



University of
**Southern
Queensland**

***A MURAGAN [WHITE WOMAN]'S JOURNEY:
LEARNING FROM ELDERS
ON COUNTRY HOW TO SUPPORT THE CULTURAL
UNDERSTANDINGS OF NON-FIRST NATIONS
EDUCATORS THROUGH THE ARTS***

A thesis submitted by

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ABSTRACT

Research has revealed that it can be problematic for non-First Nations educators to embed the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Histories and Cultures Cross-Curriculum Priority (CCP) as required in the nationally endorsed Australian Curriculum (AC) (Bishop & Vass, 2021; Stern & Burgess, 2021). This is related to a range of factors, including limited professional development resulting in low teacher self-efficacy (Gibson & Ewing, 2020; Lane, 2020). The Arts provide important opportunities for students to learn about and celebrate the diversity of human experience (Dissanayake, 2000, 2015). As an arts educator, I could see the potential of utilising the arts to support educators in engaging with and building their knowledge of the histories and cultures of Australia's First Nations Peoples, with a particular focus on the local context of the school site. Through this research, a Participatory Action Research (PAR) project with the arts as a key central theme and a specific focus on the AC arts strands of dance, drama, media arts, music and visual arts was undertaken in collaboration with the Goenpul, Noonuccal and Ngugi Elders of the Minjerribah-Moorgumpin Elders-in-Council [MMEIC] on Minjerribah/Terrangee of the First Nations land and sea Country recognised as Quandamooka located in Queensland, Australia with a local primary school. Through this research, the experiences of non-First Nations educators in teaching the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Histories and Cultures CCP were explored in an arts project in a primary school which investigated the arts strands of dance, drama, media arts, music, and visual art to provide opportunities for both teachers and students to learn about and strengthen their cultural understandings of the local First Nations land and sea Country, Quandamooka. Whilst the project did reveal that the arts can successfully support non-First Nations educators in embedding the CCP, it also revealed that there is a distinct lack of arts knowledge among generalist teachers due to the marginalisation of this learning area together with the challenges of standardised testing, benchmark standards and data collection requirements (Lowe & Galstaun, 2020). The findings also revealed that providing educators with an opportunity to learn 'on Country' with First Nations Elders results in significant insights and connections that enrich the teaching of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Histories and Cultures CCP and enhance teacher self-efficacy. However, the findings also revealed the importance of leadership support for such initiatives and that greater alignment is required across documents such as the Australian Curriculum, the Australian Professional Standards for Teachers and School Reconciliation Action Plans to support whole school approaches in working towards reconciliation with First Nations Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples of Australia.

CERTIFICATION OF THESIS

I, Jacqueline Macdonald, declare that the Thesis entitled *A Muragan [white woman]'s journey: Learning from Elders on Country how to support the cultural understandings of non-First Nation educators through the arts* is not more than 100,000 words in length including quotes and exclusive of tables, figures, appendices, bibliography, references, and footnotes. The thesis contains no material that has been submitted previously, in whole or in part, for the award of any other academic degree or diploma. Except where otherwise indicated, this thesis is my own work.

Date: 21/06/2024

Endorsed by:

Professor Margaret Baguley
Principal Supervisor

Associate Professor Robyn Heckenberg
Adjunct Associate Supervisor

Associate Professor Ian Davis
Associate Supervisor

Student and supervisors' signatures of endorsement are held at the University.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I wish to acknowledge and thank the Goenpul, Noonuccal and Ngugi Elders of the Minjerribah-Moorgumpin Elders-in-Council of the First Nations land and sea Country recognised as Quandamooka. Aunty Mary, Aunty Maureen, Goenpul Jandaiwal Elder Dale, Uncle George, and Uncle Raymond, your mentorship of me, your generosity of spirit in sharing your wisdom and knowledge has inspired me throughout my journey with you on Country. Without your patience, understanding and encouragement, this thesis would never have been completed and words can never express my gratitude and respect.

I am indebted to my supervisor Professor Margaret Baguley who has been my guide and staunch advocate for my topic from its very beginnings. She has supported me at all times and consistently advocated for my topic and research, encouraging me through the ups and downs that came with writing as a *'muragan'* on First Nations Country. Thank you so much, Margaret.

How fortunate I have been to also have as an adjunct Supervisor Wiradjuri First Nations Elder, artist and academic scholar, Associate Professor Robyn Heckenberg whose First Nations knowledge and wisdom has been invaluable as she encouraged me from the beginning to walk softly on the Country of others.

Thank you also to Associate Professor Ian Davis, my associate supervisor.

I acknowledge and thank university colleagues across the School of Education who have always expressed interest and enthusiasm for my research topic. A very special thank you to Dr Eseta Tualaulelei whose support, encouragement and expertise with technology, formatting and the final organisation of the thesis saved me from being completely overwhelmed by my tech anxiety and kept me on track.

I would also like to thank the UniSQ Senior Research Librarian Margaret Bremner for her encouragement of my topic and her assistance with research and referencing.

To my four sons Conor, Lachlan, Travis, and Callum, and their partners Bridget, Katrina and Georgia, who have supported my journey, asked lots of questions, helped with all things technical—and I think will be glad when this journey is completed—I say thank you for your love and care. You are my world.

I am grateful to have had my research supported by the Australian Government Research Training Program Scholarship.

DEDICATION

This thesis is dedicated to the Goenpul, Noonuccal and Ngugi Elders, past and present, of the Minjerribah-Moorgumpin Elders-in-Council, who have been my guides, my mentors and my friends. You have taught me so much and I thank you from the bottom of my heart.

They were the people of the Earth, Sea and the wind,

The Sun, Moon, Rain and the Waters of the land

With Fauna and Flora abounding all part of a wonderful creation.

—Elder Aunty Eileen O’Loughlin, *Memoirs of Stradbroke Island*.

(*Our Heritage* (p.3). Used with permission from family, including eldest son Uncle Michael O’Loughlin).

This thesis is also dedicated to my beloved grandchildren, Felicity, Angus, Callum, and Freya with the hope that their futures will see them walking softly on Country, to understand Country.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

ABSTRACT.....	i
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	iii
LIST OF TABLES	viii
LIST OF FIGURES	ix
ABBREVIATIONS	xii
LIST OF LANGUAGE TERMS USED IN THESIS	xiii
Chapter 1: Introduction—Yura [Hail!]	1
1.1. Cultural acknowledgements	2
1.2. Creation and presentation of the thesis	8
1.3. Chapters and signposts	8
1.4. The literature review	12
Chapter 2: Signpost 2— <i>Muragan</i> [White Woman]	16
2.1 Introduction	16
2.2 My story—my place	16
2.3 The research.....	18
2.4 The participants	26
2.5 Storytelling	26
2.6 Metaphors	27
2.7 <i>A muragan's</i> learning journey	28
2.8 Signposts and special places	32
2.9 The Elders' voices	39
Chapter 3: Signpost 3— <i>Neembeebe Binang Gana</i> [look, listen, understand] (Minjerribah-Moorgumpin Elders-in-Council, 2011)	40
3.1 Introduction	40
3.2 <i>Neembeebe Binang Gana—meaning</i>	41
3.3 <i>Neembeebe—to look and see</i>	45
3.4 <i>Binang—to listen</i>	55
3.5 <i>Gana—to understand</i>	64
3.6 <i>Neembeebe Binang Gana—I look, I listen, I understand</i>	72
Chapter 4: Signpost 4—The Midden	75
4.1 Introduction	75
4.2 The midden	76

4.3	‘Oneness’ with Country: Understanding the ‘-ologies’	77
4.4	Learning, being and doing on Country	80
4.5	The voices of others—the literature	83
4.6	The Midden and the Quampi shellfish	92
4.7	A learning environment	99
4.8	The Elders—Minjerribah-Moorgumpin Elders-in-Council (MMEIC)	108
Chapter 5: Signpost 5— <i>Terra Bulla Leumeah</i> [Beautiful place, here I rest]		110
5.1	Introduction	110
5.2	Education, the arts, cultural knowledge, and understandings.....	117
5.3	Challenges for educators	125
5.4	Introducing the research project	135
5.5	Terra Bulla Leumeah	141
Chapter 6: Signpost 6— <i>Bamira</i> [Brown Lake]		144
6.1	Introduction	144
6.2	Community and stories	146
6.3	The research questions.....	148
6.4	The preliminary process	149
6.5	Participatory Action Research (PAR) overview	154
6.6	The project phases	156
6.7	Capemba Creek / Myora Spring	202
Chapter 7: Signpost 7—Myora Spring / Capemba Creek.....		203
7.1	Introduction	203
7.2	Visiting Myora Spring / Capemba Creek	204
7.3	Research question one	207
7.4	Research question two	214
7.5	Research question three	220
7.6	Further challenges.....	229
7.7	Limitations.....	237
7.8	From Country to Sky—looking up	238
Chapter 8: Signpost 8— <i>Mirigan</i> [star]		242
8.1	Introduction	242
8.2	Where it began.....	242
8.3	Significance of the research.....	247
8.4	Pathways to the future	253

8.5	Further research	259
8.6	Conclusion	262
REFERENCES		264
APPENDIX A: Code of Ethical Conduct MMEIC Elders		320
APPENDIX B: Group One (1) Participant Information sheet and Consent Form		321
APPENDIX C: Group Two (2) Participant Information sheet and Consent Form.....		323
APPENDIX D: Group Three (3) Participation Information sheet and Consent Form		325
APPENDIX E: Interview questions.....		327
APPENDIX F: University of Southern Queensland Ethics Approval.....		330
APPENDIX G: Brisbane Catholic Education Ethics Approval.....		332

LIST OF TABLES

Table 1. <i>Background Context Survey (n=12)</i>	162
Table 2. <i>Responses to personal enjoyment of the Arts</i>	221
Table 3. <i>Support for teaching arts-based activities in the classroom</i>	224

LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 1. Intertwining of the roots and branches of the <i>Ganin</i> (fig tree) (Minjerribah-Moorgumpin Elders-in-Council, 2011, p. 78) at <i>Goompi</i> (Dunwich).	9
Figure 2. Intertwining of the branches of the <i>Burogari</i> (cypress pines) (Minjerribah-Moorgumpin Elders-in-Council, 2011, p. 78), Deanbilla Bay.....	10
Figure 3. Mapping signposts on the journey (Minjerribah / Terrangee).	11
Figure 4. Swimming in Lockyer Creek, Southeast Qld.....	17
Figure 5. Framework for the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Histories and Cultures cross-curriculum priority.	19
Figure 6. Cyclical approach to Participatory Action Research (PAR).	23
Figure 7. The Midden near <i>Goompi</i> (Dunwich) Minjerribah / Terrangee.	35
Figure 8. Myora Spring.	37
Figure 9. <i>Neembeebe Binang Gana</i>	41
Figure 10. <i>Goompi</i> (Dunwich) heritage-listed cemetery.	42
Figure 11. Sunrise: looking towards Minjerribah.	44
Figure 12. Framework for the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Histories and Cultures CCP (ACARA, 2023).	51
Figure 13. Low tide—Deanbilla Bay, <i>Minjerribah / Terrangee</i>	72
Figure 14. The old <i>ganin</i> [fig] tree at <i>Goompi</i> (Dunwich).	73
Figure 15. The midden.....	75
Figure 16. Weaving a methodology for research.	91
Figure 17. <i>Quampi</i> shells.....	93
Figure 18. The midden shells— <i>Goompi</i> , <i>Minjerribah / Terrangee</i>	93
Figure 19. Ontology of land, sea, and the Elders.	98
Figure 20: The <i>Burogari</i> [cypress pines] at Deanbilla Bay.	100
Figure 21. The Action Research Cycle.	101
Figure 22. The Action Research Spiral.....	102
Figure 23. The spiralling cycles of PAR.....	104
Figure 24. <i>Gabul</i> —carpet snake totem. <i>Goompi</i> (Dunwich).	105
Figure 25. Welcome sign at Terra Bulla Leumeah.	110
Figure 26. <i>Terra Bulla Leumeah</i> grounds.	112
Figure 27. The three dimensions of the Australian Curriculum.	118

Figure 28. Conceptual framework (Version 8.4).....	123
Figure 29. Conceptual framework (Version V9).....	124
Figure 30. Intercultural Understanding elements.....	125
Figure 31. Centring the Elders in the research spiral.	155
Figure 32. Stages of PAR.....	156
Figure 33. Bamira shadows.....	158
Figure 34. Bamira storm clouds.	159
Figure 35. Tiddalick the frog artwork.	166
Figure 36. The boats in Moreton Bay—Year Four.....	167
Figure 37. Weaving with Goenpul Elder Aunty Mary (photograph of Elder used with permission).....	180
Figure 38. Student weaving.....	180
Figure 39. Completed student weaving.....	181
Figure 40. Apron gift from Elder Aunties.	182
Figure 41. <i>Bunbiya</i> [turtle] (Minjerribah-Moorgumpin Elders-in-Council, 2011, p. 25).	184
Figure 42. Years Two and Three artwork: collage, painting.....	184
Figure 43. <i>Gabul</i> [carpet snake] (Minjerribah-Moorgumpin Elders-in-Council, 2011, p. 31). Year Three artwork: collage, camouflage art, cross-hatching.....	185
Figure 44. <i>Jalum</i> [fish] (Minjerribah-Moorgumpin Elders-in-Council, 2011, p. 43). Year One artwork: x-ray lines and explanation.....	185
Figure 45. Year Six: X-Ray art—Dolphin.	185
Figure 46. Drama Year Six: Role play re-enactment of <i>Stolen Girl</i> (Saffioti, 2011).....	187
Figure 47. <i>Janjari</i> [bushland spirit].	188
Figure 48. <i>Jargon</i> [spirit in the lake].....	188
Figure 49. Year 6 line drawings: Perspectives of connections to Country.	189
Figure 50. Student line drawing.	189
Figure 51. Yura, means welcome.....	189
Figure 52. Sea creatures—mixed media artwork.	192
Figure 53. Year Two fish sculpting.	192
Figure 54. Backdrops for Quandamooka story animations.....	194
Figure 55. Land and sea Country.....	194
Figure 56. <i>Junjaris</i>	194
Figure 57. Student engagement.	195

Figure 58. Fishing.....	197
Figure 59. Calling the dolphins.....	198
Figure 60. Collecting bush honey.	198
Figure 61. When the wattle flowers, the tailor fish come.	198
Figure 62. <i>Janjari</i> Masks—Year Three.	199
Figure 63. <i>Duram duram</i> [storm].....	199
Figure 64. <i>Gabigabi</i> [wind] and <i>Gabing</i> [water].....	200
Figure 65. <i>Jandargan</i> [rainbow].	200
Figure 66: Channels and pathways—Capemba Creek.	203
Figure 67. Myora Spring, Minjerribah.....	205
Figure 68. Capemba Creek.	205
Figure 69. Capemba Creek midden.	206
Figure 70. Capemba Creek, low tide.	208
Figure 71. Mirigan over land and sea.	242

ABBREVIATIONS

AC – Australian Curriculum
ACARA – Australian Curriculum Assessment and Reporting Authority
AEA – Art Education Australia
AIATSIS – Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies
AITSL – Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership
APST – Australian Professional Standards for Teachers
ASME – Australian Society for Music Education
ATOM – Australian Teachers of Media
CCP – Cross-Curriculum Priority
GC – General Capabilities
HASS – Humanities and social sciences
IST – Indigenous Standpoint Theory
MCEECDYA - Ministerial Council for Education, Early Childhood
Development and Youth Affairs
MMEIC – Minjerribah-Moorgumpin Elders-in-Council
NAAE – National Advocates for Arts Education
NAIDOC – National Aboriginal and Islanders Day Observance Committee
NAPLAN – National Assessment Program – Literacy and Numeracy
NAVA – National Association for the Visual Arts
NHMRC – National Health and Medical Research Council
NIAA – National Indigenous Australians Agency
NSW – New South Wales
QCAA – Queensland Curriculum and Assessment Authority
QLD – Queensland
UNDRIP – United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples
UNESCO – United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization.

LIST OF LANGUAGE TERMS USED IN THESIS

JANDAI LANGUAGE DICTIONARY

(Minjerribah-Moorgumpin Elders-in-Council, 2011)

- Bamira** – Brown Lake on North Stradbroke Island
- Banna** – rain
- Binang** – ear
- Binang gari** – person who won't listen
- Bunbiya** – turtle
- Burogari** – cypress pine
- Capemba** – creek at Myora springs
- Dada** – strong
- Duram duram** – storm
- Gabigabi** – wind
- Gabing** – water
- Gabiyili** – tell
- Gabul** – carpet snake
- Galan** – cloud
- Gana** – hear, think, understand
- Ganin** – fig tree
- Goenpul** – A clan group of Quandamooka (Moreton Bay)
- Jajum/s** – baby
- Jalum** – fish
- Jandai** – Stradbroke Island language
- Jandargan** – rainbow
- Jangang** – lightning
- Janjari** – light
- Jargon** – spirit in the lake
- Minjerribah** – Stradbroke Island
- Minyangu nginda ngariba?** – What are you talking about?
- Mirigan** – star
- Mooloomba** – Point Lookout
- Moongalba** – the Aboriginal name of the mission at Myora

Moorgumpin – Moreton Island

Mumbal – thunder

Muragan – white woman

Neembeebea (Nimgiba/Neemgeeba) – see

Ngariba – talk

Noonuccal (Nunagal, Nunukul) - make of a Stradbroke group or person

Ngugi – Aboriginal inhabitants of Moreton Island

Pullan Pullan – Amity Point

Quampi – shellfish

Terrangee – place name

Ugurie – edible shellfish

Yaguwi – bandicoot

Yura – hail!

Yuri – totem.

Chapter 1: Introduction—Yura [Hail!]

The word, *Yura*, meaning “Hail! A call or greeting on arrival at a place ...” (Minjerribah-Moorgumpin Elders-in-Council Minjerribah-Moorgumpin Elders-in-Council, 2011, p. 67), comes from the Jandai language group of the First Nations Goenpul, Noonuccal and Ngugi Peoples of the land and sea Country known as Quandamooka. These First Nations Peoples had their native title rights and interests over the land and surrounding waters of the region known as Quandamooka recognised in 2011 at Local, State and Federal government levels with ceremonies on Minjerribah / Terrangee (*Delaney on behalf of Quandamooka people vs State of Queensland & ORS*, 2011).¹ Leading up to these ceremonies it is important to note that not all described apical ancestral family groups agreed to this consent determination.²

Yura is the first word I heard from Elders when I began this research journey and I use it now and say, “*Yura*, ” to my readers, as I introduce you to this First Nations land and sea Country, and the Goenpul, Noonuccal and Ngugi Peoples who are the present-day Elders of the Minjerribah-Moorgumpin Elders-in-Council [MMEIC]. These First Nations traditional owners have guided, supported, and encouraged me, a *muragan* [white woman], (Minjerribah-Moorgumpin Elders-in-Council, 2011, p. 53) on my journey of understanding of the ancestral connections, steadfast strength and cultural knowledge of a First Nations Peoples. This cognisance has been core to my research into the capacity of the Arts of dance, drama, media arts, music and visual arts to support and strengthen the understanding of primary school educators as they embed First Nations histories and cultures in their programs.

Throughout this thesis, the voices of First Nations Elders, scholars and writers reverberate, and their stories, lived experiences, ontologies, axiologies, and epistemologies are privileged and respected, recognising the fluidity of the continuous unfolding of lived cultures (Frazer & Yunkaporta, 2021; Hogarth, 2022). In privileging these voices, this

¹ On 4 July 2011, the Federal Court of Australia made two native title consent determinations recognising the Quandamooka People’s native title rights and interests over land and waters on and surrounding North Stradbroke Island, and some islands in Moreton Bay (National Native Title Tribunal, 2011). The Quandamooka Title claimant group members are the direct biological descendants of the Quandamooka described apical ancestors (Minjerribah-Moorgumpin Elders-in-Council [MMEIC] communication, April 17, 2024).

² For example, the Dandrubu (Charlie Moreton) family lodged their full opposition to the consent determination making it public, instead, that they chose to fully reserve their original First Nation rights of Sovereignty (MMEIC Elders, communication, April 17, 2024).

thesis will deviate from the formulaic “confines and structures of western institutions and research” (Hogarth, 2022, p. 231). These variations will be introduced and contextualised in this introduction which begins with formal cultural acknowledgements of the Goenpul, Noonuccal, Ngugi Elders of the Minjerribah-Moorgumpin Elders-in-Council Aboriginal Corporation (MMEICAC or MMEIC), including the imperatives of respect, naming, cultural sensitivity and language use, and cultural resources.³ This introduction will then outline how this thesis is created and presented with a discussion of chapters and signposts, and the restructuring of a literature review in recognition of the centrality throughout the thesis of the voices of First Nations scholars and writers and the interweaving of these voices within the structure of the chapters.

1.1. Cultural acknowledgements

My name is Jacqueline Macdonald, and I am a *muragan* and educator undertaking research in a First Nations community on Country in South-East Queensland (Qld), learning from, and working with Elders. I respectfully acknowledge these Traditional Owners and Elders, both past and present, of the Goenpul, Noonuccal and Ngugi Peoples of the land and sea Country recognised as Quandamooka. This Country includes the land and sea surrounding Moorgumpin (Moreton Island), Minjerribah / Terrangee (Stradbroke Island), the Southern Moreton Bay Islands, and the mainland coast south of the Brisbane River.

However, I have learnt from the MMEIC Elders that the boundaries defined within the native title claim conflict with pre-colonial traditional and customary Aboriginal boundary systems. Original customary boundaries were reflective of language group Nations and defined by natural markers in the form of hills, mountain ranges, creeks, rivers, and different ecological environments (MMEIC Elders communication, April 17, 2024).

1.1.1. Goenpul, Noonuccal and Ngugi Elders: Minjerribah-Moorgumpin Elders-in-Council Aboriginal Corporation (MMEICAC)

The Minjerribah-Moorgumpin Elders-in-Council Aboriginal Corporation (MMEICAC) was created in 1993 to promote the value and worth of the original First Nations Peoples of Minjerribah (North Stradbroke Island) and Moorgumpin (Moreton Island). The

³ This is outlined in the Minjerribah-Moorgumpin Elders-in-Council Code of Ethical Conduct which was completed and approved in 2024. (see Appendix A).

organisation is committed to preserving, recording, communicating, and teaching communities the culture and language of the Goenpul, Noonuccal and Ngugi First Nations Peoples of Minjerribah and Moorgumpin (Minjerribah-Moorgumpin Elders-in-Council Aboriginal Corporation, 2020).

The Goenpul, Noonuccal and Ngugi Elders who are the present-day members of the Minjerribah-Moorgumpin Elders-in-Council (MMEIC) have held my hands and gently guided me, around, through and over, the many obstacles I have confronted on my journey. They have supported me and taught me to listen and understand the importance of words, such as *lore* which is representative of Land, Origins, Respect, and Elders.

Their First Nations Dreaming and Creation Stories intertwine the knowledge of the land and their origins, their lifestyles, the culture, and history of their ancestors, and reveal their deep connections to living with the sea, the land, and the sky, and all living creatures found therein (Aunty Margaret Iselin & Uncle Keith Borey 2007).⁴ I have been privileged to be invited to attend smoking ceremonies, dance performances that retell ancestral stories, and hear the strength of voices raised in songs that acknowledge Country and all therein, recognising the power of the arts to sustain, promote and embed Quandamooka culture. Pekeri Ruska, daughter of Goenpul, Jandaiwal MMEIC Elder Dale Ruska writes: “Our identity is an ancient one, rooted in ancient customs, traditions and culture, all connected to people, place and creation” (Ruska, 2016, p. 1).

1.1.2. Respect

In respectful acknowledgement of their matrilineal heritage, as well as their patronymic surname, and with their permission to do so, I acknowledge and thank Goenpul Elder, and Minjerribah-Moorgumpin Elders-in-Council (MMEIC) Chairperson Aunty Mary Iselin-Burgess; Council and Board member Ngugi Noonuccal Elder Aunty Maureen Borey-Myers, and Goenpul Jandaiwal Elder, and master wood craftsman Dale Ruska, who shared with me his knowledge and understanding of sovereignty, bloodlines, and deep abiding love for his Country. I also acknowledge and thank MMEIC Community Elder George Khan, and MMEIC Elder Nunka Raymond Dennis Walker for sharing their stories and cultural knowledge of Minjerribah / Terrangee. The voices of these Elders, their wisdom and their knowledge, are respectfully embedded, with their permission, in each of the chapters of this thesis.

⁴ Minjerribah-Moorgumpin Elders-in-Council Elders.

1.1.3. Naming—places and persons

After conversations and discussions, the MMEIC Elders have requested that North Stradbroke Island will be named throughout this thesis as Minjerribah / Terrangee.⁵ The naming of this region as Quandamooka will be accepted as an outcome of the Native Title recognition on 4 July 2011. However, I acknowledge that this was, and still is, a contentious process for Island inhabitants, particularly in relation to final consent and determination.

The word, *Goompi*, is recognised and used by the present-day MMEIC Elders for the township of Dunwich. *Terra Bulla Leumeah* or ‘beautiful place here I rest’ was named by Elders who have since passed away. These words and their meanings do not come from the Jandai Language Dictionary (Minjerribah-Moorgumpin Elders-in-Council, 2011) but are used by the MMEIC Elders.

The MMEIC Elders have also expressed a preference for the term First Nations Peoples (with capitalization of each word) and this term has been used where possible. The terms, Aboriginal, Indigenous and Torres Strait Islanders may occur, particularly in relation to the documents from the Australian Curriculum and Assessment Reporting Authority [ACARA] (Australian Curriculum Assessment and Reporting Authority, 2024b) and are used respectfully and in context.

In referencing and in-text citations, I have always used the full name of any First Nations contributor, including their title of Elder, Granny, Aunty, and their words are italicised. This is a mark of respect for the wisdom, knowledge, and graciousness of these contributors in allowing their words to be part of this thesis.

I note that this thesis contains names of peoples, including those from the Goenpul, Noonuccal and Ngugi Peoples who have passed away. Present-day family members have given permission to acknowledge their ancestors, and their writings and reflections.

There are no photographs included in the thesis of people who have passed.

1.1.4. Cultural sensitivity—language use

To become culturally aware and sensitive necessitates involvement in the perspectives of other cultures (Heckenberg, 2020). One perspective I recognise is the importance of being

⁵ Terrangee as a name for Minjerribah/North Stradbroke Island has been identified through the original tape recordings of Elder Granny Janie Sunflower of the Moreton Dandruha family group (MMEIC Elders, communication, April 17, 2024).

aware of, and sensitive to, the use of language and recognising that language, naming, and Country are inexorably connected. Capitalising the word, Country, throughout the thesis recognises the ontological interrelationships First Nations Peoples have with belonging to land, water, and place (Sunderland et al., 2022). “It (Country) is a term central to our understanding of who we are and where we belong” (Carlson, 2016, p. 510). This is substantiated through millennia as First Nations Peoples of this continent identified and named significant land surface features, integrating the landscape and locations into their individual and group identities. Thus, the physical and geographic environment became part of their history, their languages, their song-lines, their stories, and lived experiences (Moodie, 2019; Simpson & Wigglesworth, 2019).

There is deep history and meaning in names and it is essential for cultural awareness and sensitivity that they are embedded authentically, accurately, and appropriately. It is important to seek out and acknowledge input from Elders in relation to place names and language words (Croft, 2022). As my writing and research is based in and on the First Nations land and sea Country recognised as Quandamooka, I respectfully acknowledge the words of Goenpul Noonuccal Elder Donna Ruska, included here with permission from present-day family members, in relation to the importance of the *Jandai Language Dictionary*:

We are survivors, not victims, due to our Elders, our law, our song and dance...we were forced ‘underground’ for a generation or two...however, we (Jandai language group) still have a few hundred words and... a lot of work has been done by the language retrieval mob...who are currently working on a dictionary. (Ruska, 1997, p. 23)

The *Jandai Language Dictionary* was published in 2011 (Minjerribah-Moorgumpin Elders-in-Council, 2011) and its title page acknowledges it as a “dictionary of language spoken on Stradbroke and Moreton Islands based on words remembered by all Elders and recorded by interested visitors to our shores” (Minjerribah-Moorgumpin Elders-in-Council, 2011).⁶

⁶ The *Jandai Language Dictionary* identifies six main sources of information retrieved from documents dating from 1873, through to 1983 (MMEIC, 2011, pp. 110-114). The Elders Dictionary team worked collaboratively with a professional community linguist from 2008-2011 (MMEIC, 2011, p. 9).

1.1.5. Cultural resources from Minjerribah / Terrangee

I have been fortunate in being guided by the MMEIC Elders to a variety of cultural resources which have been instrumental in securing for me a solid foundation for my research. These resources include:

- ***Jandai Language Dictionary (Minjerribah-Moorgumpin Elders-in-Council, 2011)***

The *Jandai Language Dictionary* (Minjerribah-Moorgumpin Elders-in-Council, 2011) begins with a Welcome from Goenpul Elder Aunty Margaret Iselin, who was the 2011 President of the MMEIC. Her daughter Goenpul Elder and present-day chairperson of MMEIC Aunty Mary Iselin-Burgess has given permission for her mother's words to be shared:

I'm 80 years old now and I think this dictionary will give us the opportunity to recover our language which was taught to us all those years ago by Granny Dungoo and Granny Parsons, two lovely people who gave me the schooling on the culture of this island and I am ever so grateful to them for that. (September 2011, p. iii).

In this thesis, I have used traditional words, place names and spellings as they are recognised in the *Jandai Language Dictionary* (MMEIC, 2011) with an alphabetical list of all language terms and meanings provided (see pp. xi, xii). I am also aware that language revival can be a contentious process due to the imposition of colonial systems and administration and am sensitive to the knowledge of present day MMEIC Elders and their ongoing conversations in relation to the Jandai language and its origins. I understand that there is an established Elders Language sub-committee within the MMEIC whose members are undertaking research and consultation regarding future editions of this dictionary.

- ***Minjerribah, an Indigenous story of North Stradbroke Island (Aunty Margaret Iselin & Uncle Keith Borey, 2007)***

This illustrated book was collectively developed and published by the Minjerribah / Moorgumpin Elders and authored by Goenpul Elder Aunty Margaret Iselin and Ngugi Elder Uncle Keith Borey. The book has illustrations and stories including Dreaming and Creation Stories, information in relation to reading the signs found within nature, how to live with the sea and the land, and a list of special places to

visit on the island. This information was discussed with the present-day MMEIC Elders and used extensively throughout the research project.

- ***Moongalba (Myora) Sitting Down Place***

Compiled and written by Elder Aunty Bernice Fischer, assisted by Elder Aunty Rose Borey and Elder Aunty Estelle Bertossi, the book, *Moongalba (Myora) Sitting Down Place*, is a record of personal recollections and information relating to the Aboriginal Mission Era (1892-1942) and “provides a tangible link to this era of Stradbroke Island history” (Fischer, B., Aunty Rose Borey, Aunty Estelle Bertossi, 2021). This book provided me with a deeper and more detailed understanding of the life and times of now-departed Elders from Minjerribah / Terrangee. Elder Aunty Bernice has personally requested, as a mark of respect for her Elder and mother Aunty Rose Borey, that this book is always cited and referenced as follows: Fischer, B., Aunty Rose Borey and Aunty Estelle Bertossi, 2021.

- ***Memoirs of Stradbroke Island (1995)—anthology of poetry by Aunty Eileen Elizabeth O’Loughlin (nee Borey)***

“Poetry, in all its written, spoken and performance-based approaches, has emerged as a key creative form that enables Indigenous or First Nations voices to be heard” (Manathunga et al., 2020, p. 3). Bunitj clan poet, Bill Neidjie, demonstrates this in his book, *Story about Feeling* (Bill Neidjie, 2019), which evokes for readers his deep knowledge and love for Country in the same way that Aunty Eileen’s poems convey her voice, her emotions and personal connections to her beloved island. Her words communicate her interpretations and understandings of her world (Allotta, 2023).

I am grateful to the families of Aunty Eileen (including her eldest son, Uncle Michael O’Loughlin) who have kindly given permission to include some of the lines from Aunty Eileen’s poems in various chapters as her words and phrases add a creative dimension to the interweaving of the stories of the Elders (Thunig & Jones, 2021).

1.2. Creation and presentation of the thesis

When I embarked on this research, I did not wish to be confined to the often-pre-determined structures and rules for academic writing. Professor Emerita Robyn Ewing AM writes of these as being “traditional, often reductive methods and narrow writing conventions” (Ewing, 2023, p. xix), and alludes to the need to explore and take risks through playing with words, feelings and artforms in order to discover new learning and understandings and new ways of “being, knowing, doing and becoming in academia” (p. xix). Kamilari scholar, Professor Melitta Hogarth, emphasises the importance of understanding the different worldviews and individual experiences that are reflected through First Nations ways of knowing, being and doing and that First Nations stories can be expressed in a creative and adventurous way through art as well as through words and language (Hogarth, 2022).

The authors Bawaka Country including L. Burarrwanga, R. Ganambarr, M. Ganambarr-Stubbs, B. Ganambarr, D. Maymuru, S. Wright, S. Suchet-Pearson, K. Lloyd & L. Daley (2023), place Bawaka Country as the lead author believing that not to do so undermines the integrity and legitimacy of Country. They acknowledge that this is “at odds with academic referencing styles, formatting requirements and other...processes” (p. 75), but honours the land, sea, sky, living beings, both human- and non-human, the plants, and all relationships within Bawaka Country homeland.

It is vital to take time to build trust with Elders (Brearley, 2015) and create a space for authentic learning which respects and acknowledges their cultural knowledge and understanding (Paton, 2012). I have explored ways to present my writing in such a way that the interrelationships between First Nations Peoples and Country are recognised and embedded in the chapters of this thesis.

1.3. Chapters and signposts

In considering the words of Professor Ewing, and the fluid and organic nature of my thesis, I believe that the word, chapter, with its underlying indication of segments, sections, and divisions of words within a book (Cresswell, 2010), is adhering to a western writing model that can be seen as “an intellectual description of procedures, influences and origins” (Clements, 2004, p. 29). In considering the most culturally appropriate way to present this thesis, I am aware that the English language is the colonising language tool that perpetuated grievous harm to First Nation communities through the westernisation of naming places and locations (Fischer et al., 2022). Muecke and Eadie (2020) warn of the

“rectilinear capture of actual Country... through survey lines, State lines, grid patterns, blocks with boundaries and fences, and frameworks” (p. 1204). I see the legacy of this rectilinear capture of Country resonating in the traditional structure and organisation of chapters for this thesis.

There is also the ongoing tension between the “more globally dominate system of the written word” compared to the “validity of orally disseminated knowledge” (Fischer et al., 2022, p. 277). In summary, the western writing style can inadvertently compartmentalise the perspectives and knowledge of First Nations Elders.

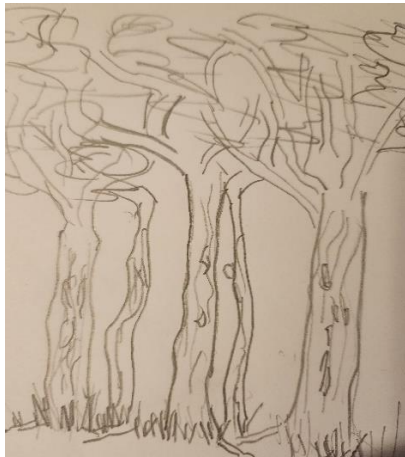
To avoid such compartmentalisation, my adjunct supervisor, Wiradjuri Elder and Artist, Associate Professor Robyn Heckenberg, advised me to be artistic and creative and draw what I see and feel on Country, rather than subscribe to the symbols, shapes, and flowcharts of Western diagrams (personal communication, June 19, 2021). Knowing that the arts, including visual art, was an essential feature of this thesis I found this advice invaluable as it enabled me to realise that the organic and transformative nature of my research has been an organic process that has been informed by the Elders’ stories and metaphors which have emphasized an interconnectedness and relatedness with Country (see **Figure 1** and **Figure 2**).

Figure 1. Intertwining of the roots and branches of the *Ganin* (fig tree) (Minjerribah-Moorgumpin Elders-in-Council, 2011, p. 78) at *Goompi* (Dunwich).



(J. Macdonald, personal drawing, May 31, 2022).

Figure 2. Intertwining of the branches of the *Burogari* (cypress pines) (Minjerribah-Moorgumpin Elders-in-Council, 2011, p. 78), Deanbilla Bay.



(J. Macdonald, personal drawing, April 17, 2024).

The roots of these trees are embedded in Country, deep into the past, and regardless of winds and tides they remain strong. Both the *ganin* and the *burogari* feature in Dreaming Stories and are physical representations of this land and sea Country planted by ancestors as markers for sacred areas. Ngugi Noonuccal Elder Aunty Maureen Borey-Myers shared with me:

My Grandfather, Elder Uncle Markwell Brown, was born under the branches of a cypress pine at Deanbilla Bay and this is acknowledged on his birth certificate. (Communication, April 17, 2024).

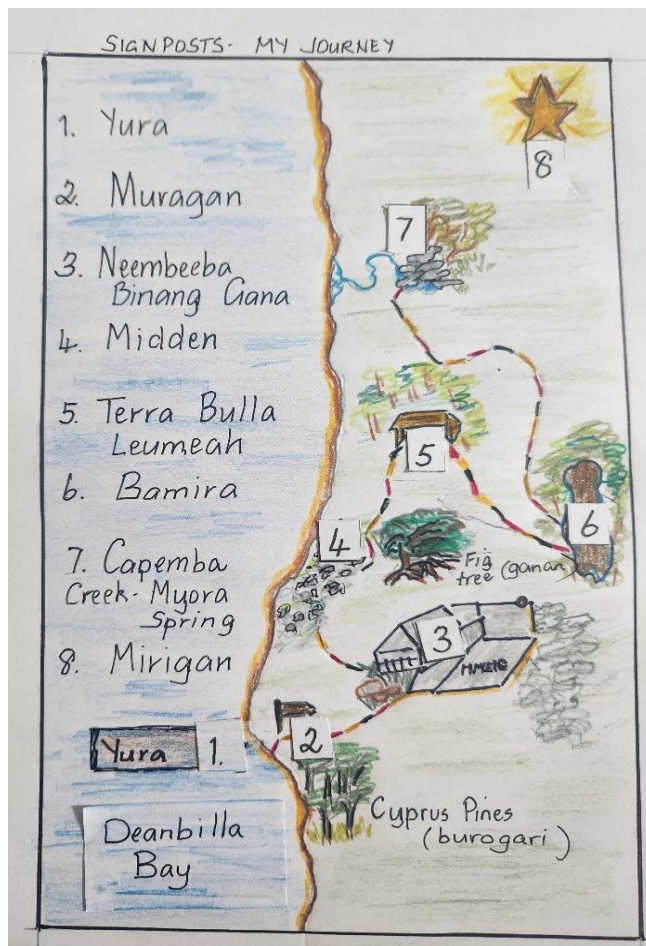
The intertwined branches remind us of the complexity of the present and the future and are representative of the intertwining and interrelationships between Goenpul, Noonuccal and Ngugi Peoples traditions, knowledges, and practices. It can be difficult to identify and communicate this through the structuring and numbering of chapters, a conventional practice in Western research (Guntarik & Daley, 2017).

Kamilaroi scholar, Professor Melitta Hogarth (2022) suggests that the use of signposts can better position First Nations Peoples and their places, providing readers with an understanding of the “different lens ... [and] different worldview[s]” (p. 238). I

noted that the words of scholar Ngugi/WakkaWakka woman, Professor Tracey Bunda, align with Hogarth's suggestion: "I centred the words from the old people in the text of [my] thesis, and at the commencement of each chapter ... a different method, to make anew, to reclaim and reshape" (Bunda et al., 2019, p. 158).

Therefore, each chapter of this thesis will have an accompanying signpost, featuring Jandai language words, indicating the unfolding of my journey on Minjerribah / Terrangee in the company of the MMEIC Elders. With their advice and knowledge and keeping to the arts theme I have provided a hand-drawn and illustrated map showing the signposting of the chapter headings tracing my journey to each special place, with ancestral and present-day connections, on Minjerribah / Terrangee (see **Figure 3**).

Figure 3. Mapping signposts on the journey (Minjerribah / Terrangee).



(J. Macdonald, personal drawing, December 21, 2023).

1.4. The literature review

When considering the requirement for a literature review chapter as part of the traditional thesis approach, I felt perturbed as I reflected on the holistic approach I have taken throughout my research and writing. The template, with its requirement for a literature review chapter, brought to mind the question asked by Kamilaroi First Nations scholar, Professor Melitta Hogarth: “What happens when the template does not mirror your ways of knowing, being and doing ... squeezing you into conformity? (Hogarth, 2022). As a *muragan* [white woman], I felt compromised as the words of First Nations scholars are a critical aspect of this thesis and weaving these throughout the thesis is more authentic and relevant. To truly and authentically reflect the First Nations voices of the MMEIC Elders, I had to understand and convey the complexity of sharing knowledge through stories, conversations and their interconnections with place (Bunda et al., 2019; Guntarik & Daley, 2017; Heckenberg, 2016; Heckenberg, 2018; Hill et al., 2019; Paton, 2012). This is part of the essence of respectfully acknowledging First Nations scholars whose voices and writings substantiate and endorse the words of the Elders.

As with the Elders, these scholars are strong, and keepers of knowledge. Their voices provide an important critical component to this thesis as I began to identify my own inadequacies and reflect on my ignorance of the inequities, both past and present, faced by First Nations Peoples (Bodkin-Andrews & Carlson, 2016a). Together with the stories and voices of the MMEIC Elders, the voices of First Nations scholars have allowed me to gain new understandings, particularly in relation to the ontology of Country with its complex interrelationships between “humans, plants, animals and spiritual entities, landforms, soil, water – salt, fresh and brackish – and air, the sun, moon and stars, the dreaming and ancestors” (Harriden, 2023, p. 204). First Nations scholars see no separation or compartmentalisation but a relationality between all aspects of the whole entity of life (Bawaka Country including et al., 2023; Country Bawaka et al., 2016; Watson, 2014b). There is integrity in the cohesion between the stories, the histories, the present-day practices, and the unwavering deep connections to Country (Martin, 2017). I believe it imperative that as a *muragan*, I am able to move beyond the representation of a western narrative construct by including elements such as ‘signposts’ throughout the thesis (Rigney, 2001). Chapters Three and Four both feature the voices found within the literature and make connections to First Nations land and sea Country recognised as Quandamooka and the words of the Goenpul, Noonuccal and Ngugi MMEIC Elders linking to ancestral places on Country.

1.4.1. What Aboriginal scholars say

The interweaving of knowledge and Country has been successfully achieved by Aboriginal scholars in their respective PhD theses (Heckenberg, 2018; Hromek, 2019; Paton, 2009; Rey, 2019; Rom, 2022b). While these scholars have presented their writing in chapter formats, they have used a variety of creative ways to share the aims and topics underpinning their respective theses, without the delineation of a specific literature review chapter.

Gunal Elder Dr Aunty Doris Paton introduced her Indigenous ways of knowing through her quilts “crafted with multiple layers of knowledge” (2009, p. 3), as a narrative medium, as her artistic quilt creations became a site for telling stories and embedded the importance of the arts in providing this medium for narrative. Associate Professor and Wiradjuri scholar, Sadie Heckenberg, wrote of the “ever-growing need for protecting spoken cultural knowledge” (2018, p. 8). She felt the tension between the western hegemonic view and expectations of colleagues, and her recognition of her obligations to her Elders and community was apparent in her utilisation of Wiradjuri language and methodology in supporting her research into oral history and Indigenous knowledges.

Dharug community member and Research Fellow, Dr. Jo Anne Rey wrote: “This thesis challenges customary thesis methodologies by including the influence of other-than-humans in the research process. By recognizing the agency of Country, this research is able to acknowledge participant voices of birds, possums, and sandstone” (2019, p. 5).

In her PhD thesis, Dr Daniele Hromek, a Saltwater woman of Bundawang / Dhurga / Yuin and Burrier / Dharawal ancestry, and also a designer and a weaver, wrote that she felt challenged by academic requirements questioning, “how, in actuality, Indigenous voices and worldviews can be privileged in a thesis structure?” (Hromek, 2019, p. 10).

As with Ngugi / WakkaWakka woman, Professor Tracey Bunda (2019), Quandamooka (Nunukul / Ngugi) Indigenous researcher, Dr Mitchell Rom, also began each chapter in his thesis with a story, declaring that “sharing stories at the beginning of these chapters reflects my Indigeneity as an author and also challenges and disrupts Westernised traditions regarding the writing of a PhD thesis” (Rom, 2022a, p. 11).

I found inspiration from these scholars and determined as a *muragan* to follow their footsteps so that I too could present the learning on this journey from my journeying on Quandamooka land and sea Country with the Goenpul, Noonuccal and Ngugi Elders. This approach is purposeful, respecting the continuation of cultural knowledge and practices

informed by the knowledge passed down by their ancestors and new knowledge that has evolved through being part of a colonised world (Heckenberg, 2018).

1.4.2. *The pathways between the signposts*

This introduction is the beginning of my journey. It acknowledges the cultural protocols, recognising the Goenpul, Noonuccal and Ngugi Elders of the Minjerribah-Moorgumpin Elders-in-Council who are my guides, and incorporates the necessity for understanding respect, naming, language and Quandamooka cultural resources.

I have introduced changes to the thesis structure, being conscious of my position as a *muragan* researching in a First Nations space. This makes it imperative for a holistic approach that recognises the deeper meaning of *Country* and the importance of interweaving the voices of First Nations scholars, and the voices of my Elders, throughout the stages of my journey.

At the beginning of Chapter Two, the signpost reads *muragan*. In this chapter, I introduce the topic and the focus of my research. I outline the purpose of the research and the chosen paradigm and the accompanying ethics and responsibilities. I share my own story, including both my passion for the arts and my background as an arts educator, and discuss the importance of ‘storying’. There is the use of metaphors in the thesis, and I share the steppingstones that began my learning journey.

Each chapter with its accompanying signpost is introduced and summarised, showing the pathway I have taken and the connections between the signposts. The literature is embedded in Chapter Three where the Jandai language words *Neembeeba Binang Gana* (look, listen, understand) (Minjerribah-Moorgumpin Elders-in-Council, 2011, pp. 51, 27, 33) are signposted. Looking, listening, and understanding becomes a possibility when I intertwine the words of First Nations scholars with the words of the MMEIC Elders.

In Chapter Four, the methodology chapter with its metaphor of a midden, also embeds the knowledge of First Nations scholars, strengthening my understanding of the ontologies and epistemologies of being on Country.

The significance of Chapter Five, *Terra Bulla Leumeah* [beautiful place, here I rest] and Chapter Six, *Bamira* [Brown Lake], with their connections to both past and present, cultural learning through the arts and the passing on of knowledge is apparent as these chapters outline and relate the arts research project undertaken at a primary school with the support and encouragement of the MMEIC Elders. The arts project was

completed and shared by all students at a presentation day that featured music, dance, visual and media arts and drama reenactments of stories, all demonstrating the new cultural knowledge of the students.

Chapter Seven observes the consistent outpouring of fresh water from Myora Spring which becomes a metaphor for the fresh new knowledge gained by research project participants through their participation in an arts project that embraced dance, drama, media art, music and visual art forms. .

Understanding that Country, as a context, also embraces sky, it feels appropriate to conclude with looking up at *Mirigan* [star] (Minjerribah-Moorgumpin Elders-in-Council, 2011, p. 51) for guidance, hoping it will light the way to new beginnings and a positive future for First Nations education in our schools.

The MMEIC Elders have led me, showing the way between the signposts, following the footsteps of their ancestors as we traversed the island, only stopping to recognise the beauty of the natural environment and hear the histories and stories often recreated through the arts of dance, song and visual art, both past and present-day.

So, I conclude this introduction as I began with *Yura*—greetings to you at this (next) place (Minjerribah-Moorgumpin Elders-in-Council, 2011, p. 67). Join me, as a *muragan*, walking in the company of the present-day Elders and the unseen but ever-present ancestors on the land and sea Country, recognised as Quandamooka, on the island of Minjerribah / Terrangee.

Chapter 2: Signpost 2—*Muragan* [White Woman]

2.1 Introduction

Throughout this thesis, I shall endeavour to show the journey of a *muragan* [white woman] (Minjerribah-Moorgumpin Elders-in-Council, 2011, p. 53). It is a sign of respect and protocol in First Nations communities to acknowledge the community, and to introduce and define oneself (Hill et al., 2019; Rogers, 2018; Rom, 2022b; Shay & Wickes, 2017). Therefore, this chapter begins with positioning myself for the reader and sharing my story and my place.

As an Arts educator, I believe that it is through the Arts that non-First Nations educators can embed cultural knowledge and strengthen their own individual cultural understandings. Further, this chapter introduces my research in relation to this belief, and its purpose.

There are ethics and responsibilities that come with research as a *muragan* in a First Nations space and I will outline and acknowledge these aspects. Additionally, I will introduce and clarify the importance of the sharing of culture, knowledge and histories through storytelling (Heckenberg, 2018) and use metaphors to make connections to Country.

As a *muragan*, I introduce my learning journey and use the metaphor of stepping stones and signposts to outline its beginnings. The signposts, that name important cultural sites on Minjerribah /Terrangee, are explained in more detail, and the chapter concludes with the voices of the Elders.

Throughout this chapter, I am ever mindful that in the Quandamooka Jandai language I am a *muragan* [white woman] (Minjerribah-Moorgumpin Elders-in-Council, 2011, p. 53), and understand that as a white woman I must remember the imperative to be responsible and respectful of another culture. Essentially, I am the ‘outsider’ on the Country of others.

2.2 My story—my place

I now acknowledge my mentors and guides who are the Goenpul, Noonuccal and Ngugi Elders of the Minjerribah-Moorgumpin Elders-in-Council [MMEIC] on Minjerribah / Terrangee in the First Nations Country recognised as Quandamooka.

My story, and affinity for land, water, and sky, began in the gullies, bushland and fertile soils encompassing the waters of the Lockyer Creek in South-East Qld, the First Nations Country of the Jagera and Ugarapul Peoples. The creek and its surrounds were where I spent my childhood with early memories of swimming in one of the many waterholes in the creek (see **Figure 4**).

Figure 4. Swimming in Lockyer Creek, Southeast Qld



(J. Macdonald, family photo collection, circa 1960).

Here is where I made my initial connections between the arts and the land, water and sky of this region. I heard the music of the wind in the treetops and in the sounds of water trickling over stones and pebbles in the creek. I experienced the drama of the sharp summer storms and the dance of the lightning and the clouds. The changing colours of the seasons, the contrast between the straight rows of orchards and the random placement of the gum trees and the bushland, together with the myriad of stars at night, all contributed to my developing aesthetic senses and awe of the Australian landscape.

Years later, as an adult, I settled, with my own family, in Hervey Bay, the Fraser Coast Region of Qld, and the country of the Butchulla First Nations Peoples. As an early career primary music teacher, I began integrating dance, drama and visual art into my music programs. This approach supports my contention that we do not learn in silos. We learn by seeing and understanding the connections between ourselves and the world we live in and understanding that relationships, interactions, and memories all contribute to our sense of place (Bowman, 2018; Dissanayake, 2000; Dissanayake, 2015).

Our family spent many happy times exploring the waters of the Bay and travelling across the Bay to the World Heritage-listed sand island of K'Gari (Fraser Island) where we

traversed the rainforest tracks, gazed in awe at ancient ferns and palms, investigated and swam in the inland freshwater lakes, and drove along the magnificence of the ocean beach with its ever-changing coastline. Absorbing the beauty of K’Gari through my senses meant I experienced the clarity of the light, the sound of the ocean, the smell and taste of the salt in the air on a windy day, and the sand between my toes. This was the beginning of my own journey to appreciate the deep connections of First Nations Peoples to land, sea and sky throughout the millennia they have been belonged to Country.

Presently, I reside in Meanjin (Brisbane) close to the banks of Maiwar (Brisbane River) and acknowledge that I am on the lands of the Turrbal Jagera First Nations Peoples (Turrbal, 2022).

2.3 The research

The importance of understanding the ethics and responsibilities of a *muragan* researching in a First Nations land and sea Country informs the approach I have taken to this research. The purpose of this research, the research questions and their connection with the Australian Curriculum (AC), including the learning area of the Arts, and the Cross-Curriculum Priority (CCP) of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Histories and Cultures (Australian Curriculum Assessment and Reporting Authority, 2024c) will be described in the following section.

2.3.1 The Australian Curriculum

This research sought to explore how non-Indigenous teachers can work with First Nations Elders to authentically embed the Cross-Curriculum Priority (CCP), Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Histories and Cultures in the learning areas of the Australian Curriculum (AC).

The AC was approved by the Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority (ACARA) in 2012 (Australian Curriculum and Assessment Reporting Authority, 2023c) and sets consistent national standards to improve learning outcomes for Australian children and young people. The CCPs which are integrated throughout the AC “provide opportunities to enrich the content of the learning areas, where most appropriate and authentic, allowing students to engage with and better understand their world” (Australian Curriculum Assessment and Reporting Authority, 2023a para.1).

The AC also acknowledges that Living Communities and Identity are central to the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Histories and Cultures CCP and further embeds the key concepts of ‘People’, ‘Culture’ and ‘Country / Place’. (see **Figure 5**)

Figure 5. Framework for the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Histories and Cultures cross-curriculum priority.



Australian Curriculum, 2023. *Cross Curriculum Priorities*, p. 2. (Australian Curriculum Assessment and Reporting Authority, 2023 -b).

This Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Histories and Cultures framework aligns effectively with the Arts, particularly through the concept of culture, which is expressed through various forms of cultural expression that are connected to the Country or Place First Nations Peoples identify with:

... students learn about the central place of the arts in the oldest continuous living cultures in the world [and] explore how First Nations Australians recognise and communicate connections to Country/Place through cultural expressions that draw on belief systems connected to the lands, seas, skies and waterways. (Australian Curriculum Assessment and Reporting Authority, 2023 -b, p. 2).

The AC learning area of the Arts values cultural diversity and provides a range of approaches through the art forms of dance, drama, media arts, music and visual arts, to assist diverse learners (Australian Curriculum and Assessment Reporting Authority,

2023f). Therefore, my experiences as an Arts educator from early childhood to the tertiary level enabled me to see how effectively the Arts could be utilised to assist non-Indigenous educators to embed the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Histories and Cultures CCP of the AC in their classrooms.

This is in addition to sharing knowledge about First Nations natural and cultural heritage, and this approach would also assist in promoting positive change, social inclusion, and provide a sense of empowerment for First Nations students and teachers.

2.3.2 Participatory Action Research (PAR)

In consultation with the MMEIC Elders, this journey has been undertaken using Participatory Action Research (PAR). This qualitative research approach enables participants and researchers to work collaboratively together to investigate real-life practices in a particular setting (G. MacNaughton & P. Hughes, 2008).

