept of critical consciousness involves learners achieving deep understanding of world complexities to resist oppression against Indigenous peoples and support healing. These concepts resonate with our study's reflexive research design, which attempts to re-imagine the post-colonial space, for sharing Western and Indigenous knowledge and experiences (Rigney, 2001; Tuhiwai Smith, 1999).

Underscored by the notion that reality is layered through the interpretations of diverse actors (Ravitch & Mittenfelner Carl, 2019), qualitative research is relevant to understanding the reflections of teachers regarding the infusion of Aboriginal perspectives

in the English curriculum. Our study aimed for in-depth analysis regarding a small number of participants, rather than representation across the general population (Kervin et al., 2016). The research questions are:

1. How do early career primary school teachers engage with literacy education in the classroom?
2. How do early career primary school teachers infuse Aboriginal perspectives in the English curriculum?
3. What are the reflections of early career primary school teachers about using multimodal texts for infusing Aboriginal perspectives in the English curriculum?

Beginning in Stage 1, as researchers/educators we met face-to-face several times to yarn about the project's design and literacy resources. Yarning is viewed as an informal, but focused conversation, and a pathway of two-way learning (Lovett, Muwadda & Lee, 2019; Nayasi et. al. 2022). Yarning is also circular, allowing conversations to weave in culturally safe ways to strengthen relationships across researchers or between researchers and participants. In this manner, yarning represents more than casual dialogue, but encompasses protocols of respect, relationship building, authenticity and accountability (Martin, 2008; Walker, Fredericks, Mills & Anderson, 2014). Multiple forms of yarning, such as social and therapeutic, have been identified (Bessarab & Ng'andu, 2010), but collaborative yarning was privileged, to facilitate a shared participant-researcher journey. For example, engagement with participants extended beyond audio taped sessions and reflections about Aboriginal literacy resources, to include informal yarning over cups of tea, light refreshments and community activities, such as teaching forums.

Given community concerns about teacher attrition and the participants' similar teaching stages, our study focuses on three early career teachers whose professional experiences ranged from beginning to three years, with focus on early childhood (years 1-3). Through purposive sampling, we drew on professional networks to recruit these voluntary participants, who offered insights about the phenomenon studied (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2018). Although estimates vary, researchers and media reports have depicted Australian early career attrition as concerning, suggesting between 30% and 50% leave the profession within the first five years (Weldon, 2018). With age ranges in the twenties, these three female teachers were non-Indigenous, and were either born in Australia or migrated to Australia as a child. They all used English as a first language, with one also regularly using a European language. Teacher 1 had taught in Western Australian urban and regional schools, where Aboriginal student enrolment was minimal. Teacher 2 had taught in Western Australian urban, regional and remote schools, including some classes with numerous Aboriginal student enrolments. Teacher 3 held experiences in Western Australian urban, regional and remote schools, including classes characterised by no Aboriginal students to a majority identifying as Aboriginal.

Stage 2 involved the researchers yarning with participants and collecting extensive information through their teaching experiences and sociocultural profiles (Creswell, 2014). They were initially offered a list of Aboriginal, multimodal resources and invited to reflect

on one or two texts (e.g. picture books, websites, video clips and television programs). Texts included *Big rain coming* (Germein, 2002), *Our world: Bardi Jaawi life at Ardiyooloon* (One Arm Point Remote Community School, 2011) and *Move it mobstyle* (2020). We also encouraged participants to recommend self-selected texts. After approximately one week, we yarned again with each participant individually, using indicative themes which were modified depending on responses. Each semi-structured conversation lasted approximately 90 minutes, and was flexible in format, highlighting purposeful sharing. Our methods were inspired from semi-structured interviewing and the narrative practice of Aboriginal yarning, which focuses on relaxed conversations allowing participants and researchers to build rapport as they cover topics (Bessarab & Ng'andu, 2010; Povey & Trudgett, 2019).