For this research, we explored the practices of educators in a school setting. Through PAR, it is possible to transform practices through reflections, discussions and reconstruction of original plans and practices, thus creating new understandings and enabling positive social change (Brydon-Miller et al., 2020; Kemmis et al., 2014). PAR is also recognised as “an important and appropriate way in which Indigenous people can engage in knowledge production that is culturally valid and meaningful to their lives” (Dudgeon et al., 2017, p. 1). This is because it values diverse ways of knowing, such as Indigenous ways of doing and being (Sharmil et al., 2021) and arts-based approaches (Datta et al., 2015; Nunn, 2022; Wright, 2020).

2.3.3 The research questions

As an educator, I am one of the vast majority of non-First Nations educators across Australia. Recent statistics reveal that only 1.5% of teachers identify as being of Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander origin. This proportion is similar across the primary, secondary and tertiary education sectors (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2022). Australian teachers work within the guidelines and framework of the AC and the expectation that they will incorporate the CCPs, including the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Histories and Cultures CCP as much as possible in their classroom. This CCP provides all students with the opportunity to enhance their knowledge and understanding of Australia’s First Nations Peoples who are representatives of the world’s oldest

continuous living culture (Australian Curriculum Assessment and Reporting Authority, 2024c).

As an Arts educator, I believe in the capacity of the arts to link all learners to the broader story of humanity. The arts provide important insights into understanding the complexity of history, culture, and experiences of others, through art forms such as storytelling, performance, music, visual expression, and movement (Baguley et al., 2021; Dinham, 2023; Gibson & Ewing, 2020). I recognise and understand the unique cultural heritage and deep connection to Country that has enabled Australia's First Nations Peoples throughout millennia, to maintain the cultural authenticity of their stories and knowledge through the different art forms (Bunda et al., 2019; Rademaker, 2021; Tacon, 2019).

It is through such artforms that educators can encourage their students to explore and strengthen their understandings of the cultures and histories of Australia's First Nations Peoples. These beliefs have given voice to the overarching research question that underpins this research:

- To what extent can non-First Nations primary school educators utilise the arts to support the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders Histories and Cultures CCP within their classroom?

The overarching research question will be addressed through the following three sub-research questions which explore the prior experiences of primary school educators with the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Histories and Cultures CCP, their experiences of learning from Elders in and on Country, and their confidence and capacity to teach the Arts.

- What challenges and highlights do educators experience in learning about and teaching Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Histories and Cultures in the primary classroom?
- How does the opportunity of learning from Elders 'in and on Country' assist educators in teaching Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Histories and Cultures in the primary classroom?
- To what extent can the Arts assist non-First Nations educators' approaches in learning and teaching about Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Histories and Cultures in the primary classroom?

2.3.4 The purpose of the research

Throughout the research, opportunities were provided for educators to discuss the challenges and highlights they face in embedding the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander CCP in their teaching. It is envisaged that this research will strengthen cultural understanding and develop awareness and sensitivities to the distinctiveness and diversity of First Nations Australians and their ongoing commitment to their cultures, their languages, stories, and contributions to our society.

It is crucial for non-First Nations educators to understand and acknowledge this diversity and be aware of their local context in relation to the histories and stories of First Nations communities so that this message and inclusive practices can be promulgated. In the context of this research, this includes the histories and cultural stories of the Goenpul, Noonuccal and Ngugi Elders of the MMEIC Elders of the land and sea Country recognised as Quandamooka.

To determine answers to the research questions, this research was undertaken in a school to ascertain the extent to which the power and potential of the Arts could strengthen teachers' knowledge and cultural understanding about the First Nations Country on which they are teaching. Through integrating the Arts with the CCP we sought to explore how the sharing of stories, ideas, knowledge and understandings by the Elders with the school community would support the teachers and build their confidence in teaching the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Island Histories and Cultures CCP.

Australian First Nations Peoples utilise various arts forms to strengthen their spiritual life and links to ancestral beings through the Dreaming. The Dreaming is “an ideological framework by which human society retains a harmonious equilibrium with the universe” (Caruana, 2012, p. 10). These connections are activated and nourished through artistic and creative ceremonies and expressed through “totemic associations with natural species and phenomena, ritual songs, dances, objects and graphic designs” (p. 10). The Arts, therefore, have a significant and necessary role in supporting teachers to embed the AC's CCP of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Histories and Cultures in their teaching.

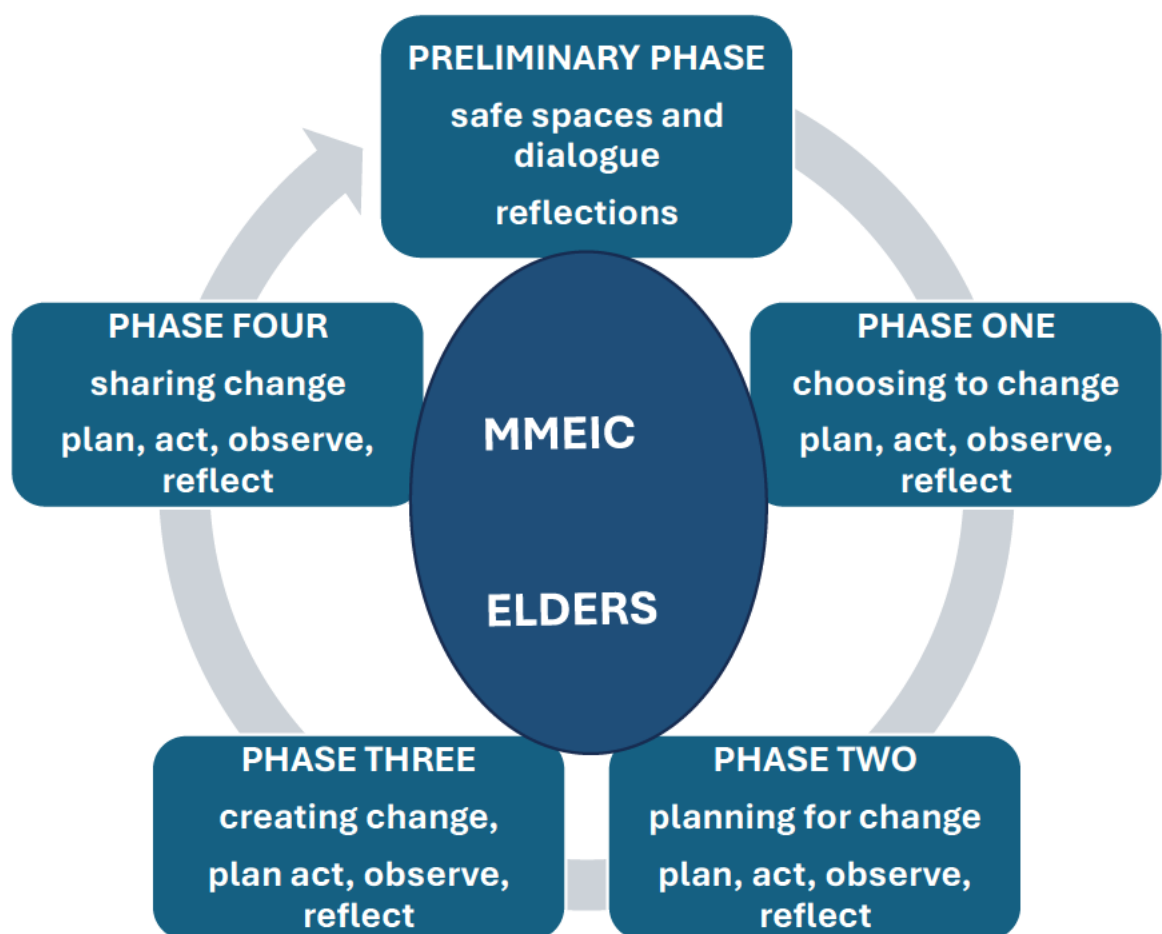
2.3.5 The research paradigm

The Participatory Action Research (PAR) paradigm is a qualitative research methodology based on an approach that encourages participants to collaborate and communicate through

four phases of choosing to change, planning for change, creating change, and sharing change (G. MacNaughton & P. Hughes, 2008). It is a cyclical approach, as within each of the four phases is the imperative to plan, act, observe, and reflect before a new phase—premised on the observations and reflections of the earlier phase—can commence. (Kemmis, 2006) (see **Figure 6**).

As a *muragan* working with the MMEIC Elders in their First Nations space, I have placed these Elders and their knowledge at the very centre of the research.

Figure 6. Cyclical approach to Participatory Action Research (PAR).



Adapted from Kervin et al. (2016, p. 65); G. MacNaughton and P. Hughes (2008).

Working within the PAR paradigm means that there is no separation between the research and the practice, and the researcher is simultaneously involved in the process of making changes to improve as well as transforming educational practices (Kervin et al., 2016).

Throughout the research process, I was an active participant and the bridge between the MMEIC Elders and the school site. During this time, as per the AIATSIS guidelines, I sought to reciprocate the time and effort the MMEIC Elders provided to this research by respectful communication, transportation to the school site, providing support at various community events and listening and learning about the Goenpul, Noonuccal and Ngugi histories and cultures of this First Nations land and sea Country recognised as Quandamooka which has provided invaluable insights for this research.

An important learning from this journey has been greater insight into how, as a *muragan*, I work within a First Nations space on Country with Elders. This has meant slowly gaining cultural competency. Being culturally competent means being able to interact with people respectfully and effectively from other cultures. It develops through cultural awareness and becoming culturally sensitive.

Cultural sensitivity acknowledges the importance of recognising and respecting the differences and perspectives of other cultures and values introspection and reflections on personal identity (Heckenberg, 2020). This was an important aspect of this research for the teacher participants as they engaged in a school-based project through arts-based learning experiences which developed through the perspective of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Histories and Cultures CCP. The sharing of stories, knowledge and culture by the Goenpul, Noonuccal and Nguigi MMEIC Elders, with a focus on the First Nations land and sea Country recognised as Quandamooka, provided the teacher participants with authentic and genuine opportunities to become culturally aware and sensitive to the Elders' stories, increasing their understanding of this First Nation and enabling the development of cultural competence (Heckenberg, 2020). The research paradigm which focuses on the PAR approach will be examined further at the midden (Chapter 3: Signpost 3) and elaborated on in *Terra Bulla Leumeah* (Chapter 4: Signpost 4).

2.3.6 Ethics and responsibilities

It is imperative to acknowledge the ethics and responsibilities that come with researching in and with a First Nations community (Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies, 2020a; Janke, 2019). The Goenpul, Noonuccal and Ngugi Elders of the Minjerribah-Moorgumpin Elders-in-Council now have a Code of Ethical Conduct (2024) which I have read and signed to show that I understand my obligation as a *muragan* to ensure that my research and writing is ethical, respectful, and authentic (see Appendix A).

The United Nations Declaration of the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP) (United Nations General Assembly, 2007) states that maintaining, controlling, protecting, and developing cultural heritage and traditional cultural expressions, traditional knowledge including sciences, technologies, the properties of flora and fauna, and visual and performing arts, is the right of all Indigenous peoples.

Indigenous people also have the right to protection and development of their intellectual property over their heritage, knowledge, and traditional cultural expressions. The UNDRIP declaration is substantiated in the Australian Government's document, *Ethical conduct in research with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples and communities: Guidelines for researchers and stakeholders* (National Health and Medical Research Council (NHMRC) (2018), and the Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies (AIATSIS) Code of Ethics for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies (2020a). The documents all reinforce the importance of continuing respect for a living culture.

The AIATSIS research framework emphasises integrity as a core ethical value (ACARA, 2022) and this became the linchpin of my research, as I was ever mindful of my status as a *muragan* and an 'outsider' in this First Nations community. Integrity means being always responsible to ensure appropriate recognition and respect for First Nations Peoples through all forms of engagement and collaboration. Gaining the informed consent of all First Nation Peoples involved in research is a vital component for cultural capability and learning. The research must always be led by First Nations Peoples and allow for their perspectives. Reciprocity is essential and there must be full disclosure of benefit to the local community.

As a researcher and educator engaging and collaborating with the MMEIC Elders, I quickly learned to be respectful of their individuality, and understood that stories may differ, and further, that interpretations of the past vary according to the bloodlines of the ancestors.

It was important for my personal development towards cultural competency to accept and acknowledge that these Elders were representatives of the three First Nations People's groups on Minjerribah / Terrangee and that their Goenpul, Noonuccal and Ngugi ancestral stories varied according to the storyteller. Hearing their individual voices, I was ever mindful of the necessity for informed consent as I asked their permission to use their words in personal communications. This was a vital step in writing this thesis. The Elders, with whom I worked closely, had strong familial connections; their relationships with each

other and their love for Country and Minjerribah /Terrangee were apparent in their recollections, their retelling of stories, and their general agreement as to what would be acceptable for my research.

2.4 The participants

The MMEIC Elders were delighted to be part of a research project that would actively involve them in visiting a school on the mainland of the First Nations land and sea Country recognised as Quandamooka. Their support was invaluable in terms of the extent of their participation with the school community and their contribution to the arts-based activities evolving from their stories and cultural knowledge.

In turn, the school community saw this as an invaluable opportunity to work with the MMEIC Elders to ensure the culturally appropriate transmission of Goenpul, Noonuccal and Ngugi histories traditions and cultures. This approach aligns with the AIATSIS Code of Ethics and the requirement for Indigenous-led research and the inclusion of Indigenous perspectives (2022).

The participation in the research project was entirely voluntary for all school participants who all received participant information sheets and consent forms (see Appendices B, C and D). They were under no obligation to take part or consent to participating in the project and also had the option of withdrawing later if they so choose. The information sheet clarified the importance of communication and collaboration with the MMEIC Elders to strengthen educators' understanding of the learning and cultural knowledge of the land and sea Country commonly known as Quandamooka. Participants were provided with pseudonyms and were able to member check their data for accuracy before it was included in the thesis.

2.5 Storytelling

The art of storytelling is seen as representative of knowledge throughout millennia. Stories are integral to understanding connections to Country and its embedded ancient knowledge. Stories educate listeners as to identities, cultures, histories, and lore (Bishop, 2021, 2022; Bishop & Vass, 2021; Bobongie-Harris et al., 2021; Heckenberg, 2018; Radley et al., 2021). In the research context, storytelling enables the voices of the marginalised to be heard, providing valuable and authentic contributions across research (Bunda et al., 2019;

Phillips et al., 2018). Therefore, it is appropriate that the stories of the First Nations Goenpul, Noonuccal and Ngugi MMEIC Elders are woven throughout the research.

Goenpul Elder and present-day MMEIC Chairperson, Aunty Mary Iselin-Burgess reveals that:

Telling our stories is very important. They allow us to remember the struggles of the past and the strengths of our ancestors. They are from our heart and must be passed on as the children of today as they are the Elders of tomorrow. (Personal communication, June 6, 2023).

The stories of the MMEIC Elders provide connections between the past, the present and the future and as such are an important element of this research project.

Goenpul Jandaiwal MMEIC Elder Dale Ruska also recognises the importance of legacy through sharing stories:

Storytelling is about transition of history to the next generation.

(Personal communication, January 10, 2024).

The words of Elder Dale Ruska are reflected in those of Wiradjuri First Nations scholar, Associate Professor Sadie Heckenberg, who is also conscious of the imperative to heed the oral narratives which demonstrate the beliefs, values, and customs of Elders in community and portray their First Nations histories and cultures (Heckenberg, 2018). The importance of storytelling is also integral to the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Histories and Cultures CCP and the learning area of Humanities and Sciences (HASS) in the AC for the primary years of schooling.

HASS requires students to develop respect for places, people and cultures, both past and present including in a local context. Additionally, it recognises the role the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Histories and Cultures CCP can play in supporting this (Australian Curriculum and Assessment Reporting Authority, 2023g).

2.6 Metaphors

The use of metaphor is a powerful learning method in First Nations cultures (Perso, 2020). Tyson Kaawoppa Yunkaporta emphasises the interconnectedness of metaphor with images and symbols, describing these as an important part of Aboriginal thinking which is “often

done in images or shapes rather than words” (Yunkaporta, 2009, p. 5). It is these interconnections between images, dance, song, language, objects, and rituals that can enable educators to “seek a viewpoint incorporating the complex, dynamic systems that make up all creation and all knowledge” (Bilton et al., 2020, p. 91). This supports the contention that the arts are intrinsic to cultural knowledge and understanding. The signposts used in this thesis are also metaphors for my learning and new understandings which have been developed during this doctoral journey.

2.7 A *muragan*’s learning journey

With the introduction of the AC, I became interested in the requirement for educators to implement the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Histories and Cultures CCP (Australian Curriculum and Assessment Reporting Authority, 2023c) where relevant across the AC’s eight Learning Areas, which include the Arts, English, HASS, Maths, and Science.⁷

As a non-First Nations educator, I did not feel prepared to incorporate effectively and authentically the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander CCP in my teaching. Therefore, during my Master of Education program, I undertook courses focussing on the concept of culture and the diversity of multi-cultural educational contexts in relation to teaching. This enabled me to explore and examine my own position as a Caucasian educator and to enhance my cultural awareness and responsiveness to the cultural diversity of students in the classroom (Buchori & Dobinson, 2015; Elliott & Clancy, 2017; Forrest et al., 2017; Macqueen et al., 2020; Vass, 2017; Walton et al., 2018).

Through teaching the different art strands of dance, drama, media arts, music and visual arts, I began to realise how these art forms could support and strengthen intercultural understanding, which is a General Capability (GC) in the Australian Curriculum (ACARA, 2023e), in addition to the CCP of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Histories and Cultures (ACARA, 2023a).

To pursue the effectiveness of this idea, I decided to undertake a cycle of action research with two primary school educators. The aim was to determine if engagement with

⁷ The F–10 Australian Curriculum identifies and organises the essential knowledge, understandings and skills that students should learn in 8 learning areas. The learning areas of English, Mathematics, Science, and Health and Physical Education comprise a single subject. The learning areas of Humanities and Social Sciences (HASS), The Arts, Technologies and Languages each comprise multiple subjects. <https://v9.australiancurriculum.edu.au/f-10-curriculum/f-10-curriculum-overview/learning-areas>

the arts could support and strengthen students' arts knowledge in addition to their learning in other curriculum areas (Macdonald & Tualaulelei, 2018). The resultant findings revealed that, when teachers are supported through relevant professional development and provided with appropriate resources, they feel confident in engaging with arts-based pedagogical approaches that embrace cross-curricula learning. Following this study, I undertook a case study in an Early Years Learning Centre to explore the extent to which the arts can support and strengthen Intercultural Understandings (Macdonald, 2022). Findings from both studies revealed that educators require professional support and guidance in developing their understanding of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Histories and Cultures.

It was the culmination of these two research projects that informed this current research, which is exploring to what extent the arts can assist teachers in increasing their awareness of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Histories and Cultures CCP (Dinham, 2023; Dinham & Chalk, 2022; Emery et al., 2015).

Phillips et al. (2018) reveal that stories can take a range of forms including being “spoken, gestured, danced, dramatized, painted, drawn, etched, sculpted, woven, stitched, filmed, written and any combination of these modes and more” (p. 3).

Rogers (2018) posits that stories also constitute a form of literacy which can embrace First Nations forms of expression such as yarning, stories, painting, weaving, and carving. It is through these artistic forms that First Nations Australians have expressed themselves culturally, physically, and spiritually for 65,000 years (National Museum of Australia, 2022).

However, further research (Harrison & Skrebneva, 2020; Heckenberg, 2016, 2017; Hill et al., 2019; Kwaymullina, 2016; Martin, 2006; Moreton-Robinson, 2020b; Radley et al., 2021), has revealed that a homogenous approach is often being taken in terms of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander art, culture, music, and stories when the reality is that:

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australia is made up of many different and distinct groups, each with their own culture, customs, language and laws. They are the world's oldest surviving culture; cultures that continue to be expressed in dynamic and contemporary ways.

(Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies, n.d.-
apara. 1).

This brings a complexity to the capacity of educators to embed the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Histories and Cultures CCP effectively and appropriately, as each local context holds very different stories, histories and cultures.

2.7.1 The stepping stones

First step

As a *muragan* and ‘outsider’ there have been metaphorical stepping-stones surrounding the *muragan* title of this chapter. My initial stepping stone in formulating this research was to consider the aims in the journey of exploring the educational experiences of non-First Nations primary school educators in teaching the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Histories and Cultures CCP. As part of this first stepping stone, I also sought to investigate the potential of the Arts to assist teachers in incorporating this CCP, with a focus on the First Nations land and sea Country recognised as Quandamooka, in their classrooms.

Second step

The next step involved reaching out to the First Nations Peoples of this land and sea Country. I was encouraged to contact the Minjerribah Moorgumpin Elders-in-Council [MMEIC] Aboriginal Corporation at *Goompi* (Dunwich). These Elders are representatives of the First Nations Goenpul, Noonuccal and Ngugi Peoples from the islands of Minjerribah/Terrangee (North Stradbroke) and Moorgumpin (Moreton). They are dedicated to their histories and cultures, offering Cultural Awareness programs on the island and have won several awards in recognition of the work they have done in the community.⁸

Throughout this project, I have regularly visited Minjerribah / Terrangee to share and discuss the aims of my research. I also sought to build on and substantiate my relationships with the Elders through listening, yarning and visiting cultural sites accompanied by the Elders. On every visit I have learned something new and, mindful of the AIATSIS Ethics Code and the imperative of reciprocity, I have assisted with the

⁸ The MMEIC Elders have received several awards including: Qld Government 2007 Reconciliation Award for Business (Highly Commended) Department of Community Safety Minister’s Award – Excellence in Community Safety 2010 (Winner), National NAIDOC Award – Caring for Country, 2017 (winner), Australia Day Reconciliation Award – 2022.

purchase of art supplies on the mainland for the holiday children's programs and attended the Art workshop days to provide practical support for the children and assist the Elders with preparation and cleaning-up.

Ensuring I am on Minjerribah / Terrangee for special events, including the NAIDOC (National Aboriginal and Islanders Day Observance Committee) week celebrations and the regular MMEIC cultural program presentations to visiting groups from across Australia gives me the opportunity to assist the Elders in practical ways prior to, and during, these events. I have also shared my Arts understandings and suggested and supported Arts activities, accompanying the Elder Aunties to cultural mornings at the local Early Learning Centre. These opportunities have allowed me to explore the complexity of non-First Nations educators teaching the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Histories and Cultures CCP of the AC in the classroom as I follow the lead of the Elders, always conscious that I am an 'outsider'.

Participatory Action Research is dependent on participants and researchers collaborating and engaging in conversations to consider real-life practices. Being mentored by the Elders, and actively participating in their community activities, enabled conversation around the challenges and successes being experienced by teachers and the type of pedagogical and cultural support they required (Owens et al., 2012; Santoro et al., 2011). My supervisor, Wiradjuri Elder, Artist, Associate Professor Robyn Heckenberg (Heckenberg, 2016) reinforced the importance of this approach, as follows:

Where better to be productive in exploring Aboriginal ways of doing, ways of seeing and ways of being than a project where Country and cultural practices come together ... this gives an encouraging place for Aboriginal cultural life in terms of knowledge and significance in contemporary Australian culture. Storytelling is a way of recording and talking about all aspects of cultural knowing, as is dance, visual art, song or musical expression. (p. 3).

This further substantiated my belief that it is through the Arts that non-First Nations educators can be supported to authentically convey First Nations stories and cultural

knowledge, within a localised context, through engaging and collaborating with First Nations Elders and their communities.

Third step

The third stepping stone saw a connection made with a small independent primary school on the mainland of the land and sea Country recognised as Quandamooka. The school principal was keen for the staff to develop their knowledge and confidence in teaching about the local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander histories and cultures. She was also eager for the students to have the opportunity to participate in activities and programs that would strengthen their understandings of the Country on which the school is located. I was able to foster the initial introduction between the school principal and an Elder from MMEIC to discuss this initiative and to further support the school connections with Minjerribah / Terrangee and this First Nations.

2.8 Signposts and special places

In consultation with the MMEIC Elders who have assisted in navigating through the complex issues I have encountered as a *muragan*, I have included at the beginning of Chapters Three through to Eight, signposts naming important cultural places I have visited with the Elders on Minjerribah / Terrangee.

The signposts feature Jandai language words, the language of the ancestors which are now compiled in the Minjerribah-Moorgumpin Elders-in-Council Jandai Language Dictionary (Minjerribah-Moorgumpin Elders-in-Council, 2011). Inclusion of sketches, drawings, and photographs of Minjerribah / Terrangee throughout the thesis also acknowledges the multimodal value of the Arts and its capacity to allow us to perceive the world through our senses, using our eyes to see colours and shapes, perspective and distance, our ears to distinguish sounds, and our bodies and sense of touch to communicate meanings (O'Toole, 2012).

Through the Arts, we can gain an aesthetic and visual shape to the concept of the lived land and sea Country of the Goenpul, Noonuccal and Ngugi Peoples of the First Nation recognised as Quandamooka. Through this journey, the MMEIC Elders have emphasised the importance of sensory and spiritual connection with being on Country and how this connection is often expressed through various arts forms such as performance.

As has been explained in Chapter One, this thesis does not easily fit into chapters and should not do so if it is to be true to embracing the First Nations histories and cultures. My words have flowed organically as I have developed an understanding that there are no divisions, no arbitrary sections that separate the special places on Minjerribah / Terrangee. They are intertwined and embedded in the fresh air I breathe, the cool water where I dabble my fingers, the soft sand I feel between my toes, and the peace I feel in the tranquil bushland of the island's interior with its intermittent bird calls and conversations. This is Country and it is land and sea Country.

With the MMEIC Goenpul, Noonuccal and Ngugi Elders as my guides, they have shared with me the special places that are intrinsic to the history of this island. I have acquired new understandings and knowledge at *Bamira*, *Terra Bulla Leumeah*, *Capemba Creek*, and *Myora Spring*. I have looked up at the night sky to find *Mirigan*, and learned as a *muragan*, the importance of *Neembeebe Binang Gana*. It is these words from the Jandai language (Minjerribah-Moorgumpin Elders-in-Council, 2011) that will appear as signposts that indicate the way to new knowledge and understanding that has informed this thesis. The following section will provide a brief outline of the thesis with a particular focus on the signposts leading the reader through this journey.

2.8.1 Chapter 3: Signpost—*Neembeebe Binang Gana* [to look, to listen, to understand] (Minjerribah-Moorgumpin Elders-in-Council, 2011)

Neembeebe Binang Gana are the words on the greeting sign that the Elders display at their cultural awareness programs for visitors. The words are translated and explained with emphasis on the importance of looking and seeing with open eyes, hearing nature's sounds, and listening with both ears to the stories of the Elders. This experience feels like a never-ending circle and spiral of new learning. Part of my developing an understanding during this journey is explained at this signpost. This includes reflection on my childhood and education, awakening to the deleterious impact that colonisation had, and still has, on First Nations Peoples and their continued resistance and resilience.

Through the literature and the voices of First Nations scholars, academics and researchers, the interconnectedness of Country, sea and sky is seen as an interwoven thread throughout Aboriginal scholar discourses. *Neembeebe Binang Gana* (Minjerribah-Moorgumpin Elders-in-Council, 2011, pp. 57, 21, 33) awakens the reader to cultural awareness, sensitivity and competency, and the underlying imperative for cultural safety for the Goenpul, Noonuccal and Ngugi Elders and the community. This means recognising

and accepting unconditionally the importance of contemporary and traditional cultural values and practices to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples.

Song-lines are considered natural boundary markings for all First Nations people and come with an understanding of Country and all that lies within (Morrison, 2019; Perry & Holt, 2018; Somerville, Tobin, et al., 2019). It is at the *Neembeba Binang Gana* signpost—the external marking of the MMEIC Elders meeting place—that the song of Country may hum and vibrate between the feet ... if one listens carefully. It is here I was afforded the opportunity to sit and listen to the yarning and storytelling of the Elders.

At this signpost, I become aware of the concept of the cultural interface which is a contested space between two separate knowledge systems; in this case Western and First Nations (Nakata, 1997, 2002, 2007a, 2007b, 2010). As a *muragan* on this journey, I have experienced an ongoing tension which I have responded to through examining, unlearning, relearning, and accepting the disunity and complexities between the two disparate systems.

In this chapter, the *Goompi ganan* (fig tree)'s complex root structure becomes a metaphor for the histories and cultures of the MMEIC Ngugi, Noonuccal and Goenpul Elders. The branches indicate the way to the 'the midden' (Signpost—Chapter Four). This represents how Western research methods need to be reconciled with First Nations methodological approaches to develop an ontology that has an interrelatedness with Country, sea, sky, and all creatures therein.

2.8.2 Chapter 4: Signpost—the midden

As I stand at the midden near Goompi (Dunwich) on Minjerribah / Terrangee and observe the bleached shells peeking through the sand, entwined with the roots of mangroves and trees (see **Figure 7**), I recall the explanation of the midden in the words of Goenpul Jandaiwal MMEIC Elder Dale Ruska:

Middens are the tangible evidence of our intangible heritage. They are proof of our being. They are indicators of where the ancestor families once gathered and camped, always near running water. The shells are leftovers and were always returned to the earth, to Country. There are middens on Minjerribah at various places, including Polka Point, One Mile, Moongalba and Capemba Creek. (Personal communication, January 10, 2024).

Figure 7. The Midden near Goompi (Dunwich) Minjerribah / Terrangee.



(J. Macdonald, personal photograph, August 17, 2022).

As I gaze on the midden near *Goompi* (Dunwich), I realise that what is visible is simply one layer of staple food, the *Quampi* [shellfish] (Minjerribah-Moorgumpin Elders-in-Council, 2011, p. 59). I become aware that hidden below, buried deep within the earth, are layers and layers of *Quampi* and other shells, including oyster, periwinkle, cockles, and mussels whose existence represents thousands of years of history, reflecting the ontology of Country.

The middens were gathering places for families and communities where they had the opportunity to share stories, eat food and to celebrate. I see the midden layers as symbolising a socio-constructivist philosophical paradigm, representing a social construction of reality that is manifested through the capacity of humanity to express ideas, beliefs, and to communicate and transmit knowledge and information through the artistic practices of stories, artworks, dance, and music (Dinham, 2023; Dissanayake, 2000; Dissanayake, 2015; Eisner, 2002b; Goldberg, 2021; Sinclair et al., 2017).

I hold to an interpretivist epistemological perspective as I explore and interpret world views, gathering information and knowledge that is reflective of people's perceptions and experiences in the world (Thanh & Thanh, 2015). During Chapter Four, I explore Indigenous worldviews and understandings and respectfully acknowledge and consider the words and the literature of First Nations scholars interrogating my role as an 'outsider' (*muragan*) in Indigenous research and my position in the cultural interface. This resonates with my own research journey with the MMEIC Elders as I consider the world views and

impact of colonialism on First Nations Peoples. Through exploring and reflecting on their stories and their experiences, I have been able to transform my own thinking, creating new personal understandings and work towards positive social change for non-First Nations educators, as I collaborate with the Elders in my research project.

The development of a deeper understanding of Indigenous ontologies and Country led me to the next stage of my journey,

Terra Bulla Leumeah—a beautiful place here I rest. (Elders communication, November 5, 2021).

This next stage is appropriate and a natural progression, as Terra Bulla Leumeah is a site of ancestral heritage and a place of learning.

2.8.3 Chapter 5: Signpost—Terra Bulla Leumeah

At this signpost, I learned of the old ways and the stories of the past and the links to the present. *Terra Bulla Leumeah* was always a gathering place where stories were told and knowledge shared. It was the site of the Myora Mission (1892-1942) and the mission school (Fischer, B., Aunty Rose Borey, Aunty Estelle Bertossi, 2021). Today, it is still a meeting place for cultural and educational tour groups, families, and community celebrations.

It is appropriate that in such a place of learning, my attention turned to present day education, with an emphasis on the AC, the Learning Area of the Arts, and the accompanying CCP and GC. There is a further review of literature in this chapter in relation to this emphasis and the challenges for educators in the Arts, the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders Histories and Cultures CCP, and the importance of professional development for educators.

Introducing the research project begins with an acknowledgement of the MMEIC Goenpul, Noonuccal and Ngugi Elders and their support. The cyclical nature of the Participatory Action Research paradigm is presented and its appropriateness for this research discussed.

Additionally, a new design for the PAR process is presented which includes the important connection to Country for the MMEIC Elders. The phases of the research project are outlined in conjunction with information shared by the Elders. Their voices still echo at this signpost and their words carry me on to the next stage of the journey at the

Signpost *Bamira* [Brown Lake] (Minjerribah-Moorgumpin Elders-in-Council, 2011, p. 97) and Chapter Six.

2.8.4 Chapter 6: Signpost—*Bamira*

Bamira is another meeting place, where there is a connection and interrelationship between the past and the present as I listen to the Goenpul, Noonuccal and Ngugi Elders share the stories of their ancestors with younger community members. This connection reveals how the cyclical approach of the PAR paradigm complements the approach of the MMEIC Elders and emphasises the importance of their voices throughout the project.

The school and participants are introduced and their stories, thoughts and reflections, observations and discussions reveal how the different phases of the project—choosing to change, planning for change, creating change, and sharing change—unfolded. These phases are intertwined within the cycles of PAR, which requires participants to plan, act, observe, reflect, and then replan, in each phase, in a process of collaborative learning and teamwork. The participants' reflections during this chapter reveal critical moments that resulted in thoughtful adjustments to planning; these became part of the phase of creating change.

Sharing change and the new knowledge and understandings that arose for both teachers and students throughout the project is detailed and represented through the artwork and arts activities introduced to the students by two of the school's arts specialists. This chapter also highlights the positive engagement of the students at the school and the culminating presentation, that concluded the project, is also analysed in the context of sharing change.

Change comes through observations, participations and reflections on the ways of doing and making connections to place. From this signpost the next stage of the journey occurred at the Signpost *Capemba Creek/Myora Spring* and chapter seven.

2.8.5 Chapter 7: Signpost—*Capemba Creek / Myora Spring*

The outpouring of fresh water from Myora Spring into Capemba Creek (see

Figure 8) is one of many flowing into creeks on Minjerribah / Terrangee.

Figure 8. Myora Spring.



(J. Macdonald, personal photograph, September 20, 2023).

Myora Spring became a metaphor for the knowledge of the Elders and their stories, and the creation of new knowledge and understandings gained by the participants in the research project.

There is another midden located at Capemba Creek that is a reminder across time and place to the midden earlier in the journey. The dilution of fresh water with salt water due to the rising tides, is representative of the challenges and critical moments faced during this journey. Therefore, in Chapter 7, the PAR approach is reviewed and the three research questions are discussed and analysed.

2.8.6 Chapter 8: Signpost—*Mirigan* [star] (MMEIC, 2011, p. 51)

This signpost recognises that connections to Country also include the sky above. Poet and Elder Aunty Eileen O’Loughlin (nee Borey) wrote in her book of poetry, *Memoirs of Stradbroke Island*, in 1995: “*Let Mirrigin lead the way*” (p. 6).⁹

In Chapter 8, I reflect on my journey—where it began, the significance of the research, and its importance for educators across Australia. I recognise the light of *Mirigan* as illuminating pathways to the future and I provide recommendations for these pathways that educators can pursue in order to enable transformative social change in education.

⁹ For the signpost heading of Chapter 8, I have used the spelling of *Mirigan* as it is found in the *Jandai Language Dictionary* (p. 51). However, it is respectful to Elder Aunty Eileen O’Loughlin to use her spelling *Mirrigin* as she wrote it, in the context of her poetry.

2.9 The Elders' voices

At each signpost, the Elders' voices ring out—their stories, their knowledge, their wisdom. This chapter has presented a summary of my role as a *muragan* walking on Country and the footsteps I have taken towards new learnings. These will now be examined as I pause awhile at the signpost for Chapter Two—*Neembeebe Binang Gana*. In that chapter, I become aware that to truly connect with First Nations Peoples on their Country, I must understand and respect the words of the Elders:

Only those who belong to Country can speak for Country; you have to walk the walk before you talk the talk. (Elders, personal communication, January 10, 2024).

Chapter 3: Signpost 3—*Neembeebe Binang Gana* [look, listen, understand] (Minjerribah-Moorgumpin Elders-in-Council, 2011)

3.1 Introduction

This chapter continues with my journey on the land and sea First Nations Country recognised as Quandamooka in South-East Queensland (QLD), as I prepare for the implementation of my thesis project. This project investigates the capacity of the Arts to support non-First Nations primary teachers as they embed First Nations histories and cultures through the context of this First Nations Country into their classroom teaching.

This journey begins with the understanding that non-First Nations researchers, such as myself, must interrogate their own perspectives, practices, worldviews, and experiences in relation to coloniality. This continues to perpetuate the status quo of western ideology in relation to social, cultural, and political practices and structures, which frequently privilege non-First Nations peoples and disadvantage First Nation Peoples (Datta, 2018a; Kennedy et al., 2022; Krusz et al., 2020; Lipscombe et al., 2021).

This personal critical analysis is crucial to developing a sensitivity to the varied contexts of the knowledge and cultural practices of First Nations Peoples. Lipscombe et al. (2021) write of the necessity for researchers working in First Nations spaces to develop a “decolonial praxis” (p. 3). Therefore, throughout this chapter, I shall be mindful of the unlearning, and relearning that is part of the ongoing process of decolonisation for a researcher and educator. This will ensure I am providing space for First Nations Peoples and their voices (Datta, 2018a), valuing their knowledge and ways of being as I build relationships and connections with community (Lipscombe et al., 2021).

I hereby acknowledge my guides and mentors from the land and sea Country recognised as Quandamooka—the Goenpul, Noonuccal and Ngugi Elders of the Minjerribah-Moorgumpin Elders-in-Council (MMEIC)—as I look to gain new understandings in relation to being on First Nations Country in the localized context of Minjerribah / Terrangee (North Stradbroke Island).

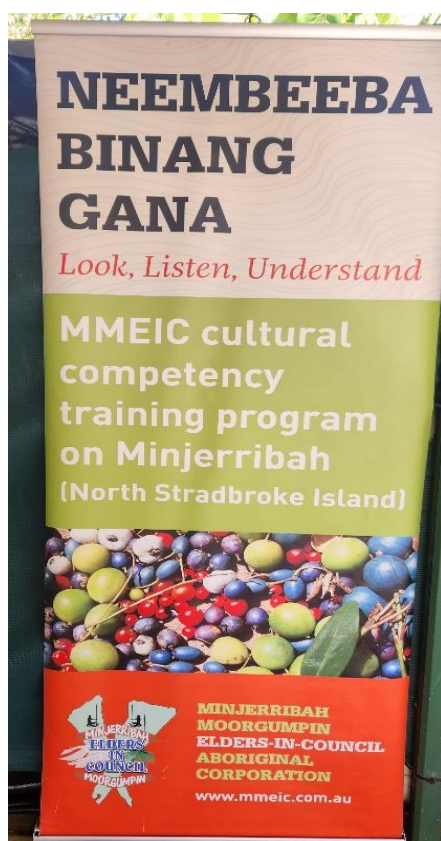
I begin with an explanation of the chapter title, *Neembeebe Binang Gana*, words from the *Jandai Language Dictionary*, published in 2011 by the Goenpul, Noonuccal and Ngugi Elders of the Minjerribah-Moorgumpin Elders-in-Council (MMEIC). This is part of a concerted effort to revitalise the Jandai language of the Elders and their ancestors who

are the traditional First Nations Peoples of this land and sea Country recognised as Quandamooka.

3.2 *Neembeebe Binang Gana*—meaning

The words, *Neembeebe Binang Gana* [look, listen, understand] (Minjerribah-Moorgumpin Elders-in-Council, 2011 p. 57, p. 21, p. 33), introduce participants to MMEIC Cultural awareness and training programs for visitors to Minjerribah / Terrangee (see **Figure 9**).

Figure 9. *Neembeebe Binang Gana*.



(J. Macdonald, personal photograph, January 4, 2024).

The Elders have indicated the importance of the words as follows:

We look and see [Neembeebe] more than just the scenery. We understand the environment and listen [Binang] to how it speaks to us at different times of the year. We look up at the sky and understand [Gana] the cloud

formations and colours that inform us of weather changes. We look down at the earth and know the changes that connect us to the way we live with nature. (MMEIC Elders communication, December 13, 2021).

As I undertake this research journey, it is very clear that I too must use my eyes and look around me and listen deeply with both ears if I am to learn about and understand the histories and cultures of the MMEIC Elders, and thus I have chosen these words as the signpost representing the context and structure of this chapter.

3.2.1 Neembēba—meaning

Neembēba means to look / see (Minjerribah-Moorgumpin Elders-in-Council, 2011, p. 57), and to look carefully all around. Instinctively, I associate ‘looking and seeing’ with a heightening of my senses as I step foot on the island of Minjerribah / Terrangee. I feel the breeze wafting across my face, I can smell sea spray, I hear water lapping the sandy shore, and the calls of the birds. I touch the bark of the ancient trees in the heritage listed *Goompi* (Dunwich) Cemetery (see **Figure 10**) and note the intertwining of the shapes and perspectives of the trees, the texture of the bark and the leaves, and the variety of bird sounds (Eisner, 2002a; Ewing, 2020b; Klein, 2018; O’Toole, 2017).

Figure 10. *Goompi* (Dunwich) heritage-listed cemetery.



(J. Macdonald, personal photograph, October 22, 2023).

I reflect on the way in which our senses connect us to the environments in which we live and influence our perceptions of the world (Lumber et al., 2018; O’Toole, 2017). I sense the intertwining of past, present, and the future, in the complicated tree root structures,

unseen, hidden from the human eye, and the myriads of small creatures scurrying in the darkness, in and between the roots as they search for sustenance.

Therefore, I interrogate ‘looking’ as meaning looking carefully to the past, and my childhood and adult education, looking and scrutinising the past history of Australia, and looking and examining present-day situations in relation to the First Nations people of Australia and, particularly, in relation to this project— those connected to the land and sea Country recognised as Quandamooka.

3.2.2 *Binang—meaning*

Binang means to listen (Minjerribah-Moorgumpin Elders-in-Council, 2011, p. 21). Only when you listen carefully, will you learn.

Listening is about respect. It is important to stop chattering and talking. You can only learn if you listen. You need to walk the walk, before you talk the talk. (MMEIC Elders communication, March 14, 2022).

This chapter reveals the importance of listening with respect to the Goenpul, Noonuccal and Ngugi Peoples who are the present-day MMEIC Elders, as they share their stories and cultural knowledge.

As part of my embracing of a “decolonial praxis” (Lipscombe et al., 2021, p. 3), I understand that listening also means giving space to and respectfully acknowledging the voices of First Nations scholars and writers. This chapter incorporates a literature review of these scholars from whose writings I have gained further insight and understanding of the concept of Country and its meaning for First Nations Peoples.

3.2.3 *Gana—meaning*

Gana means to understand (Minjerribah-Moorgumpin Elders-in-Council, 2011, p. 33). For me, understanding will come through careful and responsive looking and listening, and immersion in First Nations contexts as I spend time on Country with the MMEIC Elders.

My understanding is also strengthened through researching the writings of First Nations scholars, and discovering the artistry of Quandamooka artists, including artist and designer Delvene Cockatoo-Collins (Delvene Cockatoo-Collins, 2024), poet Aunty Eileen O’Loughlin (1995), songwriter and singer (Nunka Raymond Dennis Bruce Walker, 2024), Patrick Coolwell (Robinson, 2023), and dramatist Wesley Enoch (Enoch, 2019).

I have been privileged to meet with these artists in person, and also the family of poet and Elder, Aunty Eileen O’Loughlin. My understandings and new positioning as a *muragan* [white woman] (Minjerribah-Moorgumpin Elders-in-Council, 2011, p. 53) researcher has developed as I view with respect the way in which these First Nations artists have intertwined their stories into a variety of art forms.

Gana means gaining a perception of cultural awareness, how this leads to cultural sensitivity and, eventually, cultural competency and cultural safety. This chapter explores these understandings and how they enable navigation of the cultural interface, a contested space between First Nations knowledge and understandings and western ways of knowledge (Nakata, 1997, 2002, 2007a, 2010).

3.2.4 *Neembeebe Binang Gana*—meaning

The chapter concludes with the words of the Elders and the collective strength of *Neembeebe Binang Gana* and its centrality to my thesis topic, as through looking and seeing, listening, and understanding, through an Arts lens, educators may become better informed in First Nations cultural understandings and how to embed them in classrooms.

The Jandai language words, *Neembeebe Binang Gana* [Look, Listen, Understand] (Minjerribah-Moorgumpin Elders-in-Council, 2011) are important as they represent the beginning of my journey and my understanding. It is essential for me to learn to look, and see with my eyes open, listen to the sounds of nature, and the stories of the MMEIC Elders, and accept that, for me, this is a never-ending circling and spiralling of new learning. I have come to realise that knowledge and understandings are ongoing and can be likened to the change in the water at sunrise, with a new day dawning and the morning breeze making ripples in the surface of the water (see **Figure 11**).

Figure 11. Sunrise: looking towards Minjerribah.



(J. Macdonald, personal photograph, July 22, 2023).

3.3 *Neembeba—to look and see*

Contemplating and appreciating my surroundings, including the artistry found in the natural environment, reinforces my belief that learning occurs in a wide variety of contexts. These contexts are not always conventional but are holistic and transformative (Eisner, 2002a). Learning is most effective in the Arts when we use our senses. Engagement in the Arts enables us to strengthen our perceptions of human experience (Brown & Dissanayake, 2018; Dinham, 2023; Dinham & Chalk, 2022; Dissanayake, 2015; Eisner, 2002b; Magsamen & Battro, 2011).

As I walk the pathway to the *Goompi* (Dunwich) township, I wonder to what extent supporting educators and their students to explore the Arts on this land and sea Country can embed deeper understandings of the histories and cultures that have been and continue to be part of the First Nations Goenpul, Noonuccal and Ngugi Peoples of this region. I *look* around me and realise that in this place known as Minjerribah / Terrangee, there is new and different knowledge, another language, and many cultural practices for me to discover.

In being open to these new experiences, I am aware of the importance of using a different way of *seeing* to interrogate my history, geography, cultural knowledge, and beliefs through the praxis of decolonialisation, as I discover new ways of thinking and looking (Datta, 2018a; Henriksen et al., 2022; Klein, 2018; Manathunga et al., 2020).

To do this, I must reflect on my past experiences, particularly in the context of my education as a white Australian, which began in the 1960s and continues to the present day. To *see* clearly, the past must be examined and the deleterious impact of colonisation on this country understood. This reflection acknowledges the voices of First Nations academic scholars that disrupt accepted mainstream histories and also the voices of the MMEIC Elders:

Only those who belong to Country can speak for Country.

(Personal communication MMEIC Elders, January 10, 2024).

The political and social changes in Australia during the past twenty years have not always had a positive impact on local communities including those on Minjerribah / Terrangee where there has been community division over Native Title and the effects of sand mining and tourism (Burgin, 2020; Foley, 2009; Ruska, 1992; Ruska, 2016).

MMEIC Goenpul Elder, Aunty Mary Iselin-Burgess, recalled the destruction that was wrought on the island when the mineral sands were mined on Minjerribah /

Terrangee, the second largest sand island in the world, between 1949 and 2019. Although sand mining brought with it jobs, and the opportunity for families to return to live on the island, it also destroyed many cultural sites, including Aboriginal middens, resulting in a further loss to the island communities (Moore, 2011). Aunty Mary's words reveal the complexity and tension that occurred and still resonates today:

Sandmining brought jobs but destroyed many of our Country's cultural sites ... it was good that Aboriginal people were able to live and work on the Island – it did help us buy our homes. But in relation to our cultural sites a lot was destroyed.

(MMEIC Goenpul Elder, Aunty Mary Iselin-Burgess, November 21, 2022).

From listening respectfully to such stories and recollections, I have gained new insights into the history of Minjerribah / Terrangee. Listening on Country brings a sensory understanding as experienced when I climbed the hill with an Elder to view the Myora (Moongalba) Cemetery, hearing the stories of past times echo in the wind's whispers among the ancestral graves and headstones.

The stories come from place and live in the surrounds and sounds of the island. To be standing in the different places, feeling the earth beneath me, the water never far away, and looking up at the open sky adds an aesthetic to the words as I listen, learn and reflect that these storytellers are direct descendants of the Goenpul, Noonuccal and Ngugi Peoples of this land and sea Country.

3.3.1 Looking back

My childhood was firmly entrenched in a traditional white, Anglo-Saxon heritage where I was exposed to a narrow colonial context, particularly in the school subject of Social Studies. In Year 3, we were asked to compare living in our hygienic and comfortable homes (an ironic supposition as the farmhouse in which I spent my childhood had no indoor plumbing facilities— my mother fired up the wood stove for cooking, and a kerosene heater for hot water and the toileting facilities with the Aussie outback 'dunny' outside) with living in an Aboriginal *gunyah*¹⁰.

¹⁰ The Jandai Language Dictionary provides alternate spelling 'gunya' and the meaning as 'shelter or home, often made from large sticks and limbs and covered with bark from large trees' (MMEIC, 2011, p. 34).

Then, in Year 4, we were asked to consider why “the Aborigines presented little opposition to white intruders” (Queensland Department of Education, 1964, p. 9). This statement was presented in our textbooks as accepted truth, which was a *whitewashing* of history (Bedford & Wall, 2020; Kerkhove, 2021; Moreton-Robinson, 2015; Moreton-Robinson, 2020a; Watson, 2018). This reflection on the past is strongly contrasted by a discussion with Goenpul, Jandaiwal MMEIC Elder, Dale Ruska, who speaks:

There is ongoing intergenerational impact of displacement and dispersal, the lack of healing and the deep sense of loss of cultural credibility and authenticity for First Nations Peoples. (January 10, 2024).

This deep sense of loss of credibility and authenticity must have been felt by First Nations children in schools, particularly during that time. Ironically, in Queensland schools, Year 4 children were expected to learn about their own locality, and their own country but “not by attempting any systematic explanation of it...but in the spirit often found in travellers’ tales” (Queensland Department of Education, 1964, p. 8).¹¹

In Term One, lessons focussed on the geographical mapping of the rivers, coastline, mountains, and towns of Queensland, and then Australia. Stories were to depict the “general background of Australia’s past...rather than a knowledge of historical details” (p. 9). Included in the storytelling was learning about “Australia’s living wonders of birds, trees and animals” (p. 9) and, after this, “Australian Aborigines” (p. 9).

This marginalisation of our First Nations people to a distant and remote ‘other’ served to reinforce the message that Indigenous Australians “belong[ed] to the past or to an exotic present, far removed from the daily lives of the students and from mainstream society in general” (Sharp, 2013, p. 187; Shay & Wickes, 2017; Stastny, 2019). It is of note that the Social Studies program emphasis throughout the remaining terms, and indeed through Years Five to Seven, was an Australian focus on the historical facts of explorers, settlements, and the initiatives of pioneers, with no further indication of Australian history prior to colonial settlement.

¹¹ In a conversation with a Goenpul family member who was at school on Minjerribah / Terrangee around that time, he told me that he didn’t take much notice of “that history stuff about Captain Cook and explorers.” Mostly, he looked out the window and waited for the school day to be over when he could ride horses and go fishing. (Personal communication, March 16, 2024).

My lifelong commitment to education began with the decision to become a primary school teacher. On completion of my secondary education, I attended the Teachers' College in Brisbane, Queensland, and trained to become a teacher between the years of 1971-1973. During this time, I was aware that there were a small number of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students on campus undertaking a 12-month course entitled, *A Course for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Island Teachers* (Anderson, 1994, p. 145). This course was implemented at the college between 1965 and 1977 (Yarrow & Millwater, 1994) and was based on the premise that the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students were "a special kind of people ... with special needs and the course [was] designed in accordance with their capacities" (Anderson, 1994, p. 146). The course was to enable Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people to "acquire some formal teacher education and thus raise the level of their work" (p. 145).

The Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students had a separate common room away from the other predominately white students and, during my three years of study, I was unaware of any inclusion of these students, either socially or academically, with the mainstream students.

This one-year course culminated in a certificate that was not recognised or linked to the college's two-year Certificate of Teaching or the three-year Diploma of Education. This approach appeared to reinforce the inherent white superiority within the education system of the time with its emphasis on "dominant social norms, expectations and agendas" (Shay, 2016, p. 281). In addition, by not providing credit from this certificate, it resulted in these students needing to have additional time to obtain a formal teaching qualification and appears to reinforce the colonial hegemony that diminishes and devalues the knowledges of Australia's First Nations Peoples.

Decades of teaching in Queensland at early childhood, primary and tertiary levels, international travel, and cultural experiences, including volunteering in a Romanian children's home, have been instrumental in the development of my respect for the diversity of culture, including the world's oldest surviving and continuous culture in Australia. For more than 65,000 years, over 250 Aboriginal nations on mainland Australia lived and are continuing to live their lives with their own languages, unique cultural practices, and beliefs (Althaus, 2020; Langton, 2019; Langton & Perkins, 2008; Thompson, 2018; Weule & James, 2017). First Nations Peoples such as the Goenpul, Noonuccal and Ngugi MMEIC Elders continue to teach and share their knowledge so that this knowledge is valued and continues to inform the future.

3.3.2 Looking back at history

Since colonisation, First Nations Peoples were considered a subordinate culture within the social and political structure of Australia. This situation was set in motion over 200 years ago with the European and British exploration and discovery of new lands resulting in the “first wave of invading white British immigrants” (arriving) in Australia in 1788” (Moreton-Robinson, 2003, p. 24).

In 1788, Australia was considered *terra nullius* [nobody’s land], a description which was used to justify the treatment of Aboriginal people, the taking of land and subsequently sources of food, sites of ritual, and the curtailing of freedom to move across country with the introduction of borders and/restrictions. The concept of *terra nullius* would not be overturned until 1992 through the High Court of Australia’s finding in *Mabo versus Queensland (No. 2)* (Australia., 1992; Baguley et al., 2021) which recognised the rights of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples to their lands and acknowledged their unique occupation of, and connection with, the land.

The *terra nullius* designation rendered the Aboriginal population invisible and deficient. It reinforced the nexus between culture and power, consistently reaffirming the values and interests of a capitalistic society (Darder, 2016; Giroux, 2004; Jackson-Barrett, 2011; Martin & Mirraboopa, 2003; Moreton-Robinson, 2003; Moreton-Robinson, 2020a; Ryder et al., 2020; Watson, 2018). Anglo-centric ideologies and values, measured against a Euro-centric cultural base of presumed superior legitimate knowledge that embraced Western scientific discoveries, economic development, and the imperial power of competing European nations, were imposed and perpetuated.

This privileging of a western dominant culture that adheres to material wealth, power relations and practices, also promotes a social construct that normalises a hegemonic standard of Whiteness, with its inherent valuing of white practices and cultural identities (Koerner & Pillay, 2020; Zembylas, 2018). This hegemonic construct underpinned the construction and representations of Aboriginal people through a deficit model which did not recognise their unique languages, histories, cultures, values, and knowledge of Country (Jackson-Barrett & Lee-Hammond, 2019; Langton, 1996; Moreton-Robinson, 2021; Watson, 2014b, 2018). Goenpul, Jandaiwal MMEIC Elder, Dale Ruska, wrote:

Forceful colonial occupation and control facilitated through brutal undignified subjection...this colonial system has no acceptance of and respect for the meaning of my originality, especially to the ancient worth and value of the people and places to which I am connected through belonging.

(Ruska, 2016 pp. 4,5).

Under the guise of colonisation in Australia, there was a deliberate strategy that saw the systematic decimation of First Nations communities through a “dominant invader society [that] privilege[d] specific components of its collective language, symbols, and culture” (Koerner & Pillay, 2020, p. 43), leading to the targeted destruction of Aboriginal heritage. The development and destruction of the natural environment, for economic growth through power and achievement was an “armed industrialising/modernising complex [which has] rolled out across the country and across the waterways, sucking up knowledge and converting its values into industrial/modern ones” (Muecke & Eadie, 2020, p. 1201).

This devastation has destroyed important sites and polluted waterways and been detrimental to the spiritual connection of Aboriginal people to Country (Burt & Gunstone, 2018; Koerner & Pillay, 2020; McCartan et al., 2022; Perry & Holt, 2018; Ryder et al., 2020; Shay, 2016; Watson, 2018).

As an educator, looking back at history and preparing for a project to support other educators in embedding First Nations histories and cultures through the Arts in classrooms, I am encouraged by the present-day framework of the Australian Curriculum (AC). Importantly, this acknowledges in the Cross-Curriculum Priority (CCP) of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Histories and Cultures recognition of First Nations Peoples’ identities through Living Communities, Country and Place, and Culture (see **Figure 12**).

Figure 12. Framework for the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Histories and Cultures CCP (ACARA, 2023).



(Australian Curriculum and Assessment Reporting Authority [ACARA] 2023 -a, p. 5).

This framework underpins this research. Further, I have experienced the interrelationships between Country / Place / Culture and People and their Identity within Living Communities, through this project in my interactions with the Goenpul, Noonuccal and Ngugi MMEIC Elders of the First Nations land and sea Country recognised as Quandamooka.

3.3.3 Looking at present times

The narrative representation of First Nations Peoples has been shown as often being diametrically opposed to their lived experiences (Brett & Guyver, 2021), as was evidenced in the earlier examination of the 1964 Queensland Social Studies Syllabus for primary schools (Department of Education, 1964).

However, the second half of the twentieth century saw the beginning of a burgeoning attentiveness to human rights, inclusivity, and an increase in understanding of the distinctive histories and contexts of settler-colonialism, including the complex issues surrounding Identity and Indigeneity, sovereignty, and white possession. These topics and more have been identified and interrogated by many First Nations scholars (Foley, 2020; Moodie, 2019; Moreton-Robinson, 2020a, 2021; Ruska, 2023; Whyman et al., 2023).

As a young adult during these years, I experienced firsthand the extensive media coverage of the following events and see them as part of present times and the heralding of changes within Australian society.

I clearly remember the change of government in 1972 resulting in the Labour party's Gough Whitlam becoming Prime Minister, and with it the introduction of a "vast and transformative agenda at the heart of which was a fundamental policy shift toward self-determination in Aboriginal affairs" (Hocking, 2018, p. 86). An example of this policy shift was the successful negotiation of the return to the Gurindji First Nations people of the approximately 3,000 square kilometres of land known as Wave Hill Station in the Northern Territory.¹²

Prior to this, 200 Gurindji stockmen, house servants, and their families had walked off Wave Hill Station to earn better wages and conditions in 1966 (National Indigenous Australians Agency (NIAA), 2023). This ushered in a decade-long strike and the outcome of the return of the Gurindji ancestral lands became a pivotal moment for the Aboriginal land rights movement which continues today (Foley, 2020; McKeon, 2016).¹³

Prime Minister Whitlam recognised the "200 years of despoliation, injustice and discrimination (that) have seriously damaged and demoralised the once proud Aboriginal people" (Whitlam, 1972, p. 3). His words were reiterated twenty years later, by Australia's then-Prime Minister, the Honourable Paul Keating, at a ceremony for the Year for the World's Indigenous People in Redfern Park, New South Wales (1992). Keating emphasised that it was *white* Australia who "did the dispossessing, took the traditional lands, [and] smashed the traditional way of life" (Keating, 1992, p. 10). He asserted that white Australia's ignorance and prejudice has contributed to the ongoing discrimination and exclusion of First Nations people in Australia.

The High Court's 1992 Mabo decision (Australia., 1992) led to the Native Title Act of 1993 and formal recognition of the pre-colonial land interests of First Nations people.

¹² The Gurindji people had lived on their homelands in what is now the Victoria River area of the Northern Territory for tens of thousands of years when, in 1883, the colonial government granted approximately 3,000 square kilometres of their country to the explorer and pastoralist, Nathaniel Buchanan who then sold what became known as Wave Hill station to the international meat-packing company, Vestey Brothers, in 1914. National Museum of Australia (n.d.). *Wave Hill walk-off*. <https://www.nma.gov.au/defining-moments/resources/wave-hill-walk-off>.

¹³ In September 2020, the Gurindji claim for native title to Wave Hill station was granted. This was fifty-four years after the walk-off that helped to spark Australia's First Nations land rights movement. National Museum of Australia (n.d.). *Wave Hill walk-off*. <https://www.nma.gov.au/defining-moments/resources/wave-hill-walk-off>.

The landmark *Bringing them Home Report* (Wilson & Wilkie, 1997), was a national inquiry into the separation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children from their families; it was tabled in Federal Parliament in 1997.

The inaugural National Sorry Day was held on 26 May 1998 to commemorate the anniversary of the presentation to Parliament of the *Bringing Them Home Report*. This report was the result of an inquiry into the removal of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children from their families and documented the grief and suffering experienced by those children who were forcibly separated from their families and communities (Reconciliation Australia, nd). National Sorry Day or Day of Healing continues as an annual event, acknowledging the strength and resilience of Stolen Generations Survivors and providing and encouraging opportunities to reflect on how the Australian people can all share in the healing process.

These steps forward in the awakening of the collective Australian conscience to acknowledge the truths of settler-colonialism faltered in 2007 when Australia was one of only four countries to refuse to endorse the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous People (UNDRIP) (ABC News, 2007). Concern was expressed over the concept of self-determination as it applied “to situations of decolonization and the break-up of States into smaller states” (United Nations, 2007, para. 11). It was felt that this was encouraging particular groups to take action that could impact on and “impair the territorial and political integrity of a State [Australia] which already had a system of democratic representative Government” (United Nations, 2007, para. 11).

Reminiscent of the Federal Government change in 1972, Australia again voted for a change in 2007. The new Labor Party Prime Minister, Hon. Kevin Rudd, was quick to deliver a National Apology to the Stolen Generations, publicly acknowledging “the indignity and degradation inflicted on a proud people and a proud culture (Rudd, 2008). This government, through the Australian Human Rights Commission, also overturned the previous government’s refusal to support UNDRIP in 2009.

However, these events are now considered to be no more than symbolic gestures that enabled a white hegemonic structure to facilitate a widespread forgetting of the historical and present-day sufferings of First Nations people. This is in spite of frequent discourses that identify the social and emotional challenges that have arisen through intergenerational trauma, the educational disadvantages for First Nations children, and the economic disadvantages that impact on all of these (Bailey, 2020; Bishop, 2021; Bodkin-Andrews & Carlson, 2016b).

In contemporary Australia, too often the concept of self-determination and informed consent for First Nations people has been disregarded (Watson, 2018). Concern has been expressed that the standards set by UNDRIP are not being implemented in a comprehensive way (Law Council of Australia, 2022) with further legal and policy reform required across the federal, state and territories authorities.

The National Indigenous Australians Agency (NIAA) was established in 2019 and works to influence policy across the Australian Government to ensure Indigenous programs and services are appropriate and relevant for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. This role necessitates working closely with State and Territory governments, Indigenous peak bodies, stakeholders, and service providers and driving initiatives that include Education, the Environment, Culture, Empowering Communities, and the Indigenous Voice co-design process (National Indigenous Australians Agency (NIAA), 2019). Currently, the NIAA is engaged in a phase of consultations in relation to a new program for Community Development for First Nations people (National Indigenous Australians Agency (NIAA), 2024).

Discussion with the Minjerribah-Moorgumpin Elders about these government bodies and reports reveals a degree of cynicism, frustration, and resignation. As a case in point, they shared their concerns about the ongoing impact of the successful Native Title decision on First Nations Peoples of Minjerribah / Terrangee:

Native title divided our community with one group being granted power and privileges from which only part of community benefits. Government policies and bodies which have come from a post-colonial construct are still overseeing, influencing, directing, and controlling decision-making processes. Where once we were united now there is disunity and disharmony. It is very sad. (Elders personal communication, October 15, 2022).

Professor Irene Watson, a member of the Tanganekald, Meintangk, and Boandik, Aboriginal Nations, writes that “pre-colonial Aboriginal Australia is an example of the earliest known international relations” (2018, p. 124).

As I have embraced *Neembeebe*, [to look] looking at history, and considering the present times, I am saddened to think of the destruction of thousands of years of lawful relationships and respectful protocols and engagement between nations due to the ongoing impact of colonisation on Australia's First Nations People. However, I take reassurance from the words of Goenpul Jandaiwal MMEIC Elder, Dale Ruska:

We are resilient and resistant, always in a constant struggle for racial fairness, equity, equality and proper moral justice.

(November 2, 2023).

Delving into the past and reflecting on the present has deepened my understandings of these changes and given me a heightened awareness of the complex issues surrounding Identity and Indigeneity, and sovereignty and white possession (Moodie, 2019; Moreton-Robinson, 2020a, 2021; Ruska, 2023; Whyman et al., 2023). Through *Neembeebe*, I have a new understanding of how essential it is to develop the ability to critique and consider different perspectives, opinions and values and, through doing so, gain conceptual understandings of the past and their relationships to the present (Bishop, 2023; Brett & Guyver, 2021; Downey & Long, 2015; Lowe, 2017).

It is time now to *Binang* (listen) and to recognise and acknowledge the different ways of knowing as represented by the Elders and First Nations scholars and writers.

3.4 *Binang—to listen*

As I collaborate with the Elders in planning the initial stages of my project which will investigate the capacity of the arts to support teachers embed the culture and histories of the Goenpul, Noonuccal and Ngugi MMEIC Elders of Quandamooka First Nations land and sea Country, I am mindful of the Jandai language phrase, *binang gani*. This means “listen but don’t hear” (Minjerribah-Moorgumpin Elders-in-Council, 2011, p. 102). Listening *and* hearing, is an important step in the journey from cultural awareness and understanding to cultural competency (Heckenberg, 2020).

Being culturally competent means to hear the Elders’ stories, which embed their knowledge of their culture and history and ensures that the sharing of stories is done with their consent in a consultative process. Listening and hearing, means their stories cannot be altered or adapted or even retold unless permission has been given by the

storyteller; to do so would be misappropriating and disrespecting their cultural history and knowledge and *binang gani*—not truly hearing.

For a non-First Nations researcher such as myself, *binang* also means understanding and adhering to the Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies (AIATSIS) Code of Ethics for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Research (2022) acknowledging that First Nations Peoples have the right to “control the development and transmission of their culture and heritage” (AIATSIS, 2022, p. 18).

This message is further substantiated in the document, *Indigenous Cultural Protocols and the Arts* (Janke, 2019) which emphasises the importance of respect, Indigenous control, communication and consultation, authenticity and attribution. This latter document reveals that it is through the Arts that educators can embed First Nations histories and cultures, and that the MMEIC Elders play a central role in determining the stories and knowledge that will be shared.

Through my own professional development and participation in cultural learning programs on Minjerribah / Terrangee, I have listened carefully and learned that the knowledge of the culture, laws, protocols, histories, and perspectives of the First Nations Goenpul, Noonuccal, and Ngugi Peoples are unique to their land and sea Country recognised as Quandamooka and cannot be generalised.

3.4.1 Listening with respect

In taking steps towards decolonisation, Bradley (2012) cautions that non-Indigenous researchers must encounter the “emotional and intellectual landscapes of disorientation, bewilderment, provocation and dislocation” (p. 27). This will enable them to truly understand the complexity of Indigenous knowledge and gain a new way of looking, listening and understanding that is underpinned by recognition and respect. Being cognisant of this imperative can assist non-Indigenous researchers to look holistically at Indigenous ontology and epistemology, and refrain from the dissection and fragmentation of these ways of doing and being, which results in shallow, inappropriate, and often inaccurate interpretations.

I feel a responsibility as a white woman of Anglo-Saxon heritage to ensure that in my conversations with the Elders, I do not redefine, interpret, and/or misuse their knowledge and practices through my western perspective (Blagg et al., 2020; Fischer et al., 2022).

During this research, it has been important to reflect on the knowledge that the Elders share and consider my responses in this context (Lipscombe et al., 2021). Aboriginal law academic and writer, Amberlin Kwaymullina, from the Palyku people of the Pilbara, writes of the necessity of acknowledging the white woman's position of privilege throughout life experiences. This requires me to understand and acknowledge the benefits that I have inherited through living on colonised land (Kwaymullina, 2016).

Distinguished Professor Aileen Moreton-Robinson, a Goenpul woman of the Quandamooka Peoples, who has close familial and kinship ties with the MMEIC Elders, defines the white middle-class woman as having a socially constructed position of dominance predicated on "social status and prestige based on capital, occupation, skill and education" (2020 p. xvii).

I am mindful of this position, as I am not part of the cultural and social domains of the Goenpul, Noonuccal and Ngugi women I am working with through this research journey. It behoves me to listen carefully and respectfully to their conversations with a dawning realisation that my experiences of family life, schooling, working, and child-rearing are very different because my lived experiences of land, place, people, and history are incommensurable to an "epistemology that privileges body, place, spirit and land through descent, experience and oral tradition" (Moreton-Robinson, 2020b, p. 178).

Additionally, I am humbled by these women's knowledge and their willingness to share their stories with me. It is a privilege to be able to listen and learn about their connections to kin and family and their roles as the nurturers and caretakers of communities.

These First Nations women are the custodians of the wisdom and knowledge of their ancestors who continued the traditions and taught by example, handing down stories so they would not be lost (Dudgeon & Bray, 2019; Mooney et al., 2018; Moreton-Robinson, 2013; Oscar, 2018; Rigney, 1999; Sutherland & Adams, 2019). This is not to preference the cultural knowledge of the women over the men. Professor Moreton-Robinson (2013) describes the difference between Australian Indigenous women's knowledges and experiences to that of Indigenous men is because of "our [women's] embodiment, our relations to different country, people and ancestral creator beings and our social location...within hierarchical relations of ruling [both] within our communities and Australian society" (p. 339).

Throughout this research journey, I have listened with respect to the Goenpul, Noonuccal and Ngugi MMEIC Elders. During this time, I have understood that both men

and women have equally accepted their Eldership responsibilities to share, maintain, restore knowledge and cultural connections, and pass this on to the next generation.

3.4.2 Binang—the literature

There is an interconnectedness of Country, sea and sky that can be perceived as an interwoven thread throughout research by Aboriginal scholars. More than themes, there is an intrinsic quality throughout the writings of these scholars and the following section explores this with the literature revealing an intertwining of respect for Country (Bishop, 2022; Country Bawaka et al., 2016; Hawkes et al., 2017; Moodie, 2019; Watson, 2014b), the importance of Country, naming and language (Lee & Eversole, 2019; Poelina et al., 2020; Tynan, 2021), and understanding that relationality is all encompassing of seeing, being, knowing, doing, and living on and with Country (Bishop, 2022; Dudgeon & Bray, 2019; Heckenberg, 2016; Martin & Mirraboopa, 2003; Moreton-Robinson, 2017; Tynan, 2021; Yunkaporta & Shillingsworth, 2020).

These First Nations scholars write with full recognition of the value of lived experience in relation to the knowledge systems of the First Nations from where they come, acknowledging the importance of First Nations people coming together to share and gain knowledge from others, from Country and all sentient creatures (Bishop, 2022; Moodie, 2019).

The research of First Nations academics has informed my exploration of this research and has provided important considerations for me as a *muragan* in working on Country, being ever mindful of the apprehension that can occur in First Nations communities over unethical and/or inappropriate research.

We don't need white fellas coming in and telling us what we should be doing and then going away again. They can't speak for us on Country, and they don't walk our walk.

(MMEIC Elder, personal communication, February 21, 2021).

Respecting Country

Goenpul, Jandaiwal MMEIC Elder Dale Ruska (2016) describes the ongoing significance of Country and its deep relationship and connection with First Nations people which was not recognised by the colonisers and has ongoing impacts:

We have endeavoured for generations trying to have our identity and our original entitlements recognised by colonial law and its legal systems. We have to prove and justify our identity and its connection to place and to accept and comply with the systems processes, values and outcomes.

(Ruska, 2016).

Respecting Country means respecting and understanding individual identities, reciprocity, and the capacity to listen and hear (Hawkes et al., 2017). As I listen and hear the individual voices of First Nations scholars and researchers, I have emulated the recommendation of Aboriginal academic and researcher, Michelle Bishop, a Gamilaroi woman, who grew up on Dharawal Country. She revealed that, when using the words of Indigenous authors, she acknowledges their full name and their country. She states, “I do this to show my respect for their exceptional work and the way it has greatly informed my thinking” (Bishop, 2022, p. 133).

Bishop (2022) writes of the knowledge exchanges that occurred between Aboriginal people for thousands of generations “living, thriving, creating and nurturing” (p. 136) and contends that Country is integral to knowledge. This holistic Indigenous approach to knowledge with its all-encompassing relationship with Country, both past and present, is emphasised by Professor Irene Watson of the Tanganekald, Meintangk Boandik First Nations people who writes of the “First Nations’ relationships with the land [which] makes us one with the natural world ” (Watson, 2014b; 2018, p. 124).

Kamilaroi scholar, Nikki Moodie, calls this an “ontological relationship to Country (2019, p. 740) stating that Country is not about *place* or *land* defined through colonial constructs of dispossession and territorial acquisitions, but about deeper connections and intertwining of the environment which includes land, sea, sky, and all living creatures who are its inhabitants. In identifying Bawaka, as lead author (Country Bawaka et al., 2016) Wright et al., recognise a Homeland in far north Australia: “Bawaka is Country, as encompassed by the Aboriginal English term Country. Country includes humans, more-than-humans and all that is tangible and non-tangible...we cannot separate the contributions of humans from the contributions of Bawaka Country” (p. 456).

Indeed, there is a similar consideration from Trawlwulwuy scholar of First Nations Tebrakunna Country, Lauren Tynan, who ponders that Country is agentic, engendering

respect and continuing relationships both ancestral and living, questioning if Country should be the writer (Tynan, 2021).

I feel a strong connection to these authors who have so respectfully written of the necessity of understanding about place and space recognising that Country is not only about people but about plants, winds, rocks, animals, ancestors, the stars, language, and the earth. As I walk on the land and sea Country of Minjerribah / Terrangee with the MMEIC Elders, I am gaining respect for this place and space that is home for these Goenpul, Noonuccal and Ngugi Peoples.

Country, naming and language

Country, naming, and language are inexorably connected and strengthen identity, cultural practices, and lore. Moodie (as cited in Bradley, 1999), states that the “naming and ordering of the landscape transforms the purely physical, geographic environment into something—a place—that becomes embedded within a history, a spirituality, a lived experience” (p. 801).

I consider how different this is from the Australian “legislative or regulatory procedures for the systematic approval and recording of place names” (Intergovernmental Committee on Surveying and Mapping (ICSM), 2016, p. 6). The ICSM document, *Principles for the Consistent Use of Place Names*, acknowledges that prior to European settlement, the geographical features of Australia were named in one or more of the many First Nations languages but makes it clear that, from the late 1700s, an English-based system for naming identified geographical and physical features was instigated (ICSM, 2016).

Professor Aileen Moreton-Robinson (2022) declares that these names, many of which are still in common usage today, are further evidence of the “continuing colonial legacy of white possession and Indigenous dispossession” (p. 67).

The MMEIC Elders also believe that losing the traditional names was just another way to assimilate and destroy the culture of First Nations people. A discussion with the Elders brought to my awareness the many name changes on Minjerribah / Terrangee that were forcibly enacted by white colonisers. They spoke of the changes that were made to traditional names of places including *Moorgumpin* (Moreton Island), *Minjerribah/Terrangee* (North Stradbroke Island), *Goompi* (Dunwich), *Bummiera* (Brown Lake), *Mooloomba* (Point Lookout), *Moongalba* (Myora), and *Pullan Pullan* (Amity Point) among many others. I have endeavoured throughout my research to be true to these traditional names, using them

with the permission of the MMEIC Elders. Present-day Goenpul Elder and MMEIC Chairperson Aunty Mary Iselin-Burgess has given permission for her mother's story about the attempted destruction of the Jandai language to be included here:

In the middle of 1935, the government sent out notices and people to tell the grannies on Myora Mission that the language had to be stopped ... if we were caught speaking the language, we would be sent away to the Barambah mission (Cherbourg). In the afternoons after school, we would go for walks with the grannies through the bush where they told us of the bush tucker, the plants, the animals, and the trees – but it was all said very softly in the language so no one could hear. (MMEIC Elder Aunty Margaret Iselin, Minjerribah-Moorgumpin Elders-in-Council, 2011).

Elder Aunty Margaret Iselin's story and its connections to her lived history, language, and naming, aligns with Poelina et al. (2020) and Woollorton et al. (2020) who describe how any discussion of Country refers to "all of those places that Traditional Owners speak for, the landscapes and the named sites and significant places within those landscapes" (Poelina et al., 2020, p. 7). Indeed, Emma Lee (Lee & Eversole, 2019) and Lauren Tynan (Tynan, 2021) who are Trawlwulwuy scholars from First Nations Tebrakunna Country write of the tangible and intangible, all-encompassing sense of Country, which includes the tiniest creatures, the cycles of growth in the environment, the strength of the tides, the power of fire, and the ancestral memories of people. The ever-present power of Country has underpinned First Nations recovery and revitalisation of individual languages, including the Jandai language of the First Nations Goenpul, Noonuccal and Ngugi Peoples, of the land and sea Country recognised as Quandamooka.

Relationality

Relationality is summarised by Goenpul Aboriginal Scholar Aileen Moreton-Robinson (2017) as being "a holistic conception of the inter-connectedness and inter-substantiation between and among all living things and the earth, which is inhabited by a world of ancestors and creator beings" (p. 71), and echoed in a simple, but powerful statement, by Goenpul MMEIC Elder, Aunty Mary Iselin-Burgess:

I am part of Country it is in the way I live – it is embedded – it is who I am and can't be taken away from me. I am happiest when I am on Minjerribah.

(Goenpul Elder, Aunty Mary Iselin-Burgess, November 3, 2022).

Noonuccal / Bidjara Aboriginal scholar, Karen Martin, acknowledges the immersive network between the entities of Country and self and the “Ways of Knowing” (Martin & Mirraboo, 2003, p. 209) which inform “Ways of Being” as recognition of the relationality between the “Land, Waterways, Skies, Spirits and all Entities” (p. 210).

Wiradjuri Elder, academic scholar and artist, Robyn Heckenberg, describes relationality as the holistic intertwining of the mind, body, and spirit (Heckenberg, 2016), where “the contemplative self is in touch with the spiritual realm leading to a deeper level of communion and communication between the inner self and the Creator/Spirits of nature/Country” (R. Heckenberg, personal communication, March 19, 2023).

Bardi scholar, Patricia Dudgeon, (Dudgeon & Bray, 2019), acknowledges relationality as a “life force... which supports and nourishes life” (p. 4) and Trawlwulwuy scholar, Lauren Tynan (2021) and Kamilaroi scholar, Nikki Moodie (Moodie, 2019) believe it to be the foundation and central concept for how First Nations Peoples understand and construct knowledge through knowing, feeling, and understanding Country, its beings, and its stories. The words of these First Nations scholars resonate with the words of MMEIC Elders:

We are learning as we live, every day. Our knowledge always has a deep connection to our ancestors and what has gone before. They are with us as guides, and we are still learning from them and from our Country. We belong to Country. (Elders conversation, March 28, 2022).

In reaffirming the “cohesion between life, culture, Country, practice and memory” (Martin, 2017, p. 1395) Martin emphasises that research within First Nations communities must value culture and identity through the premise of lived experiences and the inseparable relationships with Country. I concur with this as it is through my own regular meetings and conversations with the MMEIC Elders and listening to their stories that I am developing a deeper understanding and appreciation of their deep and holistic connection to Country and the relational ties that bind them to each other.

Listening to understand

Mindful of the need to listen and the constant reminders from the Elders not to be a *muragan* [white woman] who *binang gunj* [listen don't hear] (Personal communications, September 6, 2022) (Minjerribah-Moorgumpin Elders-in-Council, 2011), I acknowledge and respect Kamilaroi scholar, Nikki Moodie (2019) who suggests a new way of thinking and understanding of First Nations knowledges through using transformative threshold concepts (Page, 2014) to learn about knowledge production.

Before being able to develop conceptual understandings of First Nations topics of race and power structure, past and present government policies, and evidence through data collections, Moodie emphasises the imperative of “centring Indigenous knowledges through a focus on Country and relationality” (p. 745), and that decolonising research practices must ensure that First Nations people’s knowledge is privileged and is given a pivotal role in order to represent their voices accurately and authentically. Only then will ethical and quality research be produced.

Evidence of the relationality of race and Country is apparent as I cross the threshold of the Minjerribah-Moorgumpin building and embrace the Elders. I feel surrounded by wisdom and knowledge, culture and histories, and reflect that within this space the boundaries that have been operating in the guise of colonial constructs are diminished and that time has slowed. Conversations and yarns are anecdotal, varied, slow, thoughtful, and invariably interspersed with cups of tea. I reflect and understand the importance of Mamu/Djirribal scholar Robyn Ober’s consideration that listening to such exchanges enables non-Indigenous researchers, such as myself, to strengthen our understandings of Indigenous peoples and their communities (Ober et al., August 23, 2022).

As I share tea with the Elders, I feel incredibly fortunate to be welcomed into this space and to be able to continue to develop relationships and gain a stronger understanding of the Minjerribah-Moorgumpin community. I am reminded again of the complexity of the relationality between Country and its people, the intertwining with the land, the sea, the skies, and all living creatures. I stop to listen to the words of MMEIC Elder, Nunka Raymond Dennis Bruce Walker, as he recites for me his poem, *One Way*.

We and the land together we bind,

We and the land have the same mind.

We live of the land and its things.

We love our land for what it brings.

From the Dreaming is where we begun,

We and the land are always ONE.

(Nunka Raymond's words reproduced with his permission,

January 10, 2024).

3.5 *Gana—to understand*

It is through listening to the Elders, and the voices of Aboriginal academic researchers and artists, that I understand the complexity of the hegemonic power of colonisation. Wiradjuri scholar, Juanita Sherwood (Sherwood & Anthony, 2020) writes of the importance of the strength-based approach and that non-First Nations researchers must be wary of the rhetoric and ill-informed content from media and political sources which so often portray First Nations people's circumstances within a deficit construct. She reminds us that First Nations people are "not a disempowered vulnerable people but an empowered yet oppressed peoples through Western constructs situated within colonial structures" (p. 20). The MMEIC Elders concur:

... we should put our energies into resisting the issues surrounding government dictates which come from white people in charge and deny us our heritage. (Elders conversation, July 29, 2022).

Goenpul Jandaiwal MMEIC Elder, Dale Ruska, spoke of the strength of his Moreton Great-Grandfather:

He encouraged us to learn the white man's words and the white man's language, using the words as a weapon to fight back. (MMEIC Elder Dale Ruska, January 10, 2024).

As noted at the beginning of this chapter, respect, relationality, resilience, and strength of First Nations Peoples were not the perspectives that were presented in my school textbooks. It is important to consider that the constant misuse and incorrect interpretation

of traditional practices and knowledge, leading to the westernisation of Aboriginal culture through hybrid and commercialised culturalisation have been perpetuated by the colonial system under which we live (Fischer et al., 2022; Foley, 2014). As Ngugi, Noonuccal Elder, Aunty Maureen Borey-Myers says:

We were living on Country but part of a western world, we lost out and can't go back. Our society changed and we lost lore. (July 28, 2022).

With new understandings and a deep empathy for the struggles the Goenpul, Noonuccal and Ngugi people have encountered and faced with resilience and determination, I realise, as a *muragan*, I need to reflect on what I have learned from looking and listening and contemplate the significance of being culturally aware and sensitive to be truly on the pathway to cultural competency.

3.5.1 Understanding cultural awareness, sensitivity and competency

Empowerment and protection for Indigenous peoples underpins Wiradjuri scholar, Sadie Heckenberg's 'cultural safety' model (2020) which incorporates the concepts of cultural awareness, cultural sensitivity and cultural competency.

Cultural awareness and sensitivity contribute to cultural competency with its consideration of deeper understandings of different cultures and their practices and "a more complex understanding of one's own worldview and how this affects interaction" (Heckenberg, 2020, p. 56). This model reflects, respects, and represents First Nations Peoples and is vital to understanding and building relationships between cultures, particularly the importance of reciprocity. I see its foundation in the simple and courteous acts of always phoning the Elders to ask permission to visit and walk on their Country, taking food to share, using the appropriate nomenclature of *Uncle* and *Aunty* unless requested otherwise, assisting in local community days such as the National Aboriginal and Islanders Day Observance Committee (NAIDOC) celebrations, helping the Aunties with activities at the Early Learning Centre and the local primary school and supporting the school holiday activity programs for Island children.

Such acts as these contribute to a narrative about community that is free of judgement and becomes a sharing collaboration with the Elders and the community, strengthening my own knowledge of Aboriginal people's actual lives and realities and

developing my cultural awareness, cultural sensitivity, and cultural competency (Heckenberg, 2020).

However, being *culturally competent* is also about acknowledging and understanding difference and considering how easy it is for a non-First Nations person to assume power within the establishment of First Nations relationships forgetting, however briefly, that social, educational, and organisational cultural differences must always be recognised (Heckenberg, 2020). The need for constant monitoring of my own ways of being in my interactions with the Elders and community members has been apparent before commencing my research project in a school on the mainland.

During a discussion with an Elder and the principal of the school regarding the possibility of commissioning an artwork for the school, the problem of time arose. It was difficult to find a time for a meeting between the principal, the artist and the Elder who were all heavily committed. I felt frustrated and impatient wanting to speed up the process, given our limited period for the completion of the artwork. Heckenberg's article (2020) made me aware that whilst I believe I have cultural awareness and sensitivity, my impatience in wanting to organise a speedy result for the school is linked to a Western construct of time and revealed a lack of sensitivity towards both the Elder and the artist and their considerations of appropriateness of the artwork in relation to what they considered to be an authentic reflection of Country.

There is further insight to be gained when one considers the significance of cultural humility and its contribution to mindful self-awareness (Krusz et al.2020). Through the practice of cultural humility and the valuing of silence, spaces can be created “ that can facilitate the avoidance of preconceptions and make room for identities to be shared” (Krusz et al., p. 208). These authors contend, as non-First Nations researchers, that cultural humility can be framed within cultural competency with the understanding that cultural competency “cannot possibly offer insight into understanding every person from that culture or every piece of their identity, as they would prefer it to be shared” (p. 208). This resonates with Sherwood and Anthony (2020), who point out that embracing silence, listening deeply, sitting quietly, comprehending, and continually reflecting are vital components for non-Indigenous researchers if they wish to create spaces for Indigenous people to feel culturally safe as research participants.

3.5.2 Understanding cultural safety

The term *cultural safety* originated in New Zealand in relation to the nursing profession and the cultural safety of the Māori population (Papps & Ramsden, 1996). Heckenberg (2020) acknowledges that cultural safety is more than being aware and competent and that it is “about the right of Indigenous people to be able to feel safe in their own country, surviving within an alien and socially dominant culture after an act of invasion or colonisation” (p. 57). Her framework for cultural safety has been formulated to “reflect us, respect us, and represent us as Indigenous peoples” (p. 48). It is vital for non-Indigenous researchers to understand that it is we who must *reflect, respect*, and acknowledge that we cannot represent Indigenous people but need to situate ourselves within an environment where knowledge can be shared but also safeguarded and protected.

Cultural competency, together with cultural humility, leads to cultural safety. In order to make this progression, we must understand the need to put aside the demands that can arise from working within the academy, including the pressures of publishing, timelines and deadlines, career progression, and constant assessment (Barton et al., 2023; Lipscombe et al., 2021). The western measurement of time, with its linear form of hours, minutes, seconds, to days, weeks, months, past, present, and future, is not an Indigenous perspective. Therefore, building relationships with First Nations Peoples to enable cultural safety takes patience, respect and understanding, and time. There is a fluidity to the Indigenous perception of time that emerges through the shifting moods of Country which mark time’s passage. It does not exist as a separate entity but becomes a part of the knowledges and practices that comprise everyday living (Bawaka Country including et al., 2023; Bishop, 2022; 2015; Country Bawaka et al., 2016; Lipscombe et al., 2021).

This makes it imperative that research and its settings should be placed in the hands of First Nations people, giving them the power to determine their culturally safe spaces (Heckenberg, 2020), which, as my reflection revealed, includes acknowledgement of a different construct of *time*.

Accordingly, the MMEIC Elders have ensured that my research is in accordance with the objectives of their group which aims “to promote and advance the culture and heritage of Goenpul, Noonuccal and Ngugi peoples of Minjerribah, Moorgumpin, the Bay islands and the Mainland” (Minjerribah Moorgumpin Elders, 2015, p. 2). This environment is non-judgmental and is safeguarded by not only the MMEIC objectives and protocols and their Code of Ethical Conduct, but also by the Australian Institute of

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies (AIATSIS) Code of Ethics (Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies, 2022).

Appreciating and learning to understand these practices supports my developing cultural sensitivity through Lipscombe's "decolonial praxis" (2021, p. 3) as I learn to respect the differences between two knowledge systems and, through the decolonial construct explore and reflect on my self-identity, unlearning and relearning in the spirit of cultural humility rather than competency. I feel shame that I am only now realising the enormity of these differences and humbled to realise that Aboriginal Peoples from Australian First Nations have been dealing with these differences for over 200 years. As Goenpul Jandaiwal Elder Dale Ruska states:

Over the last 150 years or more of Australia's colonial history, the Aboriginal struggle, walk and talk, generations echoed their voice of resistance and defiance to colonial, racial injustice. The voice continuously carried across colonial historical times through talks, literature, publications, protests and demonstrations facilitated by Aboriginal people. (Ruska, 2023).

This statement and clarification emphasises (yet) again the necessity for listening and reflecting to avoid misunderstandings and, or misappropriation of knowledge, thus developing the cultural competency required to "allow for an environment of sharing and openness" (Heckenberg, 2020, p. 56; Somerville, Tobin, et al., 2019).

Cultural safety means recognising and valuing the importance of contemporary and traditional cultural values and practices to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. It means acknowledging and respecting the boundaries of nations that were determined through song lines. Initiated Nunggarayi scholar, Margaret Somerville, and Darug Aboriginal scholars, Leanne Tobin and Jacinta Tobin (2019), describe songlines as:

... a walking trail that links story events in the path that the creation ancestors followed ... walking through country, collecting food, living out the events that are marked forever in the landscape. At each of these special places a song is sung, and the songs are connected in the song line of the linking trails. (Somerville, Tobin, et al., 2019, p. 15).

Aboriginal scholar, Irene Watson, of the Tanganekald, Meintangk Boandik First Nations Peoples states that these are important evidence of the respect and reciprocity that was embedded in first laws and “the first evidence of inter-nation relationship” (Watson, 2018, p. 120). Each nation of peoples has very individual cultural practices, and tribes and family groups within nations can have differing cultural values (Heckenberg, 2020). This is true of the First Nations Goenpul, Noonuccal and Ngugi Peoples of the land and the sea Country recognised as Quandamooka and the variations in their stories, cultural understandings, and personal histories. I have come to realise the importance of maintaining the integrity and ownership of the individual stories that have been shared with me, and that retelling or documenting a story requires permission from the storyteller.

3.5.3 Understanding storying as an artform

As I investigate the capacity of the Arts to support non-First Nations teachers embed First Nations cultural knowledge and histories in their classrooms, I take heart and am encouraged by the consideration of Trawlwulwuy scholar, Lauren Tynan, who believes that Country is the original first storyteller and teacher, providing creative inspiration for those who commune with her. (Tynan, 2021). This substantiates for me the importance of storytelling as a means of bringing culture and ancestral stories to life through art (Kelly-Mundine, 2022).

Through research, I have gained a new understanding in relation to the importance of storying and yarning to First Nations people. Marnee Shay, an Aboriginal scholar with maternal connections to Wagiman country (Northern Territory) and strong connections to Aboriginal communities in South-East Qld writes that Aboriginal storytelling is holistic and not compartmentalised. She describes stories as being all-inclusive of Country, people, the spiritual world, and integral to meaning-making and the passing on of knowledge. The stories are based on experiences and as they are passed down through the generations, the stories evolve, become refined and adjusted to new and different realities (Shay et al., 2022). I sense strength, tenacity, and a keen sense of purpose in the Aunties in a conversation where they discuss stories and storytelling.

It is very important that there is always responsible and authentic collection of [their] stories, as they are about our history and culture. Stories are about truth-telling to the next generation. (Elders conversation, April 29, 2022).

Their words and those of Marnee Shay (2022) align with those of Yuin academic scholar, Janet Mooney, Wiradjuri scholar, Lynnette Riley, and Nucoorilma/Ngarabal scholar, Fabri Blacklock (2018). They agree that storytelling (*yarning*) privileges the voices of knowledges and experiences “from a diversity of perspectives, places and temporalities, thus ensuring that Aboriginal oral heritage and knowledge is embedded in our education and knowledge systems” (pp. 268-269). Stories convey information but also share experiences that indicate the way different stories were used to teach behaviour, expectations and responsibilities. (Barlo et al., 2020). The Jandai words, *Neembeeba Binang Gana*, that open this chapter are embedded within the stories of the Goenpul, Noonuccal and Ngugi MMEIC Elders; I have looked [*Neembeeba*] at the places where the stories were once lived, I have listened [*Binang*] respectfully to the Elders words, and I am now beginning to understand [*Gana*] the depths and nuances within this cultural interface where I find myself.

3.5.4 Understanding the cultural interface

With *Gana* [understanding] comes the realisation that Western cultural ways of thinking are premised on the adoption of the English language, formal education, legal systems, religions, the world of working, materialism, technology, and even popular culture (Nakata, 2007a). These ways of thinking underpin our realities, enabling us to be active agents in our lives, accepting our prescribed knowledge system.

However, there is another knowledge system, one that is strengthened by 65,000 years of Aboriginal First Nations Peoples and their all-encompassing ontological relationships to Country (Moreton-Robinson, 2003). There has been the necessity for First Nations Peoples in Australia to orient within a changing reality circumscribed by the Western knowledge system. This has positioned First Nations people into what Torres Strait Islander and Indigenous scholar, Martin Nakata refers to as the contested space between two disparate knowledge systems—the *cultural interface*. This is “the contested space between Indigenous people, non-Indigenous people, and that body of knowledge on Australia’s Indigenous people that establishes the order of things to the ways we can and cannot understand each other” (2011, p. 2). First Nations people have had to negotiate,

blend, compete, and continually distinguish between traditional and non-traditional ways of being.

At the interface, traditional forms and ways of knowing, or the residue of those, that we bring from the pre-contact historical trajectory inform how we think and act and so do Western ways, and for many of us a blend of both has become our lifeworld. It is the most complex of intersections and the source of confusion for many. For in this space there are so many interwoven, competing, and conflicting discourses. (Nakata, 2002, p. 284).

Looking around me, listening to the MMEIC Elders and their stories, I begin to understand the complexities of this *cultural interface*. I understand that I must accept the tension that comes with reflecting and interrogating different interests and knowledge systems. For me this will be an ongoing and transformative process of “endless instances of learning and forgetting, of melding and keeping separate, of discarding and taking up, of continuity and discontinuity” (Nakata, 2002, p. 286; 1997; 2007a, 2010).

As I take my leave of Minjerribah, I return once again to the mainland with its cars, trains, buses, trucks, taxis, the noise, and busy-ness of people out and about, rushing to school, to work, to home, to shops. I board the water taxi to travel across the waters of Quandamooka Bay and I am reminded of Auntie Margaret Iselin and Uncle Keith Borey’s description of this journey being made countless times over thousands of years by the Goenpul, Noonuccal and Ngugi people of this region:

The people of the islands could only meet each other and travel to the mainland if they had a safe and seaworthy boat. Canoes were used to hunt turtles and dugong as well as to cross the Bay. (Iselin & Borey, 2007, p. 14).

I embrace the sea air, observing the sunshine reflected in the rolling swell of the waves, and feel I am positioning myself physically within Nakata’s cultural interface. The water is still, but beneath me in the deep waters of the bay there is “a heterogenous seascape containing a mosaic of habitats that support a diversity of fish” (Olds et al., 2019, p. 379).

Within this landscape I am aware of the vulnerability of marine life to western urbanisation and how the sea creatures and their environments contend with, and are

vulnerable to, the “disruptions, discontinuities...and complexities” that come with “poor water quality, damage to sea-grass beds, kill rates, pollution, conservation, sustainable practice, scientific projects, fisheries policy, rangers, local and environmental politics” (Nakata, 2010, p. 54). I draw an analogy to the vulnerability of the Elders, their stories, and their desire to teach lore/law and culture, share their heritage, traditions, and language preserving their cultural pride through education, talks, activities, raising awareness in schools and communities.

3.6 *Neembeebe Binang Gana—I look, I listen, I understand*

On my walks along the foreshores of Minjerribah, it is easy to stumble over hidden rocks, driftwood, and find the way temporarily obstructed by a fallen branch or rocky outcrop (see **Figure 13**).

Figure 13. Low tide—Deanbilla Bay, *Minjerribah / Terrangee*.



(J. Macdonald, personal photograph, August 18, 2022).

As a *muragan* [white woman], I have stumbled often, sometimes speaking, or asking questions as a university researcher, forgetting that there are many ways of knowing and it is important that I undertake the work of decolonising my ‘self’. During conversations with the Elders, I have needed to pause, listen, and relinquish my way of seeing the world. I am part of a landscape that is emotional and bewildering and, at times, I feel a sense of disorientation and dislocation from the world I inhabit (Bradley, 2012).

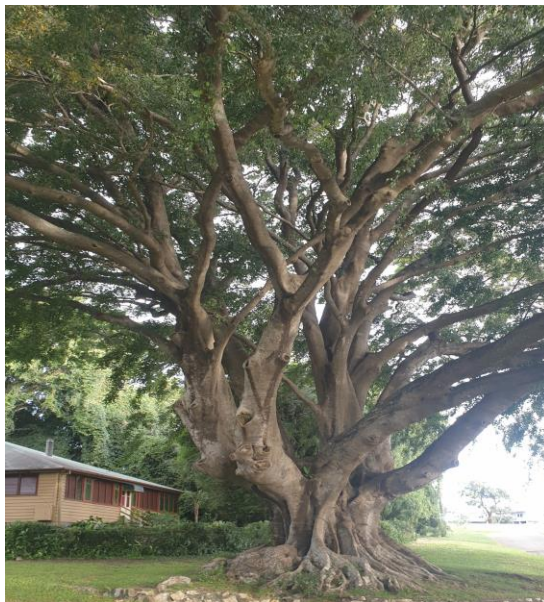
Acknowledging this—and being open to the ways of the First Nations Peoples—is an important aspect of developing cultural awareness and sensitivity. I am challenged by my white privilege as I interact with the MMEIC Elders who have welcomed me. Through

retrospect and introspection, I have sought to understand the “importance of respecting difference and the significant value of self-exploration into one’s own identity” (Heckenberg, 2020, p. 52).

I remind myself to pause, reflect, and take care where I place my feet—tiptoeing softly and carefully as I participate in the cultural interface. During my frequent journeys to the island to visit with the MMEIC Elders, I have been welcomed and included in their cultural awareness programs, taken to visit cultural sites and areas of significance to their group, and encouraged to listen to stories of the past and the connections to the present.

During this process, I have sought to look, listen, and understand as I am welcomed into a world and other knowledge system of which I had little understanding. As I gaze in awe at the immense size of a *ganin* [fig] tree at Goompi (Dunwich) (see **Figure 14**), which the Elders have told me was that size when they were small children, I sense that its complex root structure is entwined with the histories and cultures of the Goenpul, Noonuccal and Ngugi Peoples.

Figure 14. The old *ganin* [fig] tree at Goompi (Dunwich).



(J. Macdonald, personal photograph, May 31, 2022).

The fig tree’s solid and firm base is grounded in, and on Country—its past, present, and future. As the fig tree’s branches reach out to embrace the sun, sea air, and the sky, I see in the shadowy outlines the dark history of the past 200 years. In the light filtering down

between the myriad of leaves, I understand that it is this quality of the natural environment that has exuded an aura of reassurance which is continually reflected in the resilience and durability of First Nations Peoples. This is truly the essence of their connections, relationships and capacity to care for the land, the sea and each other and demonstrates the importance of *Neembeebe Binang Gana* (look, see, understand) for all who visit Minjerribah / Terrangee, part of Quandamooka land and sea Country.

The next part of my journey will explore my experience of the cultural interface as I reconcile Western research methods with Indigenous methodological approaches and devise a framework with the Minjerribah-Moorgumpin Elders that acknowledges, recognises, and respects an ontology that connects existence to country, sea, sky, and all creatures therein, understanding that knowledge is continually evolving and all-encompassing of past, present, and future.

Chapter 4: Signpost 4—The Midden

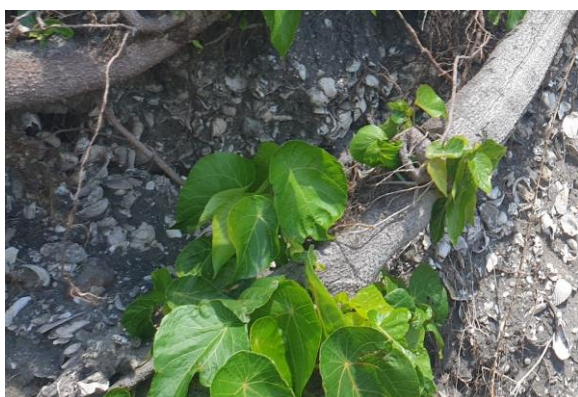
4.1 Introduction

Chapter Four continues my journey to the important ancestral sites on the island of Minjerribah / Terrangee in the First Nations land and sea Country recognised as Quandamooka. I am again in the company of the First Nations Goenpul, Noonuccal and Ngugi Peoples, the Elders of the Minjerribah-Moorgumpin Elders-in-Council (MMEIC) who gently remind me to be ever mindful of their Jandai language words *Neembeebe Binang Gana* [look, listen, understand] (Minjerribah-Moorgumpin Elders-in-Council, 2011, p. 33) which underpinned my previous chapter.

My search for deeper understanding of the concept of Country is outlined in this methodological chapter, beginning with an explanation of the importance of the middens to the Quandamooka First Nations Peoples through millennia (see **Figure 15**).

Middens are the tangible evidence of our intangible heritage and being. The diversity of the layers of the shells determines the age of the area. (Goenpul Jandaiwal MMEIC Elder, Dale Ruska, personal communication, January 11, 2024).

Figure 15. The midden



(J. Macdonald, personal photograph, September 25, 2023).

It is here at this signpost that I contemplate the imperative to understand and respect the axiology of being at one with Country and the interrelatedness of the ontologies and epistemological knowledge of the Elders with whom I am collaborating. This is crucial to finding a respectful methodological approach that captures the complexity in this research of a non-First Nations educator working on this First Nations land and sea Country with the Goenpul, Noonuccal and Ngugi MMEIC Elders. Building on Chapter Three, I again engage with the writings of First Nations scholars through a review of literature that considers Indigenous research methodologies and contextualises my position as an Outsider.

Through *Neembeebe Binang Gana*, I have gained an understanding of the imperative of learning, being, and doing on Country ensuring that the relationality between Country, sea, sky, and all creatures therein must also be an integral component of this chapter. Through this journey I was drawn to the depth and complexity of the middens on Minjerribah which I consider represent the research paradigm of constructivism which underpins this research.

The Arts and arts-based ways of knowing and being are also acknowledged in the midden layers as they support the creation of learning environments that enable exploration, interpretations, and the opportunity to collaboratively develop new cultural knowledge through the Participatory Action Research (PAR) approach. The appropriateness of PAR as a methodological paradigm for a non-First Nations researcher will be presented in this chapter, as will the importance of respectful dialogue and the concept of yarning with the Elders. This is integral to learning **through** culture as a committed participant on Country rather than **about** culture as a detached observer and researcher (Buckskin, 2016; Jackson-Barrett et al., 2015).

This chapter lays the foundation for the implementation of my proposed project in a school where I shall investigate, through a PAR approach, the capacity of the Arts to support non-First Nations teachers in embedding First Nations histories and cultures on the land and sea Country recognised as Quandamooka.

4.2 The midden

The midden is an important metaphor for this chapter as its layers, containing whole and fragmented *Quampi* [shellfish] and other shell remnants of oysters, cockles, mussels and periwinkles (Minjerribah-Moorgumpin Elders-in-Council, 2011, p. 59) reveal the connection between the past and the present symbolising patterns of land use, rituals, and ceremonies (Reeder-Myers et al., 2022) of this Country of land and sea, and its people. The MMEIC Elders

revealed that there are eighty midden sites, if not more, on Minjerribah / Terrangee (Elders personal communication, 12 April 2022).

Being on Minjerribah / Terrangee with the Goenpul, Noonuccal and Nguigi MMEIC Elders, and listening to their voices, I have gained an understanding of the importance of the midden sites described as “large, dense deposits and low mounds” (Reeder-Myers et al., 2022, p. 4). They reveal evidence in ever-deepening layers into the earth of a wide range of foods, including shellfish or ‘*Quampi/ Gwambi*’ shells indicative of the physical presence of First Nations people throughout Australia (Minjerribah-Moorgumpin Elders-in-Council, 2011, p. 59).

Archeological testing of a midden site at Wallen Wallen Creek on Minjerribah has revealed a “deep (>2.5m) stratified archaeological deposit which yielded radiocarbon dates of Pleistocene age” (Neal & Stock, 1986, p. 618). This evidence of continuous Aboriginal presence in the Qld South-East lowlands has been identified back to the Pleistocene (2.58 million to 11,700 years ago) and Holocene eras (last 11,700 years) (Neal & Stock, 1986; Reeder-Myers et al., 2022; Ulm & Hall, 1996).

As I stand at the midden near Goompi / Dunwich on Minjerribah / Terrangee, I observe the bleached *Quampi*, oyster, periwinkle, cockle and mussel shells peeking through the midden, drawing attention to the thousands of years of history buried deep in the earth, now entwined with the roots of mangroves and trees. I listen to the bird cries, the water lapping the mangrove roots, the wind rustling the leaves of the trees, and I hear the voices of the Elders explaining that middens represent thousands of years of meeting, greeting, sharing, laughing, and co-habiting in family groups. These gathering places were always established near fresh water. When the shellfish, and other natural resources, became scarce the family groups moved on to other places on the island, to allow the different sites time to rejuvenate.

We are connected to Country which is land, sea, and sky. It is instinctive and is the nature of our existence – our being. (Elders communication, Minjerribah/Terrangee, 14 March, 2022).

4.3 ‘Oneness’ with Country: Understanding the ‘-ologies’

Throughout millennia encompassing 65,000 years (Weule & James, 2017), Australia’s First Nations Aboriginal Peoples have been intimately aware of their connections and ‘oneness’ with Country, sea and sky, looking after, protecting, and nurturing through

countless generations (Arnold et al., 2021; Harrison & Skrebneva, 2020; Heckenberg, 2018; Lowe et al., 2021; Martin, 2008; Somerville, Tobin, et al., 2019; Sutherland & Adams, 2019; Watson, 2018).

The Kombumerri/WakkaWakka Aboriginal scholar, Mary Graham, calls this a “sacred web of connections” (Graham, 1999, p. 187). It is an axiology that values kinship relationships to the land, to nature, and to all living things. Kinship means sharing Country with the oceans, acknowledging, and understanding the timing of the flourishing of plants and fruits for food and medicinal purposes, and knowing the habitats and lives of myriad of creatures.

This lore has been passed down through thousands of years of storytelling. It is through stories that the customs and traditions, including the axiologies of morals, kinship structures and societal rule, connect to cultural ways of knowing and being and living on Country (Bodkin-Andrews et al., 2016; Bunda et al., 2019; Foley, 2009; Radley et al., 2021; Shay et al., 2022; Slater, 2020; Yunkaporta & Shillingsworth, 2020).

The importance of the millennia of storytelling through artistic expression is what is described by Wiradjuri Elder and scholar, Associate Professor Robyn Heckenberg, as “visual dialogue” (Heckenberg, 2016, p. 2). This visual dialogue created by First Nations people is reflected in the multitude of rock art sites across Australia (Frieman & May, 2020; Tacon, 2019). Tacon (2019, p. 8) acknowledges the knowledge shared by Dharawal Elder Shayne Williams on the importance of such sites:

Our literacy mightn't be in the form of books, but it's physically manifested into the land, like the rock engravings, for example, and paintings... they're a living, breathing part of our culture, just like the land is. And they're like our libraries: we go there and that's where we learn about our culture and heritage. (Dharawal Elder Shayne Williams, 2019).

Rock art sites with their “paintings, drawings, stencils, prints, petroglyphs, finger flutings and figures made of beeswax” (Perry & Holt, 2018; Tacon, 2019, p. 5), are places of cultural heritage. They tell stories with ancestral and spiritual connections that connect the past to the present, shaping personal and collective identity in a cultural landscape that is embedded in an ontological construct of Country.

The ontology of belonging to and being with Country is further strengthened through recognition of the songlines that crisscross the landscape and link the stories across the continent. These songline trails are considered by First Nations Peoples to be the ancestral footprints of journeys undertaken to sustain both the physical and spiritual worlds (Perry & Holt, 2018; Somerville, Tobin, et al., 2019).

Aboriginal scholar, Irene Watson, of the Tanganekald, Meintangk, Boandik First Nations Peoples acknowledges songlines as being definitive of the boundaries between First Nations around Aboriginal Australia (Watson, 2018). The songlines are linking trails which inform the navigational skills of those travelling outside their own Country. Songlines incorporate story events that come from travelling through country, collecting food and engaging in ritual practices that are embedded forever in the landscape and physically manifested in sites such as the middens. (Fuller, 2020; Morrison et al., 2019; Somerville, Tobin, et al., 2019).