While yarning has been a long-standing practice in Indigenous cultures as a process of sharing knowledge and experiences, this tradition of storytelling has emerged as relevant to re-orient Western research traditions (Geia, Hayes & Usher, 2013). Appropriate for a qualitative framework anchored in Freire's aims of emancipatory literacy, yarning focuses on developing a deeper understanding of individual experiences as well as the broader, political and social world (Geia, Hayes & Usher, 2013). This also suggests that yarning practices are supportive of decolonising, countering racism and repositioning of research away from the foundations of positivism (Rigney, 2001; Tuhiwai Smith, 1999).

To triangulate, we took notes to reflect on the data gathering contexts. Once conversations were transcribed, the participants were given an opportunity to review their utterances (Kervin et al., 2016), and yarn further. Research journals facilitated critical inquiry regarding our philosophical standpoints, socio/cultural backgrounds, professional experiences, etc. With bias inherent in all study designs, we acknowledge, that as researchers, we bring attitudes and values to the research process (Smith & Nobel, 2014). On numerous occasions, to discuss the project design and choice of literary texts, we also yarned with stakeholders, such as local librarians, the Human Research Ethics Committee, Aboriginal educators and Elders. This process allowed for external feedback while building constructive community relationships (Walter, 2019).

Although steeped in the epistemological traditions of Freire (1974, 1996), our analysis took inspiration from the work of Ladson-Billings (1995) and one of its contemporary iterations (Foster et al., 2020). This model explores the theory of culturally relevant pedagogy and its manifestations in practice, with four domains of reflection: style, texts, socio-emotional connections, and institutional knowledge. (Foster et al., 2020, p. 75). Data were initially analysed through open coding, involving reducing and categorising items (O'Donoghue, 2006). Analysis was guided by processes creating themes, reading and re-reading for key points and connecting the literature. As reading cycles occurred, we shifted from induction to deduction and interpretation.

Results

Literacies: Phonemic awareness, books, multi-modal texts and standardised testing

When speaking about how they define literacies, the participants emphasised language modes, from skills, such as phonemic awareness, to understanding multimodal texts. For example, although T1 suggested that reading, writing and comprehension were the most utilised modes of literacy in Western Australian primary schools, understanding films also featured:

I think the big focus at the moment on literacies is the English and the ability to read and write and comprehension.... The comprehension, so listening skills, being able to match up, so being able to understand films they're watching.

T2 extended this definition to include reading, writing, speaking and storytelling, but also community, culture and audience:

The different skills like segmenting, blending, tracking and then teaching students how to read words, read fluently, comprehend, but also how to write using all the skills - how to write sentences, paragraphs.... learning how to speak and then learning that literacies can differ.... So, the audience, the community, the culture, all of those things can impact on English literacy, reading, writing.

Similarly, T3 evoked student skills and understandings in primary school, focusing on effective communication and interpretation in diverse forms.

I'd say that literacies in the primary sort of context is helping children to develop the skills to be able to communicate and understand effectively. So being able to express their ideas and be able to interpret..., like other's ideas in different ways and different forms.

Importantly, T1 raised concerns regarding the impact of standardised testing at primary school, commenting on 'teaching to the test':

That [high stakes testing] is obviously being discussed day in day out at school and how to improve students' literacy skills, especially with NAPLAN.... I do think at my school they tend to teach the things that will be in NAPLAN, especially in term one

Aboriginal perspectives in the English curriculum

When participants spoke about how they infused Aboriginal perspectives in the English curriculum, a reoccurring theme was *dreaming stories* to develop literacy understandings. We highlight that *dreaming/s* is the appropriate terminology for referring to Indigenous beliefs as the *dreaming/s* are not static concepts. T2 spoke about incorporating dreaming with Aboriginal history to introduce cultural norms, such as respect for Elders and people of authority. She suggested that dreaming could encourage students to accept different

norms, which could be conveyed in the English curriculum through dance, books and movies:

... I would say, teaching, incorporating Aboriginal history and dreamtime stories and ...their cultural norms as well, so not looking at Elders in the eyes or people of authority and being respectful, that their way of being respectful is different so understanding that... other people do things differently and that's ok as well. And then also ...teaching all students and teachers to be aware of that...Acceptance, I think was a big one, but in regards to English, ... I think through the use of media..., whether it be a book or a movie, or dance routine.