Being cognisant of this deep connection to Country is vital to gaining a deeper understanding of the vast array of First Nations cultures and their interrelationships knowing that “without Country there would be no stories, no care, no law, no continuity or sustainability, no transfer of culture and no enrichment and maintenance of cultural practices” (Dolan et al., 2020, p. 38). Henry and Foley (2018) state that the deep relationship with Country “... manifests itself as an ontology of Indigenous reality, together with an epistemology of approaches to Indigenous knowledge within that reality”.

A significant number of Aboriginal scholars and researchers have acknowledged this ontology through methodological approaches which embrace Indigenous thinking and positioning on Country (Bawaka Country including et al., 2023; Bishop, 2021; Bunda et al., 2019; Country Bawaka et al., 2015; Country Bawaka et al., 2016; Heckenberg, 2020; Kwaymullina, 2016; Lowe, 2017; Moodie & Fricker, 2023; Moreton-Robinson, 2013; Shay, 2016; Watson, 2018). As a non-First Nations educator and researcher, I also acknowledge the significance of First Nations methodologies, as I sought to find an appropriate methodology that could align with and respect the ontology of Country.

Through cultural and artistic practices, First Nations Aboriginal languages, beliefs, ceremonies, and social enactments became an integral and cohesive part of an interrelated lived and living experience (Caruana, 2012; Corn, 2020; Heckenberg, 2017; Kelly-Mundine, 2022; Ryder et al., 2020). This led me to the consideration that it is through artistic practices and the support of First Nations knowledge-holders that teachers can embed the First Nations histories and cultures of the Country where they are working into

their pedagogical practice, particularly through the integration of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander CCP in the Australian Curriculum (AC) (Australian Curriculum Assessment and Reporting Authority, [ACARA] 2023).

As I have further developed my understanding of the relationality between Country and cultural identity, I realise that many Australian First Nations Peoples have experienced the ongoing reverberations of colonisation which has resulted in a separation of knowledge from Country. This has subsequently resulted in broken cultural connections which creates inherent complexity.

In discussing this complex situation, Nguigi Noonuccal Elder Aunty Maureen Borey-Myers, MMEIC Elder shared that:

Changing society has meant a loss of lore. It's gone – we can't do anything now from the old ways. (Personal communication, May 6, 2022).

First Nations researchers acknowledge how the impact of removing children from their kin and social networks, known as the 'Stolen Generations' broke familial bonds that included the cultural and spiritual ties to Country (Dunstan et al., 2020; Gilbert, 2019; Turnbull-Roberts et al., 2022). The forcible removal of First Nations children from their families was sanctioned by government policies of assimilation implemented between 1910 and during the 1970s by governments, churches, and welfare bodies. This has left an ongoing, intergenerational impact that has damaged the well-being of First Nations people (Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies, 2020a; Gibson et al., 2020; Gilbert, 2019; Kingsley et al., 2013; Menzies, 2019).

The government's strategy of removing children has resulted in a disconnection from Country and ancestral stories, resulting in an inability to acknowledge and or understand cultural activities and obligations (Foley, 2009; Gilbert, 2019; Kingsley et al., 2013). Awareness of this disconnect has meant that sensitivity is essential in conversations with the MMEIC Elders, about this topic, as I understand that not all questions may be answered and not all knowledge recalled.

4.4 Learning, being and doing on Country

Learning to gain knowledge is a never-ending and lived process. Our ways of living and learning and ways of doing always have a deep ancestral

connection to what has gone before and what is still to come and there must always be a continual connection to Country to ensure cultural credibility and authenticity as lore comes from Country. (MMEIC Elders communication, March 28, 2022).

The words of the MMEIC Elders emphasise the interrelatedness between memory, life, culture, Country, water, and sky through the ongoing connection to Country. This *never-ending lived process* aligns with Aboriginal Koori scholar, Dennis Foley's words that "our epistemology is not static, it is a journey" (Foley, 2009, p. 110).

The importance of the *deep ancestral connection* resonates with First Nations Quandamooka Noonuccal scholar, Karen Martin's "dimensions of Quandamooka ontology" (Martin, 2008; Martin & Mirraboopa, 2003, p. 208). Martin explains that the dimensions of Quandamooka ontology lie not only in the land but the animals and plants, the waterways, the skies, and the spiritual and law systems of the people. It is also evident in the relationships and connections between them. These ontological connections to Country are known through Ways of knowing, being and doing.

Further, Martin advises non-First Nations researchers to have patience and listen, read, observe and wait, share and engage, view and review, before applying and assessing the new knowledge they have learned. The Ways of knowing are more than just information but also form the contexts and processes that unite as Ways of being (Martin, 2008; Martin & Mirraboopa, 2003).

The MMEIC Elders insistence on the importance of their *continual connection to Country* is analogous to Martin's relationality between Country and self and the necessity of ongoing custodianship of Country (Martin, 2008; Martin & Mirraboopa, 2003). Identities, connections, and coexistence within dominant Western constructs have meant ever-changing circumstances affect and impact ways of being. The MMEIC Elders have discussed these complexities in the context of how First Nations people's lives and experiences have changed through government legislation premised on foreign values (Elders communication, January 10, 2024).

Although knowledge and culture can change through the experiences and interactions between people, the Ways of doing ensure verification of *cultural credibility and authenticity* in all areas including "languages, art, imagery, technology, traditions and ceremonies, land management practices, social organisation and social control" (Martin &

Mirraboopa, 2003, p. 210). This requires the articulation of realities and understandings from both the perspective of the individual's identity as well as that of the group. Acknowledging these perspectives is essential for comprehending the interrelatedness of the ontology and epistemology of the MMEIC Goenpul, Noonuccal and Ngugi Peoples of the First Nations land and sea Country recognised as Quandamooka.

As a non-First Nations observer and researcher, I am continually mindful of the need to identify, acknowledge and respect Indigenous research methodologies whose paradigms reflect and embed Aboriginal Ways of knowing, being and doing (Foley, 2009; Graham, 1999; Guenther et al., 2017; Martin, 2017; Martin, 2008; Martin & Mirraboopa, 2003; Yunkaporta & Shillingsworth, 2020).

Somerville and Turner (2020, p. 182) emphasise the importance of understanding that the relationality between all entities, "the visible and centring conceptions of Country" is necessary if non-First-Nation researchers are to avoid the limitations of traditional western research practices that include objective observations, interpretations, and translations. This can result in misappropriation of cultural knowledge through the adaptation and distortion of cultural elements (Foley, 2003; McCartan et al., 2022). Traditional Western research is considered inappropriate and ineffective when exploring Aboriginal perspectives (Ali et al., 2022; Aveling, 2013; Denzin et al., 2008; Rowe et al., 2015).

Additionally, there is the perception that research with First Nations Aboriginal Peoples and their communities should not be undertaken by non-Indigenous researchers (Aveling, 2013; Coombes & Ryder, 2020; Datta, 2018b; Williams & Stewart, 1992). However, others believe such research is possible if the research paradigm involves community control and self-determination and clearly defines the roles, responsibilities and relationships of the researcher with the community, an approach that is included in documents such as the AIATSIS Code of Ethics and the UNDRIP declaration, and also in the MMEIC Elders Code of Ethical Conduct (Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies, 2020a; Dudgeon et al., 2020; Guenther et al., 2017; Minjerribah-Moorgumpin Elders-in-Council Aboriginal Corporation, 2024; United Nations General Assembly, 2007) .

Contemporary approaches to Indigenous research have seen Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander researchers critically examine the philosophical structures and practices that underpin Western knowledge bases (Brady, 1997; Foley, 2003; Martin & Mirraboopa, 2003; Moreton-Robinson, 2000; Nakata, 2002; Rigney, 1999; Williams & Stewart, 1992).

Previous research denied the legitimacy of Indigenous ontologies and epistemologies revealing an “overwhelming collection of so called ‘facts’ and ‘half-truths’ about Indigenous peoples that has contributed to hegemonic colonial construction of Indigenous identities” (Rigney, 2001, p. 22; Smith, 2012).

The linear progression of the Western framework of research deconstructs and compartmentalises the research process through questioning, hypothesising, data collection and analysis, conclusions, and reporting of evidence. This often creates control and ownership over research behaviours and findings (Martin, 2017; Ryder et al., 2020). The Western approach to research has traditionally not valued the ontological significance of the lived experiences of Aboriginal First Nations Peoples nor recognised the interrelatedness of their epistemological knowledge base embedded in Country.

Reflecting on the research approach underpinning this study, I am reminded of the glimpses I have seen of partially exposed *Quampi / Gwambi* and other shells in the midden. I see in this ‘outside’ view an analogy to being an ‘outsider’ researcher (Guenther et al., 2017; McEntyre et al., 2019; Radley et al., 2021). As a *muragan* (white woman), (Minjerribah-Moorgumpin Elders-in-Council, 2011, p. 53), I am limited in what I can see and know, as the invisible and unknown depths of the middens is where knowledge lies.

It is a “complex navigation” (Jackson-Barrett et al., 2015, p. 37) to conduct research that is culturally safe and respectful with the MMEIC Elders. Throughout this process, I must recognise the value of First Nations perspectives, understand the importance of respect and accountability, and be aware that my research is not **on or about**, but **with** the First Nations’ Goenpul, Noonuccal and Ngugi Peoples of the MMEIC (Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies, 2020a; Heckenberg, 2018; Singh & Major, 2017). Therefore, it is imperative that I turn to the voices of Aboriginal scholars, to respectfully examine contemporary Indigenist research methodologies and approaches to research and listen carefully to the voices of the Elders on this journey.

4.5 The voices of others—the literature

4.5.1 Indigenous Research methodologies

The emergence of the discourse of Indigenous research in the latter years of the twentieth century (Nakata, 1997; Rigney, 1999; Smith, 2021) has enabled what Nurrunga Aboriginal scholar, Professor Lester-Irabinna Rigney calls “a quiet methodological revolution” (Rigney, 2001, p. 7). This has been instrumental in drawing attention to the importance of

decolonialisation in relation to the theories and research methods that have embedded the “rhetoric of ‘ancientness’ and ‘oddity’ that is unique to the Australian context” (p. 9).

Rigney (1999) sees the epistemologies and methodologies of Indigenous peoples as being affirmative of knowledge and culture. He has devised three interrelated principles when undertaking Indigenist research, which he describes as the principles of resistance, political integrity, and the privileging of Indigenous voices.

The principle of resistance is premised on the understanding that resistance is needed to emancipate and heal Indigenous Australians from the oppression and subordination to which they have been subjected. He advocates for resistance to the colonial, patriarchal, and Western constructs of research and engagement. Rigney argues that it behoves all educators and scholars to “support the personal, community, cultural, and political struggles of Indigenous Australians” (Rigney, 1999, pp. 116-117).

Together with resistance must come the principle of political integrity whereby Indigenous Australians set a political agenda that is underpinned by social justice. Rigney contends that research contributing to the political agenda must be undertaken by Indigenous Australians. Koori Aboriginal scholar, Dennis Foley (2003) concurs, stating that research undertaken by Indigenous researchers should benefit the communities who are both the participants and owners of their knowledge. This communal holistic approach is supported by Ngāti Awa and Ngāti Porou Māori scholar, Linda Tuhiwai Smith, who writes that as part of the self-determination agenda Indigenous communities should “engage quite deliberately in naming the world according to an indigenous world view” (Smith, 2012, pp. 127-128). This requires the researcher and the community to negotiate, collaborate, participate, contribute, and share all facets of the research with the community to ensure the integrity of the findings (Foley, 2003).

Rigney’s third principle describes the necessity of privileging Indigenous voices in research with a focus on “lived, historical experiences, ideas, traditions, dreams, interests, aspirations, and struggles of Indigenous Australians” (1999, p. 117). Indigenist researchers understand and support the struggle for self-determination. It incorporates recognition of Indigenous historical, political and social contexts while acknowledging and giving privilege to the voices and lived experiences of Australia’s Indigenous and First Nations people (Bishop, 2021; Evans et al., 2014; Foley, 2003; Guenther et al., 2017; Henry & Foley, 2018; Martin, 2017; Martin & Mirraboopa, 2003; McEntyre et al., 2019; Moreton-Robinson, 2013; Rioux et al., 2018; Singh & Major, 2017). For non-Indigenous

researchers, therefore, these three principles emphasise the relationality, interrelatedness, and complexity underpinning Indigenous research methodology.

Indigenous Standpoint Theory (IST) acknowledges the imperative that Indigenous Australians must “research the survival and celebration of Indigenous Australia's resistance struggle” (Foley, 2003, p. 48). Foley iterates that the foundation of IST includes critical theory, whose goal is to emancipate individuals and groups from conditions of domination and oppression. This enables people the freedom to take control of their lives with this liberation leading to a reformation of society (Rigney, 1999).

However, achieving true liberation requires acknowledgement and support of community political struggles, which also aligns with Rigney’s second principle of political integrity (Foley, 2003; Rigney, 1999). Denzin et al. (2008) concur and further emphasise that self-determination and empowerment is supported through the grounding of the “specific meanings, traditions, customs, and community relations that operate in each (individual) indigenous setting” (p. 7). This is a particularly important consideration when one acknowledges that there are over 250 First Nations in Australia with differing languages, cultural practices, stories, and beliefs (Althaus, 2020; Ford et al., 2018; Langton & Perkins, 2008; Moreton-Robinson, 2003; Thompson, 2018; Weule & James, 2017).

IST enables the researcher to explore and explain the interrelatedness of the human, the physical, and the sacred worlds that encapsulate “the physical and metaphysical aspects of Indigenous knowledge” (Foley, 2003, p. 49). Therefore, research must be flexible and emancipatory and “applicable for numerous Indigenous if not all Indigenous nations” (p. 50). This is apparent in the case study approach undertaken by three Indigenous researchers—Ngarrindjeri archaeologist, Christopher Wilson, *Anangu puliri* / granddaughter / learner / teacher, Simone Ulalka Tur, and Yidnji / MBarbaram woman and educator, Faye Rosas Blanch (Tur et al., 2010).

As part of this case study, each of these researchers worked in different community contexts. Wilson worked with “Ngarrindjeri interpretations of Ruwe (country) and the archaeological record in the lower Murray River” (p. 58), Tur, an *Anangu* educator, examined the *Anangu* philosophy of *Ngapartji Ngapartji* (reciprocation) and its possible use as a pedagogical practice. Blanch, a Murri academic whose standpoint has emerged in her ongoing response to the “call” and subsequent conversations with colleagues centred her research with young Nunga males to develop a “rappin’ methodology” (p. 58). These three approaches reveal how the researchers were able to articulate their personal

Indigenous standpoints and further develop their own methodological approach to produce beneficial outcomes for their Indigenous communities (Tur et al., 2010).

Foley posits that IST practitioners must be Indigenous and aware of the limitations of critical Western approaches. Such approaches can often be predicated on “dominant patriarchal paradigms, which discursively privilege men as knowing subjects, by exposing the partiality of the universal male standpoint” (Moreton-Robinson, 2013, p. 332). The research must benefit and be recorded, if possible, in traditional language for the communities who are the owners of their knowledge. Aboriginal scholar, Daniele Hromek of the Budawang tribe of the Yuin nation, acknowledges Māori scholar, Linda Tuhiwai Smith’s (2012) contention that Indigenous researchers must not segment their work into disciplines but focus on the individual and the goal of self-determination with theories that are integrative, ethical, and holistic (Hromek, 2019).

Aboriginal scholar and Kamilaroi woman, Chontel Gibson (2020), argues that IST is fundamental to the privileging of the voices of Indigenous people. It allows for opportunities to reflect on relationships, knowledge, and experiences from “genuine and meaningful social and cultural perspectives in a way that respects the connections between people, ancestors, culture, and spirituality” (Gibson et al., 2020, p. 195). Her research approach uses ‘yarning’ (storytelling) to privilege and encourage “individual members to share their lived experiences and stories, as well as spiritually (and therefore, culturally) connect with other yarning members” (p. 196).

4.5.2 On being the ‘outsider’

Both Rigney (1999) and Foley (2003) argue that one needs to belong to the group being researched, rather than being on the outside. Foley also states that “non-indigenous Australia cannot and possibly will not understand the complexities of Indigenous Australia at the same level of empathy as an Indigenous Australian researcher can achieve” (p. 46). He also argues that there will be a purity and untaintedness of research outcomes if Indigenous research is enacted by Indigenous researchers.

Herein lies my dilemma, for I am a *muragan* [white woman] (Minjerribah-Moorgumpin Elders-in-Council, 2011, p. 53) and therefore, an outsider working with Elders on Country. Throughout this research, I have constantly reflected on the partnership between myself and the Elders, which includes being authentic and respectful, and taking time to learn on Country about their ways of knowing and being (Althaus, 2020; Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies, 2020a). During this research, I

have been conscious of not “unwittingly perpetuating colonising practices and thus further marginalising Indigenous peoples” (McEntyre et al., 2019, p. 5). I understand it is not possible for a non-First-Nation researcher such as myself to engage in Indigenous Standpoint theories and methodologies (Guenther et al., 2017). However, through this journey, I learned that it is possible to “adopt positions that are congruent with the goals and needs of Indigenous peoples in a respectful way” (Guenther et al., 2017, p. 200). By undertaking reflexive practices that allow for critical reflection, openness, honesty, a commitment to accuracy of representation, and, most importantly, acceptance of the guidance of First Nations participants, it is possible to undertake culturally appropriate and responsible research as a cultural outsider (McEntyre et al., 2019).

The advice of my supervisor Associate Professor Robyn Heckenberg, a Wiradjuri Elder, academic researcher and artist, has been to walk carefully and softly, listening always. This guidance resonates with that of Aboriginal Quandamooka scholar, Karen Martin whose thesis was titled, *Knock before you enter – an investigation of how rainforest Aboriginal people regulate outsiders and the implications for western research and researchers* (Martin, 2008). It is gratifying that both Heckenberg and Martin do not deny the capacity of non-Indigenous researchers such as myself to be culturally sensitive, but I am aware that this also comes with the requirement for respect, responsibility, and the importance of critical reflexivity on my own position as a non-Indigenous researcher.

Together with Aveling (2013), I am “white, female and a feminist ...with children and grandchildren, ...and a teacher educator” (p. 204). In questioning whether non-Indigenous researchers should attempt to research with/in Indigenous communities, Aveling contends that it is critical to conduct research in ways that meet the needs of Indigenous communities and are “non-exploitative, culturally appropriate and culturally safe” (p. 204). However, if this not possible, we need to “relinquish our roles as researchers within Indigenous contexts and make way for Indigenous researchers” (p. 204). Further, she argues that non-Indigenous researchers can take on the role of an ally working with Indigenous researchers, accepting that mistakes will be made by feeling discomfort and confronting the inherent white privilege of non-Indigenous researchers. In doing so, we pay attention to cultural protocols that include being responsible and respectful in all relationships, being able to reciprocate, ensuring relevance and continually undertaking a reflective approach.

In the context of this research, Denzin et al. (2017) posit that stories are embedded in landscapes which tell of resistance, struggles, and hopes. Such narratives and

counternarratives must be recognised, respected and provided for in safe spaces, enabling and supporting positive collaborations and reflections with non-Indigenous and Indigenous researchers.

I feel hopeful that in constructing stories from the landscapes of Minjerribah / Terrangee and the waters of Quandamooka Bay, I am carefully observing the spaces between the midden shells and, in this process, recognise and value the embedded knowledge deep below the surface. Bundjalung, Muruwari and Kamilaroi Aboriginal scholar and artist, Brian Martin (2017), writes of the importance of researchers being able to create “an ontological space of cultural ideology in order to reaffirm the cohesion between life, culture, Country, practice and memory” (p. 1395). This cohesion recognises the ontology of an Indigenous mode of thinking in which methodological approaches and content are interconnected and inseparable, as opposed to Western research practices that often separate method and content.

Martin (2017) recommends that careful negotiation between Western and Indigenous modes of thinking is essential and reflects a “kind of shimmering that allows the argument and illumination to come through” (p. 1395). This can occur when the ontological connections of First Nations people to Country and their lived experiences are valued and respected. I see this as a dialogical approach to learning (Rowe et al., 2015) and respectfully acknowledge with gratitude the opportunities I have been given to gain deeper understandings and insights that I have received on my visits to Minjerribah / Terrangee through conversations with the Goenpul, Noonuccal and Ngugi Elders of the MMEIC. I see in these understandings a connection to Martin’s concept of ‘shimmering’ in the negotiated space between the Western and Indigenous knowledge systems and the contested space which is known as the ‘cultural interface’. (Nakata, 1997, 2002, 2007a, 2010; Yunkaporta, 2009).

4.5.3 The cultural interface

In 1997, Torres Strait Islander scholar, Martin Nakata, premised his doctoral thesis on the “two 'realities' (that) have met historically at the interface of (Torres Straits) Islander experience and Western knowledge systems” (p. xii) which he described as the cultural interface (Nakata, 1997, 2002, 2007a, 2007b, 2010, 2011; Nakata et al., 2012). It is within this interface that it is possible for true reconciliation to occur between Western research methods and Indigenous methodological approaches. The requirement is for acknowledgement, recognition, and respect for an ontology that connects existence to

Country, sea, sky, and all creatures therein, and the understanding that knowledge is continually evolving and all-encompassing of the past, present, and future.

Māori academic, Sir Mason Durie, also understood the distinct differences between two systems with differing values, methods, and understandings. He supports Nakata's contention that research at the interface "attempts to utilise two sets of values and methods not simply to bridge the benefits that might arise from each, but ultimately to produce gains for indigenous peoples most of whom live at the interface" (Durie, 2004, p. 8). These gains include "economic growth, environmental sustainability, social wellbeing, and cultural integrity" (p. 9) which can develop from the new insights, knowledge and understandings that come from research within the interface. His imperative that research in this interface must be principled on mutual respect, shared benefit, human dignity, and discovery aligns with Martin and Mirra-Boopa's (2003) requirement for flexibility and reflexivity in research to maintain cultural safety and respect.

Nakata recognises the cultural interface as the place where our lives are conditioned, our futures shaped, and where we become active agents in our own decision-making processes. Through this research journey, I have become increasingly aware that First Nations people are consistently positioned in the cultural interface as they participate in a society premised on western hegemonic values.

The tension and confrontations that come with decolonising and affirming Indigenous cultural representations within the interface and the imperative of negotiation have been acknowledged in educational research (Burgess et al., 2022; Kearney et al., 2014; Maxwell et al., 2018; McGloin, 2009; McGloin & Carlson, 2013). From a schooling perspective, Kearney et al. (2014), note the tension that occurs in educational institutions as Indigenous knowledge is interpreted through a Western framework lens. Burgess et al. (2022, p. 2), highlight the "hierarchical alignment of power" that sees an educational landscape underpinned by government-imposed frameworks that value standardised learning for accountability and school structures in which principals and school staff are constantly negotiating to improve student outcomes. Invariably in such a context, First Nations perspectives and experiences, and the embedding of authentic First Nations cultural understandings and knowledge is minimised (Maxwell et al., 2018; Shay & Lampert, 2022).

McGloin and Carlson (2013) suggest that there is an imperative for critical understanding of how language and terminology can work as "colonial tools" (p. 5). This includes the way in which language can position others through a naming process, as it is

important to consider how Indigenous people have been historically represented through various forms of representation, including language and image. Indeed, “certain stereotypical images and familiar modes of expression have become so naturalised that they can appear “... ‘harmless’ or ‘inoffensive’ ” (p. 5). Nakata (2007a) draws attention to the circumscribing of Indigenous knowledge representations through the English language.

On considering the way language can position others, I recall my conversations with the MMEIC Elders in relation to the name changes that occurred after colonisation on Minjerribah / Terrangee. This included the denial and then later reclamation of the Jandai Language of First Nations land and sea Country recognised as Quandamooka and the continuing discussions on the meaning and authenticity of many words in Jandai language, culminating in the publication of the Jandai Language Dictionary (Minjerribah-Moorgumpin Elders-in-Council, 2011).

I realise that I must interrogate and challenge the stereotypes and misrepresentations of First Nations people that were a part of my own school education, if I am to support and promote respectful and accurate practices. Torres Strait Islander nursing academic and Meriam and Wuthathi man, Ali Drummond, exemplifies this as he writes of negotiation, tension, and the confrontations he has faced in his teaching of Indigenous health, through which he constantly seeks to critique, challenge, and promote change to western practices:

Indigenous ways of knowing, being and doing can optimise the learning and teaching experiences regarding Indigenous health for all nursing students.

They enable my practice that takes students and tutors into the cultural interface between Western and Indigenous knowledges. (Drummond, 2020, p. 133).

Drummond’s practices within the interface between Western and Indigenous knowledges are substantiated by the weaving methodology undertaken by Aboriginal scholars, Courtney Ryder, a Nunga woman, Tamara Mackean, a Waljen woman, Julieann Coombs, a Kamilaroi woman, and Hayley Williams, an Anaiwan woman. These First Nations scholars were concerned that the quantitative nature of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health research has seen research framed through a colonial framework of deficit and whiteness and that the knowledges and voices of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders were missing.

It is important that “Aboriginal ways of knowing, being, and doing, along with Western quantitative research approaches” (p. 259), intertwine and are woven together to ensure that knowledge is drawn from each of the Indigenous and Western knowledge and methodologies in order to strengthen research practices and protect research outcomes. The weaving methodology process is respectful and safe with its “central focus on mutual respect, benefit and cultural integrity for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities” (Ryder et al., 2020, p. 263). **(Figure 16)**

Figure 16. Weaving a methodology for research.

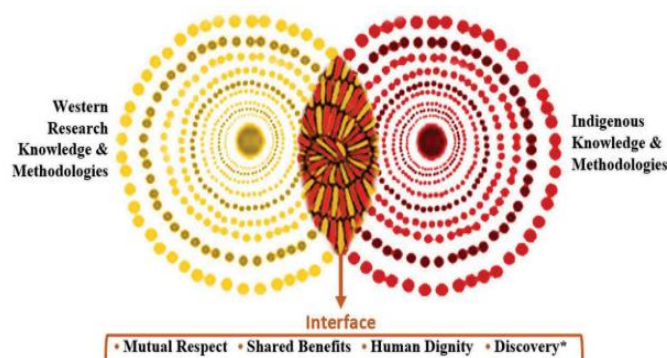


Figure 1. Visual representation of weaving a methodology for ‘research at the interface’ for the first author. * The interface for science and Indigenous knowledges from Durie 2004 (Durie, 2004a).

(Ryder et al., 2020, p. 259).

The weaving approach engaged in by Ryder, McKean, Coombes, and Williams (Ryder et al., 2020), does not privilege Western knowledge constructs and assumptions but acknowledges and recognises the value of working “alongside and among western worldviews and realities” (Martin & Mirraboopa, 2003, p. 205). This can be done whilst adhering to the relatedness inherent in Aboriginal ontology and epistemology. It is my hope that through the art forms of dance, drama, media arts, music and visual arts educators will be able to gain an understanding of this relatedness in relation to the Indigenous knowledge of the Goenpul, Noonuccal and Ngugi MMEIC Elders of Minjerribah/Terrangee.

However, it is confronting to contemplate Best and Bunda’s research which revealed that colonisation with its mandate of protectionism and segregation “saw a devastating decline in the health of Indigenous peoples as they lost access to their traditional health practices and medicines” (Best & Bunda, 2020, p. 622). This finding

aligns with the current issues inherent in the Western education system with its persistent calls to “close the gap” between the learning outcomes of First Nations Australian students and non-First Nations students (Australian Curriculum Assessment and Reporting Authority, 2021).

There is an assumption that Indigenous students are disadvantaged and deficient, and that they are participants in their own schooling failures (Bishop, 2021; Brown, 2019; Kelly & Rigney, 2022; Lowe et al., 2019; Maxwell et al., 2018). However, this perception does not recognise that educational curricula in Australia has consistently included and reinforced Western and colonial perspectives, denying a balanced account of colonisation history and reinforcing the dominance of western civilisation (Bishop et al., 2021; Bodkin-Andrews & Carlson, 2016b; Booth & Allen, 2017).

The interface with its “shifting and complex intersections between different people with different histories, experiences, languages, agendas, aspirations and responses” (Nakata, 2007b, p. 326) can be a place for progressive dialogue between First Nations and non-First Nations people but participant engagement must be premised on respectful negotiations and collaboration and commitment to partnerships (Bainbridge et al., 2015; Guenther et al., 2017; Lawrence et al., 2022; Lowe et al., 2021; McGinty, 2012; Turner et al., 2017). Commitment means time and the process can be slow, but as I stand at the midden, and look at the remains of the *Quampi/gwampi* and other shells, I feel a strong commitment and determination to walk gently and to be guided on this journey by the Goenpul, Noonuccal and Ngugi MMEIC Elders.

4.6 The Midden and the Quampi shellfish

The quampi (gwambi) is one of our staple foods. It is a shellfish found in the inside banks and shoreline of the bay. As well as supplying us with an important food, the shell can produce pearls and the shell is mother-of-pearl (Minjerribah-Moorgumpin Elders-in-Council, 2011, p. 59). (see

Figure 17).

Figure 17. *Quampi* shells.



(J. Macdonald, personal photograph, January,11, 2024).

4.6.1 *At the midden*

The multitude of differing and fractured shapes and sizes of the shells in the midden at *Goompi* (Dunwich) symbolises how the knowledge system and histories of the Goenpul, Noonuccal and Ngugi Peoples has been pushed and prodded, destroyed, and reimagined until only a fraction remains visible (Foley, 2009). Many of the midden shells are fractured and broken and one can only catch glimpses of them, intertwined as they are within the midden. (see **Figure 18**)

Figure 18. The midden shells—*Goompi, Minjerribah / Terrangee*.



(J. Macdonald, personal photograph, October 26, 2021).

However, as with the ancient trees on the island whose roots go deep in the earth, so too are the *Quampi/Gwambi* shells, and others, deep in the earth. Their shapes may well be as different, but the iridescence of the mother-of-pearl lining the *Quampi* shells, despite their depth and damage, speaks of the continuity and interrelatedness of being on Country, surrounded by the sea and the sky. The pearl produced within the shell can be likened to the wisdom and knowledge of ancestors passed down to the Elders of today. Again, I see the interrelatedness between these traditional owners, the land and the sea, the trees, and the buried shells that make up the layers within the middens. It is First Nations Country where all is one and one is all.

With a heightened awareness of Aboriginal deep connections to Country, I am apprehensive about using Western knowledge research terms to identify my own position and research approach. Aboriginal scholar, Tyson Yunkaporta, a Bama of Nunga and Koori descent, and Doris Shillingsworth, Gandugari Elder of the Murrawarri Nation, (Bilton et al., 2020) recognise ontology as coming from the heart, epistemology from the mind, and walking with your feet on country to build your methodology. I think of conversations with the Elders and the expression “*Minyangu nginda ngariba?*” (Minjerribah-Moorgumpin Elders-in-Council, 2011, p. 56) which, in Jandai language means, “What are you talking about?” In recognition of, and respect for, Aboriginal Quandamooka scholar, Karen Martin, who developed her own theoretical framework based on Ways of Knowing, Being and Doing (2008), I am encouraged to construct a layering approach within my research as I search for the answer to my overarching research question: To what extent can non-First Nations primary school educators utilise the arts to support the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders Histories and Cultures CCP within their classroom?

4.6.2 *Minyangu nginda ngariba?* [What are you talking about?].First layer—my constructivist paradigm

As I ponder the thousands of years of the construction of the middens, I realise that my ontology is grounded in the earth and the living, growing natural environment whose resources have nurtured First Nations peoples for millennia. This is my reality which began as a young child growing up on the land and waters in the country of First Nations Jagera / Ugarapul Peoples then as an adult living on the land and waters of the First Nations Butchulla Peoples, and now, as a Meanjin (Brisbane) resident on Turrbal Jagera Country. It

has developed and been further constructed through my continuing visits and discussions with the MMEIC Elders on Minjerribah / Terrancee.

Constructivism, as a philosophical paradigm, focuses on the construction of meaning and acknowledges that the world which we inhabit is both complex, energetic, and dynamic and that knowledge is a socially and culturally constructed product of humanity (Aliyu et al., 2015). Meaning is shaped through social processes of human agency that acknowledge the individual perspectives of people whose experiences and interactions with each other in both social and cultural environments allow them to construct their own understandings and knowledge of the world.

Adom et al. (2016), Jung (2019), Kanselaar (2002), Rannikmäe et al. (2020) and Kim (2014) are cognisant of the subjectivity of constructivism recognising that individual meanings are personal, evolve from experiences, and can become part of new knowledge structures that are built on changing beliefs and attitudes. The MMEIC Elders speak of the evolving nature of culture, and that its meanings and values stress the importance of authenticity and truth as being the foundations for cultural integrity.

You have to walk the walk on Country before you talk the talk about

Country. (Personal communication, MMEIC Elders, January 12, 2024).

The approach utilised in this thesis also recognises socio-constructivism, a subdivision of constructivism with its practices entailing approaches that focus on dialogic interactions through an active and socially engaged process. Data collected through activity, discourse and reflections acknowledge the complexity and unique perspectives of individuals and are integral to the construction of meaning (Brau et al., 2020; Kim, 2014).

A constructivist paradigm allows for an interpretivist epistemological perspective as interpretivism enables researchers to explore and interpret world views through gathering data that is reflective of people's perceptions and experiences in the world (Thanh & Thanh, 2015). Interpretivism allows for the gaining of new knowledge through reciprocal interactions and collaborative dialogue between the researcher and the researched (Aliyu et al., 2015; Kim, 2014; Sipe & Constable, 1996) and strengthens the understanding that knowledge is not static but evolving (Grix, 2002). This approach aligns with Nakata's belief that within the cultural interface "all Knowledge systems are culturally embedded, dynamic, respond to changing circumstances and constantly evolve" (Nakata, 2002, p. 286).

It is through my personal experiences and interactions with the MMEIC Elders and the First Nations community on Minjerribah / Terrangee that I have been able to construct new meanings and knowledge of the diversity of First Nations cultures, traditions, lore and beliefs, both past and present. This has strengthened my understanding of the constructivist paradigm which accepts that the phenomena and realities that are produced through the social and cultural contexts and interactions of human experience are constantly changing, revising and restructuring (Grix, 2002; Kim, 2014; Mirza, 2016).

It is in this layer that I see the remains of the *Quampi/Gwambi*, the oyster, periwinkle, cockle and mussel shells, as they protrude from the earth, and wonder at the social and cultural interactions between the Goenpul, Noonuccal and Ngugi Peoples of this First Nations land and sea Country. Goenpul Elder Auntie Mary Iselin-Burgess and Nguigi-Noonuccal Elder Auntie Maureen Borey-Myers reveal that the middens are:

...our indications of where communities lived and shared social times and knowledge – They are the remnants of feasting and celebrations. Food not used was returned to Country and left as a marker for the future. Groups returned at later times and would know where to camp – always near fresh water – always a creek nearby. (Personal communication, September 15, 2022).

As the Aunties have shared their perceptions and knowledge of their world through their stories and their lived experiences, I have gained a deeper understanding of the social construct of their realities and gained new meanings from which to develop my new knowledge structure (Holden & Lynch, 2004; Oancea & Punch, 2014).

The Goenpul, Noonuccal and Ngugi Peoples of this First Nations land and sea Country known as Quandamooka have continually been faced with the necessity for change, revision and restructuring as they inhabit a cultural interface between two disparate knowledge systems. This is also a requirement for me, as a non- Indigenous researcher, working with them in their home community on Minjerribah / Terrangee.

4.6.3 *Minyangu nginda ngariba? [What are you talking about?] Second layer—the Arts*

Through millennia, the cultural practices of Australia's First Nations people have been centred within a spiritual, natural, and moral ideological framework (Caruana, 2012; Dolan et al., 2020; Heckenberg, 2018; Skerritt et al., 2016). This is a vital and integral part to understanding and embracing Australian First Nation Peoples cultures and ways of seeing, hearing and knowing (Dolan et al., 2020).

For thousands of years, communities have come together at the middens on Minjerribah / Terrangee to feast, celebrate, sing, dance, and tell stories, all of which is symbolised through the deeper layers of the *midden* shells, returned to the earth. It is through such cultural practices that the human race has discovered humanity, constructed new understandings through personal connections and emotions, gained insight and empathy into the experiences and lives of others, and acquired fresh perspectives of human experiences (Braund & Reiss, 2019; Dinham, 2023; Eisner, 2002a; Gibson & Ewing, 2020; Magsamen & Battro, 2011).

As an Arts educator, I am aware of my constructivist position and a social construction of reality that is manifested through the capacity of humanity to express ideas, beliefs and communicate and transmit knowledge and information through the cultural and artistic practices of stories, artworks, dance and music (Dinham, 2023; Dissanayake, 2015; Goldberg, 2021; Sinclair et al., 2017).

4.6.4 *Minyangu nginda ngariba? [What are you talking about?] Third layer—explore, interpret, collaborate*

There is acknowledgement that research can be seen as encompassing explorations, investigations, and interpretations of collected data through organised processes of inquiry to discover meaning and greater understanding of the world (Mackenzie & Knipe, 2006; Oancea & Punch, 2014). Qualitative social science research is based on the perspectives, experiences, and observations of people within their life contexts (Oancea & Punch, 2014; Thanh & Thanh, 2015). It supports and enables multiple perspectives of participatory, collaborative, and holistic research in the construction of new knowledge.

A researcher's worldview, their set of beliefs and assumptions about life and reality are divergent and influence the way in which data is interpreted and meaning constructed. (Grix, 2002; Kim, 2014; Kivunja & Kuyini, 2017). I can acknowledge an ontological social construct of reality and an interpretivist epistemological perspective as a Western

academic, however the Elders with whom I am collaborating and communicating will ask “Minyangu nginda ngariba?” [“What are you talking about?”] (Minjerribah-Moorgumpin Elders-in-Council, 2011, p. 56).

I ponder the midden layers and the guidance of Aboriginal scholars who warn of the pitfalls for a non-Indigenous person working in an Indigenous space (Foley, 2003; Guenther et al., 2017; Martin et al., 2020; Rigney, 1999, 2001b). I realise that I must establish and understand this new environment in my position as an outsider. I am guided by documents such as the Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies (AIATSIS) Code of Ethics for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Research (Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies, 2022). This document has been informed by the *United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples* (United Nations General Assembly, 2007). These documents include principles that encompass recognition and respect, engagement and collaboration, informed consent, cultural capability and learning, Indigenous perspectives, and participation when undertaking research with First Nations Peoples.

As I consider my responsibilities to the Goenpul, Noonuccal and Ngugi Elders of MMEIC, I contemplate a framework that will encapsulate their social and cultural contexts through a process of respectful engagement. The photograph below (**Figure 19**), reveals the reality of my ontology, which has been informed through conversation and collaboration with the MMEIC Elders. The ocean is ever-present, and the tress become the metaphor for the construction of new knowledge—always growing and branching out in new directions. My journey cannot be undertaken without the support and encouragement of the MMEIC Elders as they show me how to interpret their wisdom and knowledge authentically and respectfully.

Figure 19. Ontology of land, sea, and the Elders.



(J. Macdonald, personal photographs, October 25, 2021).

4.7 A learning environment

As a non-First Nations woman [*muragan*] (Minjerribah-Moorgumpin Elders-in-Council, 2011, p. 53) working within the cultural interface, my learning environment must acknowledge and respect the interconnection between First Nations Peoples and Country and the relationality between the self and others. This comes from reciprocity, obligation, and cooperation (Martin, 2008; Moodie, 2019; Moreton-Robinson, 2000).

Throughout this study, I have adopted a “relationally responsive approach (which) seeks dialogue, synergy and innovation in the respectful interaction of diverse systems” (Yunkaporta & Shillingsworth, 2020, p. 10). This has enabled me to maintain a position of integrity and to “negotiate pathways, metalanguages and shared understandings within local knowledge frameworks and protocols” (Yunkaporta & Shillingsworth, 2020, p. 10). Yunkaporta and Shillingsworth suggest that there is a four- step process to being relationally responsible, respectful and connected:

1. *Respect – aligned with values and protocols of introduction, setting rules and boundaries.*
2. *Connect – establishing strong relationships and routines of exchange that are equal for all involved.*
3. *Reflect - thinking as part of the group and collectively establishing a shared body of knowledge to inform what you will do.*
4. *Direct - acting on that shared knowledge in ways that are negotiated by all.* (Yunkaporta & Shillingsworth, 2020, pp. 11-12).

I see the roots, branches and leaves of the *Ganin* [fig] trees at *Goompi* (Dunwich) and the *Burogari* [cypress pines] at Deanbilla Bay as metaphors for the four steps of Respect, Connect, Reflect, and Direct (Yunkaporta and Shillingsworth (2020). *Respect* is hidden deep in the roots which provide the life-force of the tree—without the roots firmly anchored in the ground there will be no life and without respect there can be no connections. The branches of the trees are all *connected* and become the metaphor for the necessity of relationships. It is in the rustling of the canopy of the leaves that thinking, and

reflection can occur, feeling a gentle breeze and listening to the sounds created. Returning to the roots of the trees gives us a metaphor for *direction* and ways in which we can negotiate and share knowledge, again with respect. It is within this learning environment that the Participatory Action Research (PAR) paradigm resonates. (see **Figure 20**).

Figure 20: The *Burogari* [cypress pines] at Deanbilla Bay.



(J. Macdonald, personal photograph, May 31, 2022).

4.7.1 Connecting the layers—Participatory Action Research (PAR)

It is acknowledged that the concept of Participatory Action Research (PAR) evolved in post-World War Two through the work of social psychologist, Kurt Lewin. He believed that research should seek to engender positive change through a participatory process of collaboration between all those involved (Adelman, 1993; Barnett, 2015; Burnes & Bargal, 2017). Kemmis et al. (2014) state that Lewin “described action research in terms of a cycle of steps which included planning a change, putting the plan into action, observing what happened, and re-formulating the plan in the light of what happened” (p. 18).

G. MacNaughton and P. Hughes (2008) suggest that creating change requires phases that often overlap through thinking and reflecting as research participants choose to change, plan for change, create change, and share the lessons of change. (see **Figure 21**)

Figure 21. The Action Research Cycle.

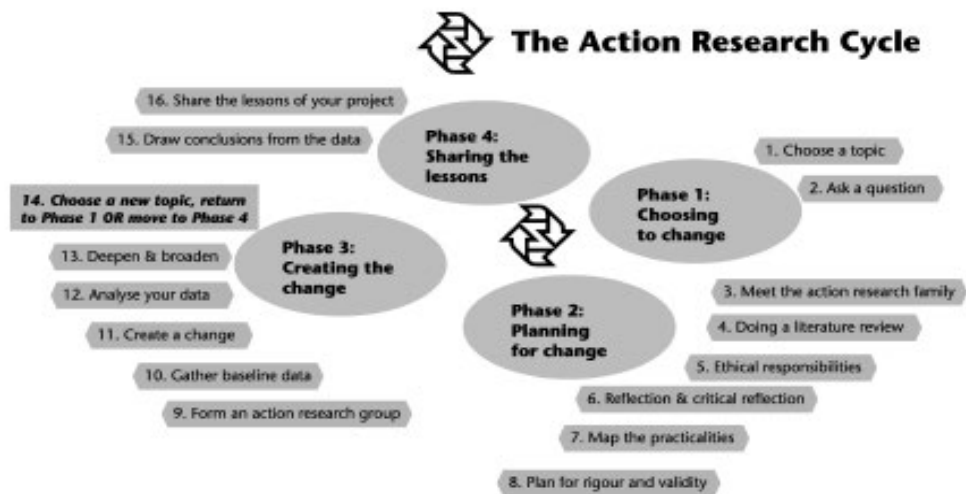


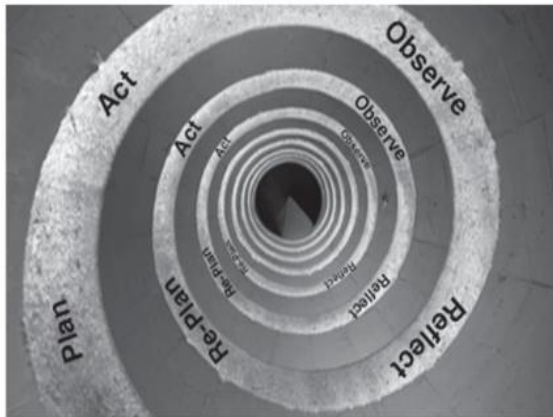
Figure 1.1 The action research cycle.

The Action Research Cycle (G. MacNaughton & P. Hughes, 2008).

Self-reflection whereby “our thinking informs our practice, and our practice informs our further thinking” (G. MacNaughton & P. Hughes, 2008, p. 1) enables perceptive insights that can lead to new ways of thinking and new directions. This organic and fluid aspect of PAR demonstrates a recursive process that resists the traditional linear approach to Western research (McIntyre, 2007).

The cyclic spiral, as proposed by Kemmis et al. (2014) (see **Figure 22**), is more than a series of steps but a fluid, responsive and social approach to collaborative learning. These steps include planning change, acting and observing the process of change, reflecting on consequences of change and then re-planning, acting, observing and reflecting again as the cycle repeats.

Figure 22. The Action Research Spiral



The Action Research Spiral (Kemmis et al., 2014, p. 19).

It is important to note that PAR is not predicated on the traditional research practices where the researcher is a separate entity designing, directing and conducting research projects (Lake & Wendland, 2018; Zuber-Skerritt, 2018). Rather, it is a collaborative, social, and community-led approach where participants are recognised for their diverse ways of knowing as they choose and plan to make changes to strengthen their knowledge and develop new practices (Benjamin-Thomas et al., 2018; Datta et al., 2015; Dudgeon et al., 2017; Noffke & Somekh, 2012).

As a non-First Nations researcher, I remain critically aware of my privileged position as an educator and researcher with the cultural identity that comes with an Anglo-Saxon heritage, and the significant insights that the MMEIC Elders have provided through this collaboration.

My increasing awareness of the nuances within the cultural knowledge of community through retelling of stories, the use of language, and the acknowledgement of Elders long-passed, highlighted the complexities of the cultural interface. The Elders described the disconnect and the fragmentation of knowledge that resulted from colonialism and denied generations of First Nations knowledge holders the opportunity to pass down stories, language and histories.

PAR supports the development of change through the understanding that living and interacting within a social and shared world means understanding how the actions of others emanate from their lived experiences and actions (Armstrong, 2019; Baum et al., 2006; Benjamin-Thomas et al., 2018; Brydon-Miller et al., 2020; Kemmis & McTaggart, 2007; McNamara & McNamara, 2011). As a methodological framework, PAR empowers

participants through a respectful dialogic and collaborative process with researchers who are also part of the participant research context (Armstrong, 2019).

When working with First Nations communities, researchers must have insight into the needs, cultural values, and customs of the communities with whom they are collaborating. This approach also aligns with the PAR paradigm. The *National Empowerment Project* (NEP), which commenced in 2012, used PAR as a localised process in Aboriginal-led communities in Western Australia (Dudgeon et al., 2017). PAR enabled these communities to actively engage in the research processes through collaboratively designing, delivering and analysing the direction and development of the PAR strategies to improve health-related outcomes in their communities.

The successful implementation of PAR in Aboriginal communities is further substantiated by Scrine et al. (2022), whose five-year *Ngulluk Koolunga Ngulluk Koort* project in Perth, Western Australia—exploring early childhood development of First Nations children—emphasised “local participation, collective decision-making and empowerment through group activity” (p. 5). Both the NEP and *Ngulluk Koolunga Ngulluk Koort* projects noted inclusion of community Elders as essential for the authenticity, legitimacy and authority of the process for the research, including the findings, and a necessary requirement for the expectation of reciprocity and respect as part of a genuine participatory approach.

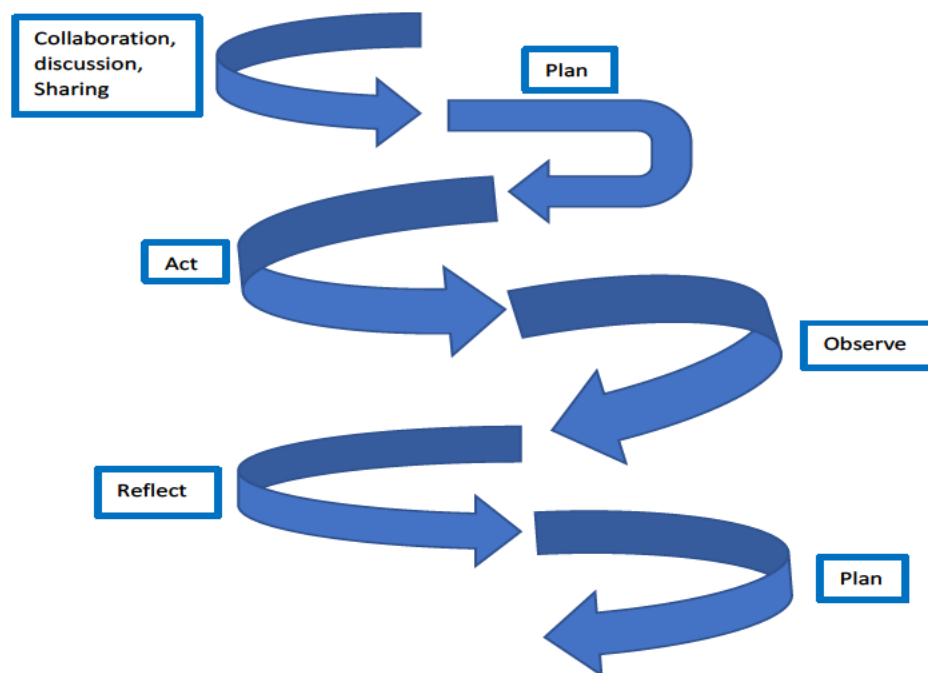
I see here an analogy to my own research and collaborations with the Goenpul, Noonuccal, and Ngugi MMEIC Elders. I am humbled and honoured knowing that my supervisor, Associate Professor Robyn Heckenberg, is a proud Wiradjuri Elder, as Elders are significant and knowledge-holders in First Nations communities (Cox et al., 2022; Gibson et al., 2020; Heckenberg, 2018; Hughes & Barlo, 2021; Jackson-Barrett et al., 2015; Jackson-Barrett & Lee-Hammond, 2018; Martin, 2008; Radley et al., 2021; Tacon, 2019). True and authentic PAR within First Nations communities requires acknowledgement of the importance of the power and voice of First Nations people to ensure their values and beliefs are respectfully aligned within the research (Munns et al., 2017; Scrine et al., 2022).

To arrive at the conclusion that Participatory Action Research (PAR) is best suited to my own research has meant learning about Indigenous research methodologies and acknowledging the distinctive elements of interrelatedness, empowerment, self-determination and leadership inherent in each (Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies, 2020a; Dudgeon et al., 2020). If we understand that our

practices are the outward products of our individual and particular circumstances, we can deconstruct our knowledge, as well as transform and develop new practices as outlined through the PAR process (Kemmis & McTaggart, 2007). PAR's aim for transformative practice means being prepared to understand the conditions of our present practice and learning to think and act differently to create change.

For non-Indigenous researchers, such as myself, there is a synergy between the aims of PAR and Nakata's contention that, in the interface between two knowledge systems, we must recognise "the disruptions, discontinuities, continuities and convergences of knowledge" (Nakata, 2011, p. 5). Through this process, we can therefore appreciate and acknowledge the complexities of the two differing standpoints and become part of the "spiral of self-reflective cycles" (Kemmis & McTaggart, 2007, p. 276). This process enables participants to work collaboratively to plan for change, act and observe the processes and consequences of change, reflect on these actions, replan, and continue the cycle. (See **Figure 23**).

Figure 23. The spiralling cycles of PAR.



(J. Macdonald. Adapted from Kemmis & McTaggart, 2007, p. 278.).

I see the spiralling cycles of PAR in the coils of the Quandamooka totem *Gabul* [carpet snake] (Minjerribah-Moorgumpin Elders-in-Council, 2011, p. 31). (see **Figure 24**) .

Figure 24. *Gabul*—carpet snake totem. *Goompi* (Dunwich).

Designed by Quandamooka artist and song man, Joshua Walker.



(J. Macdonald, personal photograph, May 31, 2022).

As *Gabul*'s coils vary, swelling, growing smaller, and changing, so too can PAR's cycles of planning, acting, observing, and reflecting vary. Kemmis and McTaggart (2007) contend the cycles within the spiral of PAR can overlap, plans can change and evolve in different directions. There is a true sense of development, fluidity and responsiveness to practices with collaboration in reflection.

For this reason, PAR was chosen as an appropriate approach to traversing the cultural interface. Along with the other project participants, I understood that together we had to "research from the inside" collaborating with the Minjerribah-Moorgumpin Elders-in-Council (MMEIC) in a process that does not distinguish between the researcher and the participants (Noffke & Somekh, 2012, p. 94). During this journey, my research with PAR in the cultural interface has required negotiations, as I and the other participants looked for new ways to view, understand and know, not only our world, but that of the First Nations Goenpul, Noonuccal and Ngugi MMEIC Elders (Nakata, 2007a). Working within the PAR paradigm, and being an active participant, has made it possible to find a pathway within the interface to aid in overcoming the dichotomy between two disparate ways of living.

The central positioning of the MMEIC Elders in the PAR process and their participation and contribution of cultural experience and knowledge, gave cultural validity and meaning and ensured the authenticity of the activities undertaken during the duration

of the project. (Bartleet et al., 2019; Dudgeon et al., 2017; McEntyre et al., 2019). With the ongoing guidance, cooperation and support of the Elders, the participants were able to work within the cyclic approach of PAR and its spiral process of the four stages of planning, acting, observing, reflecting and then replanning throughout the stages of choosing to change, planning for change, creating change and sharing change (Kemmis et al., 2014; G. MacNaughton & P. Hughes, 2008) (see **Figure 23**).

4.7.2 Dialogue and Yarning [Ngariba—talk; Gabiyili—tell]

The constructivist / interpretivist paradigm acknowledges the necessity for dialogue (talking and telling of stories), including interviews and conversations between participants, to gain understandings from various points of view through lived experiences (MacDonald, 2012; Sipe & Constable, 1996; Thanh & Thanh, 2015). It is through such dialogic approaches, both formal and informal, that people convey and receive information which can be processed and reflected on leading to different and new understandings and knowledge (Bessarab & Ng'Andu, 2010).

When working in the cultural interface, it is appropriate to use the term ‘yarning’ which can also be recognised as an “Indigenous cultural form of conversation” (Bessarab & Ng'Andu, 2010, p. 37). Yarning encompasses the telling of stories and sharing of knowledge in the oral tradition. Aboriginal scholar, Marnee Shay, with connections to Wagiman country and communities in South-East Qld, notes the English origins of the term ‘yarn, to sew with’, ‘to spin a yarn’ or tell a tale (2021, p. 63). She states that:

It is not documented how Indigenous people in Australia took up this term and created another meaning from the same term... I have asked my elders who have said that the term yarn or yarning is in their living memories, and they do not understand its meaning as telling tales or false stories ... it is about sharing through discussion and connecting. (p. 63).

Connecting and sharing through yarning is a concept recognised in many Indigenous contexts across Australia (Arnold et al., 2021; Cox et al., 2022; Gibson et al., 2020; Hughes & Barlo, 2021; Jackson-Barrett et al., 2015; Leeson et al., 2016; Mooney et al., 2018; Sharmil et al., 2021; Shay, 2021; Walker et al., 2014). Scholar Cheree Dean of Kamilaroi country, writes of the flexibility and adaptability of yarning as it caters to the

needs of individuals, topics for discussion and expectations between those involved in the research.

It allows the participants, the intended beneficiaries, to become partners within the research process, not just individual contributors. This means that the research purpose, local expectations and roles can be negotiated in a collegial and holistic manner during yarning sessions. Participants then become fundamental contributors to research decision making as well as fundamental contributors of information. (Dean, 2010, p. 7).

It is through yarning, listening, sharing, and reflecting, that PAR's approach supports educators in truly learning through culture, and not about culture (Kervin et al., 2016; McKenzie, 2008). This aligns with the different types of yarning proposed by Bessarab and Ng'andu (2010) and reiterated by Shay (2021). Deconstructing personal knowledge and experiences can begin with and be informed by social and informal yarning which allows for the development of relationships prior to the research process.

Opportunities to yarn about the research topic required purposeful conversations with due respect paid to cultural protocols. Interpretations and active engagement in the research, together with the dissemination of information, are enriched through collaborative yarning. These yarning processes are analogous with the guidelines of the Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies Code of Ethics (2020a) which prioritise the need to inform and explain, consult to gather information and listen to concerns and aspirations. A two-way exchange of information through meaningful discussions and collaborative partnerships empowers the participating community group in leading the decision-making process. Yunkaporta and Shillingworth's appeal to "respect, connect, reflect and direct" (2020, p. 112) is also a part of this process of learning **through** culture and not just **about culture**. As I am invited to yarn with the Elders, community members and artists I realise I am learning and forming social relationships that are cognizant of this collaborative and co-learning knowledge-gathering process.

I leave the midden, which has provided an important metaphor for me to deconstruct and interpret my understandings through the metaphor of the layering of *Quampi/Gwambi* and other shells and the depth of ontology of Country. I realise the importance of being not only a researcher in the cultural interface but also a participant. It

has been essential that I look to reconcile my Western views and realities with the connections I have made to the land, the sea, and the sky in my journey walking softly on this First Nations land and sea Country recognised as Quandamooka.

4.8 The Elders—Minjerribah-Moorgumpin Elders-in-Council (MMEIC)

There are many middens on Minjerribah / Terrangee and contained within all of them, through the layers of the shellfish, I see a living culture which is sustained by the deep knowledge and connections to Country throughout millennia. It is through my engagement with the MMEIC Elders that I am learning what is valid and meaningful to their culture and that, in their sharing of their connections to Country, they are privileging their experiences, knowledge, and contributions. I see their wisdom as the pearls in the *Quampi/Gwambi* shells. One must step carefully, look closely, and remain silent if one is to discover and then protect, respect, and reflect on what one has found.

In this chapter, I have used the metaphor of the midden to examine the ontologies and epistemologies of First Nations people and their ongoing interrelatedness with Country. Through examination of Indigenous Research Methodologies, I have gained a stronger understanding of the ‘outsider’ position in which I am placed within a cultural interface where opposing knowledge discourses converge and must be examined, interrogated, and reflected on, before undertaking research practices (Nakata, 2002). The social, cultural and collaborative Participatory Action Research as a methodology has been explained and accepted by the MMEIC Elders as a supportive paradigm for this research.

As a researcher, I am also a participant, learning and unlearning, creating new knowledge through listening to the Elders, reflecting on my learning and embracing change. The importance of yarning as part of a collaborative story-telling process and dissemination of knowledge also plays an integral part in the PAR methodology.

4.8.1 The Elder Aunties

It is important to pause and acknowledge the importance of the MMEIC Aunties who are also Elders. These gracious and kind ladies have been warmly welcoming, sharing stories, and showing their care and concern for the future of their people. They have made me aware of their vital role in “Women’s Business” (Gibson et al., 2020; Moreton-Robinson, 2013). They have women’s stories to tell and while I understand that both men and women

had responsibilities to family and community in continuing the stories of lore of culture and Country, their roles are distinct and often quite different (Dudgeon & Bray, 2019).

The MMEIC Aunties have expressed great interest and offered support for this research. As Aboriginal mentors and holders of cultural knowledge, their contribution has organically informed the PAR model (Dudgeon et al., 2017), and contributed to the creation of new knowledge and understandings, enabling action for social change (Baum et al., 2006; Brydon-Miller & Maguire, 2009; Kemmis et al., 2014; MacNaughton & Hughes, 2007; Sales et al., 2020).

4.8.2 The journey continues

We now visit *Terra Bulla Leumeah* [Beautiful place, here I rest] (Minjerribah-Moorgumpin Elders-in-Council, n.d.) where the Goenpul, Noonuccal and Ngugi families and friends have gathered over time. It was in this place that camps were constructed, and stories and knowledge shared and passed down through the generations. It was a place for learning and after colonisation the building of a mission with a school on this land enabled education and learning (albeit Western) to continue.

The next chapter will visit the days of the past and acknowledge the differences in the education that was provided. It is at *Terra Bulla Leumeah* today, that Quandamooka cultural awareness programs led by the MMEIC Elders are held substantiating the ongoing importance of education. These programs encourage island visitor participants to reflect, observe, and share new knowledge in order to replan, building on the knowledge of the past and remembering the depth of the middens and their hidden stories and wisdom.

Chapter 5: Signpost 5—*Terra Bulla Leumeah* [Beautiful place, here I rest]

5.1 Introduction

Chapter Four focused on understanding the First Nations concept of oneness with Country, and the importance of a learning environment grounded in the ontology of life, physical and spiritual interrelated with land, sea, sky, all sentient creatures, and culture. The chapter also discussed how Participatory Action Research is a respectful and appropriate methodology to use when conducting research that involves First Nations peoples.

Therefore, it is now timely and appropriate to spend time at the next signpost *Terra Bulla Leumeah* [a beautiful place, here I rest]. These words remember the traditional owners who lived on Minjerribah / Terrangee during the existence of the Myora Mission and the ancestors who gathered there to share stories, wisdom and knowledge and called this place *Moongalba*.¹⁴ The area has a deep history and heritage and continues today as *Terra Bulla Leumeah*, an important gathering place for educational tours, family gatherings, events, and celebrations. (See **Figure 25**).

Figure 25. Welcome sign at Terra Bulla Leumeah.



(J. Macdonald, personal photograph, March 19, 2023)

As an educator, I believe the area of *Terra Bulla Leumeah* is a timely place to stop and consider the role this special place has played, and continues to play, in the education

¹⁴ Moongalba is the original name. It was changed to Myora, when the government mission opened in 1892. The Minjerribah-Moorgumpin Elders-in-Council renamed this area, Terra Bulla Leumeah, in 2004.

of both past and present communities of Minjerribah / Terrangee, in the land and sea Country recognised as Quandamooka.

It is here that the past will be contemplated in context with the present and through the aims of this research. In conjunction, an overview of the Australian Curriculum requirements for the Arts learning area, the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Histories and Cultures Cross Curriculum Priority (CCP) and the Intercultural Understanding General Capability (GC) will be discussed. Three interrelated themes from the literature which reflects the challenges educators face in implementing the Arts, the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Histories and Cultures Cross Curriculum Priority (CCP) and the Intercultural Understanding General Capability (GC) of the Australian Curriculum (Australian Curriculum Assessment and Reporting Authority, 2023) will also be presented and analysed.

The research project will be introduced and the choice of Participatory Action Research (PAR) as a methodology will be reviewed, and its phases outlined. This will include the significance of the sharing of knowledge by the Goenpul, Noonuccal and Ngugi Elders of the Minjerribah-Moorgumpin Elders-in-Council (MMEIC) with the school site-based educators to support and strengthen their knowledge of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Histories and Cultures CCP through the arts learning area and the importance of this sharing occurring where possible on Country.

5.1.1 The past—*Moongalba*

Terra Bulla Leumeah (previously known as *Moongalba* by the First Nations Goenpul, Noonuccal and Ngugi family groups, and *Myora* when the government mission was established) is a 1.5-hectare bushland conservation reserve situated on Minjerribah / Terrangee. (see **Figure 26**).

Figure 26. *Terra Bulla Leumeah* grounds.



(J. Macdonald, personal photograph, March 19, 2023).

Moongalba was an important gathering place for Aboriginal people long before European arrival. The MMEIC Elders recall stories of their grandparents living and camping on the land. In 1907, historian Tom Welsby recorded that this place, *Moongalba*, was where Aboriginal people continue to ‘sit down’ on grounds where their ancestors gathered (Fischer, B, Aunty Rose Borey, Aunty Estelle Bertossi, 1997, 2021, p. 7). The fresh water from the nearby *Gabemba* creek (MMEIC, 2011, p. 31) ensured that the area was always inhabited and frequented by Aboriginal family groups. It is here that stories were told, traditional songs and dances participated in, and cultural knowledge shared and passed on to new generations in a never-ending cycle over thousands of years.

Change came with colonisation. In 1892, this traditional lifestyle of sharing cultural knowledge, stories and language, when family groups came together at *Moongalba*, began to disintegrate due to the opening of a government mission which also included a school. The Aboriginal way of life was severely curtailed and controlled, rules were enforced, and many Aboriginal names were changed including *Moongalba*. The introduction to the book *Moongalba (Myora) Sitting Down Place* (Fischer, B., Aunty Rose Borey & Aunty Estelle Bertossi, 2021) acknowledges historian Tom Welsby’s records:¹⁵

¹⁵ Tom Welsby, historian of Moreton Bay 1858-1941, had a participant-observer approach, together with eye-witness accounts, and original documents to explain Moreton Bay, early settlements, Aboriginals, and the environment.

Martin, S. (2000). *Recognition at last Thomas Welsby, historian of Moreton Bay 1858-1941*. University of Queensland <https://doi.org/10.14264/241963>.

...that the mission inhabitants were not happy with the government's designated name of 'Myora' ...Moongalba is the native term for Myora and in conversation with the older inhabitants they don't fail to let you know that they prefer Moongalba to Myora. (p. 7).

Goenpul Elder, Aunty Mary Iselin-Burgess and Ngugi-Noonuccal Elder, Aunty Maureen Borey-Meyer, shared their memories of being told about the mission name by Aunty Mary's mother, Elder Aunty Margaret Iselin:

Moongalba was its name but that meant 'sitting down' and the white fellas called it Myora because Aboriginals weren't allowed to sit down ever, always had to be working, yard work, gardening, building houses, using bark, trees, corrugate tin built on stumps. Personal recollection of Elder Aunty Margaret Iselin.

(Personal communication Goenpul Elder Aunty Mary Iselin-Burgess and Ngugi Noonuccal Elder Aunty Maureen Borey-Meyer, March 23, 2022).

The sharing of knowledge and wisdom by the Elders at that time was forbidden, however the 'Myora Grannies' and the Elders subversively continued their teaching to the children. "The old ones were always called Granny, even if you weren't related to them" (Personal recollection, Elder Aunty Rose Borey, 1997) (Fischer, B., Aunty Rose Borey, Aunty Estelle Bertossi, 2021, p. 36).

Whilst the rudiments of reading, writing and arithmetic were taught at the mission school (Walker, 1998), the deep cultural knowledge and stories from Country were shared covertly with the children by the Grannies and Elders. Walker (1998) acknowledges that the 'Myora Grannies' "contributed to the maintenance of Aboriginal culture by storytelling" (p. 164).

Aunty Margaret Iselin spent her childhood on the Myora Mission and attended the Myora Mission School. The value of learning about language, culture, and being on Country is evident in her recollection, which is used here with permission from her daughter Aunty Mary Iselin-Burgess, Goenpul MMEIC Elder and chairperson, 2023).

My Aboriginal culture is vast, and I have had the opportunity of knowing two old Grannies, Dungoo and Alison, whose knowledge was passed down to me. I am grateful to these two old ladies, who have taught me so much about the animals, sea creatures and plants... They were wonderful old ladies ... so gentle and kind. They would take us little kids into the bush and teach us the names of the wildflowers and the bush tucker food. The meaning of words in the Aboriginal language, our language. A new headmaster arrived at the Mission and the Aboriginal language was forbidden. Under threat of being sent off the Island to a harsh inland Mission the Grannies pretended to obey, but secretly continued the lessons, the children responding in whispers.

(Personal recollection, Aunty Margaret Iselin (Mortimer, 2011b).

At the beginning of 1941, Robert Morrison, who was both the Superintendent and Myora Mission school teacher, retired. With only ten pupils enrolled at this time, the school closed. The closure of the Myora Mission followed in 1943, and the families who lived there were relocated to other parts of the island (Walker, 1998).

5.1.2 The present

The land where the mission was sited became freehold land and was sold to independent settler people becoming privately owned. Eventually the Redland City Council purchased a portion of the land. (Elders communication, March 28, 2023).

The year 2004, saw the establishment of a cooperative agreement between the Redland Shire Council and the MMEIC Elders predicated on ensuring appropriate and respectful management, preservation and protection of the natural and cultural heritage and values of

this site (Redland City Council, 2004). At this time, the Elders also decided that the name *Moongalba* would be changed to *Terra Bulla Leumeah* [a beautiful place, here I rest]. This name change acknowledged the families who had gone before and the First Nations people who were responsible for the protection and preservation of the Moongalba Aboriginal cemetery.

This small cemetery is a special place, situated on the hill to the north of the mission. It played a significant role in the lives of Moongalba residents and even after the mission closed people still chose to bury their deceased in the cemetery. (Fischer, B., Aunty Rose Borey, Aunty Estelle Bertossi, 2021, p. 12).

The present-day MMEIC Elders continue custodianship of *Terra Bulla Leumeah*, ensuring that this area of Country is once again a place for sitting down, yarning and sharing knowledge. Island families gather for community activities, including NAIDOC week celebration which commence on the first Sunday in July and continue to the following Sunday.¹⁶ Visitors to the island are welcome and encouraged to participate in cultural awareness programs that include guided walks along a bush tucker trail and the opportunity to listen to stories from the past, including the days of the mission and the families that lived and worked there.

Education about Aboriginal culture and ongoing connection to Country is considered critical by the Elders and ensures *Terra Bulla Leumeah* continues to be a place for learning. Positioning this chapter at the signpost of *Terra Bulla Leumeah* is to respectfully acknowledge the importance of education and the passing on of cultural knowledge. It is here that I reflect on the powerful and ongoing impact of educational policies and practices that operated at *Moongalba*:

I first started my schooling at the Myora Mission School. At a later date one of the new teachers was opposed to the fairer children going to

¹⁶ NAIDOC stands for National Aborigines and Islanders Day Observance Committee. Its origins can be traced to the emergence of Aboriginal groups in the 1920's which sought to increase awareness in the wider community of the status and treatment of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians.

school with the other Aboriginal children, so I [being fairer-skinned] was sent to the Dunwich school. [Personal recollection of Aunty Kitty Ellis, 1984]. (Fischer, B., Aunty Rose Borey, Aunty Estelle Bertossi, 2021, p. 22)

It is confronting to think that the assumption at the time was that fairer-skinned children were more intelligent than those with darker skin (Walker, 1998). Such beliefs do not have a place in contemporary mainstream education in Australia. This is demonstrated through the current and national Australian Curriculum (AC) which is based on a three-dimensional model which integrates General Capabilities [GC], including Intercultural Understanding, and Cross Curriculum Priorities (CCP), including Aboriginal and Torres Strait Histories and Cultures, with eight Learning Areas where relevant and appropriate. For this research, the GC of Intercultural Understanding and the aforementioned CCP is of particular interest (Australian Curriculum Assessment and Reporting Authority, 2024c).

When I am on Country at *Terra Bulla Leumeah* and speaking with the Elders, I begin to understand the interconnected cycle of learning and passing on of knowledge, particularly through the performative arts of music, drama and dance. This learning helps me to see how important being on Country is to supporting educators to embed the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Histories and Cultures CCP in the learning experiences they provide their students. This ongoing cycle of listening, learning and reflection has important alignments with the research paradigm of Participatory Action Research (PAR).

In this study, the PAR approach provided the teacher participants with opportunities to listen, learn, reflect, and pass on their newly acquired knowledge and cultural understandings to a new generation of school children through the Arts. I have been privileged to observe and talk with Quandamooka singers, dancers and artists and have a greater appreciation for how significant the arts are in connecting with and telling the stories of Country. Goenpul, Jandaiwal MMEIC Elder Dale Ruska is the creator of *Goenpul Woodworks* and a master wood craftsman. He reveals the ongoing connection and importance of the arts and traditional materials in presenting and sharing knowledge through stories between First Nations people:

The Arts are an ancient form of cultural medium used by our people through painted symbols in sacred ceremonies, performance of traditional songs and dance to transfer knowledge, rock carvings and paintings. Using wood is a contemporary continuation of an ancient skill. I get feeling from the wood itself – it speaks to me in a sense and the timber itself determines the shape ... but it is important to remember also that timber was always used for day-to-day practices and when managed it is a sustainable resource and we have been able to access it for millennia.

(Goenpul Jandaiwal MMEIC Elder Dale Ruska, personal communication, October 23, 2023)

5.2 Education, the arts, cultural knowledge, and understandings

The AC was approved by the Australian Curriculum and Assessment Reporting Authority [ACARA] in late 2012, after a lengthy consultative process which began in 2009 and included teachers, academics, businesses, and community groups. (Australian Curriculum and Assessment Reporting Authority, 2023b). This section will provide a brief history of the development of the AC and its innovative three-dimensional model (see **Figure 27**) which draws upon three major elements: Learning Areas (LA) of which there are eight, including the Arts; General Capabilities (GC) of which there are seven, including Intercultural Understanding; and three Cross-Curriculum Priorities (CCP) including Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander histories and cultures which “provides opportunities for all students to deepen their knowledge of Australia by learning about the world’s oldest continuous living cultures” (Australian Curriculum Assessment and Reporting Authority, 2023 -b, p. 1).

Figure 27. The three dimensions of the Australian Curriculum.



Australian Curriculum and Assessment Reporting Authority (ACARA), (nd).

5.2.1 *The Australian Curriculum (AC) and its key components*

The Australian Curriculum (AC) resulted from a commitment by state and territory education ministers to a national curriculum which had been in discussion for several decades. Both the Hobart Declaration (1989) and the Adelaide Declaration (1999) included “bipartisan commitments by federal and state governments to develop national frameworks for curriculum” (Savage, 2016, p. 835). The development of the 1994 *National Statements and Profiles* provided “maps of the learning outcomes” (Hill, 1994, p. 37) for each of eight learning areas: the Arts; English; Health and Physical Education; Languages other than English; Mathematics; Science; Studies of Society and Environment; and Technology.

The *National Statements and Profiles* also provided information to assist in charting students’ progress through their learning and monitor standards through outcomes-based reporting (Kennedy et al., 1996). Whilst at the time there was a lack of proactive collaboration between the States and Territories and the Federal government for the National Statements and Profiles (Harris-Hart, 2010; Reid, 2005) they were actually a precursor to a later national curriculum. Kennedy (1996) highlighted the determination of the Commonwealth Government at that time “to intervene directly in the shaping of the school curriculum” (p. 33).

In 2008, the *Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority Act* (Commonwealth) saw the establishment of the Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority (Australian Curriculum and Assessment Reporting Authority, 2023c).

This independent statutory authority was tasked with the development of a national curriculum, and an assessment program with data collection and reporting which became known as the National Assessment Program - Literacy and Numeracy (NAPLAN) (Australian Curriculum and Assessment Reporting Authority, 2023a; Harris-Hart, 2010; Savage, 2016).

Several significant documents informed the tenets of the AC including the *Melbourne Declaration on Education Goals for Young Australians* (Ministerial Council on Education Employment Training and Youth Affairs, 2008) and most recently *The Alice Springs (Mparntwe) Education Declaration* (Department of Education Skills and Employment, 2019). In May 2022, an updated version of the AC (Version 9) was released by ACARA, to be phased into schools from 2023. The AC is still a three-dimensional document with learning areas, general capabilities and cross-curriculum priorities; however, much greater detail has been provided to assist teachers in implementing the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander CCP with further information provided for the Arts Learning Area and elements such as increased awareness of cultural appropriation.

The AC's CCP of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Histories and Cultures recognises that contemporary First Nations Australian communities are strong, resilient, rich, and diverse, and that this CCP provides opportunities for students to strengthen their knowledge and understanding of the world's oldest continuing living culture (Australian Curriculum Assessment and Reporting Authority, 2023 -b). Ensuring the sensitive and appropriate identification of aspects of this CCP has been essential. Therefore, ACARA, in consultation with the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Advisory Group, whose members include senior officials responsible for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander education and representatives of Indigenous Education Consultative Bodies (Australian Government, 2013) determined that "existing collective nouns used to describe Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples are increasingly being rejected by many First Nations Peoples of Australia."

Following these discussions, ACARA advised that the current version of the Australian Curriculum will include the terms "First Nations Australians" and "Australian First Nations Peoples" to describe Aboriginal Peoples and Torres Strait Islander Peoples (Australian Curriculum Assessment and Reporting Authority, 2023 -b, p. 1).

The CCP acknowledges the special connection to Country/Place and the sophisticated social organisations systems and kinship structures of First Nations Peoples together with the importance of using terminology with respect and as preferred in specific

locations. Through the Arts learning area, students are encouraged to learn about the diversity of cultural practices that celebrate, challenge and communicate perspectives of cultural knowledge (Australian Curriculum Assessment and Reporting Authority, 2023 -b).

The GC of Intercultural Understanding which involves students developing the capacity to reflect on culture and cultural diversity, cultural and linguistic diversity and understanding intercultural contexts (Australian Curriculum and Assessment Reporting Authority, 2023e) complements the CCP of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Histories and Cultures. The incorporation of the Intercultural Understanding GC with the Arts learning area through students learning to communicate responsively and respectfully in relation to cultural and linguistic diversity and “develop[ing] empathy through exploring their own cultural identity and those of others...and consider...beliefs and practices in new ways” (Australian Curriculum Assessment and Reporting Authority, 2024d, p. 1) demonstrates the valuable interconnections between the three-dimensional approach that underpins the AC. This is particularly so in relation to the Arts.

5.2.2 The Arts learning area

The Arts education sector is informed by a range of national and international documents and policies including the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO) *Road Map for Arts Education* (UNESCO, 2006) which outlines the aims for arts education including cultural participation and acknowledging cultural diversity.

Another international document which informs the arts education sector is the *Seoul Agenda: Goals for the Development of Arts Education* (UNESCO, 2010). This UNESCO document reinforces “the potential of arts education to develop, conserve identity and heritage and to promote diversity and dialogue among cultures” (p. 9). Interestingly, initial plans for a national curriculum in Australia “omitted the arts” (Ewing, 2020a, p. 77). Russell-Bowie (2011) reveals that this appeared to stem from the historical pre-eminence given to Music and Visual Arts in the classroom where music education mainly consisted of singing and visual arts education focused predominantly on drawing. This hierarchical bias in the Arts towards the other three arts forms of Dance, Drama and Media Arts, was also evident in two national reviews that were undertaken on the Arts in Australia. The only two arts forms examined were music (Pascoe et al., 2005) and visual arts (Davis, 2008).

In 1989, the Australian Joint Council of Cultural and Education Ministers identified the potential of the arts in education. They supported a national affiliation of Arts educators to work with the Australian government. The National Advocates for Arts Education (NAAE) was subsequently formed and continues to provide a united voice for the Arts through the following professional and industry peak bodies: Dance (Ausdance National); Drama (Drama Australia); Media, the Australian Teachers of Media (ATOM), Music, Australian Society for Music Education and Music Australia (ASME) and Visual Arts, Art Education Australia (AEA) and the National Association for the Visual Arts (NAVA). The NAAE was influential in working with ACARA to ensure that the learning area of the Arts was included in the AC (National Advocates for Arts Education, 2019). NAAE continues to work with government agencies, educators, schools and tertiary institutions to advocate for “sequential and developmental arts education in schools, the development of arts education policy, and promotion of quality teaching and learning in the arts” (Dyson, 2019, p. 1).

The Arts in the AC includes the five art forms (Dance, Drama, Media Arts, Music and Visual Arts). In the context of this research, the AC Arts rationale (Version 9) states that the Arts are “central to the diverse and continuing cultures of First Nations Australians” (Australian Curriculum and Assessment Reporting Authority, 2023f, p. 1). The aims include “engagement with the diverse and continuing cultures, arts works and practices of First Nations Australians” (p. 2). Within each Arts strand, there are year level and content descriptions, that include connections with the other aspects of the curriculum. This includes the GC of Intercultural understanding and the CCP of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Histories and Cultures.

5.2.3 Cross-Curriculum Priorities

The CCP were identified in the *Melbourne Declaration* (Ministerial Council on Education Employment Training and Youth Affairs, 2008) as key areas to be addressed that provide national (Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Histories and Cultures), regional (Asia and Australia’s Engagement with Asia) and global dimensions (Sustainability) to student learning. *The Alice Springs [Mparntwe] Education Declaration* (Department of Education Skills and Employment, 2019) has built on the goals of the *Melbourne Declaration on Educational Goals for Young Australians* (2008). This document places students at the centre of learning and makes a commitment to “ensure that all students learn about the

diversity of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures” (Department of Education Skills and Employment, 2019, p. 5).

In relation to the CCP of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Histories and Cultures, ACARA acknowledges the important consultative process that is expected between representatives from First Nations Peoples of Australia and First Nations Peoples of the Torres Strait Islands, their educators and community members. However, in 2011 the Ministerial Council for Education, Early Childhood Development and Youth Affairs (MCEECDYA) endorsed the Content Descriptors and Achievement Standards for the AC prior to the completion of the CCP and before the consultative process with First Nations peoples on the CCP document had been completed (Lowe & Yunkaporta, 2013, 2018). Hogarth (2017) contends that this action demonstrated a level of insincerity in relation to collaboration and consultation regarding authentic curriculum content for the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Histories and Cultures CCP.

Subsequently, ACARA established an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Advisory Group, (Commonwealth of Australia, 2013). The advisory group found in their “review of the Australian Curriculum, F-10: Cross-Curriculum Priorities – Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Histories and Cultures” that there was a lack of transparency in the CCP of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Histories and Cultures. They agreed that the existing organising ideas were “outdated and did not reflect Australia’s First Nations’ Peoples” and called for “truth-telling with greater respect for, and inclusion of, First Nations Australians Histories and Cultures throughout the Australian Curriculum” (Australian Curriculum and Assessment Reporting Authority, 2021, p. 4).

It is important to note that *The Uluru Statement from the Heart* (2017), endorsed by more than 250 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples who gathered at the *First Nations Constitutional Convention*, Uluru, Northern Territory (NT) (First Nations National Constitutional Convention & Central Land Council (Australia), 2017) called for truth-telling to “clarify historical truths and pay respect to previously unrecognised victims or their descendants” (Appleby & Davis, 2018, p. 504). The convention hoped that a truth-telling process would inform conversations and recognise the agency of First Nations Peoples and their continued sovereignty (Appleby & Davis, 2018; Barolsky, 2022). Adherence to truth-telling and reconciling history avoids assimilating First Nation Peoples and knowledge into an education system that is not aligned with holistic approaches practiced by First Nations Peoples but predicated on national assessment and performance

indicators. If the voices of First Nation Peoples are not listened to then the message that many Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students receive is that they will continue to be “measured against a concept of success in education which, in every way confirms that they can only succeed on non-Indigenous terms” (Harrison et al., 2019, p. 248).

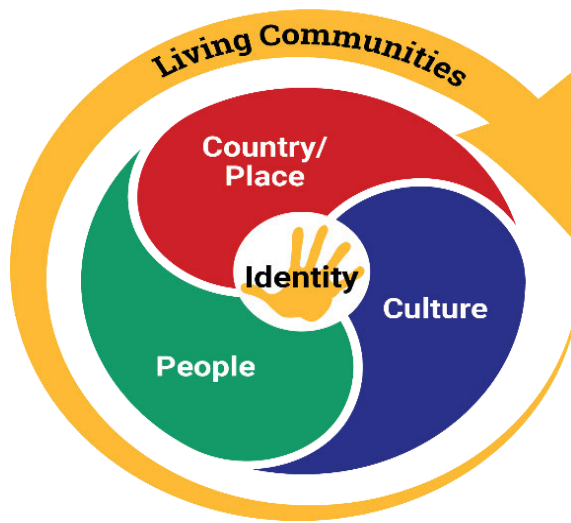
The current version of the AC (Version 9) includes ‘Identity’ as a central feature of the conceptual framework underpinning the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Histories and Cultures CCP. There is also a greater sense of interrelationships between the elements of ‘People’, ‘Culture’, ‘Country/Place’ which are supported and surrounded by the element of ‘Living Communities’. This represents a changing narrative, as evidenced when one compares the conceptual ‘Living Communities’ framework of Version 8.4 (see **Figure 28**) with that of Version 9 (see **Figure 29**).

Figure 28. Conceptual framework (Version 8.4)



(Australian Curriculum and
Assessment Reporting Authority, n.d.)

Figure 29. Conceptual framework (Version V9)



(Australian Curriculum Assessment and Reporting Authority, 2023 -b)

The Version 9 diagram reflects the core understandings of Country/Place, People and Culture for today and the future, acknowledging Living Communities and Identity as central to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander histories and cultures. The AC Version 9 provides a comprehensive overview of this CCP with information regarding the structure of Country/Place, Culture, and People, and recognition that “Australian First Nations Peoples form significant, diverse and resilient living communities within contemporary society” (Australian Curriculum Assessment and Reporting Authority, 2023 -b, p. 1).

Changes, as evidenced in the new structure of the ‘Living Communities’ visual icon, were instigated through a comprehensive collaborative process involving the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Advisory Group (Australian Curriculum and Assessment Reporting Authority, 2021). These changes provide important guidance for educators to engage in the complex and multilayered understandings of Country, enabling a genuine recognition and connection to Indigenous heritages and community identities (Lowe et al., 2021).

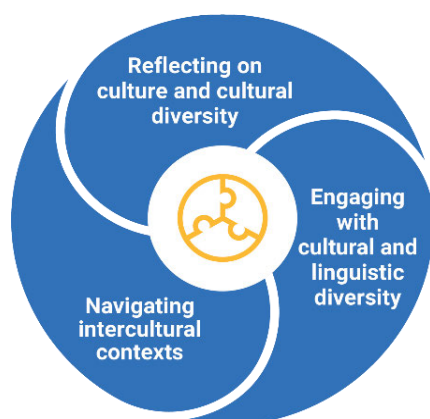
5.2.4 General Capabilities

The General Capabilities (GC) in the Australian Curriculum encompass the knowledge skills, behaviours and dispositions that will assist students to live and work successfully in

the 21st century and can be developed or applied in all learning areas (Australian Curriculum and Assessment Reporting Authority, 2023e).

The GC diagram of intercultural understanding (see **Figure 30**) shows the interconnectedness between reflection and engagement with culture and cultural diversity, cultural and linguistic diversity and navigating intercultural contexts (Australian Curriculum and Assessment Reporting Authority, 2023e). Students are encouraged to consider their personal behaviours, perspectives and practices in engaging with different cultures, including Aboriginal and Torres Strait Island histories and cultures. Reflecting on the diversity of the cultures of First Nations Peoples provides students with opportunities to both understand and engage with their cultural and linguistic diversity. As they enhance their understanding of these differing beliefs, values and cultural practices it is hoped that students will develop an appreciation for, and deeper understanding of, the importance of identity and belonging in intercultural contexts.

Figure 30. Intercultural Understanding elements.



(General Capability of Intercultural understanding, (Australian Curriculum and Assessment Reporting Authority, 2023e)

5.3 Challenges for educators

The Arts are central to human existence and artistic practices are found in every culture. They have contributed to the complex knowledges of humankind (Dinham, 2023; Dissanayake, 2000; Ewing, 2011). When educators provide an arts-rich learning environment, students can develop their perspectives and understandings of cultural practices (Emery et al., 2015; Ewing, 2018; Noddings, 2018; Sun & Buys, 2013). In ascertaining the need for relevant and culturally appropriate arts-based learning for non-

First Nations Australian educators, an investigation of literature revealed three important and interrelated themes:

- There is general disquiet in relation to the implementation of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander CCP in the AC (Henderson, 2020; Lowe & Galstaun, 2020; Maxwell et al., 2018; Salter & Maxwell, 2016).
- 2. Educators have low self-efficacy and are challenged in their implementation of the Arts and cultural understandings despite the literature revealing that the Arts can be used in a respectful and holistic way to discuss Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander histories and cultures (Chapman et al., 2018; Gibson & Ewing, 2020; Kerby et al., 2021; Lemon & Garvis, 2017; Lindsay, 2021).
- 3. Ongoing professional learning and support is vital for educators if they are to strengthen their knowledge of the Arts and the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Histories and Cultures CCP (Chapman et al., 2019; Collins, 2016; Ewing, 2020a, 2020b; Lindsay, 2021; Macdonald, 2022; Macdonald & Tualaulelei, 2018; MacGill, 2022).

The three themes identified above will now be presented and contextualised in relation to this thesis, which investigates the capacity of the Arts to support primary school educators embed the CCP of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Histories and Cultures in their classroom learning units.

5.3.1 Challenge One: Implementation of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Cross Curriculum Priority in the Australian Curriculum

The rationale of the Arts LA of the AC states that “the arts are as old as humanity. They are part of every culture and central to the diverse and continuing cultures of First Nations Australians.” This is further substantiated in the aims which include the imperative of “engagement with the diverse and continuing cultures, arts works and practices of First Nations Australians” (Australian Curriculum and Assessment Reporting Authority, 2023f, p. 1). However, the capacity of students and educators to fulfil this aim through the LA of the Arts is challenged in the research (Baguley, 2019; Chapman et al., 2018; Ewing, 2020a; Green, 2018; MacGill, 2022). An important and ongoing concern since the implementation of the AC is the allocation of time for arts education within schools and appropriate professional development for teachers (Miller & Amorsen, 2020).

With the different state authorities responsible for implementation of the AC (Australian Curriculum and Assessment Reporting Authority, 2023c), the Queensland Curriculum and Assessment Authority (QCAA) recommendation of an allocation of 60- 75 minutes per week for teaching the Arts (40-50 hours per school year) compared to approximately six to seven hours weekly for English, five hours weekly for Mathematics and a maximum of two hours weekly (Years Five and Six) for Humanities and Social Sciences (HASS) (Queensland Curriculum and Assessment Authority, 2022). This substantiates the perception that the Arts are perceived to be lower in the hierarchy of curriculum learning areas (Ewing, 2020a; Green, 2018).

Miller and Amorsen's (2020) in depth analysis of the CCP in the AC (Version 8.4) Foundation to Year Six curriculum documents revealed that the LA of the Humanities and Social Sciences [HASS] had 241 references to the CCPs, compared to the Arts which had 24. In Queensland, the present time allocations for the Arts LA have been reduced from 2011 when the Queensland Studies Authority (QSA) recommended an allocation of 60- 90 minutes per week for teaching the Arts. However, the five-hour weekly allocations for English and four hours weekly for Mathematics (Queensland Studies Authority, 2011) have been increased in line with national priorities and public concerns related to decreasing literacy and numeracy standards (Crome, 2022; Reid, 2020; Thomson, 2021). This tends to contradict the three-dimensional non-hierarchical structure of the AC and detract from the statement in the Rationale that:

... the arts are core to the development of creative, confident, compassionate and resilient individuals who can think and reflect critically, celebrate and challenge ideas, people and events, and work towards making a difference in sustaining and reimagining their own and their communities' futures. (Australian Curriculum and Assessment Reporting Authority, 2023f, p. 1)

It also fails to recognise how arts-led approaches can support and engage children and young people in their learning (Baguley et al., 2022; Cornelius, 2022; Goldberg, 2021; Kerby et al., 2021).

The AC Version 9 has also restructured the content of the five Arts subjects (Dance, Drama, Media Arts, Music and Visual Arts). This includes expanding the two interrelated strands of Making and Responding which were both simple and accessible for classroom teachers (Baguley et al., 2021) into the following four interrelated strands:

Exploring and Responding, Developing Practices and Skills, Creating and Making, and Presenting and Performing (Australian Curriculum and Assessment Reporting Authority, 2023f). The structural change from “making” to “developing practices and skills “and “creating and making” together with the requirement to “explore and respond” and “present and perform” is seen as problematic for generalist primary teachers. The complexity for both students and teachers in moving from the simple and accessible two-strand arts approach to a four-strand structure also appears to contradict the AC’s acknowledgement of “a more stripped-back and teachable curriculum...with a reduction in content” (Australian Curriculum and Assessment Reporting Authority, 2023h, p. 1; Baguley et al., 2021; Goopy, 2021; Robb, 2021).

The new Arts structure aims to enhance “engagement with the diverse and continuing cultures, arts works and practices of First Nations Australians” (Australian Curriculum and Assessment Reporting Authority, 2023f, p. 3) with the support of the CCP of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Histories and Cultures. However, this increasing emphasis has created concern regarding the time, resources and professional development teachers will need if they are to effectively and authentically embed the CCP of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Histories and Cultures across the five arts strands (Anderson et al., 2023; MacGill, 2022; Maher, 2022; White et al., 2022).

The previous ACARA statement (Australian Curriculum Assessment and Reporting Authority, 2016, p. 1) that the CCP are only to be addressed through learning areas as they “do not constitute curriculum on their own” has been removed in Version 9 of the Australian Curriculum. The AC CCP Review (Australian Curriculum and Assessment Reporting Authority, 2021) states that the “cross-curriculum priorities are incorporated through learning area content; they are not separate learning areas or subjects. They provide opportunities to enrich the content of the learning areas... allowing students to engage with and better understand their world” (p. 3). The aim is to encourage teachers who have previously viewed the CCPs as optional or of lesser importance to recognise that the voice and existence of the Living Communities context for learning in the CCP of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Histories and Cultures is essential.

However, the expectation that this CCP is to be incorporated into the content of learning areas does cause concern as deeper knowledge and understanding of First Nations beliefs, values and practices should be taught in context, particularly in relation to local cultural groups. Harrison and Greenfield (2011, p. 66) state that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultural knowledge “cannot be packaged within a unit of work.” MacGill

(2022) and Maher (2022) raise concerns about the responsibilities placed on teachers who may not have an appropriate understanding of this CCP and are unsure of what to embed and how to do so respectfully and authentically. This reflects a sense of disquietude as research has already revealed the vulnerability of this CCP resulting in superficial recognition and or neglect (Henderson, 2020; Lowe & Yunkaporta, 2018; Maxwell et al., 2018; Salter & Maxwell, 2016). For example, teachers may not be aware of the importance of acknowledging and learning about the First Nations Country on which they are teaching.

The complexity of terminology such as ‘sea Country’ and ‘saltwater Country’ which are terms used by First Nations people of Australia to refer to “any environment within their broader traditional estate that is associated with the sea or saltwater—including coastal areas, estuaries, beaches, marine areas, and islands” (Rist et al., 2019, p. 139) will not be common to many non-First Nations educators. Indeed, the Goenpul, Noonuccal and Ngugi MMEIC Elders requested during this research that the First Nations Country recognised as Quandamooka be referred to as land and sea Country. Yunupingu and Muller (2009) allude to the importance of the oceans and the sea in Country in relation to cultural wellbeing and economic survival. The literature recognises this in relation to sustainability, marine protection and conservation and Indigenous Protected Areas (Austin et al., 2018; Gould et al., 2021).

In their review of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Histories and Cultures CCP, ACARA’s Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Advisory group supported the concept of Country/Place (see **Figure 28** and **Figure 29**). They recommend that it is essential to understand that “First Nations communities of Australia maintain a deep connection to, and responsibility for, Country/Place and have holistic belief systems that are connected to the land, sea, sky and waterways” (Australian Curriculum and Assessment Reporting Authority, 2021, p. 9).

Many First Nations Peoples situated away from coastal areas also have a deep and significant connection to Country through waterways, including rivers. Wiradjuri Elder, academic scholar and artist, Robyn Heckenberg, writes of the intimate connection to the natural world and the river as a source of nourishment (Heckenberg, 2016). This makes it concomitant on schools to work with local Elders and cultural groups to ensure that students experience authentic and relevant knowledge, such as knowing the language group on which the school is located.

As I walk with the MMEIC Elders on Minjerribah / Terrangee and gaze with them out at the waters of Quandamooka Bay, I realise how deeply embedded in Country my First Nations mentors are. I understand how important it is for educators to build relationships, situating knowledge at a local level in order to develop insight and deeper understanding into the requirements of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Histories and Cultures CCP (Burgess et al., 2022; Lowe et al., 2021; Parkinson & Jones, 2019). I feel privileged through this research to have the opportunity to learn from these Elders who wish to be known as the Goenpul, Noonuccal and Ngugi people of the land and sea Country and to walk softly as I learn from, and with, them.

5.3.2 Challenge Two: self-efficacy in Arts education and cultural understandings

Arts education

The literature revealed the low self-efficacy of many educators in relation to implementation of the Arts learning area (Chapman et al., 2020). Many students entering pre-service education courses have variable and minimal personal arts experiences, often with accompanying negative perceptions of their arts capacities and low self-efficacy in relation to arts education and teaching (Collins, 2016; Lindsay, 2021). Their general lack of understanding of the Arts and limited or fragmented knowledge of the individual artforms “each of which is a distinctive discipline with particular knowledges, languages and skills” (Barton et al., 2013; Chapman et al., 2019; Ewing, 2020b, p. 6; Polesel et al., 2014) is exacerbated by the reduction of university arts-based education courses for pre-service teachers with limited time available for improving Arts discipline knowledge in each of the individual strands (Baguley, 2019; Collins, 2016; Ewing, 2020b; Ewing & Gibson, 2015; Lummis et al., 2014).

Further, it is thought by many that there has been an impact on intake due to the Australian government’s fee rises from 2021 for certain courses including the Humanities and Social sciences which have been “identified as an easy target for a conservative government seeking to reduce its financial commitments to higher education” (Doidge & Doyle, 2022, p. 671). This approach may also negatively impact on student selection of university courses, steering them away from the Arts and the Humanities (Horton, 2020; Khadem, 2020).

Although a designated learning area in the AC, the Arts are at risk. Research reveals that the continued challenge for educators of standardised testing and benchmark standards, data collection requirements, and the focus on literacy, numeracy, and science

has narrowed teaching content within the classroom and impacted on educators' teaching time (Baguley et al., 2021; Barton et al., 2013; Chapman, 2015; Gibson & Ewing, 2020; Green, 2018; Guenther et al., 2014; Hickling-Hudson, 2014; Lowe & Galstaun, 2020; Lummis et al., 2014; Morrison et al., 2019; Roberts et al., 2019). This is seen to have a flow on effect to curriculum timetabling limiting students' access to a wide and varied curriculum, thus resulting in learning areas such as the Arts, which are not seen to instrumentally contribute to external benchmarking data, becoming marginalised and peripheral to children's learning (Lorenza, 2021; Polesel et al., 2014).

Without the necessary training and support for pre-service teachers, low self-efficacy in the Arts will continue to manifest itself within the classroom context as educators disengage and limit or minimise arts education for their students (Baguley et al., 2022; Lane, 2020; Lemon & Garvis, 2017; McLaren & Arnold, 2016). This lack of confidence does not augur well for successful embedding of the CCP of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders Histories and Cultures through the Arts in classrooms.

Cultural understandings

That educators are pedagogically challenged in relation to the implementation of First Nations' cultural understandings in the classroom is also apparent in the research (Barton et al., 2013; Buchori & Dobinson, 2015; Collins, 2016; Macdonald, 2022; Peacock et al., 2015; Russell-Bowie, 2012). They admit their personal lack of knowledge about Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders histories and cultures, doubting their capacity for embedding this CCP in their teaching for the fear of giving unintended offence, or providing tokenistic experiences (Bishop et al., 2021; Forrest et al., 2016, 2017; Harrison & Greenfield, 2011; Stern & Burgess, 2021). Such reasoning and general discomfort can possibly be attributed to the fact that the Australian education sector reflects the perspectives and values of white, middle-class Anglo-Australians with the perpetuation of 'white' behaviours, attitudes, customs and beliefs as a standard rather than a difference (Bainbridge et al., 2015; Booth & Allen, 2017; Hogarth, 2017; Koerner & Pillay, 2020; MacGill, 2022; Miller, 2015; Schulz, 2017).

Whiteness, as a racial identity and social construct, has been influential in the construction over time of Australian cultural values, dominant social customs, and laws which collectively contribute to the education system (MacGill, 2022; Miller, 2015). Many educators subsequently unknowingly and often unintentionally reproduce and reinforce 'whiteness' in their classrooms (Bishop et al., 2021; Enriquez-Gibson & Gibson, 2015;

Miller & Petriwskyj, 2013; Mills, 2013; Walton et al., 2018). Zembylas (2018) notes that subscribing to these dominant values and customs can lead to educator emotional resistance and the raising of discomfoting emotions when confronted with the concept of whiteness, lessening the ability to scrutinise the deeper practices of racial understandings and identity.

There is also the perception that the concept of ‘niceness’ and being pleasant and agreeable, avoiding discomfoting situations, controversy and conflict, is a pattern of behaviour that enables white educators to avoid or “reframe potentially disruptive or uncomfortable things in ways that are more soothing, pleasant, and comfortable.” Understanding this concept was important as I discussed this concern with the MMEIC Elders of implementing this research project in a predominately ‘white’ school. I was aware that participating staff may well offer resistance and potentially reframe their behaviours through a veneer of politeness and courtesy.

5.3.4 Challenge Three: Lack of professional development and support

The third theme that arose in the literature was the minimisation of opportunities for educators to engage in professional development and/or receive support for implementation of the CCP, the Arts learning area, and the GC of Cultural Understandings. Chapman et al. (2019) note that school budgetary constraints and lack of leadership support from school administrations limits and impacts on staff accessing development and support in curriculum areas such as the Arts. However, the research also revealed that when opportunities are provided for professional development and support educators appear to be willing to create change within their classrooms (Barton et al., 2013; Boyd & Cutcher, 2015; Collins, 2016; Ewing, 2020a; Lindsay, 2021; Macdonald & Tualalelei, 2018; MacGill, 2022).

It is apparent that Australian educators feel there is a lack of support and appropriate resourcing of the CCP of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Histories and Cultures (Bishop et al., 2021; Booth & Allen, 2017; Harrison & Greenfield, 2011; Lampert et al., 2014; Macdonald, 2022; MacGill, 2022). This issue is also evidenced in other nations, including Canada) and New Zealand (Buck & Snook, 2016). However, in Australia, Indigenous peoples are two distinct cultural groups made up of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples. There is subsequently great diversity within these two broadly described groups with over 250 different language groups spread across Australia (Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies, n.d.-b). This brings a

complexity to the capacity of educators to embed both the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Histories and Cultures CCP, and the GC of Intercultural understandings, effectively and appropriately.

In addition, the lack of a treaty between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander and the Crown, such as the *Treaty of Waitangi* (1840), that was implemented in New Zealand, continues to reverberate in Australia. This may have contributed to the failure of the 2023 Australian referendum which asked Australians to support an Indigenous Voice to Parliament being enshrined in the Australian constitution (Biddle et al., 2023). Collaboration with and between local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities is imperative if educators are to ensure that they are incorporating accurate and culturally sensitive content in relation to the First Nations Country on which they are learning and teaching (Burgess et al., 2022; Lowe et al., 2021; Maher, 2022).

The literature reveals that there are complexities and tensions in relation to the role of the CCP within the AC learning areas for non-First Nations educators. They are often attempting to include Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander ways of knowing with limited knowledge and confidence and often through a familiar Western knowledge perspective (Maxwell et al., 2018). This view is reinforced by Harrison and Greenfield (2011) who state that “students are not learning Aboriginal views or perspectives, rather they are learning about their non-Aboriginal teacher’s perspective on Aboriginal Australia” (p. 70). It is in this complex and shifting cultural interface (Nakata, 2002, 2007a, 2011) between First Nations and Western knowledge systems that appropriate professional learning for educators needs to take place if there is to be a meaningful embedding of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander CCP, and a commitment to developing a deeper understanding of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Histories and Cultures as sources of growth and learning (Ford et al., 2018; Harrison et al., 2019; Lowe & Yunkaporta, 2013, 2018; Thompson, 2018; Watkins & Noble, 2019).

Two longitudinal studies in school districts in New South Wales that sought to embed First Nations’ cultural understandings (Bishop et al., 2021; Elliott & Clancy, 2017) acknowledge the importance of appropriate professional learning for educators; and further, that there is the imperative that First Nations Elders and community members play a genuine and meaningful role in education-related decision making and practices. However, the findings also revealed that establishing these connections and building relationships takes time. Longitudinal programs support the establishment of respectful and

positive communication, authenticity of activities and opportunities for consistent engagement in a valued contributory environment (Elliott & Clancy, 2017).

Promising initiatives in education include the University of Tasmania's "Indigenous Lifeworlds: Story, History, Country" course (Alvaro, 2021). This allows time for non-First Nations educators to be supported both individually and within their educational settings, allowing opportunities to partake of necessary critical discussions enabling reflections on their own personal identity, privilege, whiteness, and racism.

The *Ngarrngga* [to know, to hear, to understand] Project led by First Nations Kamilaroi Professor Melitta Hogarth at the University of Melbourne is a collaboration between the University's Faculty of Education, Indigenous Studies Unit and Indigenous Knowledge Institute (University of Melbourne, 2023). This project is aimed at providing curriculum resources made by educators for educators in collaboration with Indigenous Knowledge Experts.

Other universities across Australia are engaging pre-service teachers in programs and outreach workshops. These include the *Learning from Country to City* (LFC) education program at an urban university where pre-service teachers have the opportunity to participate in First Nations community-led learning on Country (Burgess et al., 2022) and a regional university's cultural immersion programs taking students on Country in a localised context (Dolan et al., 2020). The Arts-based Service Learning strategy adopted at another university supports students in connecting with community promoting arts practices which embed First Nations People's cultural content in collaboration with First Nations communities (Bartleet et al., 2019). This university has also devised a new approach to including the knowledge of First Nations Peoples in a First People's module for both under- and post-graduate students through the establishment of a First People's Reference Committee consisting of "traditional owners, Elders and First Nation academic staff" (Synot et al., 2020, p. 225). Importantly, this has created a space for First Peoples to lead the decision-making processes around the course design and delivery.

It is important to note that while this list is not exhaustive, it does represent an essential and emergent opportunity for educators to advocate for professional development that is relevant, and based on Country, in collaboration with local Elders and custodians. These approaches are a constructive first step to building educators' capacity to strengthen their pedagogical understandings of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander histories and cultures. The Australian Bureau of Statistics (2022) revealed that across Australia approximately 1.5% of teachers identified as being Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait

Islander. These statistics show that even though there is an expectation that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander histories and cultures be taught by all Australian teachers, the reality is that most of this teaching will be undertaken by non-First Nations educators. This reveals the importance of professional learning and support for educators if they are to effectively gain the knowledge and understandings that will strengthen their cultural competency and capacity.

5.4 Introducing the research project

Researching in and on land and sea Country resonates with me personally, having spent many years on the Butchulla First Nations country of the Fraser Coast with frequent visits to K’Gari (Fraser Island). A trip to Minjerribah / Terrangee (Stradbroke Island) and an initial meeting with the Minjerribah-Moorgumpin Elders revealed that they were supportive of sharing their culture and histories with non-First Nations educators who are teaching in the designated Quandamooka region of Redlands city and shire.

Previously, I had met the principal of a small independent school located in this region who shared that the school was prioritising the development of their Reconciliation Action Plan (RAP). This would ensure that the school was a culturally safe environment for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students and staff. RAPs are supported by Reconciliation Australia with the belief that implementation of a RAP builds greater cultural awareness, understanding and community connections that help school communities to move towards reconciliation (Reconciliation Australia, 2024). After consultation with the Elders and the principal, it was agreed that the school would become an important site for the research. The participants at this site would include: the school’s administration team, the teaching staff, and two specialist Arts teachers.

5.4.1 The choice for Participatory Action Research (PAR)

Chapter Three outlined the importance of the collaborative and social processes of PAR with its interrelationship between the researcher and the participants working together to seek and gather new knowledge to create change (Kemmis et al., 2014; Zuber-Skerritt, 2018). The capacity to create change is core to PAR as it enables all participants, including the researcher, to reconstruct and reframe their behaviours and practices. My choice of the PAR approach arose through my conversations on Country with the Goenpul, Noonuccal and Ngugi MMEIC Elders. Through listening and building relationships with the Elders, I have gained insight, new knowledge and understanding into the needs, cultural values and

customs of the Minjerribah /Terrangee community. This has empowered me to make changes in my life, work, and social practices. The description of successful PAR-based projects in Aboriginal communities in Western Australia (Dudgeon et al., 2017; Scrine et al., 2022) in Chapter Three, noted the imperative of reciprocity, respect, collaboration, and inclusion of community Elders throughout the research.

As discussed in Chapter Three, the action research cycle (G. MacNaughton & P. Hughes, 2008) proposed that participants are continually self-reflecting as they choose to change, plan for change, create change, and share the lessons of change, and is analogous to the cyclic spiral proposed by Kemmis et al. (2014) with its steps of planning, acting, observing, reflecting, and then re-planning in an ongoing and fluid approach to collaborative learning.

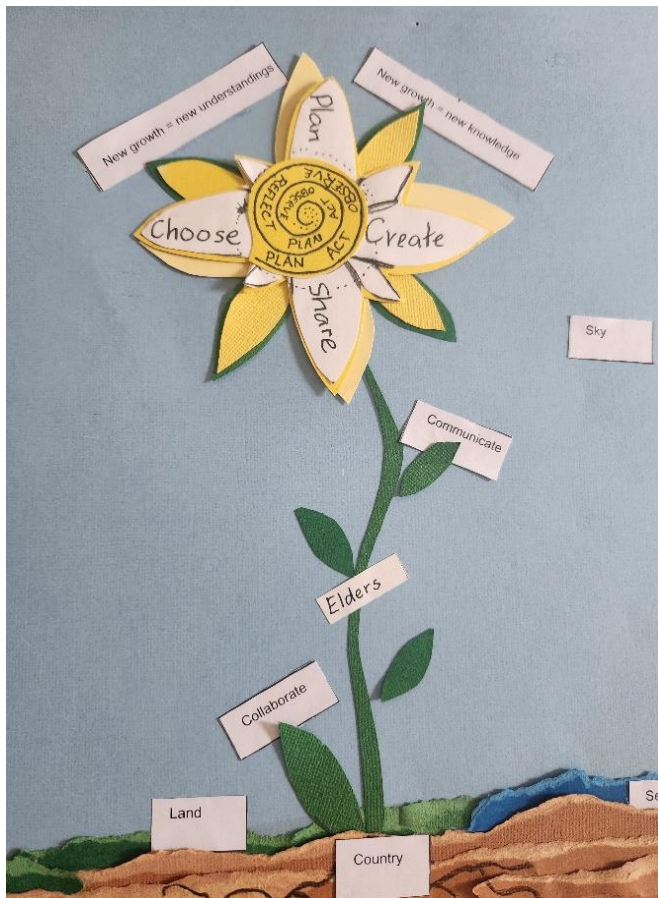
For my own PAR design, I have chosen to adapt the cycles of MacNaughton and Hughes (2008) and action research spiral of Kemmis et al. (2014), to more accurately reflect the process that I have undertaken in this research which includes respecting and acknowledging the Minjerribah-Moorgumpin Elders and their connection to the Country which is a critical aspect of this research. In a departure from Western conventions, and with input from the MMEIC Elders, I have created a visual representation of the cyclic spiral using a flower as a metaphor for PAR. This symbolises the bushland of *Terra Bulla Leumeah* which features the flowering wattle (see **Figure 32**). This acknowledges both the ontological and axiological context of Country (see **Figure 33** and **Figure 34**).