Similarly, T1 commented on how, during professional development, she learnt about Aboriginal symbols, linked to dreaming stories, to facilitate creativity and literacy.

I guess what we learnt on our PD is actually getting some common Aboriginal symbols and getting the students to... get in groups and create a story using a few of those symbols and then maybe presenting them to the class or writing them down So that could be ... how they speak to the class, how they can write, how they comprehend and maybe even their creativity. What sorts of stories can they come up with using these different Aboriginal symbols?

In addition, T3 mentioned that she often infused dreaming in the primary English curriculum, particularly through story. During a pre-service practicum in an Aboriginal school, T3 drew on Noongar language to explore literature, including dreaming to support Aboriginal students, who were not always aware of their Indigenous language. To scaffold these students, T3 liaised with community members, such as Aboriginal officers and grandmothers:

So, a lot of the children didn't actually know what their sort of language was, their Indigenous language. But I ended up bringing in the Aboriginal Education Officer and some ... of the grandmothers from the community were quite close with the school and we ended up looking at the Indigenous language, which was Noongar for these kids.

However, T3 found herself challenged to utilise dreaming stories in a classroom where there were no Aboriginal students. T3 found that despite a high Indigenous population in the broader school community, the non-Indigenous students appeared to have a restricted understanding of Indigenous cultures.

I actually have used a lot of dreamtime stories with my children this year. We did a project of work where we looked at different dreamtime stories, but again I came across this hurdle of there's no Indigenous children in my classroom. They [the students] don't particularly know any Indigenous children. Like, I even asked that question and I was quite shocked to realise that they don't have much understanding of the culture. They're so far removed sometimes.... Even though the community in which they live has a high Indigenous population, there was not a solid understanding there. All they said... when I asked them, what is it and who's Indigenous and..., tell me a little bit about it [the culture] the only thing that they could really tell me is..., what the people looked like, which isn't a definitive thing of Indigenous culture, and they could tell me dot paintings...

Texts, strategies and activities for infusing Aboriginal perspectives

When presented with numerous, Aboriginal multi-modal texts, T1 reflected on *Move it mobstyle*, which she believed was useful for implementing the English curriculum to engage students with dancing, and counter negative connotations about Aboriginal people.

Oh the dance videos, the kids could have a go at the dancing or the class activities... I guess you would have to pick and choose what would work with your class and make sure that there's nothing inappropriate. But it seems to have good film clips that are engaging... That way, they [students] can realise that there's nothing wrong with Aboriginal people, which is what seems to be quite mainstream in the media at the moment, especially if they have parents that have negative connotations against Aboriginal people.

Similarly, T2 reflected on *Move it mobstyle*, which she deemed useful for developing physical activities and oral language. For T2, this multimodal text could be helpful for introducing linguistic and cultural understandings, related to Aboriginal English and vocabulary.

Move it mobstyle, that's really good at teaching dance and I was thinking I might start doing warm-ups in the morning with that. But it also opens up to different ways that they speak. So, as they're teaching the dance moves, they also speak in a way that isn't the same as how everyone else speaks and they introduce different words. So, it's a good way of informally introducing them [students] into... a different use of the English language
....

As the conversation unfolded, T2 shared a self-selected resource:

... I really liked *Geckos* because... it gave me a whole list of resources to go to and it just said talk about this... and it kind of gave me ideas as to what to do... in the English curriculum.... You spend a lot of time decoding exactly what to teach and in what year, or what time of the year. You've already got a lot of time spent creating your lessons... it's really handy to have some ideas just there for you, especially if you're new to Aboriginal culture.

When beginning to infuse Aboriginal perspectives, T2 appreciated how *Geckos* scaffolded her to 'decode' the English curriculum, with instructions and pedagogical 'ideas,' that support teacher efficacy.