Figure 32. Flowering wattle—Minjerribah / Terrangee.



(J. Macdonald, personal photograph, June 7, 2023)

Figure 33. PAR Cyclic Spiral on Country.



PAR Cyclic Spiral—J. Macdonald, adapted from (Kemmis et al., 2014, p. 19; G. MacNaughton & P. Hughes, 2008).

Figure 34. Close-up of cyclic spiral—on Country.



Choose, plan, create, and share (G. MacNaughton & P. Hughes, 2008) and the merging of the cyclic spiral of Kemmis et al. (2014).

In my artwork, the complex root structure that is hidden underground hints at the many ways the participants, the MMEIC Elders and myself, as the researcher, interacted throughout this project. The stem represents the strength of the Elders in ensuring the knowledge they share and how it is received are done in a spirit which is genuine, authentic and respectful. The leaves on the stem are a metaphor for the important preliminary phase of collaboration and communication with the Elders and my experience of localised on-Country learning (Burgess et al., 2022). The petals reflect the four phases of choosing, planning, creating, and sharing. Within the flower's centre, with a radiating connection to each petal, is the cyclic spiral of planning, acting, observing, and reflecting. New buds represent the new knowledge and understandings that are an outcome of the PAR process.

5.4.2 The PAR phases

Within the preliminary phase, I was able to share my ideas for planning with the Elders who guided my actions and introduced me to new concepts and understanding of the importance of being on Country, encouraging me to listen, and observe. This enabled the opening of safe spaces for dialogue and the opportunity for self-reflection. My experiences

in this phase emphasised to me the importance of teachers needing to experience Country-centred learning led by local Aboriginal community members. From these experiences, teachers can build relationships and better understand local knowledges and practices to develop a greater awareness and understanding of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander CCP.

The four proposed phases of the PAR approach in relation to this study are briefly described below and will be contextualised in greater detail through the research questions in the following chapter.

Phase One: Choose to change

Phase one involved conversations with the participant educators at the school site through shared dialogue and interactions in social settings where they felt at ease with the initial planning process (Kervin et al., 2016). It was through these conversations that the participant educators were encouraged to consider their actions and observe and self-reflect on their prior knowledge and understandings of both the Arts and Quandamooka land and sea Country. The educators were then invited to communicate their needs and concerns in relation to support for the topic. Data was collected from questionnaires and responses, and recorded conversations in interviews with detailed notes. The themes and considerations for planning were shared with the MMEIC Elders with subsequent discussions about how to strengthen the educators' knowledge and respond to their concerns through the Arts.

Participating in a Quandamooka Cultural Awareness Program on Minjerribah / Terrangee was considered by the MMEIC Elders to be important in this initial phase. This invitation was accepted by the school and a date set for the beginning of the following school year. This would enable the educators' opportunities to learn on country by observing and listening to the cultural stories and reflecting on the new knowledge they gained about the First Nations land and sea Country recognised as Quandamooka.

As noted in the next chapter, due to a number of factors including the school's closure during COVID, the Cultural Awareness Program was only attended by the two Arts specialists. Concluding this phase, and acknowledging the cyclic spiral, would provide opportunities to re-plan, with the support of the Elders and the participants, for arts-rich activities that respect and support knowledges and cultures of the Goenpul, Noonuccal and Ngugi MMEIC Elders.

Phase Two: Plan for change

Analysis of the themes that arose from the conversations and data collected in Phase One enabled implementation of Phase Two: 'Planning for change' and an exploration of how different arts activities could support the embedding of deeper intercultural understandings shared by the MMEIC Elders. The inclusion of the Elders in the planning process allowed the educators to develop their understandings about respectful approaches, language, cultural contexts, their importance in any form of art, cultural protocols, and the role Elders play in preserving and representing the histories and stories of the Goenpul, Noonuccal and Ngugi People.

The teacher participants subsequently engaged their students in a variety of arts activities to assist in their development of understanding these First Nations Peoples histories and cultures. This process was documented through anecdotal notes and journal entries with the information shared with the Elders during regular collaborative sessions on Minjerribah / Terrangee. This approach corresponds with the cyclic and spiralling nature of PAR and emphasises the importance of planning, acting on the plan, observing and then reflecting to re-plan.

Phase Three: Create change

During Phase Three the educators implemented units of work constructed collaboratively with the researcher and in consultation with the Elders whose knowledge of their Goenpul, Noonuccal and Ngugi history and culture informed the units of work. These arts-based activities maintained the integrity of each of the individual Arts strands. Yet, it was also recognised that these can be integrated as part of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander histories and cultures. The cyclical nature of PAR also allowed for actions from the educators that included implementation of the units of work, observations, reflections, evaluations, and adjustments to activities within the classroom.

Phase Four: Share change

The final phase provided further opportunities for reflection and evaluation of the learning experiences. The lessons created by the educators were shared and discussed with the Elders as part of a collective learning process. This culminated in planning for and acting on the planning through the presentation of a school wide event in consultation with the

MMEIC Elders. The event was attended by Elders, the school community, educators from the local community, and representatives of other educational institutions.

This demonstrated how the Arts can provide important pathways to growth in cultural understandings of First Nations' cultures and specifically that of the Goenpul, Noonuccal and Ngugi people and their relationality with the land and the sea in the region known as Quandamooka. This resulted in sharing the lessons of change and the learning journey that had been undertaken. After this event, reflections for re-planning for the future were undertaken as the cyclical spiral of PAR is constantly evolving and developing, in the same way that the resources of the natural environment of Country and Sea, as represented in this chapter by *Terra Bulla Leumeah*, are forever growing, nurtured by the sun, wind and rain, and cared for by community.

5.5 Terra Bulla Leumeah

The cyclic approach of the research paradigm of Participatory Action Research enabled the MMEIC Elders to inform the research through their stories, their wisdom and knowledge. This ensured that I, and all the participants in this research, gained new and stronger understandings of the histories and cultures of this First Nations Country recognised as Quandamooka.

As the young people of the Ngugi, Noonuccal and Goenpul Peoples of the past learned of the history and culture from their Elders in places such as *Terra Bulla Leumeah*, so we too become part of this never-ending cycle of learning. In the Minjerribah / Terrangee Myora mission school, First Nations knowledge was hidden and whispered. Yet, today, it is officially sanctioned through the CCP requirement that all educators incorporate the voices of living communities. How enriching and fortunate for me as a non-Indigenous educator to learn about the history of the Goenpul, Noonuccal and Ngugi Peoples at *Terra Bulla Leumeah*, the very place where knowledge was protected and continued throughout the generations through immersion in the artforms of storytelling, artworks, dances, songs and re-enactments. To be on Country, walking in the footsteps of the MMEIC Elders and their ancestors, and listening to their stories, is to absorb the holistic cultural awareness that was denied to the Aboriginal inhabitants of Minjerribah/Terrangee through the ongoing process of colonisation.

The value placed on education by the MMEIC Elders is apparent:

It's simple. We're here to work with the kids and teach them the stories.

(Ngugi Noonuccal MMEIC Elder Aunty Maureen Borey-Myer, July 29, 2022).

Research reveals that as First Nations Peoples age and become Elders, with roles and responsibilities, they become attuned to their cultural connections and more desirous of sharing, maintaining, developing, and passing on cultural knowledge to the next generation. (Gainsford & Robertson, 2019; Gibson et al., 2020; Perry & Holt, 2018).

My mother shared her knowledge with me, and her mother with her, and I can pass it on. Now I am an Elder and if I don't teach the young ones there will be no Elders to carry on. It is so important. (Goenpul MMEIC Elder, Aunty Mary Iselin-Burgess, March 16, 2023).

It is through the PAR model that genuine engagement with the MMEIC Elders of Minjerribah / Terrangee has enabled important engagement and insights for non-Indigenous educators, that support and strengthen their understandings of the importance of identity and connection to place.

You white fellas have to 'walk the walk'live on country, be part of community, be genuine. Earn respect. (Ngugi Noonuccal MMEIC Elder Aunty Maureen, Borey-Myers, November 2, 2022)

The PAR approach enabled the research to become meaningful and genuine through the establishment of partnerships with the MMEIC Elders that ensured participants recognised cultural humility. Additionally, the Elders felt culturally safe and respected, bridging the gap between research and practice (Dudgeon et al., 2020; Lowe et al., 2021). Supporting educators in a variety of Arts activities that embed the stories of the Elders respects the millennia of artistic practices that have ensured that First Nations' cultural knowledge is continually evolving.

The next chapter will situate the research project at *Bamira* [Brown Lake] (Minjerribah-Moorgumpin Elders-in-Council, 2011, p. 19). It is here that Aboriginal families have always gathered and still gather today acknowledging their sense of community and connection to Country. As the families and Elders of the Ngugi, Noonuccal and Goenpul Peoples journey to the lake to participate in a variety of activities in the summer of 2023, I was invited to journey with them. As I participated in the

activities, I felt humbled to be experiencing, at first hand, life in a society of which I, a non-Aboriginal woman, am not a part.

The requirement of PAR for genuine participation through the cycles of planning, acting, observing, and reflecting, ultimately support empowerment and social transformation (Benjamin-Thomas et al., 2018; Dudgeon et al., 2020). I have furthered my educational understandings gained at *Terra Bulla Leumeah* here at *Bamira* where I have learnt respect for the Minjerribah / Terrangee community, their local culture, and ways of being and doing. The PAR project recognises and respects community knowledge and experiences. At *Bamira*, I focus on the project, its resources, and strengths, and how it has facilitated a co-learning process under the guidance of the MMEIC Elders.

Chapter 6: Signpost 6—*Bamira* [Brown Lake]

6.1 Introduction

Chapter Five has described my visit to *Terra Bulla Leumeah* [beautiful place, here I rest]. This bushland setting on the island of Minjerribah / Terrangee was the site of the Myora Mission, and included a school (Fischer, B., Aunty Rose Borey, Aunty Estelle Bertossi, 2021). It is here that I gained new understandings of education on Minjerribah / Terrangee through the stories of the Goenpul, Noonuccal and Ngugi Elders of the Minjerribah-Moorgumpin Elders-in-Council (MMEIC). It is here at *Terra Bulla Leumeah*, that visitors to the island, and participants in the MMEIC Cultural Awareness programs, are educated as to historical times and their ongoing legacy for present-day generations.

Several visits with the MMEIC Elders to *Bamira* (Brown Lake) (Minjerribah-Moorgumpin Elders-in-Council, 2011, p. 19) revealed to me the importance of community education in local culture, and ways of being and doing that continually interweave the past with the present. Families have gathered at this lake for millennia, laughing, swimming, cooking, and sharing stories.

At *Bamira* today, First Nations families still gather to participate in community leisure activities, sharing food and listening quietly in the afternoon sun to Elders. Having been privileged to be invited and actively involved in these community experiences, I realised during this study that the teachers and students in the small mainland school located on First Nations land and sea Country recognised as Quandamooka, have also been listening quietly to, and learning from the Elders. Therefore, *Bamira* with its links to the past and its importance as a present-day meeting-place is an appropriate signpost for this chapter (see **Figure 35**).

Figure 35. Bamira.



(J. Macdonald, personal photograph, January 4, 2023)

In this chapter, I shall share the story of the unfolding of the Participatory Action Research project I undertook at a small independent school located on the mainland of the land and sea Country recognised as Quandamooka. This project was to investigate the potential of the Arts (Dance, Drama, Media Arts, Music, and Visual Art) to support teachers in embedding the Australian Curriculum's Cross-Curriculum Priority (CCP) of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Histories and Cultures in the classroom.

Throughout the project, there was support from, and collaboration with, the Elders of the Minjerribah-Moorgumpin Elders-in-Council (MMEIC), who shared their stories and knowledge of the land and sea on which they and their ancestors lived, with the school community.

The importance of community and connecting stories from the past with the present will be discussed in this chapter. The research questions will be outlined together and linked with relevant documents such as the Australian Curriculum General Capability (GC) of Intercultural Understanding. Early reflections on the preliminary stage of the project as framed by the PAR process, will be presented, and an overview of the cyclical nature of PAR will be a precursor to a discussion of each of the four phases of the project: choosing to change, planning for change, creating change, and sharing the lessons of change with the community. Each phase will demonstrate the PAR requirement to plan, act, observe and reflect, before re-planning.

6.2 Community and stories

I sit at Bamira and listen to the stories of the Elders of past times at the lake and how present-day activities are a continuation of the legacy of these ancestors. I reflect on the Aboriginal scholars who have written of the importance of storytelling as a meaningful way to share cultural knowledge and histories (Bunda et al., 2019; Gibson et al., 2020; Hamm, 2008; Paton, 2009; Rom, 2022b; Slater, 2020).

Indeed, Yorta Yorta artist, Dr Treahna Hamm, writes of the responsibility when working in First Nations spaces to “seek and gain knowledge from [our] Elders” (Hamm, 2008, p. 71). Knowledge has been generously shared by the MMEIC Elders related to the important places that have created signposts through this thesis. *Bamira* holds memories and stories within its depths and the following stories emphasise the interrelationships and connections of these First Nations Goenpul, Noonuccal and Ngugi Peoples to their land and sea Country and place and the education that has taken place through the sharing of cultural and community knowledge.

Men went along on the walk but only the Grannies stopped at the top of the hill before Brown Lake – they would call (wailing, crying) to Biambi (great God), (Minjerribah-Moorgumpin Elders-in-Council, 2011, p. 20) to keep them safe while they were there - safe from Jargon, the spirit of the lake, (Minjerribah-Moorgumpin Elders-in-Council, 2011, p. 106) safe from drowning and protecting the jajums (babies) (Minjerribah-Moorgumpin Elders-in-Council, 2011, p. 86).

Men would forage – hunting for goannas, ducks etc. Women would gather flowers, reeds for weaving. Children played and bathed using soap tree to get clean. A Bamira story from Goenpul Elder Aunty Margaret Iselin, retold by Ngugi Elder, Aunty Maureen Borey-Myer (personal communication, May 30, 2022.)

The *Bamira* stories from past Elders and Grannies reveal that, despite colonising practices that attempted to thwart and deny their interconnectedness with the natural world

(Watson, 2018) family gatherings at the lake that reinforced traditional ways of being, knowing and doing, were not completely erased. Stories such as those linked to *Bamira* have been kept safe and shared for the benefit of future generations (Moreton-Robinson, 2003).

On Sundays Dad would take us children out to the lake and on our way there we would come to this hill. On the other side of the hill was the lake and the old people would make us stand back and they would talk to the water... they would speak in their own language and then pause for a moment ... they would then give us the okay to go and we would all run down the hill to the lake ... Dad would always go missing for a time and then he would return looking for a container. Then he would be off again returning with the container full of fresh honey still in the comb.

(Aunty Charlotte Richards, 1984, as cited in (Fischer, B., Aunty Rose Borey, Aunty Estelle Bertossi, 2021, p. 44)

The simplicity of Aunty Charlotte's story reveals the importance of sharing knowledge about Country through stories that both educate and pay respect. The Aunties shared other stories and reminiscences of bush walks to the lake, picnics and swimming (Aunty Bethel Delaney p. 48 and Aunty Kitty Ellis p. 42). The following story about the bunyip who dwells in the deep waters of Bamira was shared by Aunty Joan Costello and Aunty Phyllis Donovan:

The Lake was always covered with reeds and one day Granny Nuningha was sitting on the bank of the lake with her son Davey on her lap with his feet dangling in the water, and something, they say the Bunyip, pulled this little boy out of her arms through the reeds ... he would easily have drowned only that she called out to the men and the men spoke in their tongue and pulled the boy out of the reeds.

(Fischer, B., Aunty Rose Borey, Aunty Estelle Bertossi, 2021, p. 28)

It is this story that was shared with me on my first visit to *Bamira* (February 16, 2021). This story highlights the importance of storytelling and narrative for Aboriginal people in linking the past with the present. In addition, the sharing of these stories (where appropriate and relevant) contributed to the development of cultural awareness and understanding for non-First Nations educators who were participants in this project.

6.3 The research questions

Embodying the many different ways of sharing and telling stories through the Arts of dance, drama, music, media, and visual arts, can provide important opportunities to bridge the metaphoric space of First Nations knowledge and culture with other cultures and ways of being (Nakata, 2010). This research, which sought to explore the extent to which the Arts can support educators in embedding the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders Histories and Cultures CCP into their classroom practice, was underpinned by three research questions:

1. What challenges and highlights do primary educators experience in learning about and teaching the AC's Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Histories and Cultures CCP in the primary classroom?
2. How does the opportunity of learning 'in and on country' assist primary educators in teaching Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Histories and Cultures CCP in the primary classroom?
3. To what extent can the Arts assist non-Quandamooka primary educators approaches in learning and teaching about the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Histories and Cultures CCP in the primary classroom?

6.3.1 Intercultural Understanding: A General Capability in the Australian Curriculum

Although the research questions do not specifically reference the Intercultural Understanding General Capability (GC) of the Australian Curriculum (AC) there is a strong interrelationship with the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Histories and Cultures CCP. As teachers and students engage in learning about the diversity and distinctiveness of First Nations cultural practices and the unique ways of being, knowing and doing (Australian Curriculum Assessment and Reporting Authority, 2023 -b) they will

also be developing intercultural understandings and the “knowledge and skills needed to reflect on culture and cultural diversity, engage with cultural and linguistic diversity, and navigate intercultural contexts” (Australian Curriculum and Assessment Reporting Authority, 2023e, p. 1).

The GC outlines that it is through working with the arts that educators can encourage students to explore the cultural identities of others, engaging them with a variety of arts works that allow responses to and considerations of images, sounds, beliefs, and practices in new ways thus developing their understandings in response to stereotypes and biases (Australian Curriculum and Assessment Reporting Authority, 2023e).

Throughout the project, there was input from the Elders in a co-planning process with myself, as the researcher, with information provided to the school-based research participants, which saw a merging of this CCP and the GC. This enabled authentic learning about the distinctiveness and diversity of First Nations cultural practices with a focus on the impact of historical and contemporary events for First Nations Peoples of the land and sea Country recognised as Quandamooka. Both teachers and their students developed a sensitivity and respect for the cultural and linguistic knowledge of the Goenpul, Noonuccal and Ngugi MMEIC Elders (Australian Curriculum Assessment and Reporting Authority, 2023 -b).

6.4 The preliminary process

There are several documents that outline important principles and protocols for working with First Nations Peoples, including the United Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP) (United Nations General Assembly, 2007) and the AIATSIS Code of Ethics (Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies, 2020a). These documents emphasise the importance of building and developing relationships with Indigenous peoples globally including Australian First Nations Peoples, and specifically for this research, the Goenpul, Noonuccal and Ngugi MMEIC Elders, who also have their own Code of Ethical Conduct, as approved in 2024. These types of relationships are underpinned by the values of “cultural continuity, equity, reciprocity, respect and responsibility” (Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies, 2020a, p. 11).

Discussions with the MMEIC Elders began before the project formally commenced to ensure that they were full partners in the research and were able to determine the extent

of their involvement (if any) “prior to formally starting the project” (Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies, 2020a, p. 10).

During my initial visits to the MMEIC Elders of Minjerribah / Terrangee, we discussed the potential of the project for educating non-First Nations students and teachers about the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander histories and cultures. The MMEIC Elders emphasised to me that knowledge begins with *place* on *Country* and that a project in a school situated on First Nations Quandamooka land and sea Country must accurately represent the knowledge and cultural understandings of the MMEIC Goenpul, Noonuccal and Goenpul Elders Peoples, First Nations Peoples of Minjerribah / Terrangee. The educative importance and the integrity of storytelling was also discussed.

Lots of our stories have meanings that can allow a young person to find

a direction in life and learn to respect their kin and their environment.

(Elders conversation, February 21, 2021)

In April 2021, I undertook the MMEIC Cultural Awareness Program and listened to the Elders’ welcome talk based on *Neembeba Binang Gana* [Look, Listen, Understand]. I was also taken to the midden at Goompi (Dunwich), *Terra Bulla Leumeah* [beautiful place here I rest],[Bamira [Brown Lake], and *Myora Spring / Capemba Creek*.

The cultural program enables participants to peruse artefacts housed in the MMEIC museum and access the photo gallery which documents the history of the island after colonisation, together with images and stories featuring the Goenpul, Noonuccal and Ngugi Peoples. Throughout this journey, I recorded reflections in my journal as part of the reflection aspect of the PAR process, which helped me to respond to the research questions underpinning this study.

I am starting to grasp the immensity of the task I have undertaken. There are so many stories, so much knowledge and seeing the artefacts and photos reinforces the concept of Country and how important it is to these lovely Elders – it truly is in their DNA and their souls. I feel the pull of the land and the sea and wonder if it is because of my childhood in the Jagera Ugarapul bush country of the Lockyer Creek area, and adulthood

exploring K’Gari on Butchulla Country. I wonder if this would resonate with me so much if I had not had these experiences. (J. Macdonald, April 4, 2021)

During these visits to Minjerribah / Terrangee, I was also encouraged to share my story, including my journey as an educator and what I proposed to do through this research. After listening carefully, Ngugi Noonuccal Elder Aunty Maureen declared:

All the university degrees don’t make you a true knowledge holder unless you have walked the walk. You have gotta be genuine and work to earn respect, there’s too much disrespect now from white fellas. (Ngugi Noonuccal Elder, Aunty Maureen Borey-Myer, personal communication, June 10, 2021)

I reflected that it was important to hear and be reminded of this reinforcement of the importance of respect for and reciprocity to the local community.

In May of 2021, I provided the Board of the MMEIC Elders with a digital presentation which covered the important aspects of the proposed research, including the rights of the Elders to their intellectual property and public acknowledgement of the Minjerribah-Moorgumpin Elders-in-Council Corporation in the thesis and any subsequent research presentations or publications. The unanimous decision of the MMEIC Board was that the proposed research was appropriate and respectful and would be able to commence. I was delighted when two of the Aunties, Goenpul Elder Aunty Mary Iselin-Burgess and Ngugi Noonuccal Elder Aunty Maureen Borey-Myer attended my Confirmation of Candidature presentation in July 2021.

6.4.1 Early reflections

As I slowly developed relationships with the MMEIC Elders, I realised how lacking I was in understanding the multiple and complex histories, languages, beliefs, and cultures of the many First Nations across Australia. Although I was eager to learn as much as possible about Quandamooka land and sea Country, I was approaching this through the hegemonic structure of western ways of knowing (Althaus, 2020). It was disquieting for me to think that during this preliminary stage of the research, I had adopted the concept of ‘niceness’ (Castagno, 2014, 2019; Orozco, 2019) to subconsciously avoid having disruptive or

uncomfortable conversations with the MMEIC Elders, particularly regarding the ongoing and reverberating impact of colonisation.

Wiradjuri academic scholar, Associate Professor Sadie Heckenberg (2020), describes people having a “romanticised and idealized version of Aboriginality that comes from a place of ignorance rather than a grounded knowledge of Aboriginal people's actual lives and realities” (p. 50). This statement resonated strongly with me as I had not reflected on my personal position as a white and privileged educated female seeking to work with First Nations people on this project and the multiple identity variations that comprise First Nations communities (Burgess, 2019; Hill et al., 2020).

As I observed and participated in activities with the MMEIC Elders, I had to acknowledge the gaps in my knowledge in relation to Aboriginal sovereignty in local cultural contexts. I had to actively engage in reflexive practices to reconstruct my perspectives and recognise the complexities and diversity of First Nations Peoples (Bishop, 2022; Bodkin-Andrews & Carlson, 2016b; Watson, 2018).

At each stage of the research, the Goenpul, Noonuccal and Ngugi MMEIC Elders generously provided mentoring and guidance. They shared stories revealing the histories and culture of this First Nations land and sea Country enabling me to gain new knowledge and understandings of their complex history.

Visiting Minjerribah / Terrangee, and listening and talking with these Elders, gave me a stronger understanding of the importance of being a participant in this research process. Participatory Action Research (PAR) is about communicating and learning to change. I now understand more clearly how social and educational practices come from the “material, social and historical circumstances that produced them” (Kemmis & McTaggart, 2007, p. 279). This requires me to accept my background and open my heart to change acknowledging again the importance of the Jandai language words *Neembeba Binang Gana* (Minjerribah-Moorgumpin Elders-in-Council, 2011, pp. 57, 21, 33). As I look, listen, think and reflect, and learn to understand, I developed a respectful relationship with the Elders who provided guidance and assistance with the preparations for the research project. This interactive social process involving real rather than abstract practices underpins PAR (Kemmis & McTaggart, 2007) and is essential in relation to considerations relating to First Nations knowledge. (Read, 2000).

During this critical introductory phase of the project, I realised the significance of being a *muragan* [white woman] (Minjerribah-Moorgumpin Elders-in-Council, 2011, p. 53) and non-First Nations researcher and outsider in the First Nations space. There was the

imperative to be willing to transform my own practices through authentic, respectful and responsive developmental learning, continually reflecting on the voices of Aboriginal scholars who emphasised commitment to accuracy of representation, and acceptance of the guidance of First Nations Elders (Denzin et al., 2017; Guenther et al., 2017; McEntyre et al., 2019).

I felt humbled to be invited by the Elders to participate in other Cultural programs and to assist in variety of community events. These opportunities enabled me to reciprocate the MMEIC Elders' time and hospitality. As an Arts educator, I particularly enjoyed participating in and providing support for the arts activities at the Stradbroke Early Learning Centre at *Goompi* (Dunwich). Whilst helping the Aunties with the collection of natural bush materials that were to be used as resources for arts activities at the Centre, I heard more of their stories of growing up on Minjerribah / Terrangee. After observing the interaction of the children with these resources, the Aunties suggested that visiting the school in the research project could support similar arts activities enabling teacher participants and students to make connections to Country and the local bush environment. Listening to their suggestions supports the AIATSIS Code of Ethics for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Research which ensures that research with and about Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples "engages with Indigenous perspectives...facilitating direct involvement in the research" (Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies, 2020a, p. 18).

It is also my responsibility as a researcher, to participate in "ongoing cultural learning...[demonstrating]...a level of cultural competency and...an understanding of relevant culture" (Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies, 2020a, p. 16).

The MMEIC Elders are the nurturers, caretakers, educators, community role models, and the custodians of the wisdom and knowledge of the ancestors (Mooney et al., 2018; Mortimer, 2011a). The opportunity to work closely with them has provided important moments of personal reflection (see note below) which have been challenging but educative:

I am awed at how tireless the Aunties are as they work in and for community and wish I could help them more. They take their responsibilities as Elders very seriously and have told me it's all about family, caring and sharing and

it's how they were brought up by their parents. I felt sad today when Aunty Maureen said:

... changing society has meant a loss of lore. It's gone – we can't do anything now from the old ways. (Ngugi Noonuccal Elder, Aunty Maureen Borey-Myers, personal communication, J. Macdonald, July 23, 2021)

6.5 Participatory Action Research (PAR) overview

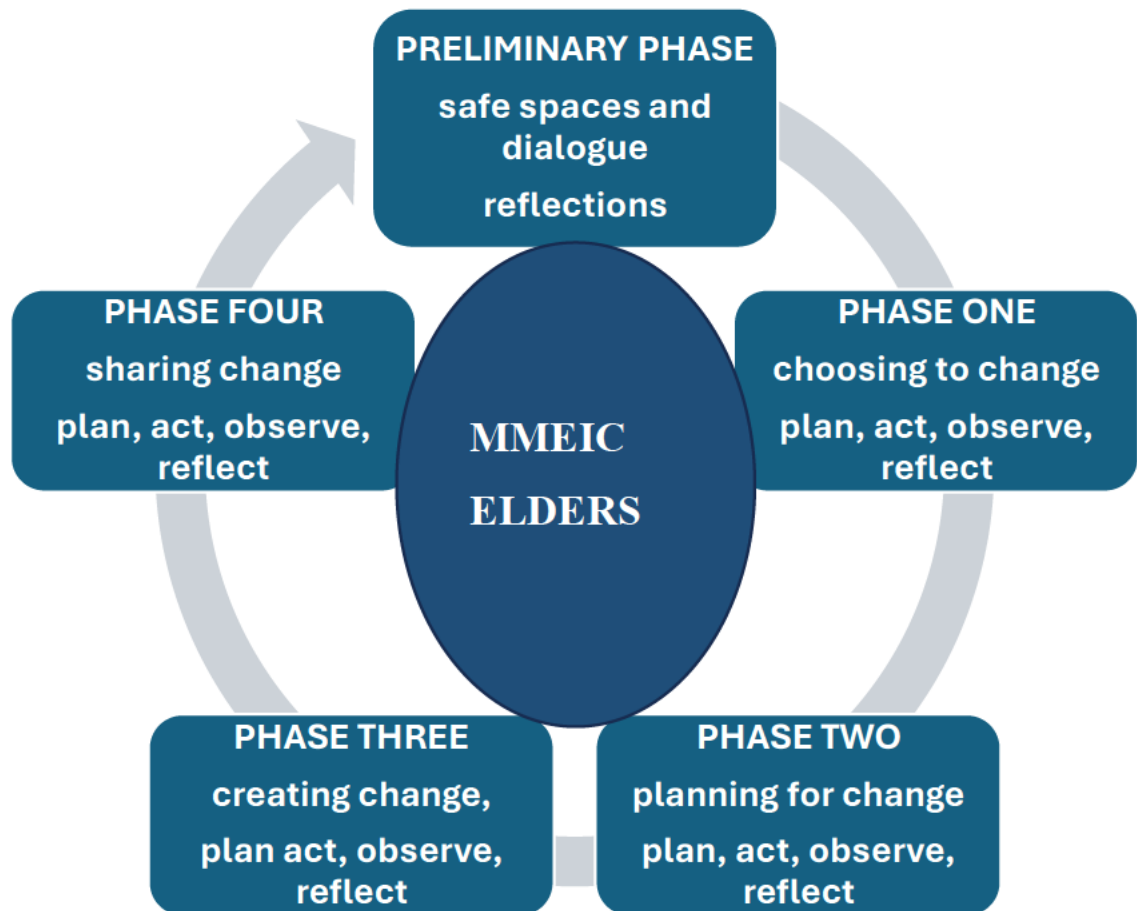
The implementation of the PAR project at a small independent primary school on the mainland, in collaboration with the Elders, provided an important opportunity for the educators and students to listen, learn and gain new understandings as they participated in arts activities on Country and further developed their understanding of Quandamooka history and culture through direct involvement with the MMEIC Elders.

PAR is premised on change as participants construct new knowledge and understanding through four phases: choosing to change, planning for change, creating change and sharing change (G. MacNaughton & P. Hughes, 2008). Contained within each of these four phases are cycles of planning, acting on, and observing the processes of the plans, reflecting, and then replanning (Kemmis et al., 2014). This cyclic approach ensures that throughout each phase, there will be overlapping, adjustments and adaptations to be made. The process becomes more fluid, open, and responsive (Kemmis & McTaggart, 2007; Kemmis et al., 2014; G. MacNaughton & P. M. Hughes, 2008) and is furthermore strengthened and supported by the knowledge shared by the MMEIC Elders.

The central positioning of the MMEIC Elders in the PAR process and their participation and contribution of cultural experience and knowledge, gave cultural validity and meaning and ensured the authenticity of the activities undertaken during the duration of the project. (Bartleet et al., 2019; Dudgeon et al., 2017; McEntyre et al., 2019). With the ongoing guidance, cooperation and support of these Elders, the participants were able to work within the cyclic approach of PAR and its spiral process of the four stages of planning, acting, observing, reflecting, and then replanning, throughout the stages of choosing to

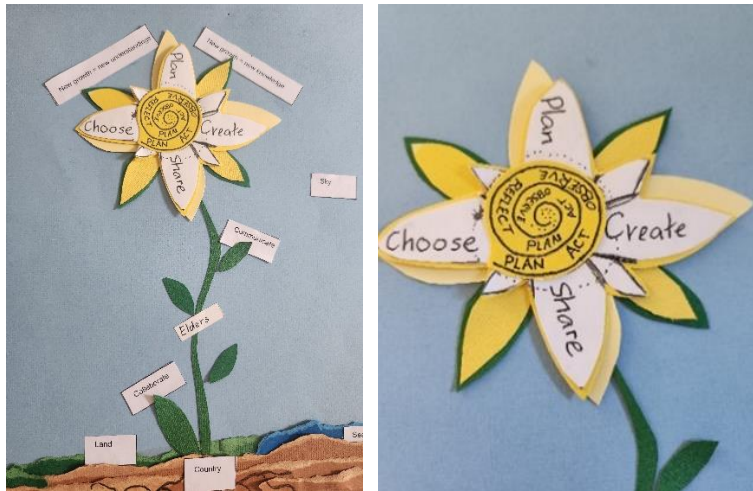
change, planning for change, creating change and sharing change (Kemmis et al., 2014; G. MacNaughton & P. Hughes, 2008). (see **Figure 31** and **Figure 32**).

Figure 31. Centring the Elders in the research spiral.



J. Macdonald, 2023 (adapted from Kemmis et al., 2014; G. MacNaughton & P. Hughes, 2008)

Figure 32. Stages of PAR.



PAR Cyclic Spiral—J. Macdonald

Adapted from Kemmis et al. (2014); G. MacNaughton and P. Hughes (2008)

Thus began the preliminary phase of my research with its requirement for the building of relationships with the MMEIC Goenpul, Noonuccal and Ngugi First Nations Elders on Minjerribah/Terrangee and prioritising the strengthening of my cultural capability and competency (Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies, 2022). I understood that this process of learning to show respect and recognition through my engagement with the Elders before gaining their formal informed consent as required by the university was significant to “getting the process right” (Ungunmerr-Baumann et al., 2022, p. 96). This also demonstrated my commitment to a research process and the AIATSIS principles, including reciprocity, which is an integral element of First Nations ways of being.

6.6 The project phases

Each of the four phases will now be presented demonstrating the cyclic approach of the necessity for planning, acting, observing, and reflecting and the centrality of the MMEIC Elders throughout the project.

6.6.1 Phase One: Choosing to change

In this first phase, the research project began in the Woodlands Independent School [WIS] * (pseudonym) with voluntary involvement from most staff. The teachers chose to change their usual practice by agreeing to participate in this journey. This required them to make

important adjustments to their planning and programming in relation to the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Histories and Cultures Cross-Curriculum Priority and the arts within their classroom practice (Australian Curriculum Assessment and Reporting Authority, 2023 -b). The following sections provide an overview of the implementation of this first phase of the research project.

Research site

The WIS is a primary school (Prep- Year Six) situated on a quiet semi-bushland road in a suburban area of the First Nations land and sea Country recognised as Quandamooka. The school population is approximately 342 students, with 2.1% identifying as First Nations. Each year level from Prep to Year Six has two co-educational classes. The school features a well-equipped library, outdoor playground facilities, and an oval partly enclosed by natural bushland. The arts are catered for with two specialist rooms: one for Music, Dance and Drama, which is adjacent to a stage area and the school community hall, and one room for Visual and Media Arts, with a wet area and outdoor space.

The principal was enthusiastic about the proposed research and particularly the opportunity for the school to complete and submit their Reconciliation Action Plan [RAP] for approval. A RAP is a guide for building respectful relationships with First Nations peoples and documents how schools can strengthen relationships, respect and opportunities in the classroom (Reconciliation Australia, 2024). The principal revealed that: “One of our RAP goals continues to be to build greater connection to our local Quandamooka Elders and learn more about Minjerribah-Moorgumpin culture, language, stories and histories” (School Principal, personal communication, June 11, 2021). She felt that this could be achieved by the school’s participation in the research project throughout 2022.

The principal was keen to identify opportunities for the staff and students to build connections with the local Quandamooka Elders. Both the principal and the assistant principal met with one of the MMEIC Elders to discuss the school’s draft RAP (November 2021) which reinforced the importance of recognition and communication with the local First Nations community. The planned research project was therefore seen to be an important opportunity to further highlight important principles embedded in the school’s RAP. The principal revealed that staffing for 2022 would extend to including the two arts specialists as part of the research, particularly given the focus on learning about the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Cross-Curriculum Priority through the Arts. The

employment of a teacher to organise, plan and support the implementation of the research project as part of a whole school curriculum approach was also a planned initiative, and this teacher was known as the Primary Learning Leader (PLL).

There were three (3) participant groups involved in the research. These included the school administrative team which included the principal, the assistant principal / religious education (APRE), and the newly appointed primary learning leader (PLL). They were designated Participant Group One (PG1).

The entire group of fourteen (14) classroom primary teachers, two (2) from each year level from Prep to Year Six were Participant Group Two (PG 2). The two specialist Arts teachers who were employed to teach all the primary year levels, one leading the Creative Arts (Visual and Media Arts) and the other the Performing Arts (Music, Dance and Drama), were designated as Participant Group three (PG 3).

The principal invited me to the staff professional development and planning days in January 2022 to present the research project to the staff. The staff were also scheduled to attend a cultural awareness program on Minjerribah / Terrangee that was organised as part of the Professional Development and Planning days in January 2022.

Critical moments (observing the shadows)

When the storm clouds close in on *Bamira*, the shadows are reflected in the water, broken only by the ripples created by a rising wind (see **Figure 33** and **Figure 34**).

Figure 33. Bamira shadows.



Figure 34. Bamira storm clouds.



(J. Macdonald, personal photographs, June 10, 2021)

I identified with these shadows and ripples at the beginning of the 2022 school year which was fraught with difficulties. The careful planning that had been undertaken to launch the project was impacted by several events. These included the cancellation of the cultural awareness program on Minjerribah / Terrangee due to the ongoing impact of the coronavirus pandemic.

At this time, COVID-19 impacted many staff during the first two weeks of the school year and consequently, no outside visitors were permitted on the school grounds for the first four weeks after school commenced. This announcement was followed by the news that the principal would be away for the duration of the semester due to serious health problems.

One of the newly employed Arts specialists resigned to accept a position elsewhere and the second Arts specialist took extended long service for the term. Referring to my journal at this time, I noted that:

I feel quite disheartened at the news re the principal. She has been so supportive and enthusiastic, and my fear is that without her the staff will not be interested in the project. There is no opportunity yet to meet with staff, and the arts teachers are unavailable. It is a setback. On speaking with the Acting Principal (APRE) she suggested I send the Project Information and Consent forms together with the Background Context survey via email, and she would share project information with the staff and distribute the forms on my behalf. I have prepared a PowerPoint presentation outlining the project, but

considering the professional development Cultural Awareness training session did not eventuate, and the staff have yet to meet with me I am afraid there will be limited response. (J. Macdonald, January 20, 2022)

The storm clouds that occasionally loom over Bamira closed in dramatically in late February that year. An extreme weather event with torrential rain caused major flooding and school closures across South-East Queensland. The school was closed for a week due to water damage in the administration block and my planned visits to Minjerribah / Terrangee to discuss the project were cancelled.

There was also termite damage found in the library which had to be closed immediately, and scaffolding placed around the area for an indefinite period. My journal entry provided further context regarding the issues, that were occurring at this time, revealing that the first phase of the PAR cycle—choosing to change—was being impacted by external factors beyond the school and its staff:

First term has not gone well for anyone. The Covid-19 virus is still affecting staff members and there has been upheaval due to relocation of all the library resources across the school. I have not been able to meet with the staff, although have spoken with the Acting Principal and the Primary Learning Leader. This is a new position in the school and Jo the PLL [pseudonym] is busy sorting, collating, and organising curriculum units of work and planning for Maths, English and HASS (Humanities and Social Sciences). I did suggest that there could be a possibility for integration with the project but was disappointed that she felt it would be too much for the teachers at this stage, because they were already behind due to the interruptions.*

(J. Macdonald, March 11, 2022)

The participants—action

Despite the upheaval that the acting principal was facing due to COVID-19, and the severe weather event, she was enthusiastic and personally made time to introduce the research project to the staff early in Term One, 2022. Given the disruptions to the school, and the

absence of several staff members, initial responses were limited, and it was not until a few months later in April that I was able to address the staff at a meeting and share with them further details of the project.

During the meeting, I was able to distribute copies of the book, *Minjerribah, an Indigenous story of North Stradbroke Island* (Iselin & Borey, 2019), and the *Jandai Language Dictionary* (Minjerribah-Moorgumpin Elders-in-Council, 2011). There was consensus that providing this background information and support for language would be helpful for teachers in meeting the goals of the research project. The staff were also overwhelmingly supportive of having the Elders visit the school.

The acting principal and the Performing Arts specialist spoke warmly of the potential for engaging in activities that would support the school's RAP. Following the presentation, several more classroom teachers agreed to participate resulting in twelve (12) total participants who received the University's Participant Information sheet and Consent form (see Appendices B, C, and D).

As part of the first phase of the PAR process, two (2) administration team members (PG1), eight (8) classroom teachers (PG2), and the two (2) Arts specialists (PG3), completed the contextual background information survey which sought to obtain information in relation to participant educational qualifications, experiences with and enjoyment of the Arts, and awareness of the histories and cultures of this First Nations land and sea Country recognised as Quandamooka.

The data from the Background Context Survey is presented below (See Table 1).

Table 1. Background Context Survey (n=12)

QUESTIONS	PG 1 (Administration) 2 responses	PG 2 (Primary classroom teachers) 8 responses	PG 3 (Specialist Arts Teachers) 2 responses
Gender <i>Female</i> <i>Male</i>	2	7 1	2
Country of Birth	2 -Australia	8 -Australia	2 -Australia
Ethnicity	1- Australian 1 -Australian-Irish	5 -Australian 3 - Caucasian	1 -European 1 - Australian
Education	1-Postgraduate 1-Graduate	1-Diploma 6-Graduate 1-Postgraduate	1 - Graduate 1 - Double Graduate
Visits to Moreton Bay Islands	2-yes	7-yes 1-no	2-yes
Enjoyment of Arts with one being limited or no enjoyment and ten being maximum enjoyment (scale of 1-10)	1 responded 10 1 responded 6	Of the 8 responses from PG2, 2 rated arts enjoyment with 9, 1 each with an 8 and a 7, and 2 each with 6 and 5	PG3 participants both rated their enjoyment with 10
Supporting/Teaching Arts-based activities	1-Music, Visual art 1-all arts strands	3 -Dance 4-Drama 1-Music 3-Media art 6-Visual Art	1-Drama, Media Arts, Visual Art 1-Media Arts, Visual Art
Confident teaching /supporting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Histories and Cultures CCP	1-yes 1-maybe	1-no 5-yes 2-maybe	2-no, not really
Understanding of Quandamooka land and sea Country Histories and Cultures (ranking 1-10 – low to high)	1 ranked 3 1 ranked 9	2-2 2-8 2-5 1-4 1-7	1-2 1-5

There was variance in responses, particularly in relation to understanding of this First Nations land and sea Country recognised as Quandamooka and its histories and cultures, with only four of the twelve participants indicating confidence in their personal understanding.

Six of the twelve expressed confidence in being able to support the Australian Curriculum's (AC) Cross-Curriculum Priority (CCP) of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders Histories and Cultures. General comments revealed that all but one respondent supported the capacity of Arts-based activities, including dance, drama, media arts, music, and visual arts, to support teaching content in relation to the CCP.

Across the three participant groups, there was variation also in the enjoyment of the arts. With a rating scale from one (1) least enjoyment to ten (10) most enjoyment, three ranked their enjoyment at ten (10), two with nine (9), one with an eight (8), three with a six (6), and two with a five (5).

Confidence in implementing Arts-based activities into classroom planning revealed only one participant responding positively to supporting all arts strands. Of the individual arts strands ten (10) out of the twelve (12) responses were positive for Visual Art activities, the numbers dropped to six (6) for Media Arts and four (4) for Drama with only three (3) feeling confident in teaching Music. In addition, all the participants listed their ethnicity as being Australian.

Interview responses: PG1 (administration team)

Due to COVID-19 restrictions operating at the time, the opportunity to conduct the semi-structured interviews with the participants, who had responded to the initial background context, had to be changed with participants providing written responses.

Two (2) responses were received from PG1, four (4) responses from PG2 and two (2) responses from PG 3, resulting in eight (8) responses in total. The questions included reference to the learning area of the Arts and the CCP of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander histories and cultures in the AC (See Interview Questions in Appendix E).

These written responses revealed that the PG1 participants had engaged in a variety of arts activities throughout their schooling. As teachers, they have facilitated arts initiatives in schools.

The PG1 participants acknowledged the significance and importance of understanding First Nations cultures and had sought to extend their knowledge by undertaking professional development at the Brisbane based Ngutana-Lui [To Teach]

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Cultural Centre. They revealed that the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander CCP was considered in their planning for the school and included in the learning experiences for each year level.

However, they also expressed concern in relation to appropriate engagement with First Nations histories and cultures. The PG1 participants highlighted how the Arts could support student learning about Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander histories and cultures because they provide students with multiple ways and different opportunities to engage. The written responses provided in lieu of interview data revealed that at this initial stage of the project the leadership team were keen for change, which aligned with the 'choosing to change' stage of the PAR process.

Interview responses: PG2 (classroom teachers)

Written responses (one from each year level) to the semi-structured interview questions were received from the Prep Year, Year One, Year Five, and Year Six teachers; four (4) responses in all. There was little indication from the middle primary teachers as to why they did not respond, but there were Year Four and Year Five teachers in part-time teaching roles which did limit their time in the classroom. However, it was felt there was enough data to reveal useful insights from the early and later primary years.

The PG2 participants recalled their primary school Arts education as being focussed on music instruction. At secondary school, two teachers studied Visual Art and Music, one did Dance, and another studied Drama. This was based on what specialist teacher was available in their school. As part of her university degree, one teacher participant had completed an Arts subject which focussed on music and drama. All the PG2 participants agreed they had never participated in any professional development in the Arts learning area of the AC curriculum.

Prior to the commencement of the project, three teacher participants (PG2) had supported the CCP of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Histories and Cultures through using Aboriginal authored story books in English work units including children's books such as, *Tiddalick the Frog* (Connolly, 2009), *No way, Yirrikipayi* (Lester, 2015), *Stolen Girl* (Saffioti, 2011), and *The Burnt Stick* (Hill, 2014). Four PG2 participants had incorporated bush tucker information in the Humanities and Social Sciences (HASS) learning area.

In this first phase of choosing to change, the PG2 participants felt that there were definite challenges in learning about and teaching the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander

Histories and Cultures CCP in the primary classroom. These concerns included the confidence to make links with the local First Nations community, the importance of cultural respect and ensuring students were aware of what constitutes cultural appropriation, so they did not unknowingly cause disrespect.

Interview responses: PG3 (Creative Arts teacher and Performing Arts teacher)

In Term One, PG3 participant, Heidi* (pseudonym), a graduate teacher in her first year of employment, had accepted a contractual position to teach Visual Art as the regular Visual Arts specialist, Anna *(pseudonym) was on leave.

On her return in Term Two, Heidi moved to the Performing Arts role and taught Dance, Drama, and Music. Heidi had expressed early interest in the research project and was an enthusiastic participant. Her schooling included Visual Art, Music, and Drama which she also specialised in through the completion of a Bachelor of Fine Art from the Queensland College of Art. During her degree she explored how Visual Art, Drama, and Performance could be integrated. After completing her undergraduate degree, she undertook a Master of Learning and Teaching degree (Primary) to gain her teaching qualifications.

During this research project, Heidi was employed at the school research site (WIS) for two days a week in addition to a Queensland state primary school teaching Visual Art and Drama, for two days a week. During a semi-structured interview with Heidi, which occurred during Term One, she expressed concern regarding the challenges of authentically and respectfully incorporating First Nations perspectives. Her concerns were related to her lack of knowledge of this area.

Heidi believed that learning from the Quandamooka Elders, such as through story-based approaches, would be an enriching and authentic starting point for developing approaches to including the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Histories and Cultures CCP into Arts activities. Her enthusiasm for the Arts and for their potential to support the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Histories and Cultures CCP was apparent in her written description of an Art unit she undertook in Term One of 2022:

I have started to embed Indigenous perspectives through my Year Four unit specifically. In the Year Four unit, students were inspired by the dreamtime story of Tiddalick the frog who caused a flood (Connolly, 2009) and the colours and shapes in the artwork of proud Bundjalung woman and artist, Dr

Bronwyn Bancroft (Bancroft, 2021). Students drew a copy of Tiddalick the frog from an aerial perspective and used circular patterning on his body. They created patterned paper backgrounds and glued their frogs onto the background. (see **Figure 35**) (Respondent Heidi)

Figure 35. Tiddalick the frog artwork.



(J. Macdonald, Year four artwork, used with permission, March 13, 2022).

The second PG3 Participant Arts Specialist Anna * (pseudonym) also has a strong background in the arts and studied Visual arts, Media Arts, and Music, throughout her schooling. She has a Bachelor of Arts degree, majoring in Visual Art, and a Bachelor of Education. Anna also runs a private Art Studio with a focus on painting, printmaking, water colours, and sculpture.

At a semi-structured interview meeting with Anna in late March of 2022, she shared how she incorporates into her Arts teaching a variety of techniques and mediums. “I like the children to experiment with different mediums to create their artworks. We use paint, prints, mixed media and collage, crayons, pastels, water colours and clay for sculpting” (Respondent Anna, March 24, 2022).

Anna also expressed her concerns about the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Histories and Cultures CCP in her Art program. “I have always worried that my lessons are

not localised and doing justice to the local Aboriginal community and supporting the histories of Quandamooka country” (Respondent Anna, March 24, 2022).

In conversations with classroom teachers, she has felt comfortable in integrating the Arts with the HASS programs in the school. She revealed that previously, with her Year Four classes, she encouraged the children to create art works from the perspective of Aboriginal people seeing the Englishmen’s boats arriving in Moreton Bay. (see **Figure 36**)

Figure 36. The boats in Moreton Bay—Year Four.



(Respondent Anna, personal photographs, used with permission, June 2021).

As part of the ‘choosing to change’ process, both the PG 3 participants, Heidi and Anna, were very keen to attend a MMEIC Cultural Awareness morning program on Minjerribah / Terrangee during May that year. They indicated that this would be an important opportunity to further their understanding of the protocols and ethics of the culture and values of the Quandamooka First Nations Peoples through the stories and knowledge of the Elders.

I accompanied Heidi and Anna on their visit to Minjerribah, and we discussed how invaluable it was to engage in this workshop with the MMEIC Elders. Anna expressed the importance of being able to learn and appreciate the culture of the Elders through walking on Country:

Being on the Island I saw where the stories came from. It gave more of a personal feel for me, and I could understand why the stories were made. Myora Springs, the native food, environment used for medicinal, and food related purposes was really interesting ... I loved seeing the artifacts in the MMEIC museum. It connected the past to the present and gave me a better understanding of the history and the culture. (Respondent Anna, personal communication, May 16, 2022)

Heidi acknowledged that being on Quandamooka land and sea Country with Elders really opened her eyes to First Nations Peoples cultures and histories in a local context:

I am realising now how First Nation Australians understand their Country and the fact that the stories are real, not fictional. I was amazed at the Elders understanding of the local landscape and native plants on the island. Everything in their culture seems to have a purpose, nothing was taken for granted and was a very sustainable way of living. (Respondent Heidi, personal communication, May 16, 2022)

Sharing a love of the Arts, Anna and Heidi were keen to collaborate with the Elders and co-plan their arts units together to ensure they were being respectful and authentic. They both saw the potential for integrating the arts strands in a variety of arts activities that would embed the stories of the Goenpul, Noonuccal and Ngugi MMEIC Elders and support the Australian Curriculum's Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders Histories and Cultures CCP. As Anna expressed:

I feel more confident that working together [with Heidi] will let us provide a more in-depth creative arts program that will be respectful and accurate in relation to the local area and the First Nations people. We can make connections with Elders and the local stories, and this will support deeper

understandings of the Quandamooka people both for us and the children.

(Respondent Anna, personal communication, May 16, 2022)

Phase One: Reflections and replanning

In reflecting on the PAR Phase One of ‘choosing to change’, I considered how “initial plans [can] quickly become obsolete” (Kemmis et al., 2014, p. 18). During Phase One, there were many times that situations changed and required fluidity, flexibility and responsiveness by me as the researcher, and the participants. The absence of the principal, the extreme weather event, the closures and cancellations due to the impact of the Coronavirus, and the change of Arts specialists, slowed the momentum of the project and the engagement of some staff who were required to quickly pivot to online teaching. This saw initial plans and actions by staff alter with the circumstances as they were required to navigate technology and adapt their teaching methods to the requirements of the on-line digital environment whilst ensuring the continuation of student engagement and motivation during the weeks of the school’s closure during a COVID-19 outbreak.. School closures were experienced, at varying degrees, for many Australian teachers during the pandemic (Flack et al., 2020; Garcia, 2022; Ziebell & Robertson, 2021).

One theme was apparent across the data collected from PG2 during this phase: the challenge of curriculum constraints and time. This impacted heavily on the capacity of these respondents to incorporate the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Histories and Cultures CCP and Arts activities in the classroom.

One respondent (PG2) revealed in a conversation that with so much curriculum content to cover “there is little time to pursue relationships with the Elders” (PG2 respondent April 28, 2022). The same teacher participant also noted that not knowing the local contexts of the Goenpul, Noonuccal and Ngugi MMEIC Elders and their land and sea Country made it difficult to know how to teach stories and histories appropriately.

Another two (PG2) respondents, in their written responses to the semi-structured interview questions, expressed concern about being appropriate and respectful of First Nations histories and cultures whilst trying to align their teaching with the demands of curriculum. Another wrote of her frustration at the structuring and compartmentalisation of the curriculum which made it difficult to find times to integrate the arts and the CCP.

During this phase, I also became aware of the lack of classroom teaching of the Arts across the school. The Arts appeared to only be taught by the Arts specialist teachers and were not featured in regular classroom planning or teaching. This led to the

consideration that the two Arts specialist participants in PG3 would be responsible for embedding the CCP through their respective Arts programs and further, that the PG2 teacher participants could be supported in other curriculum areas as they juggled all the requirements of curricula.