Indicating that she had numerous Aboriginal picture books, including *Big rain coming*, T3 explained how she used this text during guided reading. T3 compared the responses of a class composed mainly of non-Aboriginal students to a class with a high representation of Aboriginal students. During shared-reading, the Aboriginal students appeared to spontaneously engage with the text:

Although I've got lots of Indigenous texts ... I've got this one on my shelf and I actually used it in a guided little reading group. ... in my current context it didn't have any affect, they [the students] just saw it as another text, which was quite disappointing actually because there were certain things in there and we were actually looking at the weather...

and they didn't really altogether grasp- it was just another story for them and I found that ...we ended up turning it into a whole class thing and then really going into it and looking. But we had to complement it. Whereas I used this in prac, in that context that has a lot of Aboriginal children and I didn't need to complement it. They got it straight away. I had to obviously read it to them but, they knew exactly what I was on about and they engaged more with the text. I think because they have an understanding of it.

T3's comments suggest that these Aboriginal students identified with connection to country and were aware of nuanced climatic patterns, including Mankala (wet season) and Wirralburu (dry with strong winds) (Bureau of Meteorology, 2014).

Discussion

Inspired by the model of Foster et al. (2020, p. 74), which explored four domains of culturally responsive pedagogy, we employed *Style* as ways in which teachers and students interact during activities, based on traditions within homes or respective communities (p.74). *Texts* are defined as broader than written words, to include objects and symbols such as street signage, films, photographs, *YouTube* clips, songs. *Socio-emotional connections* involve a foregrounding and individual's identity and/or voice, which are linked to socio-cultural, political, linguistic and historical contexts. *Institutional knowledge*, we view as dominant understandings valued not only in educational organisations, but also in society more broadly.

Research Question 1: How do early career primary school teachers engage with literacy education in the classroom?

Our data suggest that the three early career primary school teachers engaged with literacy education using a constructivist approach, featuring texts from multiple modes and genres, such as films, stories and conversations. Over numerous years, The National Curriculum (ACARA, 2014) and pre-service teacher education texts (Winch, Ross, Johnston, March, Ljungdahl & Holliday, 2020; Emmitt, Zbaracki, Komesaroff & Pollock, 2015) have espoused a constructivist approach, with aspects of critical literacy, to assist teachers to design learning opportunities based on diverse student needs and abilities. As per Foster et al. (2020, p. 75), in line with the principles of culturally responsive pedagogy, when used effectively, a broad range of texts, which go beyond reading and writing, facilitate the instructional process, and can lead to effective teacher-student and student-student communication and comprehension. Given an early childhood focus, when many students are learning to read, it is not unusual that one teacher noted the manipulation of oral texts through phonemic awareness, allowing for segmenting and blending of syllables or words (Winch & Holliday, 2020).

Two teachers also commented on the significance of context, for example, culture, audience and community, to engage effectively with literacy education in the primary classroom. This connection speaks to the importance of respecting diverse ways of using language at school and code-switching between languages, dialects and /or social expectations in Aboriginal communities (Scull, 2016). Foster et al. (2020, p. 73) referred to

this dynamic style of interaction as negotiated through daily patterns, which ultimately lead to shared knowledge and understandings. Moreover, from an Institutional level, in accordance with the *Mparntwe Education Declaration* (DESE, 2019) schools are expected to build on the cultural knowledge of Indigenous communities to ensure that literacy outcomes of Indigenous students match those of non-Indigenous students.

It is important to reiterate that one teacher raised concerns regarding standardised testing, which appeared to hinder engagement with literacy education. Daily discussions about NAPLAN and the practice of 'teaching to the test' seemed to take precedence in the school over other aspects of planning. This type of institutional knowledge (Foster et al., 2020) suggests that although high stakes testing may be useful for diagnostics and reporting, its normalisation in school cultures may have unintended consequences. Researchers have criticised NAPLAN regarding increased student/teacher anxiety, marketisation of schools, 'one-size-fits-all' assessment, and manipulation of scores (Howell, 2017; O'Mara, 2014). Although standardised tests may be well-intentioned, they can be used to make unfair comparisons between Indigenous and non-Indigenous cohorts, particularly when linguistic and cultural barriers are not acknowledged (Johnston & Claypool, 2010).

Research Question 2: How do early career primary school teachers infuse Aboriginal perspectives in the English curriculum?

When early career primary school teachers talked about how they infuse Aboriginal perspectives in the English curriculum, a recurring theme was the usefulness of multiple texts (Foster et al., 2020), including multimedia, movies, symbols, dance, conventional print, children's literature and Aboriginal dreaming stories. This focus on texts aligns with the work of Mills, Davis-Warra, Sewell & Anderson (2016), who argued that a broad range of multimodality facilitates steps in decolonising deficit assumptions about Aboriginal students' literacy achievement. Numerous researchers have also argued that through engagement with inclusive literature, children can discover more about their own sentiments while learning about the experiences of socioculturally diverse people (Adam, Barratt-Pugh & Haig, 2017). From this perspective, to develop culturally responsive pedagogy, the style of classroom interaction (Foster et al., 2020) must respect the shifting communication and technological competencies of Aboriginal students as well the dynamic nature of Indigenous knowledge.

For Foster et al. (2020), such interactions value socio-emotional connections, which allow students to access their home and community knowledge. However, a pedagogical challenge was highlighted when one teacher remarked that some Aboriginal students were not aware of their heritage language; to support her students, this teacher sought community knowledge, through Aboriginal Education Officers and grandmothers. Whilst internationally, language and cultural heritage programs have become common amidst Indigenous peoples, in Australia, there is limited data regarding achieving cultural reclamation through heritage languages (Sivak et al., 2019). This is despite a common view in research that bilingualism is not a linguistic problem (Cummins, 1986), but a

resource to activate along with the multisensory aspects of Indigenous literacies (Mills & Doyle, 2019).

A second pedagogical challenge occurred when the same teacher attempted to utilise dreaming stories in a classroom in which there were no Indigenous students. Despite a high representation of Aboriginal peoples in the local community, it appeared that the non-Indigenous students had limited understanding of Indigenous cultures. Arguably, the teachers' role is to introduce content, despite the low number of Aboriginal students in a classroom. However, in terms of institutional knowledge (Foster et al, 2020), these data reaffirm the conclusions of Booth (2019) that limited implementation of Aboriginal curriculum content across Australia has reinforced stakeholders' beliefs that Indigenous histories and cultures are mainly, or only, for Aboriginal students. This is despite one teacher conveying that professional development provided practical ideas for oral and writing activities with Aboriginal symbols and dreaming stories.

Research Question 3: What are the reflections of early career primary school teachers about using multimodal texts for infusing Aboriginal perspectives in the English curriculum?

The opportunity to reflect on multimodal texts appeared to assist the three teachers to plan for culturally responsive classroom activities, which combined kinesthetics with oral, written and visual traditions. Such texts, which are defined more broadly than the written word (Foster et al., 2020), may provide channels for focusing the energy and knowledge of culturally and ethnically diverse students. Privileging English and Aboriginal languages or dialects, these multimodal texts allowed the teachers to expose their students to remote and urban minority group experiences. As per Ladson-Billings (2006), reflecting on how lessons are planned can assist teachers to unpack the values of community cultures and the realities of the dominant culture. Critical reflection also improves professional practice by encouraging the unravelling of one's own assumptions and attitudes in environments of socio-economic and cultural change (Kim & Silver, 2016).

Two of the teachers reflected on *Move it mobstyle* (2021) a text linked to an Australian Aboriginal website that provides not only dance videos, but also cross-curriculum sports, music, cooking and science activities. With online and television platforms, this resource supports teachers to present authentic information texts, delivered by talented performers of Aboriginal, Asian and Southeast Asian descent. In addition, *Big rain coming* (Germein, 2002) a lyrical picture book written in Aboriginal English, tells the story of waiting for rain in an isolated Aboriginal community. Although one teacher appeared challenged when the non-Aboriginal students in her class did not immediately grasp some concepts from *Big rain coming*, she provided scaffolding through a whole class activity and complementary texts, which can draw on children's prior knowledge to create socio-emotional connections (Foster et al., 2020).