In conversations with the PG2 participants, they agreed they wanted to change and develop new knowledge and understandings of the histories and cultures of this First Nations land and sea Country, but they expressed doubts: “The hard part will be finding the time because it has to be relevant to the curriculum and what we are assessing” (Emma* pseudonym, PG2 respondent, personal communication, March 17, 2022), and “It is hard to fit it into our classroom units are which already planned” (Sue* pseudonym, PG2 respondent, personal communication, March 17, 2022). Di *(pseudonym) felt that embedding the CCP had potential in the learning areas of English, Humanities and Social Sciences [HASS] and Technologies, including food production and sustainable living, but not in the Arts, which has specialist teachers.

The conclusion of Phase One saw the PG2 teacher participants share their learning topics for the following term. They were keen for the Elders to have input through proposed visits to the school. “This would really help with understanding the local stories and cultures and help to avoid a generic approach” (PG2 Respondent Sue, personal communication, March 17, 2002). Di agreed: “This would really demonstrate to the students the importance of lived history—hearing the voices of the Elders from Minjerribah” (PG2 Respondent Di, personal communication, March 17, 2002).

As a participant in the research process, I made several trips to Minjerribah / Terrangee to discuss with the Elders the concerns of the teachers, including the constraints of time and the sharing of their proposed topics for the next term’s teaching program. There were also ongoing conversations with the PG3 arts specialist participants and how they could embed the stories and histories of the MMEIC Elders in their arts programs.

While expressing disappointment that PG1 and PG2 had been unable to visit the island for a cultural awareness program, missing the opportunity to communicate with the MMEIC Elders on Country, the Elders did meet with the two PG3 arts specialist participants on Minjerribah /Terrangee and shared ideas in relation to artistic interpretations for the different stories. They expressed hope that they would be able to support the different topics provided by the PG2 teacher participants in the planning for change phase and that subsequent school visits would be able to strengthen the

understandings of teachers in relation to the First Nations land and sea Country recognised as Quandamooka.

6.6.2 Phase Two: Planning for change

Planning for change involves a decision-making process through which participants decide what they wish to know, how this knowledge can be achieved, when, and with whom (G. MacNaughton & P. Hughes, 2008). The decision-making follows the spiral of planning, acting, observing and reflecting, understanding the need for flexibility, and the variations that can occur within the level of participation due to the constraints of time, resources and even, waning interest levels and minimal recognition within the institution (Kemmis et al., 2014).

These variations became apparent in this phase when the eagerness of four participants—two (2) from the PG2 teacher participants and the two (2) PG3 Arts specialists—was in direct contrast with a lack of involvement from the PG1 leadership participants and the remaining six PG2 participants. Flexibility was key to this phase as units of work across all curriculum areas had already been completed.

Although the two PG2 participants were keen for the MMEIC Elders to contribute and add a localised context to the planning, it was apparent that any planned-for changes in content would be within the parameters of the school's curriculum work units. For the Elders to visit the school to partake in these planning conversations was problematic due to their heavy work commitments to their community on Minjerribah / Terrangee. The lingering presence of the Coronavirus, in and around the local area, also contributed to their wariness in embracing the public space of a school environment.

There was no allocated time for the project participants to meet with the Elders. Subsequently, I took on the role as intermediary in this phase of planning for change. I felt a strong degree of responsibility as the liaison between these teachers and the Elders, sharing the teacher's classroom topics with the Elders and then sharing the Elders' ideas and contributions with the teachers. This is not to say that there was a lack of communication with or exclusion of the Elders within the planning process; it was just that, understandably, alternatives had to be found.

So, I followed that premise that whilst face-to-face communication is usual, "it can also include communications between participants who are unknown to one another" (Kemmis et al., 2014, p. 40). This became evident during one meeting I had with the Elders who indicated that they felt a part of the planning process through being able to

share their feedback on the classroom topics and units of work shared with them by the teachers.

PG1: Planning for change

Following on from the PG2 discussions relating to changes to units of work that would embed the local context of the CCP, and after consultation and collaboration with the Elders, I made a request on behalf of the participants and the Elders to the school's administration team (PG1), for an introductory visit to the school by MMEIC Elders. The teachers in Prep, Year One, and Year Six, were particularly keen for the Elders' input into the Australian Curriculum's learning area of HASS. The planning for Prep and Year One included the HASS/Geography focus on the local environment and familiar places and in Year Six HASS/History class, the students were studying the impact of colonisation and the post-Federation years, including the stolen generation (Australian Curriculum Assessment and Reporting Authority, 2023b).

The MMEIC Elders had also communicated that they were keen to share their knowledge of bush tucker and sustainable living skills. In a conversation with Year Four teachers, I then discovered that they were preparing a HASS unit on "sustainable use and management of renewable and non-renewable resources, including the custodial responsibility First Nations Australians have for Country/Place" (Australian Curriculum Assessment and Reporting Authority, 2023d AC9HS4K06). On sharing this information with the Elders, they were pleased to think that this was now a part of the Australian Curriculum content, and they were happy to plan how they could support this unit. The PG1 team agreed that involving the Elders further with this topic would be beneficial and supportive of the HASS units and subsequent visits were planned for Years Two, Year Four, and Year Five, to support potential plans for change within these units.

The PG1 team intimated they understood the value of having both teachers and students listen to and reflect on the perspectives and knowledge of the Elders gained through their own lived experiences. The Arts specialists (PG3) also expressed to the PG1 team how important it would be for them to attend these sessions to obtain further understanding, and to take the opportunity for conversations and planning with the Elders to consider ways in which they could integrate their stories and knowledge into their arts activities.

PG2: Planning for change

During the PAR Phase Two: Planning for change during Term Two, as part of my liaison role between the Elders and the participants, I was able to have conversations with PG2 participants in relation to their opportunities for planning for change which I then shared with the Elders. A participant from the Prep Year explained that the children would be “looking at places that are special to us, features of these places, and how to take care of these places” (PG2 participant Sue, personal communication, March 17, 2022) as part of their HASS unit. She observed that they were excited about the Elders coming to visit and as part of her initial planning, she had been looking at a map of Minjerribah /Terrangee and identifying the different places on the island.

Also, as part of her preparation in planning for change, she had introduced First Nations dreaming and/or creation stories, making links to their Religion unit. The Prep and Year One teachers had also read the book, *Minjerribah, an Indigenous story of North Stradbroke Island* (Iselin & Borey, 2007) for information regarding the way in which the First Nations Peoples on Minjerribah / Terrangee lived with the land and the sea. These participants were keen to have the opportunity to listen to stories that contextualised local history and culture of the First Nations Goenpul, Noonuccal and Ngugi MMEIC Elders.

Whilst the two Year Four teachers had declined to be formally interviewed, they showed interest in this phase and, together with information regarding the HASS unit, they also shared their English planning. This included an introduction to poetry and verse writing and, as I had been privileged to receive a copy of the poetry book, *Memoirs of Stradbroke Island* (Aunty Eileen O'Loughlin, 1995), I shared this with them. Aunty Eileen Elizabeth O'Loughlin (nee Borey) was a Ngugi Elder and poet, and I was able to meet with Aunty Eileen's present-day family relatives, including her eldest son Uncle Michael O'Loughlin, who gave me permission to share her poems with the Year Four teachers.

These poems were then introduced to the students as part of the planning for change phase. Heidi, one of the Arts specialists (PG3) also planned to integrate these within the Drama classes through role play and mime, with the approval and support of present-day Elders and relatives. As Aunty Maureen Borey-Myers said:

Aunty Eileen would be thrilled to think school children were reading her words and learning about her Country and deep love for her island Minjerribah/Terrangee. (Personal communication, March 23, 2022)

As well as studying Indigenous perspectives and post-federation issues, including the Stolen Generation in HASS and English, Year Six students were also investigating Natural Disasters in the Australian Curriculum (Version 8.4) through the Earth and Space Science unit (Australian Curriculum Assessment and Reporting Authority, n.d.). I was pleased that, in consultation with the Elders, about the different poems of Elder Aunty Eileen that her son, Uncle Michael O'Loughlin had spoken with me and shared his memory of the day his mother came home and told of "a strange event on the Oyster Lease." Apparently, this was when the tide receded suddenly, then flooded in and again receded accompanied by a roaring westerly wind (p. 12). With his permission, I was able to pass this story and the poem on to the Year Six teacher, who immediately included it in her future plan for this unit.

PG3: Planning for change

In April 2022, I was able to meet again with Anna and Heidi, the Arts specialists, and was accompanied by a MMEIC Elder who was interested to see and discuss the arts activities that were being planned. They wanted to ensure that they were authentic and not breaching cultural protocols by inadvertently sharing stories that were not meant to be shared. This discussion was very helpful as one of Heidi's planned dramatic role plays for one of the stories from the book, *Minjerribah, an Indigenous story of North Stradbroke Island* (Iselin & Borey, 2007), was not considered suitable for children to perform. Specifically, the MMEIC Elder advised that this story was a part of ancestral men's business and present-day male dancers on Minjerribah / Terrangee, and that they had their interpretation of the story.

Once again, this emphasised for me, and the PG3 participants, how important it is to facilitate and, where possible, maintain close communication with Elders in order to gain their affirmation when attempting to present First Nations stories which have unique cultural and spiritual values (Bartleet et al., 2014). Together with the Elder, the PG3 Arts specialist participants discussed the proposed planning overviews for the different year levels and how arts activities could be used to introduce and support the stories and knowledge of the MMEIC Elders.

In this phase of planning for change, I was able to share my arts knowledge and experiences as a teacher educator in the five art forms of Dance, Drama, Media Arts, Music, and Visual Art. Heidi expressed how helpful this was for her in her first year as a registered teacher. As an experienced Arts educator in a variety of artistic mediums, Anna was also able to provide support for Heidi. This co-planning process, together with the

suggestions and advice of the Elders, ensured the authenticity and the integrity of the stories that would be shared with the students.

Having been provided with classroom unit plan topics by the PG2 teacher participants also enabled the PG3 Arts specialist participants to focus on an integrative process between the arts strands and the classroom learning areas. This resulted in a holistic approach to the planning and the embedding of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Histories and Cultures CCP through the localised context of Quandamooka land and sea Country.

Planning for change also included discussions with all three participant groups on providing opportunities for the students to demonstrate their learning through the presentation and exhibition of dramatic representations, musical soundscapes and visual art activities through a showcase presentation. The Elders thought this was an appropriate way to include community in the knowledge sharing. With Year Four being introduced to poetry writing and requests from PG2 teacher participants and PG3 Arts specialist participants for advice on the introduction of Jandai language words, I was able to spend time with Goenpul Elder Aunty Mary and Ngugi and Noonuccal Elder Aunty Maureen who worked together to compose a series of poems and rhymes about the creatures on Minjerribah / Terrangee. This included Jandai Language words for the students to learn. These poems were shared with all PG2 Prep, Year One, and Year Four teachers to support their planned units of work.

The Elders, Heidi (PG3) and I also collaborated on a set of rhyming couplets for Year Four acknowledging the section, *Living with the Land in Minjerribah, an Indigenous Story of North Stradbroke Island* (Iselin & Borey, 2007, pp. 15-18). Heidi planned to use these for musical activities that supported beat and rhythm to accompany information about Minjerribah / Terrangee that the Elders had provided. This allowed for musical accompaniment and strengthened the students verse writing in their classroom literacy unit.

Anna's planning for Years Four to Six included an introduction to collage as the Elders had shared with her how local bush materials could be used for weaving, patterns and creating pictures to represent the islands of Minjerribah and Moorgumpin and the waters of Moreton Bay. Anna planned to integrate these into her Media Arts activities when the students would be introduced to photography and movie making digital technology to create stories of Minjerribah / Terrangee. After consultation with the MMEIC Elder, Heidi received permission to recreate some stories and included dramatic role play incorporating mime, freeze-framing, and improvisation (ACARA, 2023) in her planning for the Middle and Upper school students.

Phase Two: Reflections and replanning

In reflecting on the progress of this project during Phase Two, I felt cautious optimism that the PG2 teacher participants were expressing interest and reaching out to the Elders for information that would strengthen the unit plans. Importantly, it would also provide new knowledge and understanding of the history, stories, and culture of the Goenpul, Noonuccal and Ngugi MMEIC Elders of Minjerribah / Terrangee. An added benefit was growing enthusiasm every time the Elders' visits were planned; this was an attitudinal change that was rewarding for me to see. PG2 teacher participant Sue informed me that the Prep classes were preparing questions about living on the island for the Elders.

During the discussions around planning for the Arts units, the PG3 Arts specialist participants revealed that for some year levels, new knowledge would be dependent on their engagement in Arts activities with the Arts specialists and not their classroom teachers. This was because the teachers were not required to be present during Arts lessons as this was provided as a 'free' lesson for teachers to undertake other tasks such as planning. Anna also drew attention to the National Assessment Program – Literacy and Numeracy (NAPLAN) (Australian Curriculum and Assessment Reporting Authority, 2023a) which was scheduled to occur in May for Year Three and Year Five students and would impact on those teachers and their students in terms of initial support for Phase Three.

In concluding this phase, I felt that the planning for change revealed the importance of the reciprocal relationships between the participants and the MMEIC Elders who were able to access albeit from afar, classroom units of work. This allowed them time in their *place* on *Country* of Minjerribah / Terrangee to discuss and provide suggestions for reconstructing and changing classroom practices. (Kemmis, 2009; Kemmis et al., 2014). Their input enabled a more authentic and genuine understanding of the local context of this land and sea Country recognised as Quandamooka.

Building a relationship with the Arts specialists was indicative of the importance of having arts specialists engage with this planning to change process. In my journal at this time, I noted:

I am so fortunate to be able to work with two arts-educated teachers who have the same passion for their work as I have. I shall learn much from them about embedding the CCP through the arts in the classroom and together we will be learning at the same time from the Elders and their stories. (J. Macdonald, personal reflection, April 18, 2022)

6.6.3 Phase Three: Creating change

Phase Three and the creation of change focusses on the project participants implementation of units of work that had been planned collaboratively with the MMEIC Elders and informed by their knowledge and understanding. The PG3 planned activities reveal how the integrity of each of the individual arts strands was maintained and integrated with the stories and knowledge of the Goenpul, Noonuccal and Ngugi MMEIC Elders.

PG2: Creating change in the classroom

I never knew there were different tribes and languages ...

I felt sad that young Aboriginal children had to leave their island, change their names, live on rations and were not allowed to say their language words...

I love they were smart and knew when to catch fish and what to eat from the land without being poisoned ... they had cool strategies to catch the parrots which they ate.

(Reflections from Year Six students, May 13, 2022)

After the visit of the MMEIC Elders to the Year Six students (May 6, 2022), the written extracts from the students revealed the important insights that were gained through the sharing of stories. The MMEIC Elders shared with the Year Six students the stories of the Myora Mission days. This included how Aboriginal children were sent away to the mainland if they misbehaved. They spoke of catching food to eat as a child, how the supply boats came from Brisbane, and how weather patterns and signs in the environment informed the community's knowledge of fishing and food gathering.

During a follow-up conversation with Di* (*pseudonym), one of the Year Six teachers, shared how the topic of Indigenous perspectives and post-federation including the 1967 referendum and the stories of the Myora Mission days brought the HASS unit to life

for her class. The Year Six students were subsequently looking forward to more visits from the Elders, including engaging in weaving with the Aunties.

The Prep and Year One students were introduced to the Jandai Language word “*Yura*” meaning ‘hello’ (Minjerribah-Moorgumpin Elders-in-Council, 2011, p. 67). During the visits from the MMEIC Elders, they heard stories of growing up on Minjerribah / Terrangee and were told the Dreaming/Creation story of *Mirrabooka* [Southern Cross] (Iselin & Borey, 2007, p. 10).

The Prep teacher, Sue * (pseudonym), provided a written reflection on one of these visits from the Elders:

... the children asked questions and engaged well with the Elders’ stories and have made connections to the stories in the Minjerribah book. I feel more confident now ... and have been able to use the stories in our literacy program with children taking on some of the roles of creatures and people to enhance their oral communication. The students have also used mime in role play, supporting drama. This was helpful in HASS as we had discussed places that were special to us, and the Elders were able to support and strengthen this further with their sharing of the special places on Minjerribah and how Aboriginal people care for and protect these places. (PG2 Participant Sue)

It is critical when teaching students about First Nations histories and cultures to foster authentic partnerships with First Nations communities to ensure their perspectives and cultural knowledge creates “a new knowledge set for all” (Turner et al., 2017, p. 96).

The importance of this statement was highlighted through the positive feedback from the school community by the school visits undertaken by the MMEIC Elders. PAR requires continual planning and replanning, and the knowledge that was generously shared by the Elders during these visits contributed to the PAR Process Phase 3 ‘creating change’.

As part of this phase of creating change, there was an opportunity to re-plan as participants reflected on this first visit from the Elders and their developing understanding of their present practices and the need to reframe future learnings.

Planning for subsequent visits to the school began with the lower primary classes of Prep, Year One, and Year Two, with the teachers sharing with the Elders the topics scheduled to be explored in the next round of planning including farming life (English) and family celebrations (HASS) and toys that push and pull (Science).

Additionally, Year Three were investigating how communities participate and express themselves culturally, and Year Four were examining sustainability and resources in the environment. The MMEIC Elders felt they would be able to contribute to all of the lessons by sharing specific stories of growing up on the island related to farming, family celebrations and toys/games.

In their second visit to the lower school, the children of Prep, Year One, and Year Two demonstrated their new language knowledge using the Jandai word, *Yura*, to welcome Elders Aunty Mary and Aunty Maureen to their classes. They also performed for the Aunties a song taught to them by Heidi, using *Jandai* words for the sea creatures in Quandamooka Bay. The Aunties' stories of bush tucker food, bush craft, living in the bush, family celebrations, school, and games provided important opportunities for the students to learn about and appreciate Aboriginal culture and history as experienced by the Goenpul, Noonuccal and Ngugi MMEIC Elders.

As part of the creating change phase with the Year Six students, the Elders shared the importance of passing on knowledge and how it is a vital component of their role. They described their roles and responsibilities that include growing cultural connections as they restore, develop and pass on their knowledge to the next generation (Gainsford & Robertson, 2019; Gibson et al., 2020; Perry & Holt, 2018).

Aunty Mary spoke of how the Grannies taught the art of weaving and using special reeds, to the young girls on the Myora Mission. These young girls grew up and passed on this knowledge as well. Goenpul Elder Aunty Mary's mother (Aunty Margaret Iselin) was one of these young girls. She shared how:

... the Grannies would go with the young girls into the swampy area outside

the mission grounds to collect the special reeds required for weaving baskets.

They were allowed to leave the mission to do this as the finished woven baskets

were handed to the mission superintendent who then sold them on the

mainland. Of course, the women never received any payment for this.

(Goenpul Elder Aunty Mary Iselin-Burgess, personal communication, July 29, 2022) (see **Figures 37-39**)

Figure 37. Weaving with Goenpul Elder Aunty Mary (photograph of Elder used with permission).



Figure 38. Student weaving.



Figure 39. Completed student weaving.



(J. Macdonald, personal photographs, July 29, 2022)

After observing the students as they engaged in weaving, their classroom teacher Di's written reflection on the experience acknowledged the significance of the tactile experience the Aunties provided. She described how the experience was grounded and anathema to the virtual screen experiences with which many students are engaged. Di felt the students had a much better understanding of this First Nations Country because of the visits by the MMEIC Elders, and particularly the Aunties.

Our science unit of 'grains and technology' has certainly been strengthened due to the Elders' stories of the medicinal purposes of bush tucker and the seasonal approach to cultivating food. The children enjoyed hearing about Aunty Marg's 'Johnny Cakes' and how they were cooked on the open fire ... (Participant Di)

The Aunties' gift to Di of an apron featuring a screen-print of Aunty Marg's Johnny Cake recipe (see **Figure 40**) was greatly appreciated. Di felt that having this item in the classroom would become another "touchstone for learning in the future" (Participant Di).

Figure 40. Apron gift from Elder Aunties.



(J. Macdonald, personal photograph, May 10, 2024)

PG3: Creating change through the Arts

Both PG3 participants kept written reflections on the progress or otherwise of the arts activities, noting the students' responses and any challenges that arose. They met regularly to discuss their observations and that, in this "space of communicative action" (Kemmis et al., 2014; p. 35), they identified ways to address challenges, altering and adjusting their planning and enlisting my support in reaching out to the Elders to ensure the integrity of new adjustments thus adhering to the co-planning process.

The cyclic nature of this iterative process (Schiller et al., 2021) enabled the two Arts specialists to develop their own personal cultural understandings and capacity to embed Quandamooka land, sea, and Country cultural knowledge.

With copies of the *Jandai Language Dictionary* available in the school, selected Jandai language words were being incorporated by Heidi into her lessons with the lower school classes.

The students enjoyed learning new words and picking out different animals and sea creatures for role play. This was a success, and I felt this balanced teaching drama concepts with Quandamooka culture. (PG3 Participant Heidi)

On their second visit to classrooms, the MMEIC Elders had spoken of bush tucker food and living from the land and the sea. Their stories included that of *Booangun* (Aunty Margaret Iselin & Uncle Keith Borey, 2007, p. 12) the dolphin, and how this sea creature is a *yuri* (totem) (MMEIC, 2011, p. 67), along with land-based Gabul (carpet snake) (Minjerribah-Moorgumpin Elders-in-Council, 2011, p. 31).¹⁷ Using this new knowledge of the land and sea Country recognised as Quandamooka, Anna involved students in creating artworks inspired by the fish and turtles of Quandamooka Bay, and the *yuri* [totem] of the carpet snake.

The students had learned from the Elders of the Quandamooka traditional art styles of cross-hatching and x-ray art. Through researching with Anna, the Year Six students discovered that these art styles were also traditionally associated with Northern Australia (Arnhem Land). They also learned that particular styles of art revealed artists' important connections to Country (Artlandish Aboriginal Art Gallery, 2024). The children were keen to explore these artistic techniques and understood that using motifs and patterns and artwork without consent is cultural appropriation (Blacklock, 2024).

The Australian Curriculum's Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Histories and Cultures CCP recognises the importance of protecting Indigenous Cultural Property through respectful application of protocols (Australian Curriculum Assessment and Reporting Authority, 2023 -b). Anna and I always consulted with the Elders in regard to the proposed artworks. Thankfully, the Elders had no hesitation in approving this approach, as they felt it provided another opportunity for students to think about the living creatures on this First Nations land and sea Country and create their own images and interpretations. Anna was then able to balance the cultural knowledge with Western artistic elements of line, shape, colour, and texture, and the children were encouraged to use their own styles to create their creatures. (See **Figures 41-45**)

¹⁷ Booangun, dolphin, is also spelt in the Jandai Language Dictionary as Buwangan with the meaning white porpoise. Minjerribah-Moorgumpin Elders-in-Council. (2011). *Jandai Language Dictionary*. Minjerribah-Moorgumpin Elders-in-Council Aboriginal Corporation p. 25.

Figure 41. *Bunbiya* [turtle] (Minjerribah-Moorgumpin Elders-in-Council, 2011, p. 25).

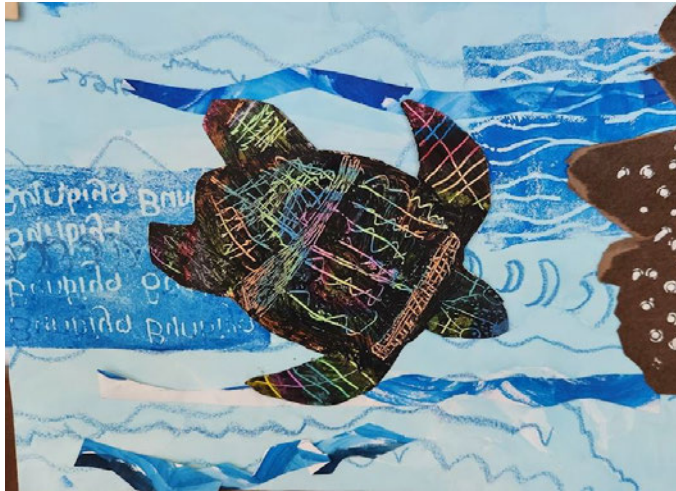


Figure 42. Years Two and Three artwork: collage, painting.



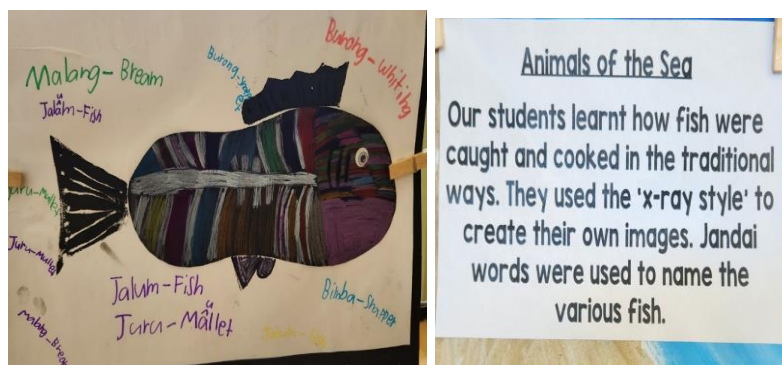
(J. Macdonald, personal photographs, November 21, 2022)

Figure 43. Gabul [carpet snake] (Minjerribah-Moorgumpin Elders-in-Council, 2011, p. 31). Year Three artwork: collage, camouflage art, cross-hatching.



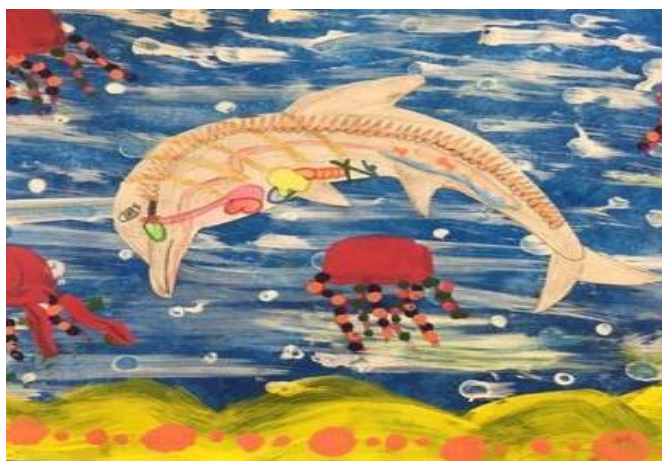
(J. Macdonald, personal photograph, November 21, 2022)

Figure 44. Jalum [fish] (Minjerribah-Moorgumpin Elders-in-Council, 2011, p. 43). Year One artwork: x-ray lines and explanation.



(J. Macdonald, personal photograph, 2 November 21, 2022)

Figure 45. Year Six: X-Ray art—Dolphin.



(J. Macdonald. Personal photograph, November 20, 2022)

Anna's written reflection during this time revealed how she used her Arts expertise and knowledge to sensitively integrate knowledge of the Country the students were working on:

I am consistently trying to strengthen the children's art knowledge and understanding and cognitive awareness in topics such as shades in colours. It was easy to link this to, for example, the waters of Quandamooka Bay and draw the children's attention to the local area and the original inhabitants.

(PG3 participant, Anna)

As part of this phase of creating change, Heidi's Drama lessons for the Year Three to Year Six students included various books. *You, Me – Our Place* (Norrington, 2008) encouraged the students to compare and contrast their personal lives with the lived experiences of First Nations people. The book, *Sam's Bush Journey* (Morgan & Kwaymullina, 2009), introduced students to the importance of the ancestors and being on Country and resonated strongly with the children who had been introduced to the importance of the ancestors and the retelling of stories by the MMEIC Elders.

Further, the story of *Stolen Girl* (Saffioti, 2011), the school's chosen literary text in Year Six English, helped students to learn about the Stolen Generation. The Elders' stories of children being removed from the Myora Mission made these stories authentic and credible for the students, as they were also able to ask questions from people who had experienced the stories that were depicted in these books.

Heidi's observation that the student role-playing and improvisations of being taken (stolen) from their homes appeared to have much deeper significance after the visit from the Elders (see **Figure 46**) appeared to reflect "a deeper understanding of the stolen generation appears to be developing for these students" (PG3 Participant, Heidi).

Figure 46. Drama Year Six: Role play re-enactment of *Stolen Girl* (Saffioti, 2011).



(Arts specialist, personal photograph, used with permission, May 21, 2022)

The Elders had shared with the Year Five students stories of the bush spirits on the island with particular reference to *Janjari* [light] (Minjerribah-Moorgumpin Elders-in-Council, 2011, p. 44), and *Jargon* [bunyip, spirit in the lake] (Minjerribah-Moorgumpin Elders-in-Council, 2011, p. 44).

Through the dramatic elements of role, situation, place, movement, character, relationships, and voice (Australian Curriculum and Assessment Reporting Authority, 2023f), the students engaged in role play and enacting the attempted removal of the young child by the *Jargon* at *Bamira* as told by Aunty Joan Costello and Aunty Phyllis Donovan (Fischer, B., Aunty Rose Borey, Aunty Estelle Bertossi, 2021, p. 28). They also envisaged scenarios where a *Janjari* would appear to guide them, frighten them, and lead them.

Heidi reflected:

It was interesting to see the conversations between the children with some announcing that the bunyip was scarier than the Janjari which was probably trying to help keep people safe – the classes have really thought about facial expressions and body movements and enjoy creating freeze frames in small groups. (PG3 participant, Heidi).

In Visual Art, students were encouraged to imagine and create their own impressions of these two bush spirits using pencils as an art medium, to support drawing and shading techniques (see **Figures 47 and 48**).

Figure 47. Janjari [bushland spirit].



(Arts specialist, personal photograph, used with permission, June 19, 2022)

Figure 48. Jargon [spirit in the lake].



(Arts specialist, personal photograph, used with permission, June 19, 2022)

As the students were exploring different identities and characterisations through Drama, they were also exploring personal identity through Visual Art. The students were asked to choose six elements that represented their connection with First Nations Quandamooka

land and sea Country and, once again being mindful of cultural appropriation, to design and draw their own symbols as they created an artwork (see **Figures 49-51**).

Figure 49. Year 6 line drawings: Perspectives of connections to Country.



Figure 50. Student line drawing.



Figure 51. Yura, means welcome.



(Visual Arts Specialist personal photographs, used with permission, June 2022).

During this PAR Phase Three of creating change, the focus for the school's Arts program had moved from Drama and Visual Art to Music for Heidi and Media Arts for Anna. The two Arts specialists (PG3) and I worked very closely together, meeting regularly and sharing our knowledge as we co-planned actively for creating change.

Proposed activities for Music and Media Arts that evolved from the knowledge shared by the MMEIC Elders in their visits to the school, were shared with and discussed by the Elders. This decision-making process demonstrated the imperative of being culturally aware and respectful, as we considered how to authentically create change by incorporating the cultural knowledge that was shared through an arts-based learning approach. In this respect, the cyclical process of PAR was working effectively as we planned, acted on the plans, observed student responses, and jointly reflected to re-plan and make changes. Heidi's reflection at the end of Week Three, Term Three, is indicative of the learning journey that took place.

This week the Year three children were working on their music and role plays about Janjari and Jargons (spirits). They are planning mimes and freeze frames to show small story extracts of bush walks and hearing, seeing, the spirits and what happens. The Year five classes are creating a musical soundscape of a storm using graphic notation. We have found Jandai words for wind (gabi-gabi) (Minjerribah-Moorgumpin Elders-in-

Council, 2011, p. 31), rain (banna) (Minjerribah-Moorgumpin Elders-in-Council, 2011, p. 19), thunder (mumbal) (Minjerribah-Moorgumpin Elders-in-Council, 2011, p. 52), and storm (duram duram) (Minjerribah-Moorgumpin Elders-in-Council, 2011, p. 30), using them as we put together sequences for a storm story soundscape. They practised using percussion instruments to make the sounds. The skill level and engagement are quite high for most students. Year Six students are busy writing their Quandamooka raps. They've been able to introduce some of the things they did and learnt on the Year 6 camp which was on Moorgumpin (Moreton Island) this year. Many of the students in year 6 are loving the unit, their engagement is very high.

Heidi also added as part of her reflection that:

A Year 2 teacher reached out to me as she wanted to go through the Quandamooka songs and integrate them into her classroom literacy program. (PG3 Participant, Heidi)

Heidi's music lessons included teaching the poems and rhymes written with the support of Ngugi Noonuccal Elder Aunty Maureen and Goenpul Elder Aunty Mary incorporating the knowledge of Community Elder Uncle George Khan who maintains the Bush Tucker Trail at Terra Bulla Leumeah. Through these lessons, the children learned about the musical concepts of beat and rhythm and used a variety of musical instruments to accompany the words. They were therefore able to increase their knowledge and skills of music and embed the cultural knowledge of their local First Nations community and its traditional owners, the Goenpul, Noonuccal and Ngugi Elders, as part of their learning.

At the same time, Anna shared the success she was having with stop-motion animations with Years Five and Six. The students enjoyed learning about the process, using plasticine and clay to create their Quandamooka stories. Other classes used mixed media resources to create sea scenes of Quandamooka Bay (see **Figure 52** and **Figure 53**).

Figure 52. Sea creatures—mixed media artwork.



Figure 53. Year Two fish sculpting.



(J. Macdonald, personal photographs, November 20, 2022)

Both Arts specialists agreed that following the visits to the school from the MMEIC Elders, there was an increase in positive engagement from the students. Anna wrote in her reflection that:

They [the students] really do seem to have more respect for the local area because they feel connected through the Elders' stories and being able to use the stories to create their own artworks. (PG3 Participant Anna)

Working with the two Arts specialists and sharing our diverse knowledge and skills in a collaborative approach, also facilitates new learning as reflected in this third phase of the PAR process. I reflected on how I have been able to support Heidi in her music lessons:

It was fun for me to demonstrate in a music lesson a sequence for introducing percussion instruments. I felt a sense of 'deja vu' from my days of classroom music teaching as I instructed the children (Year Four) in keeping the beat and creating rhythmic patterns using body percussion and then untuned instruments. I felt gratified too that I had not misremembered how enjoyable this process is and hope that Heidi is able to continue these steps with the couplet rhymes. (J. Macdonald, reflection, August 11, 2022)

The opportunity to mentor Heidi gave me the opportunity to draw upon my expertise and experience in music education and provide her with suggestions for adjusting activities in relation to the knowledge that had been shared by the Goenpul, Noonuccal and Ngugi MMEIC Elders.

Heidi and Anna also collaboratively designed media arts activities with permission from the Elders to use the stories they had shared with the students on their visits. Anna reflected that it was so much easier to include the design elements and principles for visual art and media when authentic connections were able to be made with the Country on which the school is located.

In our collaborations, I shared a sequence of steps for introducing a music topic and Heidi showed Anna the sequence of steps for stop-motion animations. During this time, the Year Five and Six students worked on their backdrops for their animation, their clay models, and figures (see **Figure 54-56**).

Figure 54. Backdrops for Quandamooka story animations.



Figure 55. Land and sea Country.



Figure 56. Junjaris



(J. Macdonald, personal photographs, used with permission, October 18, 2022)

Anna also noted that the conversations with the Elders helped the students to make their learning experiences more authentic, thereby strengthening their engagement (see **Figure 57**).

Figure 57. Student engagement.



J. Macdonald, personal photograph, used with permission, November 8, 2022.

Phase Three: Reflections

The creating change phase saw the implementation of arts activities by Anna and Heidi, the two Arts specialists. The activities were planned collaboratively with the support of the MMEIC Elders and embedded much of the local content and cultures of this First Nations land and sea Country recognised as Quandamooka that they had shared on their visits to the school.

During this phase, feedback from classroom teachers (PG2) was instrumental in creating the classroom activities in other curriculum learning areas. The cyclical nature of PAR allowed for implementation of planned activities, observations, reflections, and adjustments to the arts planning. As the researcher participant, I was able to interact with the Arts specialists and their students at various times, giving me important insights related to the processes that the teachers were following.

Both Arts specialists were genuinely committed to maintaining the integrity of the individual Arts strands. Most students were engaged in using and manipulating available

materials to follow the principles and elements of both Music and Visual and Media Art. They were also able to analyse and reflect critically on their own progress and understandings.

The visits from the MMEIC Elders provided me with opportunity to reflect and observe students' participation and understanding of this First Nations land and sea Country through observations of their engagement with the different arts activities.

After discussing my initial observations with the Elders, they agreed that:

Telling stories is about listening to lived history. They are about listening to Elders and learning about our Aboriginal culture and connections to our Country. We have to get them actively involved and participating. It is good that the children at the school are doing plays and songs and making artworks. They will learn more if they are actively involved.

(Elders' conversation, September 25, 2022).

The observations of the MMEIC Elders appeared to complement the PAR process of planning, active involvement, observing, and reflecting. This approach is also a way of learning that is ingrained in Aboriginal culture and was emphasised by the Elders during their school visits. Their stories have resonated throughout this PAR Phase Three of creating change. It was through the students' active involvement in the varied arts activities directly connected to stories and culture that the Arts specialists were able to embed the knowledge shared by these Elders.

6.6.4 Phase Four: Sharing change

PAR is a co-learning and social process with an underlying premise that, throughout the cycles of planning, acting, observing, and reflecting, which make up the phases of choosing to change, planning for change, creating change, and sharing change, there will be a transformation in practice that will generate change (Kemmis et al., 2014; Sales et al., 2020).

After discussion with the school principal, the Arts specialists, and the MMEIC Elders, it was agreed that the students would present their new knowledge of First Nations land and sea Country recognised as Quandamooka to the school and wider community.

This PAR Phase Four of sharing change occurred at a special presentation in the school hall on November 22, 2022. A Visual Art Gallery walk featured all the artworks completed by students throughout the months of the project. The students' Media Art animations and film clips were displayed on screens positioned either side of the stage and each year level shared their artistic accomplishments in Movement, Dance, Drama, and Music, on the stage. The event was titled "Quandamooka Connections" and was introduced by a MMEIC Elder with a Welcome to Country. The Elders' contributions to the performances were acknowledged at each year level by the students. Representatives from the MMEIC Elders, and educational bodies and other institutions were in attendance, in addition to the student body, teachers and parents/guardians.

The weeks prior to the event saw the students becoming significantly more involved, giving up their lunch time to complete art works to assist with scenery and props. Older students were supporting the younger ones with movements and actions and a group from Year Six were engaged in choreography to support their Rap performance. Both Anna and Heidi reflected that they were observing a definite change in the attitude of the students and an increase in sensitivity and understanding of First Nations Aboriginal culture through their arts activities. This was particularly noticeable with the Year Five and Six students who were creating their clay animations in Media Arts. The animations were based on the students' new knowledge and understanding of the lifestyles and stories from the Goenpul, Noonuccal and Ngugi MMEIC Elders including fishing, calling the dolphins, collecting bush honey, and the various signs in nature. (see **Figures 58-61**)

Figure 58. Fishing.



Figure 59. Calling the dolphins.



Figure 60. Collecting bush honey.



Figure 61. When the wattle flowers, the tailor fish come.



(J. Macdonald, personal photographs, used with permission, November 10, 2022).

The day of the event saw the school hall packed to capacity with many parents having to stand. The student performances were enthusiastically received by all in attendance and the Elders who attended expressed how proud they were to see their stories and histories brought to life by the students (**Figures 62-65**).

Figure 62. *Janjari* Masks—Year Three.



Figure 63. *Duram duram* [storm].



Figure 64. *Gabigabi* [wind] and *Gabing* [water].



Figure 65. *Jandargan* [rainbow].



(J. Macdonald, personal photographs, November 22, 2022)

Student feedback from the schoolwide “Quandamooka Connections” event included: “I liked being a *Yaguwi* [bandicoot] and acting out the character” (Prep student); “I got to learn a new language (Jandai) and the word, *Ugurie* [edible shellfish] (Year 1 student); and “It was fun and a great way to learn about Quandamooka people” (Year 6 student).

Feedback from the school community was positive, with parents delighted that students were making relevant and respectful connections with the Elders and learning about the Goenpul, Noonuccal and Ngugi First Nations Peoples in this local context. The Elders expressed their delight at seeing their stories and cultural knowledge brought to life through the displays of the children’s work.

I liked the way they used the beat of the instruments to accompany their rhymes and movements. It is what our dancers do in their performances on the island. The artwork really shows our stories as we told them.

(Elders' personal communication, November 22, 2022)

Phase Four: Reflections

With the culmination of the project and the presentation of students of their new learnings of the stories and culture of the Goenpul, Noonuccal and Ngugi MMEIC Elders, I felt a sense of achievement. But, there was also a heightened awareness that the success of this project is not to be measured by the performance outcome and the following of the steps of the PAR four phases of choosing, planning, creating, and sharing of change. It is whether or not the participants have genuinely and authentically evolved in their practices as educators and developed a stronger cultural understanding of the local context of the MMEIC Elders of Minjerribah /Terrangee. Further, it should enable them to make transformative changes in their embedding of the Australian Curriculum's CCP of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Histories and Cultures in the classroom (Kemmis et al., 2014).

There is optimism that the fluid, self-evaluative, ongoing PAR process of the four phases, together with the spiralling action of planning, acting, observing, and reflecting, contained within each phase leading to re-planning in a cyclical and iterative process, was successful for the PG2 and PG3; they were active participants in the project with the support of the PG1 leadership team who enabled the project to be implemented.

The project was underpinned by the lore of the Goenpul, Noonuccal and Ngugi MMEIC Elders and, throughout each of the four PAR phases, these Elders with their histories and stories were respected, listened to, consulted, and collaborated with. Their visits to the school saw a new awareness and recognition of Elders as representatives of community with a living identity having strengths and resources (Dudgeon et al., 2020). I observed changes in the participants' responses as they integrated new knowledge and the stories and language of the First Nations land and sea Country recognised as Quandamooka revealing their developing cultural understandings.

However, PAR is an ongoing process, and its iterations can continue indefinitely. Therefore, whether the facilitating of change through the four phases has been instrumental in guaranteeing sustainable transformation of the teaching practices of the project participants cannot be determined at this early stage (Benjamin-Thomas et al., 2018; Walter, 2009).

What is evident however, is that there was a transformation that had taken place on a whole school basis which is directly linked to the active inclusion of Elders in the school community. Ideally, the future should see a continuation of the reciprocal relationship between the school and the MMEIC Elders and a continuing embedding of First Nations histories and cultures in the local context of the First Nations land and sea Country on which this school is situated.

6.7 Capemba Creek / Myora Spring

And so, I return to *Bamira* where, for me, the stories began; where stories were always told and a place which has long been a significant meeting place for the First Nations Goenpul, Noonuccal and Ngugi Peoples of the land and the sea.

Bamira still provides a special and safe space on Country for stories to be told, memories made, and reflections on connections to place. Much learning has occurred since my first visit to *Bamira*, and I can see the growth in my own cultural understanding as I engaged in the PAR process of choosing, planning, creating, and sharing change. Throughout this process, there has been the imperative to look, listen, and understand, and then to enable the transformation of pedagogical practices.

My journey now takes me to the waters of Capemba Creek and Myora Spring, a pure-freshwater spring that is running today with water constantly flowing into the creek and out to the bay. This signpost, indicating new fresh water, will become the metaphor for the new learnings, knowledge, and transformations of practice that evolved throughout participation in this project.

The planning, actions, observations, and reflections that have made up each phase have all provided an organic fluidity to a process that began with choosing to change, continued with planning for and creating change, and finally sharing of new knowledge, whilst continually reflecting on the continuation of the PAR cycle.

Chapter 7: Signpost 7—Myora Spring / Capemba Creek

7.1 Introduction

As with the signposted sites in previous chapters, Myora Spring / Capemba Creek is another important cultural site with echoes of stories of the past. This spring, which is one of many on Minjerribah / Terrangee, is a source of constant fresh, life-giving water flowing constantly into Capemba Creek. The name, Capemba, was explained to me by Goenpul Jandaiwal MMEIC Elder Dale Ruska, as follows:

‘Capem’ means water; and ‘ba’ means place – our language is always connected with deep Country.

(Personal communication, October 16, 2023)

This chapter commences with the Minjerribah-Moorgumpin Elders-in-Council [MMEIC] Goenpul, Noonuccal and Ngugi Elders’ stories of Myora Spring and Capemba Creek and an explanation of my choice of this place for a signpost.

The water pouring from the spring symbolises for me the new knowledge that was gained on this journey for the non-First Nations educators during the Participatory Action Research (PAR) research phases. The narrow channels and meandering pathways which become covered as the tide creeps in, are a metaphor for this new learning represented by the channels and pathways the “Quandamooka Connections” project took throughout 2022.

Figure 66: Channels and pathways—Capemba Creek.



(J. Macdonald, personal photograph, September 25, 2023)

My study aimed to (a) explore the educational experiences of non-First Nations Primary School educators in teaching the Australian Curriculum's (AC) Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Histories and Cultures Cross Curriculum Priority (CCP); and, to (b) collaboratively work 'on Country' with the MMEIC Elders to develop arts-based recommendations to assist educators working on the First Nations land and sea Country recognised as Quandamooka.

The research questions which guided the study were:

- (a) What challenges and highlights do educators experience in learning about and teaching the Australian Curriculum's Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Histories and Cultures Cross-Curriculum Priority (CCP) in the primary classroom?
- (b) How does the opportunity of learning 'in and on country' assist educators in teaching Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Histories and Cultures CCP in the primary classroom?
- (c) To what extent can the Arts assist non-First Nations educators' approaches in learning and teaching about the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Histories and Cultures CCP in the primary classroom?

This chapter will discuss each of these research questions contextualised with the Participatory Action Research (PAR) approach, through the phases of choosing to change, planning for change, creating change and sharing change. It is acknowledged that the research project has been conducted at a specific school site on the First Nations land and sea Country recognised as Quandamooka, with a small number of participants collaborating with the MMEIC Elders. The challenges and responses of participants throughout the project will be discussed.

7.2 Visiting Myora Spring / Capemba Creek

The Myora Spring flows into Capemba Creek which meanders its way across the tidal flats to join the expanse of water we know as Moreton Bay. (See **Figure 67 and 68**)

Figure 67. Myora Spring, Minjerribah.



Figure 68. Capemba Creek.



(J. Macdonald, personal photographs, September 29, 2023).

The Myora Spring's constant outflow of water is, for me, a metaphor for the knowledge of the Elders and their stories which are embedded in Country. I am always learning something new, something fresh, like the water itself. I see my thesis journey in the meandering of Capemba creek. I also feel awe that this water has been flowing through the creek and its mangroves for thousands of years, providing an abundance of food and water for the First Nations Peoples who have lived here. The depths of the nearby middens with

their variety of *quampi*, cockle, oyster, periwinkle, and whelk shells provide important connections to the ongoing story of First Nations Peoples who have lived on this land and sea Country (See **Figure 69**).

Figure 69. Capemba Creek midden.



(J. Macdonald, personal photograph, September 29, 2023).

I am once again reminded that middens hold a relationality with Country and are a metaphor for the ontological and epistemological construct of the living cultures of these First Nations Peoples. Goenpul Elder and chairperson of the Minjerribah-Moorgumpin Elders-in-Council (MMEIC), Aunty Mary Iselin-Burgess, has generously helped me to extend my knowledge and cultural understanding further, particularly as an educator.

On a visit to Capemba Creek and Myora Spring, I stood with Aunty Mary on a boardwalk above the creek bed, enjoying the stillness, broken only by the noise of the rushing water. Aunty Mary's keen eye spots a koala in the gum trees close by, unseen by me, and another example for me of First Nations people close connections and interactions with Country. Appreciating the importance of storytelling and sharing knowledge, I listen to Aunty Mary's childhood, as she reminisces:

We would come here, all the families, for picnics. There was a big grassy area beside the creek, and we spread cloths and blankets. The creek had a deep-water hole where we could jump in, swim and play. We walked along the creek at low tide to look for and collect oysters, Quampi [shell-fish], and crabs and bring them back to the families and have a cook-up and feast.

(Goenpul Elder Aunty Mary Iselin-Burgess, personal communication, September 29, 2023).

The grassy area Aunty Mary referred to has now gone and there is the boardwalk, ostensibly constructed for protection of the creek bed and the midden on the opposite bank. The deep-water swimming hole is no more. I observe the creek's meandering pathway through the mangroves and the mud flats, knowing that the fresh water eventually becomes one with the wider water expanse of the bay. Ngugi Elder, Aunty Eileen O'Loughlin, showed her intimate knowledge of this area in her poem, *Quandamooka Bay* (O'Loughlin, 1995):

Along the sand banks and gutters at the near full ebb

A mullet jumps in the shallows...a disturbed flathead scurries away

Leaving a telltale muddy patch behind...

A flock of wild ducks are feeding in shallow pools

And everywhere that clicking noise of small crustaceans

Mixed with the fragrant scent of the sea....

(Ngugi Elder Aunty Eileen Borey-O'Loughlin 1995, used with family permission, 2021) .

I am privileged to learn about the continuity between past and present from my position as a white woman working with the MMEIC Elders within the cultural interface (Nakata, 2011). Through the research questions, I seek to explore how non-First Nations educators can become more confident in teaching the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander histories and cultures CCP through the arts, with the critical involvement of the Goenpul, Noonuccal and Ngugi First Nations Elders of the Country the school is located on.

7.3 Research question one

My first research question asked, "What challenges and highlights do educators experience in learning about and teaching the Australian Curriculum's Aboriginal and Torres Strait

Islander Histories and Cultures Cross-Curriculum Priority [CCP] in the primary classroom?”

The water of Capemba Creek finds its own path to the ocean, navigating through the natural environment challenges of mangrove roots, broken tree branches, rocks, pebbles, and ferns (see **Figure 70**).

Figure 70. Capemba Creek, low tide.



(J. Macdonald, personal photographs, September 25, 2023)

I see in the water of Capemba Creek, the analogy between the perseverance and challenges in the natural world and the challenges outlined by the participants who expressed hesitancy in embedding the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Histories and Cultures CCP (Lowe & Galstaun, 2020; MacGill, 2022; Maher, 2022) as part of the Australian Curriculum requirements.

7.3.1 Channels to the bay and challenges on the journey

There is a natural strength to the water flow of Capemba Creek, as it eddies around and through the sandy stretches, hesitating as it encounters living organisms that rely on the water itself for their nourishment. The participants in the project followed a similar process, revealing their strengths and interests in the data they provided in their responses to this first research question which incorporated the PAR process of choosing to change.

Twelve members of the school staff agreed to participate in the project, two from the school leadership team (participant group one [PG1]), eight classroom teachers (PG2)

and two Arts specialists (PG3), providing information related to their background contexts and their confidence in relation to teaching of the arts and of the CCP of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Histories and Cultures.

Written responses to a preliminary survey established the background knowledge of the participants. This was followed with a set of semi-structured interview questions with written responses received from eight participants. (see Appendix A).

The responses revealed that PG1 participants had concerns in relation to sourcing and incorporating information about the First Nations land and sea Country recognised as Quandamooka (Interview data, PG1, 2022). This was echoed by the teacher participants from PG2 and PG3 with one teacher's response capturing the overall concerns that had been expressed by many of the participants. Her concern was in not making:

... direct links [to the CCP of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander histories and cultures] other than event days with generic activities... I feel unsure about making links to local community and know that I should. It is easy to make generic links to the overall Cross Curriculum Priority in terms of Aboriginal culture, but I have no idea about Quandamooka.
(Sue* [pseudonym] PG2)

These findings are also evident in the literature with educators revealing that they lack awareness, background knowledge, and resources in teaching Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander histories and cultures. They also wish to avoid teaching this complex material in a tokenistic or incorrect manner (Acton et al., 2017; Baynes, 2016; Bishop et al., 2021; Guenther et al., 2021; Harrison & Greenfield, 2011; Morrison et al., 2019) (Nakata, 2011; Paige et al., 2023; Rowan et al., 2017; Stern & Burgess, 2021).

Although 50% of the participants (6/12)) initially expressed confidence in teaching the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander CCP, it became evident that this was not reflective of what was happening in classrooms. Across the three participant groups, only three (two (2) from PG1 and one (1) from PG2) had highlighted their prior involvement in activities during National Aboriginal and Islanders Day Observance Committee [NAIDOC] week. The two PG1 participants had previously organised student excursions to an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Cultural Studies Centre and had also delivered an acknowledgement of Country at school assemblies.

Prior to the commencement of the project, three teacher participants (PG2) had used Aboriginal authored story books in English work units, and four had incorporated bush tucker information in the Humanities and Social Sciences (HASS) learning area. One of the PG3 participants had incorporated HASS information into her art planning for student artworks.

7.3.2 Participant Groups One and Two challenges

Participants from all three (3) groups had expressed their concerns regarding their lack of knowledge and information regarding First Nations histories and cultures. Torres Strait Islander academic researcher, Professor Martin Nakata (2011), wrote that “teachers can only begin from the premises they currently work from” (p. 2). This reinforces the importance of teacher training in ensuring pre-service teachers have the knowledge and confidence to teach cultural contexts other than their own.

Research reveals that this lack of knowledge is also impacted by other factors such as the challenges and expectations of standardised testing, benchmark standards and data collection requirements (Green, 2018; Guenther et al., 2014; Lowe & Galstaun, 2020; Morrison et al., 2019; Peacock et al., 2015; Roberts et al., 2019). The classroom teacher participants (PG2) also revealed that the compartmentalisation and structure of teaching blocks made no allowance for the integration of different learning areas, an approach which emphasises the holistic view of learning which was reinforced through the interconnected nature of the stories told by the MMEIC Elders.

When discussing the implementation of the CCP in her classroom, Di* (pseudonym) revealed that it was difficult to establish the relationships required with Elders “when there is so much curriculum content to cover” (Di, PG2).

Another teacher participant felt unable to embed the CCP in the classroom due to the curriculum requirements which included a HASS unit of work for Term three (Year Five) focussed on Colonial history and the Gold Rush (Australian Curriculum Assessment and Reporting Authority, nd). She did not appear to understand that the significant and continuing reverberations of colonial history on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples, could be incorporated into the unit, but instead stated that there was no flexibility for embedding the CCP “unless it is specific to our topic of work – it is difficult to deviate from outcomes-based learning” (Emma* [pseudonym], PG2). PG1 participant Kate* (pseudonym) appeared to substantiate this, revealing in conversation that many of the staff were “too busy to become involved in the research project” (Kate, PG1, March 28, 2022).

MacGill (2022, p. 187) describes this response as a state of “deferred responsibility”, where time and educational requirements are used as reasons for not including the perspectives of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander CCP. MacGill contends that this is problematic and can lead to the omission of the CCP altogether. This contention was given credence in a brief message from a PG2 participant early in Term Four informing me that her topics for the term did not really support the CCP as the focus was on spelling, punctuation, and reading. However, she acknowledged that she would be able to use the rhymes and rhythms written by the Aunties as an introduction to poetry. A PG1 participant reinforced this view stating that from a planning perspective: “When teachers are planning units of work it is still difficult to embed the CCP into what else has to be taught, we can’t be expected to do it all the time” (Kate, PG1).