To develop a culturally responsive unit around *Big rain coming*, teachers can access online material, building on what children know and cross-curriculum activities, such as

recording a weather diary and comparing European seasons with the more nuanced Indigenous seasons (Germein, 2002). Thus, on one level, the Internet can provide early career teachers with opportunities to self-select and explore literacy resources, which can unpack institutional knowledge (Foster et al, 2020), that can sometimes be difficult to interpret. For example, given her limited experience with Aboriginal cultures, one teacher spoke about using a self-selected, digital literacy resource, which assisted with practical decoding ideas.

Although the use of such texts can provide educators, both Indigenous and non-Indigenous, with material to enrich the presentation of Indigenous knowledges in the curriculum, there is still a risk of selecting resources at random, without adequate understanding. Such evidence affirms that to redress educational disadvantage, providing culturally and linguistically diverse texts is only one factor, amongst a range of language/literacy, health, socio-political, cultural, family and community considerations (Cummins, 1986; Ntelioglou et al., 2014; Scull, 2016). To counter this constraint, Bow (2016) contended that educators can involve Aboriginal authorities in discussions surrounding text selection. Another challenge for educators to deepen understanding about Aboriginal perspectives remains the discourse of institutional knowledge (Foster et al., 2020) at the societal level, for example, the influence of media, which can affect children's language, etc. In line with one teacher's reflection, Cannon (2018) indicated that mainstream Australian news plays an important role in reinforcing inequality due to racist stereotypes.

We are cognisant that our data are illustrative of only three early career primary school teachers, who were working towards the proficient levels of Western Australia's Professional Teaching Standards. Therefore, it is important to interpret with caution these findings, which cannot be translated seamlessly to other contexts. Notwithstanding, the insights from our data suggest that several factors can assist early career primary school teachers to infuse Aboriginal perspectives in the English curriculum and explore culturally responsive pedagogy. These include having access to and engaging with culturally relevant multimodal texts, useful in-service professional development and pre-service teacher education programs, appropriate community based human resources, and 'low stakes' yarning opportunities. Yarning has developed as an increasingly powerful communicative tool, which allows participants to re-imagine the post-colonialist space, allowing for subtle understanding of multiple viewpoints and Aboriginal ways of doing and knowing (Byrne et al., 2021; Jackson-Barrett & Lee-Hammond, 2019; Tuhiwai Smith, 1999). The yarning in our study contrasted with that of Mills, Sunderland & Davis-Warra (2013) and Ungummer-Baumann (2002), which involved yarning circles to develop primary school children's oral skills and to that of Flückiger, Diamond and Jones (2012), which focused on building family-school partnerships. We used yarning as a means of developing meaningful, authentic and culturally safe communication between researchers and participants, across members of the research team, and between researchers and key members of the educational community.

Depending on teachers' contexts and/or backgrounds, other factors, such as policy documents appeared to have a double-barrelled impact, of either assisting or hindering early career teachers in their attempts to infuse Aboriginal perspectives in the English curriculum. This is despite numerous policy statements highlighting a broad definition of literacy as well as an inclusive and culturally relevant approach to literacy education (Education Council, 2019; MCEETYA, 2008; UNESCO, 2020). The General Capabilities of the Australian National Curriculum (2014) and Cross Curricular Perspectives aim to teach Aboriginal Studies and/or perspectives to all students and to close the gap in literacy for Aboriginal students. The Aboriginal Cultural Standards Framework (Government of Western Australia, 2015) acknowledges the fundamental role that teachers play in raising awareness about Aboriginal histories and cultures, even in contexts where there are few or no Aboriginal enrolments. Despite the framework's whole school approach to teaching, relationships and leadership, the standards have yet to be adequately implemented, leaving a gap in teachers' knowledge about infusing Aboriginal perspectives.

Further, Biddle, Foley and Klein (2016) argued that spending for the Australian Government's Aboriginal policies does not address systemic inequalities or challenges in achieving the Closing the Gap targets. In the Australian educational landscape, several researchers have also pointed to obstacles in developing culturally responsive pedagogy and curricular infusing of Aboriginal perspectives, such as limited pre-service and in-service professional development, a predominantly Anglo-centric teaching force, feelings of being ill-equipped and racist attitudes towards Aboriginal peoples (Morrison et al., 2019; Mooney, Halse & Craven, 2003). Further, although teachers may be well intentioned by deploying children's literature, dot painting or Dreaming stories, sometimes activities can inadvertently promote historical stereotypes, which are intensified through media representation, especially in contexts where non-Aboriginal students possess little knowledge about Aboriginal languages and cultures.

Foster et al. (2020, p. 70) suggested that when all four domains of culturally responsive pedagogy (style, texts, socio-emotional connections and institutional knowledge) interact concurrently, a 'sweet spot' is created that assists pre-service and in-service teachers to understand how the theory and practice of culturally relevant pedagogy coalesce. We argue that the quest is on-going to develop culturally relevant teachers and pedagogy for a respectful and inclusive Australian society, which acknowledges and celebrates the contributions of Aboriginal peoples. Ultimately, as per the United Nations Conventions on the Rights of the Child (UNICEF, 2006), long-term, systemic reform is required to develop students' personalities and talents, as well as their families' language(s) and traditions, regardless of minority or majority status.

Conclusion

Our purpose in writing this text has been to contribute to a scholarly discussion which forges theoretical understandings about the opportunities and challenges, which early career primary school teachers experience while infusing Aboriginal perspectives into the English curriculum. Forging a praxis between culturally responsive pedagogy, literacy

education and the Aboriginal cultural practice of yarning, our work showcases a limited number of early career teachers' voices in an education system, which requires bricoleurs, who can embrace a journey of transformation (Jackson-Barrett & Lee-Hammond, 2019). Providing these teacher participants with the opportunity to yarn about their practice and reflect on a variety of culturally appropriate Aboriginal texts, our study explored factors that assist and hinder primary school teachers as they grapple to infuse Aboriginal perspectives in the English curriculum. As per Heaton (2019), despite positive factors, such as the existence of cross-curriculum Aboriginal priorities, it is contestable whether teachers and schools are effectively and consistently teaching about Aboriginal cultures and histories. Mooney et al., (2003) highlight that teachers' cultural values and practices may instil fear of infusing Aboriginal perspectives in the English curriculum. In this sense, literacy, including multimodal texts, can provide tools for scaffolding teachers and developing a socially just society, which recognises Australian Indigenous people as key stakeholders, historically and contemporaneously (Education Council, 2019).

Drawing on the work of Ladson-Billings (1995) and its contemporary model (Foster et al., 2020), we argue that to develop culturally relevant pedagogy for diverse and respectful education communities, which celebrate the contributions of Aboriginal peoples, early action can be initiated through a methodology of yarning (Gaia, Hayes & Usher, 2013). Through yarning, our style of interaction has identified reflective ways that educators can use Aboriginal texts to meet Cross Curriculum Priorities (Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership, 2017). These understandings are associated with historical and cultural contexts, diverse language features and text genres, including visual literacy (ACARA, 2013). Whilst the yarning in our study was exploratory, future research could extend this format to investigate the pedagogical practices of larger groups of in-service and pre-service teachers. Based on Freire (1974, 1996), further iterations could combine yarning circles and scenarios for teacher education, which would support participants to critically solve problems by considering decolonising viewpoints, including those of Aboriginal Elders.

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Appendix 1: Infusing

We use the term *infusing* (Peterson, Jang, San Miguel, Styres & Madsen (2018), instead of integrating or embedding. In our view, integration is a remnant term that aligns to colonialist ideas of 'terra nullius', which have sought to dismiss Aboriginal perspectives (McKinley & Tuhiwai Smith, 2019). Given connotations of scientific infiltration into a substance or attachment of a smaller group into a larger military or government unit (Merriam-Webster, 2021a), the term embedding can be viewed as mechanical, or a 'bolt on' approach. In contrast, infusing refers to pouring and steeping of liquid (e.g. water) to permeate an entity, normally for improvement (Merriam-Webster, 2021b).

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