This state of ‘deferred responsibility’ became apparent during the second term of 2022 which coincided with both the school’s Curriculum Review and the National Assessment Program – Literacy and Numeracy (NAPLAN). This became the primary focus for the PG1 administrators and the PG2 teacher participants further reducing the capacity of classroom teachers to incorporate the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander CCP in an authentic manner. The prioritisation of curriculum and assessment outcomes with an emphasis on testing for achievement is acknowledged in the research (Paige et al., 2023; Rao, 2020).

An early discussion with a participant from PG1 revealed that as the learning intentions for units come directly from the achievement standards, they felt they were only able to approach the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander CCP in a superficial way, such as by recognising culturally important dates including National Sorry Day, National Reconciliation week, and National Aborigines and Islanders Day Observance Committee [NAIDOC] week. “We are doing it at a surface level only – it is not rigorous – it is hard to fit everything into the timeline of the term and it is literacy and maths that is the most important” (Kate* [pseudonym], April 8, 2022). As Burgess et al. (2022) argue that with any content knowledge, if there are no clear links to curriculum outcomes or inclusion in some form of assessment, whether internal or external then it is not valued and has a lower priority in a classroom schedule.

This reinforces the contention of Lowe and Gaulston (2020), who describe “competing claims of legitimacy” (p. 95) with the teaching of First Nations histories and cultures as being subservient to learning areas such as Maths, English, and Science. This is in spite of the requirement of the AC, that First Nations content should be embedded,

where relevant and appropriate, across the learning areas by virtue of its status as a cross-curriculum priority.

Lowe and Galstaun (2020, p. 94) contend that because Indigenous histories, languages and cultures do not accord with Western / European disciplinary structures, greater consideration needs to be given to the content and how this information can be presented and taught in an authentic and holistic way. Buxton (2017) highlights the dangers of non-First Nations educators not having the requisite knowledge, skills and understanding to teach First Nations content in their classrooms. This was clearly an issue for experienced teacher Di (PG2) who pondered about the complex stories and histories of the country you are teaching and how she could “teach them correctly” (personal communication, March 19, 2022).

The data revealed numerous challenges for the PG1 and PG2 participant groups, however there were positive responses from the PG3 Arts specialists which are presented in the following section.

7.3.3 Participant Group 3: The Arts specialists’ challenges

The data provided by the two Arts specialists (PG3), revealed that they also found it personally “challenging to incorporate First Nations perspectives authentically and respectfully”. Heidi* (pseudonym) further elaborated that she was concerned with talking about Indigenous cultures “when I am still learning about Indigenous cultures myself” (personal communication, February 26, 2022).

Anna* (pseudonym) indicated that she had “always worried that my lessons are not localised and doing justice to the local Aboriginal community” (personal communication, April 5, 2022).

However, both PG3 participants expressed enthusiasm and a willingness to strengthen their understanding of the complexity of this CCP and welcomed the opportunity to make connections to the heritages and identities of the Goenpul, Noonuccal and Ngugi MMEIC Elders (Lowe et al., 2021).

Both Anna and Heidi revealed that it would be a new and exciting challenge to embed the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander CCP more effectively through their respective areas of Visual Arts, Media Arts, and Drama, Dance, and Music. Anna felt her Arts background and knowledge provided her with greater expertise and agency to incorporate the CCP into her subject areas through the celebration of diverse cultures.

However, she also revealed challenges and frustrations in relation to the lack of professional learning opportunities available.

Another concern that Anna expressed was the disinterest of generalist classroom teachers who “are not required to implement arts activities in class” due to the Arts specialists having specialised arts classes without involvement from the teachers (Anna, personal communication, April 5, 2022). Anna revealed that another issue she was experiencing was the reduction in time for weekly arts lessons for the students which had been reduced from 60-minute to 40-minute lessons, which needed to incorporate time for cleaning up and preparing the resources for the next class.

The research also reveals that, in Australian schools, Arts curriculum subject areas have been reduced with priority given to subject areas which are externally benchmarked, such as through NAPLAN (Barton et al., 2013; MacDonald et al., 2016).

Both Arts specialists had introduced First Nations histories and cultures in Arts activities prior to this research project. However, they revealed that, at the time, they were uneasy about presenting these activities, although the students enjoyed them. These concerns included not having genuine links with the First Nations land and sea Country recognised as Quandamooka such as through conversations with the MMEIC Elders. However, by introducing Arts learning activities that integrated other learning areas including literacy (Dreaming stories) and Humanities and Social Sciences (HASS) and the arrival of colonising boats in Moreton Bay, they created an awareness for the students of First Nations histories and cultures through artistic representations of stories and imagined scenes (Dinham, 2023; Roy et al., 2019).

Both Arts specialists viewed their participation in this research project as an important form of professional development. Their enthusiasm and confidence in authentically embedding the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander CCP emulates characteristics demonstrated by teachers of the Arts, including incorporating positive personal attitudes such as flexible thinking, different ways of viewing the world, empathy for the perspectives of others, and creative collaboration (Baguley et al., 2022; Dinham, 2023; Gibson & Ewing, 2020; MacDonald et al., 2016). This approach was in direct contrast to the responses provided by the PG1 and PG2 participants on the challenges of implementing the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander CCP in the classroom.

7.4 Research question two

The second research question, “How does the opportunity of learning ‘in and on Country’ assist educators in teaching Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Histories and Cultures CCP in the primary classroom?” revealed that when opportunities for learning ‘in and on Country’ are provided participants can authentically integrate the histories and culture of the First Nations Country on which they are living and working. This was apparent in the responses from the PG3 Arts specialists who undertook a cultural awareness training with the MMEIC Elders on Minjerribah / Terrangee.

7.4.1 Learning in and on Country—PG3

The two Arts specialists were able to visit Minjerribah / Terrangee in May 2022, for the Cultural Awareness morning presented by the MMEIC Elders. They both found this opportunity to be enlightening and informative with both teachers acknowledging the importance of this session for their professional learning.

Their reflections following this visit resulted in a substantial commitment to providing Arts learning experiences for their students. They both identified that this was informed by their new cultural awareness from being ‘on Country’, sitting with the MMEIC Elders, and learning from their stories about Quandamooka First Nations land and sea Country (Bartleet et al., 2014; Bishop, 2022; Burgess, 2019; Burgess et al., 2022; Dolan et al., 2020; Elliott & Clancy, 2017; Guenther et al., 2021).

In a conversation with the Arts specialists, they agreed that being ‘on Country’ with the opportunity to speak with the Elders gave them a better understanding of the meaning and importance of Country, deepening their respect for, and appreciation of, the Goenpul, Noonuccal and Ngugi First Nations people of Quandamooka land and sea Country. Anna shared that “being with the Elders on Minjerribah, I could see where the stories came from. It gave a personal feel for me” (Anna, PG3, May 19, 2022).

The feedback from Anna and Heidi after their excursion to Minjerribah / Terrangee reveals the importance of having the opportunity to engage in the “deep listening, truth telling” (Burgess et al., 2022, p. 165) which can only happen with Elders, and taking place in and on Country. This is an important insight for all educators in relation to their awareness of the Country on which they are working. It was also affirming to hear that both Heidi and Anna (PG3) felt they gained an understanding of the concept of the Cultural interface by being on Country (Nakata, 2002, 2007a, 2011). They identified with the tensions and negotiations required for understanding different knowledge systems and discourses and the importance of

authentic and respectful consideration when embedding these into future practices. As Heidi commented:

There is extra stress when planning. There is a sense of a 'protective attitude' towards the knowledge and the complexity of how the knowledge has passed down and the fact that it can be seen as fractured. I am starting to realise how this has been misused and misinterpreted. The MMEIC Elders stories add another layer of concern and worry when I am not a First Nation person. I have a real fear of not doing the stories justice and mispronouncing language words. Teaching in this area requires accuracy and respect. (Personal communication, June 2, 2022)

These words correlate with the commitment of PAR to social change through participants' new understandings which enable them to challenge practices that are neither divergent, nor inclusive and equitable (Dudgeon et al., 2020; Dudgeon et al., 2017; Lake & Wendland, 2018). The enthusiasm with which the arts specialists embraced their new knowledge reveals that learning 'on Country' can support the confidence and knowledge of teachers in embedding the CCP of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Histories and Cultures in the classroom.

The connection between the Arts and the CCP, as a means through which First Nations cultural understandings can be strengthened, was an important premise of the project and it was heartening to see the PG3 arts specialists incorporate their new understandings, gained from their session on Country with the Elders, to support children's creativity and imagining through experimenting with various art forms in positive, safe, and inclusive arts-focussed ways. Having experienced walking 'on Country', Anna commented that she was excited to be designing and planning Visual and Media Arts activities that supported the stories and histories of the Goenpul, Noonuccal and Ngugi MMEIC Elders. She felt there was an opportunity to share with the students that there can be "something special in simple things" and "what is ordinary can also be extraordinary" (Anna, PG3, June 2, 2022).

7.4.2 *Learning in and on Country—PG1, PG2*

The cancellation, due to unforeseen circumstances, such as the Coronavirus and extensive flooding in Brisbane, of the planned visit to Minjerribah / Terrangee for staff as part of their professional development in cultural awareness training was a significant barrier which impacted on the PG1 and PG2 participants understanding of ‘learning in and on Country’. This important professional development opportunity was to support the acquisition of new knowledge and cultural understandings to support the embedding of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Histories and Cultures CCP and ensure positive change within the school learning environment. As noted previously, only the PG3 Arts specialist participants were able to attend the cultural awareness training provided by the MMEIC Elders on Minjerribah / Terrangee.

The Elders expressed concern that it is difficult to understand Country if you have never walked on Country and listened on Country. They were worried that the PG1 and PG2 participants would not be able to make authentic connections to the histories and cultures of the Goenpul, Noonuccal and Ngugi Peoples of Quandamooka First Nations land and sea Country. These types of opportunities are important in enabling educators to examine their existing worldviews and deepen their understandings of First Nations Peoples and their cultures (Turner et al., 2017).

However, while disappointed, the Elders were enthusiastic about having opportunities to visit the school and share their knowledge and stories with the students and teachers as they believe in the importance of education of the young for a positive future.

7.4.3 *Visits from Goenpul, Noonuccal and Ngugi MMEIC Elders*

Learning ‘in and on Country’ requires access to the knowledges and resources of local First Nations communities and a commitment to engaging authentically and listening with an open heart to their lived experiences, perspectives, and relationships with Country (Burgess et al., 2022; Turner et al., 2017; Ungunmerr-Baumann et al., 2022).

Although the school leadership team acknowledged that the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander CCP is considered in all planning documents and discussed with staff on school planning days, the reality is that planning is completed ahead of time and therefore only allows for limited changes. In addition, despite the expressed desire for staff to be able to “access Quandamooka community members who are able to share their stories and insights with teachers” (Kate, PG1, personal communication, April 22, 2022), there were

several structural and organisational challenges to overcome to enable the visits from the MMEIC Elders to the school site.

The school timetable was crowded, and visits to classrooms were limited due to availability of staff. Unfortunately, there was no allocation of time for cultural mentoring of teachers away from the classroom, again due to already scheduled meetings throughout the year. Additionally, the absence of the school principal, in the critical early stages of establishing the project, whose initial enthusiasm and support was the premise for the project's instigation, meant that the envisaged authentic collaborations between the participants and the MMEIC Elders did not occur. The MMEIC Elders were also busy with affairs of their local community and, therefore, arranging school visits was problematic.

As noted by Bishop and Harwood (2023), it is also imperative and respectful to consider that First Nations Elders may be employed elsewhere and require remuneration for school visits to share their knowledge and stories. In addition, First Nations Elders may lack confidence and feel intimidated in working within the school environment (Burgess & Harwood, 2023). To provide support for and recognition of the time and commitment of the MMEIC Elders, donations were made to the MMEIC prior to each visit with transport arrangements and refreshments provided. The MMEIC Elders were consulted about this arrangement and were supportive of this approach.

Ngugi Noonuccal Elder, Aunty Maureen Borey-Myers, revealed that she preferred a more holistic approach to working with the students rather than the larger classroom-based approach which many teachers use:

I'm not much good talking to a big group. I'd rather have small groups of the kids that can sit around me asking questions.

(Personal communication, May 6, 2022)

Unfortunately, Auntie Maureen Borey-Moyer's preferred option for children to learn through a story was administratively not possible with classes combined for what became more of a presentation rather than a general collaborative and conversational process.

However, this engagement with the MMEIC Elders was seen as immensely valuable. One of the teacher participants (PG2), wrote how the visit from the Elders provided her with an authentic experience for the Prep students in engaging with Aboriginal culture and history.

This term, our Prep classes were fortunate to have the Elders from Minjerribah / Terrangee visit. They told stories of life growing up on the island which the children until that point knew as Stradbroke.

The children had looked at a map of the Island prior to the visit and found places of interest that some had visited with their families. This fitted well with our unit of work in HASS where we are looking at places that are special to us and features of these places. We also discussed how to take care of these places. The Elders described their special places and how they look after them. We made connections to our Science unit as we learned about changes in nature and weather patterns. The dreaming/creation stories link to our Religion unit. (Sue, PG2)

This important opportunity enabled the students to engage with the Goenpul, Noonuccal and Ngugi MMEIC Elders. The visits by these Elders also provided the teachers with more confidence to incorporate the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Histories and Cultures CCP through a range of learning areas (Australian Curriculum Assessment and Reporting Authority, 2023 -b). The support and guidance of First Nations Elders is recognised as a significant opportunity for teachers to enhance their understanding and confidence in integrating the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander CCP in their teaching through this process to transform their classroom professional practice (Burgess & Harwood, 2023; Funk & Woodroffe, 2023; Guenther et al., 2021).

After a return visit from the Elders, the same teacher participant provided important insights into her developing understanding of how she could incorporate the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander CCP, in her practice:

The Elders Aunt Mary and Aunt Maureen presented stories about food, bush, family celebrations, school and games played when they were young ... It did fit more into last Term's HASS learning area, but it was a great

refresher for the students. There is potential for embedding it into future units with careful planning. (Sue, PG2)

There was also further affirmation from Di* (pseudonym) in her reflection regarding potential changes to her pedagogical approach, after the MMEIC Elders' classroom visits:

It has been most beneficial to have the Elders present. They have given information to us so much information which has helped to give a firm foundation and confidence to my teaching. My learning has then opened up the ways in which I can incorporate teaching about the peoples of the Quandamooka region in natural ways that add to the richness of the curriculum. (Di, PG2)

Given the positivity of these responses, it was disappointing to be told by a PG1 leadership participant that “while the weaving lessons were very interesting and enjoyable the Aunties visit did go over the allocated time and impacted on the literacy and maths programs that were scheduled” (Kate, PG1, July 29, 2022).

Although the school's leadership team had ostensibly supported the project, this type of comment emulates the concept of ‘deferred responsibility’ by diminishing the importance of First Nations knowledges, histories and cultures due to time and resourcing, invariably relating the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander CCP to the margins of the curriculum. This perception, risks a form of tokenism with the Elders' visits becoming “add-on activities ... [instead of being] ... intertwined with and valued as central to the core business of schooling” (Lowe et al., 2021, p. 473). It also revealed a potential disconnect between the school leadership team and the teachers in supporting and committing to a culturally responsive environment that values First Nations histories and cultures (Morrison et al., 2019).

7.4.4 Learning in and on Country—conclusion

The visits to the school by the MMEIC Elders, centring the First Nations knowledge on the Quandamooka land and sea Country, enabled the research participants to engage with the

local First Nations contexts and values of the Goenpul, Noonuccal and Ngugi Elders thus supporting an affirmative response to this research question.

Although only two participants from the PG2 teacher participants and the two Arts specialists (PG3) actively engaged in responsive dialogue in relation to their planning, they were prepared to make changes and reconsider their teaching approach (Burgess et al., 2022; Dolan et al., 2020; Maxwell et al., 2018; Moodie, 2019; Parkinson & Jones, 2019).

Ultimately, this revealed a burgeoning understanding and knowledge in relation to cultural awareness, sensitivities and competence (Heckenberg, 2020; Maxwell et al., 2018). Acknowledgement of the local realities of a community and the understanding that the knowledge of First Nations Elders cannot be separated or marginalised from its locale (Funk & Woodroffe, 2023) makes it imperative to understand the importance of learning ‘in and on Country’ and the opportunities this provides for educators in teaching Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Histories and Cultures CCP, in the primary classroom.

7.5 Research question three

The value and importance of the Arts to children’s education has consistently been highlighted in research (Baguley et al., 2021; Baguley et al., 2022; Barton et al., 2013; Dinham, 2023; Duck, 1990; Eisner, 2002b; Ewing, 2011, 2020a; Gibson & Ewing, 2020; O’Toole, 2021) and was the premise for the third research question: “To what extent can the Arts assist non-First Nations educators’ approaches in learning and teaching about the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander histories and Cultures CCP in the primary classroom?”

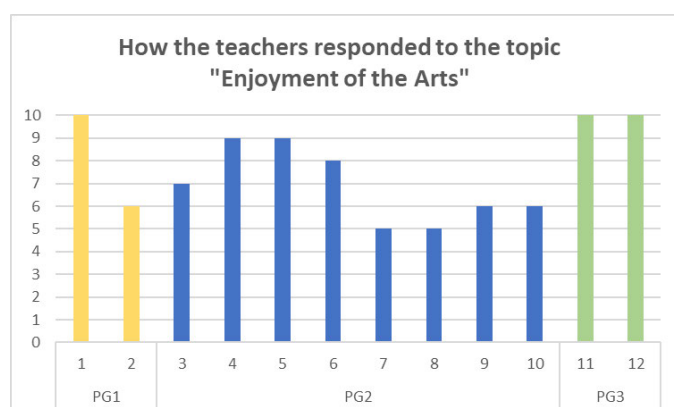
The Arts are integral to the cultures and histories of all First Nations people across Australia. The oldest living culture remained connected over millennia through songs and music, drawing and paintings, dances, and dramatic telling of stories (Caruana, 2012; Phillips et al., 2018; Watson, 2014a). Therefore, it is appropriate that the project engaged with the Arts to support non-First Nations educators’ approaches in learning and teaching about Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander histories and cultures.

In the preliminary survey, the twelve (12) project participants were asked to rank their enjoyment of the arts on a scale from one (1) (being the least enjoyable) to ten (10) being the most enjoyable.

Table 2 (see below) reveals that six (6) of the twelve (50%) participants ranked their enjoyment of the arts from eight (8) to (10) indicating keen enjoyment in artistic

pursuits. The remaining six (6), five (5) of whom were from PG2 and one (1) from PG1 ranked their enjoyment between five (5) and seven (7) which indicates less enthusiasm for the arts.

Table 2. Responses to personal enjoyment of the Arts.



7.5.1 Participant Group 1—analysis

The PG 1 leadership participants’ written responses to the semi-structured interview question relating to arts inclusion within the school were positive. One person felt confident that all Art strands could be included in a range of classroom activities, noting that there are “plenty of opportunities for classroom teachers to incorporate the arts into other curriculum areas as well” (PG1 participant Libby* [pseudonym]). However, it was also noted that there is a “challenge [in] finding funding for arts education including accessing experts, providing professional learning and resources”. The other PG1 participant wrote that “the vision is for the Arts to be taught as both a stand-alone subject but also to enhance the teaching and understanding of other subject areas”.

The PG1 participant who was concerned about the time allocation provided for the visits to the school from the Aunties also noted towards the end of the project that it was “a small component of the whole curriculum and needs to be balanced with all the other Learning Areas”. I found this comment interesting given the context of the Australian Professional Standards for Teachers (APSTs) and specifically, Standard 2.4 (Proficient level): “Provide opportunities for students to develop understanding of and respect for First Nations histories, cultures and languages” (Australian Institute for Teaching and Leadership, 2017, p. 13; Rogers, 2018).

It was ironic therefore, at the beginning of the project, that it was the leadership team participants (PG1) who enthusiastically responded when asked whether they considered the arts could better support teachers in the embedding of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Histories and Cultures CCP. They were overwhelmingly positive, with one stating that “the various strands of the Arts curriculum lend themselves to incorporations of the CCP in classrooms and provides students with multiple ways/opportunities for engaging with this aspect of the curriculum” (PG1 participant Kate). This statement makes connections to enrichment and allocation of resources but with no evidence that there will be positive action to interpret and make changes to curriculum policies (Lorenza, 2021). However, this could be related to knowing that the school had employed Arts specialists who could provide the skills and expertise required outside of the generalist teachers existing commitments if required.

The words of the PG1 leadership team contradicted the reality as only the PG3 Arts specialists, and two participants from PG2, truly engaged with the project from the beginning to the end. In August of that year, the Arts specialists shared that they were “disappointed at the lack of support from the administration. It means that the project isn’t being reinforced by classroom teachers either to develop deeper understandings” (PG3, August 15, 2022). The assurances provided by the school administrators in PG1 did not result in a full and authentic engagement with the aims of the research project. It is worth noting that only one PG1 participant ranked personal enjoyment of the Arts at the highest level (10) (see Table 1). The other PG1 participant ranked personal arts enjoyment at a six (6) indicating less enjoyment and potentially lack of arts engagement at school and through teacher training. This could also be a reason for the perceived lack of support and involvement throughout the duration of the project.

This lack of positive school leadership is in contrast with research substantiating the importance of affirmative school leaders who can support and encourage new understandings and flexibility within school programs (Aldridge & Fraser, 2016; Barblett & Kirk, 2018; Conway & Andrews, 2016; Donohoo et al., 2018; Lorenza, 2021; McGlade, 2023; Peters & Pearce, 2012).

The responsibilities of school leaders are extensive, including meeting externally prescribed educational standards and management of school administrative tasks of budgets and maintenance of facilities (Peters & Pearce, 2012). However, they are also instrumental in ensuring that a positive school culture is developed (Aldridge & Fraser,

2016; Peters & Pearce, 2012). When school leaders are approachable and encouraging, supporting school staff to work collaboratively and share ideas in a non-threatening environment, improvements and changes can be made that can revitalise the school narrative (Donohoo et al., 2018). It was anticipated that this would be the case with the instigation of a project that would support arts learnings and strengthen staff and student understanding of the First Nations land and sea Country recognised as Quandamooka on which the school is situated.

However, initial support for the project waned due to several factors including the absence of the school principal due to illness, the cancellation of the cultural awareness session with the MMEIC Elders on Country, the prioritisation of literacy and numeracy in preparation for the May NAPLAN test, and an external review of the school curriculum plan. This further emphasised the extreme pressures School Principals and leadership teams are under.

It is important however to ensure other school needs are met such as relevant professional development and whole school planning towards projects such as this which, when implemented with full support, can provide more time in the crowded curriculum through authentic integration between the relevant CCPs, the Learning Areas and the General Capabilities.

7.5.2 Participant Group 2—analysis

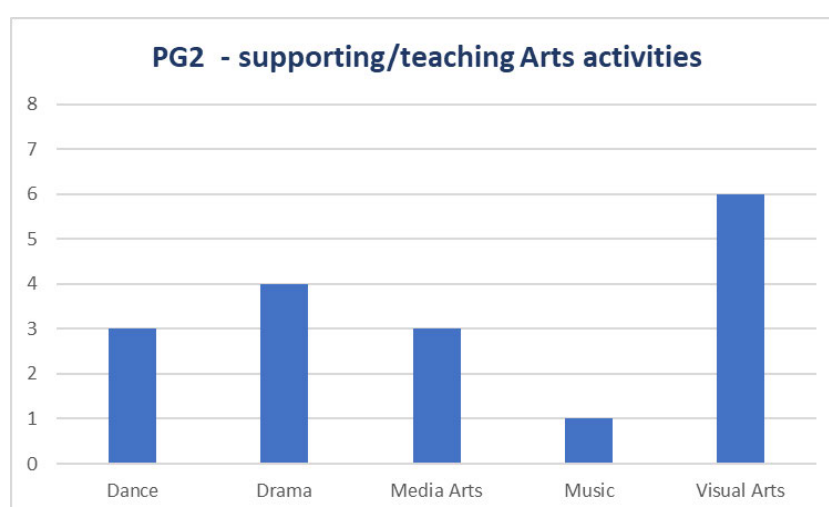
PG2 results from the survey relating to personal enjoyment of the arts included responses from eight teachers from PG2. Four (4) of the eight (8) (50%) ranked their personal arts enjoyment at five (5) and six (6), two (2) responding with a nine (9), and one (1) each with an eight (8) and a seven (7) (see Table 7.1). With half of the responses revealing a lack of personal Arts enjoyment ranked at five (5) and six (6), there is a concern as the research reveals that personal arts enjoyment may impact a teacher's self-efficacy and confidence in embedding the arts in the classroom (Barton et al., 2013; Boyd & Cutcher, 2015; Chapman, 2015; Gibson & Ewing, 2020).

Teachers enjoyment, or lack thereof, of the Arts can influence the provision of Arts learning opportunities in the classroom (Chapman et al., 2019). In this respect, teachers must be better supported and encouraged to adapt their individual strengths and skills to include Arts practices in their classroom teaching (Baguley et al., 2022; Ewing, 2020a; Lane, 2020; MacDonald et al., 2016; Russell-Bowie, 2012).

PG2 participants also provided data relating to their confidence in their capacity to support and engage in teaching any of the Arts strands, responding with a Yes (feeling confident or No (not feeling confident) (see Table 1).

Table 3 reveals the PG2 support for teaching arts-based activities in the classroom.

Table 3. Support for teaching arts-based activities in the classroom.



Six (6) of the eight (8) (75%) expressed confidence with Visual Art and four of the eight (50%) felt confident in teaching Drama. Confidence in teaching Dance and Media Arts was indicated by three of the eight (37.5%) and Music, with only two positive responses (25%) was the lowest. The lack of confidence in teaching Music in the classroom is substantiated in research (Collins, 2016; De Vries, 2017), with Barrett et al., stating that “the issues of generalist (non-specialist) teachers’ confidence and perceptions of appropriate expertise in music education are commonplace” (Barrett et al., 2020, p. 132).

However, in this small primary school, where there could have been encouragement for classroom teachers to collaborate with the Arts specialists in the school, their role was instead seen as providing some relief for the teachers to undertake planning and classroom preparation during the students’ Arts lessons. This was revealed in PG2 teacher participants written responses to the semi-structured interview questions relating to Arts practices in the classroom.

The feedback revealed that the “Arts are taken by the specialist teachers and are not part of classroom planning” and “this school has Arts specialist teachers, and the children go to the art room and the music room for lessons ... I am not part of what they do” (PG2 participants Sue* and Emma* [pseudonyms]). This marginalisation of the Arts and teacher negativity towards engaging with Arts practices in the classroom is substantiated in the research (Barton & Ewing, 2017; Barton et al., 2018; Chapman et al., 2019; Ewing, 2020b; MacDonald et al., 2016).

Although the PG2 teacher participants acknowledged the Arts could support First Nations histories and cultures and seven of the eight respondents (87.5%) in the initial survey (Chapter five, table one) were positively disposed towards teaching the CCP, it appears that teaching this through the Arts was problematic. This appears to be partly due to the responsibility for teaching the Arts allocated to the Arts specialists and therefore not seen as part of regular classroom teaching. The data also revealed that the PG2 teacher participants did not feel empowered to question or critique institutional and school policies and practices that provided time for the Arts but did not reinforce stronger links between the teachers and the Arts specialists. Therefore, this appeared to result in short-term goals such as providing a form of teacher relief (Barton et al., 2018; Kemmis et al., 2014; Molla & Nolan, 2020).

While the teachers were keen and enjoyed the classroom visits from the Elders, most did not appear to make any changes to their classroom practice or to seek further opportunities to develop deeper knowledge and understanding of connecting to Country. This may have also been due to a lack of confidence or a view that, given the purpose of the project, the stories would be explored more fully through the activities with the arts specialists.

Buxton’s (2017) case study of teachers’ implementation of First Nations pedagogy, history and perspectives found that while participants were capable and dedicated teachers “they were not prepared to take risks and embark on more authentic tasks” (p. 205). For example, the ancestral art of weaving for First Nations people which continues to the present day, can provide authentic and meaningful connections with cultural stories and, in fact, break down stereotypical representations and link the past and the present (Maher, 2022).

The weaving activity introduced by the MMEIC Elder Aunties could have been a stepping stone for deeper engagement in the role of girls and women in First Nations

communities. However, only one upper primary classroom teacher (PG2), was interested in this opportunity, sharing:

The Aunties' visit gave the students a real connection to them and in turn a genuine activity in weaving that fits perfectly with technologies. Aunty Mary explained the materials used traditionally, the way it is processed for use, the custom of only women using the fibre and only traditional owners being able to use the ungaire [reeds]. These are things that you can't connect to through books and the internet - you need people to be able to talk about them, the students to be able to see the fibres and see how they are used to produce useful and decorative items. (Di, PG2, personal communication, August 8, 2022)

However, the negative response from most of the PG2 teacher participants in relation to the question of the arts in the classroom supporting the embedding of the CCP, for a range of reasons such as time, saw further dilution of the project.

To me, this reasoning was reminiscent of the way the salt-water tide creeps steadily into Capemba Creek, encroaching on the sand banks, the tree roots, the midden, and engulfing the fresh water from the Myora Spring. However, as the tide recedes, the fresh water remains, always gushing forth into the creek as if a new beginning. This daily renewal of the fresh water became a metaphor for the fresh and new ideas emanating from the enthusiasm and creativity of the two Arts specialists who created and shared change across the school community, revealing their readiness to undertake new pedagogical practices and engage with the CCP by focussing on the stories and knowledge shared by the MMEIC Elders to undertake a variety of arts activities with students.

7.5.3 Participant Group 3—analysis

The content of the Australian Curriculum—the Arts recognises the five individual strands of Dance, Drama, Media Arts, Music, and Visual Arts. Further, it stipulates that through the Arts, students will have the opportunity to engage with the cultures and practices of First Nations Australians, using appropriate and approved resources and materials to gain

perspectives of local histories and cultures (Australian Curriculum and Assessment Reporting Authority, 2023f).

When non-Indigenous educators are invited into the cultural interface of a First Nations culture, it is essential that they commence with knowledge of the local First Nations community, their language groups and family clans (Bishop et al., 2021). Inclusion of the MMEIC Elders, representatives of the Goenpul, Noonuccal and Ngugi Peoples in the research project, ensured that this occurred through an interweaving of the past with the present through their stories.

This approach also supported the children (students), as they created their own artistic interpretations of the stories they were told, whilst, at the same time, developing their Arts practices and skills in specific art forms (Buxton, 2017; Griffin et al., 2017; Riley, 2021).

Throughout the planning for their units of work, the two Arts specialists (PG3) (Heidi and Anna) ensured that the resources and materials collected and used with the students were approved by the MMEIC Elders and were authentic representations of their histories and stories. As noted, the PG3 Arts specialist participants were the only ones who undertook the cultural awareness training. This reinforces MacGill's (2022) contention that authentic inclusion of the CCP in the Arts curriculum requires teachers to gain understandings of cultural knowledge of local First Nations communities. The impact of all teachers not being able to participate in the cultural awareness program with the MMEIC Elders on Country reverberated throughout this project.

The school's Arts learning area was separated into two strands—Performing Arts (Dance, Drama, and Music) taught by Heidi, and Creative Arts (Media Arts and Visual Art) taught by Anna. Dance, Drama and Music were allocated one term each and Media Arts and Visual Arts two terms each. This allocation was to ensure that all classroom teachers received their appropriate allocation of non-contact teaching hours.

Heidi indicated that in Term Four, she would be able to support the final phase of the project through integrating music into both the children's drama and dance presentations to demonstrate sharing change. Prior to the research project's commencement, I met with the Arts specialists to discuss the potential of Arts integration and how their respective Arts strands could be intertwined with the stories, poetry, and cultural knowledge of the MMEIC Elders thereby supporting the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Histories and Cultures CCP.

As a tertiary Arts educator working with pre-service teachers, we have developed courses that support the teaching of arts integration in the classroom. Arts integration can occur with other Arts strands and also with other learning areas. This approach also enables multi-modal forms of expression that can include the kinaesthetic, the visual, and the auditory and complement a range of diverse learning styles (Baguley et al., 2022; Cornett, 2014; Goldberg, 2021).

Arts integration also supports creativity and flexible thinking skills enhancing students' well-being and imagination, and positively strengthening and supporting varying abilities and linguistic backgrounds (Barton & Baguley, 2014; Corbisiero-Drakos et al., 2021; Cornelius, 2022; Gibson & Ewing, 2020; Goldberg, 2021; LaJevic, 2013; Ludwig et al., 2017).

7.5.4 The Arts—a collaborative process

The Arts specialists worked together to co-construct units of work featuring activities that were designed to maintain the integrity and authenticity of each of the individual Art strands, as well as incorporating important stories shared by the MMEIC Elders during their classroom visits. During this time, I also shared my Arts expertise and created an authentic connection between the school community and the MMEIC Elders. This collaborative approach was important for implementing authentic Arts open-ended learning experiences that were both individual and collaborative and, given the emphasis on literacy, also enhanced the students' arts literacy and skills (Cornett, 2014; Dinham, 2023).

I found that being an engaged participant in this social and interactive process of collaborative learning substantiated for me the importance of PAR's inclusive framework where a facilitator with particular expertise can also contribute as a participant (Brydon-Miller et al., 2020; Kemmis et al., 2014; Lake & Wendland, 2018). As a participant, I was able to serve as a conduit between the MMEIC Elders and the specialists disseminating and sharing resources and knowledge with the Elders' consent. With their new understandings from their visit to Minjerribah, and their partaking of the MMEIC Cultural Awareness program, Heidi and Anna were able to develop rich integrated units for the students as part of this research project.

During the second term of 2022, with the Arts focus on Drama and Visual Art, it was apparent that the stories of Minjerribah / Terrangee that were shared by the MMEIC Elders became a central point for the children's creative development. Heidi noted that the

children's perspectives of First Nations people were changing, as they reflected on the stories and the characters within the stories. "Many students felt sad, about what 'we' had done to the Aboriginal children and their families. They thought without colonisation, life would look very different, perhaps [be] a more environmentally friendly world" (PG3 Heidi).

The multimodal quality of the Arts provided opportunities for the students to interpret the stories told by the MMEIC Elders in varying ways and integrate approaches through other Arts forms and learning areas (Barton & Baguley, 2014). Heidi's reflection provided insight into the benefits of integrating literacy with drama when she noted that "Year Six students enjoyed the book, *Stolen Girl* (Saffioti, 2011) and seem[ed] to be developing a deeper understanding of the Stolen Generation through their role playing of the different characters in Drama lessons" (PG3, Heidi). This demonstrated an interrelationship between the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Histories and Cultures CCP and the General Capability [GC] of Intercultural Understanding which requires students to navigate intercultural contexts and develop empathy as they reflect on the cultural shaping of identities and ways to respond to discriminatory behaviours (Australian Curriculum and Assessment Reporting Authority, 2023e).

7.6 Further challenges

The initial response to the project was promising with twelve (12) members of staff consenting to be participants. However, only four (4) of the twelve¹² (33.3%) PG2 teachers responded positively to the request for information regarding the Term Two units of work they would be teaching. The emphasis within the school during this period of time was on the external School Curriculum Review and the NAPLAN testing for Years Three and Five. This made it difficult for teachers to find the time to support the project.

As planning was undertaken against a tight schedule within prescribed units of work, making changes or adjustments within the classroom was difficult. With the compartmentalisation of the learning areas within the structure of the school's timetable, three other PG2 teacher participants indicated that although they were keen to make changes, there was no real opportunity to do so. They therefore struggled with "finding the time to align arts and the CCP with curriculum demands" (PG2, Emma* [pseudonym], personal communication, April 29, 2022).

Teachers from each year level met with the primary curriculum leader (PCL) on a regular basis. However, flexibility within this planning to enable incorporation of the Arts

to support the CCP in the classroom was not apparent, again reflecting the decreased expectation that classroom teachers incorporate arts learnings in the classroom when there are appointed school arts specialists (Chapman, 2018). Emma (PG2) expressed her disappointment with this approach, as she had an Arts background and felt she could support this learning area in her classroom. However, she advised that there was no time, nor support, for integrating the Arts into the wider curriculum (personal communication, April 29, 2022).

The Arts specialists revealed they felt somewhat isolated from the generalist teachers' planning with the Arts being treated separately to the material being covered in the generalist classes. The sense of disempowerment that can arise when teachers feel isolated can adversely impact on teacher self-efficacy (Aldridge & Fraser, 2016; Lowe et al., 2020; Lowe & Galstaun, 2020). This in turn can have a deleterious effect on the emotional well-being of participants (Pain et al., 2019).

In a meeting to discuss the planning and introduction to the project's Phase Three (creating change), both the Arts specialists agreed that although they were very supportive of the project that they were frustrated by this state of affairs. Anna commented, "Everything is left up to whatever we do in our Arts programs. Arts are not seen as part of classroom activities. There is always a disconnect between what we are trying to do and what is happening in classrooms, it can be quite depressing."

As a beginning teacher, Heidi noted that "the lack of support for what I am trying to do in Drama has made it quite stressful. I have had to manage behaviours, fulfil requirements for differentiation and at the same time try to engage the children in authentic dramatic experiences through role play" (PG3, July 1, 2022).

7.6.1 *Focus on the positive*

In Term three, the Arts focus moved to Music for Heidi and Media Arts for Anna; two Arts strands that neither teacher felt confident about implementing, as they were not their respective specialisations. However, they were able to support one another during this process because of their existing skills and expertise in the Arts forms the other was teaching. PAR's premise of participation, collaboration, and reflection in a democratisation process that values inclusion and a sense of belonging, can help to alleviate these types of situations (Ludwig et al., 2017; Morales, 2016; Sales et al., 2020). Understanding that participants can share the facilitator role, depending on their own knowledge and expertise

(Kemmis & McTaggart, 2007; Wood, 2020), became a necessary component within the collaborative planning during this phase of creating change.

My background in Music, Dance, and Drama education, allowed me to support Heidi through an integrated approach to Music. Heidi's knowledge of Media Arts was beneficial for Anna in integrating Visual Art with Media Art in her planning. Through this collaborative teamwork, where knowledge and ideas were exchanged, we developed our own Arts dispositions and expertise in developing strategies that would support the students to create artistic works that would be informed by their new understandings of First Nations histories and culture as shared by the Goenpul, Noonuccal and Ngugi MMEIC Elders (Dinham, 2022; Garrett & MacGill, 2021). Both specialists felt that working together was a strength and enabled them to maintain their enthusiasm despite their perception of a lack of support and encouragement from staff in relation to the "value of the arts to learning" (Anna, conversation, August 4, 2022).

Anna observed that several students already possessed some knowledge of Media Arts. She wrote in a reflection that "they were quite enthusiastic [about media arts] and keen to share their knowledge with the other students and myself. It was great to see the cooperation between students in the classroom" (Anna, PG3).

This engagement with students in co-constructed learning is a "key pedagogical feature in student-centred arts education where the agency of the students, their knowledges and their expressions of ideas are prioritised" (Dinham, 2022, p. 24). This active participation in their own learning enabled these students to critique their creativity, knowledge and skills through observations, descriptions, interpretations, and reflections.

Anna also made an important observation which emphasised the importance of the local context for this research project: "While children have a superficial broad worldview because of exposure to the internet, social media, and movies, they are not used to focusing on the local area and believe they know about it simply because they live there" (Anna, PG3). This important insight revealed that the students' cultural understanding was further developed through this local area focus, as they integrated both Visual and Media Art to interpret the Minjerribah / Terrangee stories of the everyday life of the Quandamooka Goenpul, Noonuccal and Ngugi peoples as shared by the MMEIC Elders. Similar representations of the stories were being interpreted in the other year levels through Music, Dance and Drama.

Through this engagement and the later visual and performance sequences which were part of the ‘Quandamooka Connections’ showcase, the students were deepening their understanding of local First Nations Country and communities.

7.6.2 Affirmation of the project

PAR projects involve community and researchers working together and sharing lived experiences, generating new knowledge and understandings (Benjamin-Thomas et al., 2018). In this research project, the involvement of the Goenpul, Noonuccal and Ngugi Elders of the MMEIC promoted collaboration throughout the phases through conversations with participants, school visits, provision of written resources, and stories.

The MMEIC Elders provided a catalyst for the changes in the thinking and pedagogy of the two Arts specialists (PG3) who were able to enact and implement positive changes in their arts programs. These changes were shared at the whole school community ‘Quandamooka Connections’ event near the conclusion of the school year in 2022. The Elders from the MMEIC were special guests and expressed their delight at seeing their stories come to life through the Arts.

I just feel so proud as a Goenpul Elder – so much of the children’s learning has come from my mother who learnt from her mother. I could really feel the ancestors looking on and being so happy. This is what education of the next generation is all about. MMEIC chair-person, Goenpul Elder Aunty Mary Iselin-Burgess, (Personal communication, November 22, 2022)

Aunty Mary’s sense of self and pride in her identity, as she observed the outward indicators of the transference of her cultural knowledge of her land and sea Country, provided important affirmation of the significance of these types of projects for schools. Her stories are not those of the isolated individual but rather they represent the practice of wisdom, which has evolved through personal experiences and a diversity of different ways of looking and thinking that have been shaped on Country (Hill et al., 2019; Mooney et al., 2018; Oscar, 2018).

Proud Bunuba woman, June Oscar AO, (Australia’s Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Social Justice Commissioner 2017 – current), writes that Country is “an intimately

entwined relationship of land, language and culture...[and that] language is a vehicle to transmit the cultural strengths” (2018, p. 324). So often, it is the women, the grandmothers and mothers, personified by Goenpul MMEIC Elder, Aunty Mary, who are the nurturers, safeguarding the knowledge for the future generations through their storytelling.

The project and the culminating arts event presented a non-stereotypical discourse of the Goenpul, Noonuccal and Ngugi Elders, people of the land and sea Country recognised as Quandamooka, which showcased their culture, their stories and experiences (Heaton, 2020). The school principal shared with me responses from parents who expressed delight at the artworks which revealed the respectful interactions of the children with the local First Nations Elders and community. This gives credence to the consideration that it is through the active voices and agency of the Arts specialists that students gained knowledge as they discussed, shared and processed their understandings of the culture and stories of the Goenpul, Noonuccal and Ngugi MMEIC Elders (Kemmis et al. 2014; Lake & Wendland, 2018).

Through such appreciation and valuing of local cultural identities and heritage, one can see a “ripple of learning” (Elliott & Clancy, 2017, p. 20) within the wider community. Additionally, one can recognise the potential for the school community to actively strengthen and foster future collaborative partnerships with the MMEIC Elders in programs that focus on cultural knowledge and inclusion (Baguley et al., 2022; Elliott & Clancy, 2017).

The ‘Quandamooka Connections’ event provided a positive arts-based response to the third research question: “To what extent can the Arts assist non-First Nations educators’ approaches in learning and teaching about the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander histories and Cultures CCP in the primary classroom?”

As each year level was involved, this has demonstrated the different strands of the Arts and the students ‘new learnings’ about the First Nations land and sea Country recognised as Quandamooka, and the Goenpul, Noonuccal and Ngugi Peoples. The children responded enthusiastically in their reflections and performances with many commenting on their enjoyment of being on stage, singing, and dancing, learning Jandai language words, learning how to do animations and work with clay, learning more about Aboriginal peoples and Quandamooka land and sea Country, and being able to meet and talk with the Elders.

7.6.3 Participant Group One responses

To conclude the project, post-performance surveys were sent to all participants with responses from the two (2) PG1 participants, five (5) from PG2 and one (1) each from the two Arts specialists in PG3. The administration team (PG1) responders were positive in relation to visits from the Elders, the children's learning of the Jandai language words, and believing there was a stronger appreciation of the histories and cultures of this local First Nations across the school. They commented on the importance of the storytelling, the weaving sessions, and the class discussions before and after the MMEIC Elders' visits, showing the success of the project.

Feedback from a PG1 leader participant warned that the time and resources dedicated to the project were unfeasible for the future and did not balance with the school curriculum requirements. This cautionary comment is substantiated in the research which acknowledges that leaders of schools are central to the structuring and shaping of school practices with the wider school perspective of accountability for improved educational learning outcomes (McFerran et al., 2023; McGrath-Champ et al., 2019).

However, questioning the 'balance' is problematic as it appears to disregard the mandate of the Australian Curriculum (Australian Curriculum Assessment and Reporting Authority, 2024c) that the CCPs, including Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander histories and cultures, will be embedded across all year levels and learning areas. This carries the expectation that teachers will engage in pedagogical practices to support cultural awareness and inclusive classroom practices that use local, and relevant First Nations knowledge (Funk & Woodroffe, 2023). The Australian Professional Standards for Teachers (APSTs) also requires inclusion of Indigenous perspectives, across all year levels and learning areas (Australian Institute for Teaching and Leadership, 2017). These directives aim to encourage a better balance in terms of strengthening First Nations content in the curriculum.

There is concern, therefore, that the school culture will not benefit from this type of PAR project when pedagogies and curriculum content appear focussed on Western ways of 'knowing' and the need to 'balance' that overrides the importance of the values and beliefs of communities that are grounded in First Nations knowledge and relationality with Country (Bobongie-Harris et al., 2021; Lowe et al., 2021). However, the responses post-performance from both the PG2 teacher participants and the PG3 Arts specialist participants also revealed the success of the project, again highlighting the importance of the close collaboration and communication with the MMEIC Elders.

7.6.4 Participant Group Two responses

Five of the twelve of the PG2 teacher participants responded to the post-performance survey with all acknowledging that they now had a stronger understanding of Quandamooka First Nations people. One commented that “having connections with the Minjerribah Elders was critical in being able to create understandings and finding ways to integrate these into learning” (Di, PG2).

These classroom teachers also indicated that they felt more able to support the CCP and Quandamooka connections through HASS, English, Technologies, and Science. One teacher wrote that “learning the Jandai language words opened up a whole level to becoming culturally literate” (Sue, PG2).

Aboriginal educator of Wiradjuri First Nations Country, Jessa Rogers (2018), contends that literacy in schools is not only communication through English, but should also be inclusive of cultural literacies such as yarning, stories, songs, languages and artistic pursuits. Pursuing these opportunities for learning through the English curriculum would not only support the CCP but align with the General Capability of Literacy: “Literacy involves students listening to, reading, viewing, speaking, writing and creating oral, print, visual and digital texts, and using and modifying language for different purposes in a range of contexts” (Australian Curriculum Assessment and Reporting Authority, 2023c, p. 1). As one of the PG2 participant teachers noted:

It was great to be able to see how understandings of the Quandamooka region and its people could be highlighted in the current curriculum. Challenges will remain about how to maintain connections with the Elders and continue to find new ways of supporting and building on learning in the curriculum. Meeting and sharing are important. We have had a facilitator for this in 2022 but how can this be maintained into the future? (Di, PG2)

This insightful comment regarding the imperative of future support to enable teachers to be agents for change emphasises the importance of pre-service education and continuing

professional development for educators (Baguley et al., 2022; Ewing, 2020b; Lane, 2020; Lane, 2019; Macdonald & Tualaulelei, 2018). It is unfortunate that, too often, the professional development of teachers is prescribed by external indicators in relation to school priorities which inevitably focus on the core imperatives of curriculum pedagogy, and assessment of literacy, numeracy, and science (Chapman et al., 2018; Gibson & Ewing, 2020; Lane, 2020; Lowe et al., 2021).

Transformation, as an aim of the PAR process, not only addresses change in peoples' understandings, but also in their practices and the conditions and situations in which they practice (Kemmis et al., 2014). It became apparent that for some of the PG2 teacher participants and the PG3 Arts specialist participants that the research project was a transformative learning experience enabling them to reassess their understandings about education and the First Nations CCP, and their teaching practices and strategies, whilst also attempting to accommodate the internal and external policies and contexts of state and national education regulations and requirements (Molla & Nolan, 2020). Herein lies the challenge of achieving the full potential of the research project as there is still an "epistemic, pedagogic and structural disconnect" (Lowe & Galstaun, 2020, p. 95) between what teachers are required to achieve within the Australian Curriculum and the need to develop authentic and rich programs that are both constructive and beneficial to both educators and students.

7.6.5 Participant Group Three responses

The two Arts specialists embraced their new learnings and cultural understandings, though their responses revealed a degree of frustration at the marginalisation of the Arts program with the school. This is substantiated in research (Chapman et al., 2018; Gibson & Ewing, 2020; MacDonald et al., 2016) and was alluded to during each of the PAR phases of the project. However, it did not deter them from instigating changes in their programs to support and embed the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Histories and Cultures CCP through the Arts. As Heidi commented:

It has been amazing to see through the teaching of the arts activities the impact on students' knowledge of First Nations perspectives and cultural understanding. The project has felt so significant and gave students the opportunity to grow in their confidence and understanding through the

Quandamooka Connections presentation ... I am feeling very proud of what has been achieved at the school. There has been a change in dynamics, I think that more students have learnt a deeper appreciation of Aboriginal culture through the arts. (PG3, Heidi)

Anna's reflections included her realisation that appropriation of First Nations art styles can be avoided when there is open communication with local First Nations Elders.

I have really enjoyed talking with the Elders on their visits to the school about the local context of visual art styles and this has made it easier for me to explain cultural protocols to the students. (PG3, Anna)

This statement reinforces the importance of relationships with local First Nations communities when exploring the wide variety of Indigenous art forms and styles (Riley, 2021). This aspect of the project exemplifies further how this arts-rich project made connections between the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Histories and Cultures CCP and the Intercultural Understanding General Capability in the Australian Curriculum. (Australian Curriculum and Assessment Reporting Authority, 2023d).

Yorta Yorta artist, Dr Treahna Hamm, says: "The finished work is not as important as the creating and learning process" (Hamm, 2008, p. 70). Her statement rings true as it is through their positive engagement in the aforementioned social and artistic and creative practices that the students were developing their own cultural identities and making connections to the cultural contexts of First Nations Quandamooka land and sea Country developing their understanding of the world around them (Emery et al., 2015; Gibson & Ewing, 2020; Paton, 2012).

I am once again reminded of the constant flow of fresh water from Myora Spring into Capemba Creek as a metaphor for new learning and consider that perhaps, this positive engagement of the students as an important development of their cultural awareness which may see them eventually become facilitators for change.

7.7 Limitations

The small size of the school and the voluntary involvement of staff limited the extent of the data, which was collected through surveys, discussions, personal communications, and written

reflections. There were external factors, addressed in Chapter Five, that impacted and diluted the contributions from staff and diminished their participation. The MMEIC Elders made rich contributions to the project through their storytelling and visits to the school but collaborated in the overall design of the project as a collective voice and not as individual participants in the study. This ensured the authenticity of the knowledge they were sharing through a collective voice. The Elders felt that the focus on one school enabled them to allocate time for discussions and visits that may not be viable if more schools had been included. This ensured that they were central to the project and part of the decision-making process throughout.

In representing the data and reflections and responses of the two Arts specialists, I have endeavoured to portray their feelings and practices accurately and objectively. As an Arts educator myself, I do acknowledge that my own subjective feelings towards Arts education may have influenced my analysis of the data, however the maintaining of a reflective journal during this time and discussions with my supervisors has helped to provide important balance to their interpretation. I also acknowledge the difficulty of being an authentic researcher ‘outsider’ in a First Nation’s community and this also added to the complexity of the PAR process.

However, as the great majority of educators in Australian schools are not of First Nations Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander heritage, this study seeks to provide insights into the steps, challenges and learnings that can occur when working as an educator in a ‘cultural interface’ between Western education systems and the inherent knowledge of a First Nations community.

7.8 From Country to Sky—looking up

It is time to leave Capemba Creek, recognising that at low tide there is little water flowing and sand banks are exposed. I feel this is emblematic of the situation at the school after the ‘Quandamooka Connections’ showcase and so, I will now provide a concluding response to the three research questions.

7.8.1 The research questions—a summary

Research question one

In relation to research question one, there is no doubt that all participants felt challenged by the expectation that the Australian Curriculum’s Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Histories and Cultures CCP would be embedded across learning areas in the classroom.

The challenges were substantiated in the research. Although some spoke of highlights, they tended to be aligned with specific days on the calendar (Reconciliation Day, Sorry Day, NAIDOC week) and not related to classroom activities.

The exposed sand banks and dry runnels within Myora Spring / Capemba Creek suggest the challenges that the staff acknowledged and felt were insurmountable. As the saltwater tide comes swirling in covering the sand, it is possible to see in the dilution of the fresh spring water the competing complexities of educational imperatives informing curricula requirements and educator commitments to providing students with the skills, abilities and learning dispositions they require for twenty-first century living. (Baguley et al., 2021; Chapman et al., 2018). However, fresh new learnings can also be swept away on the tide and set aside in favour of a prescriptive outcomes-based curriculum with measurable outcomes.

Research question two

Research question two asked whether learning ‘in and on Country’ would assist educators in teaching the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander CCP. There was a sense that both the PG1 leader participants and the PG2 teacher participants were supportive of this concept, but the reality was very different with explanations and reasons given as to why this was difficult to achieve. It was unfortunate that a number of circumstances prevented these participants from having the opportunity to walk and talk ‘on Country’.

However, the importance of learning ‘in and on Country’ to assist teaching the CCP was endorsed by the two Arts specialists who were able to visit with the Goenpul, Noonuccal and Ngugi Elders on Minjerribah / Terrangee. The visit gave them insights and new knowledge and understandings that, with the permission of the Elders, they were able to share with students through arts-based ways of learning.

I see the fresh water that continually pours in Capemba Creek from Myora Spring as a metaphor exemplifying the students’ new learning gained from being ‘in and on Country’. The MMEIC Elders’ visits to the school supported all participants through the storytelling and sharing of skills such as weaving, but through the PG1 and PG2 participants not being able to visit the cultural sites that were being talked about, the learning was diluted as the incoming tide dilutes the fresh water of the spring.

Research question three

Research question three explored the capacity of the Arts to support non-First Nations teachers in embedding the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander CCP. It was wonderful to see the students tumble over themselves, as the Myora Spring water tumbles over the mossy rocks, to interpret and share the Minjerribah / Terrangee stories through creative performances and artistic representations that demonstrated authentic arts learning and skills. (Lorenza, 2021). The Arts specialists (PG3) revealed that through the project they:

... felt challenged at the beginning. But it was so rewarding to visit the MMEIC Elders on their Country, hear their stories, visit the places that had special meaning for them. It meant a lot and gave us a visual picture of Country. Through our arts programs we were able to integrate the stories and the histories and help the children to discover a different cultural way of thinking and living. (PG3 participants, December 12, 2022)

I think of the Arts specialists and their dedication to the project and remember that tide ebbs and the fresh water is still there.

It was disappointing to discover that there were no opportunities at this school for Arts to support the CCP in the classroom through the generalist primary teachers, due to the school's employment of the two Arts specialist teachers. However, there were positive responses from some of the PG2 participants in relation to embedding the CCP into other curriculum learning areas.

A postscript to the project from one of the PG3 participants, early in 2023, was to inform me that the Prep and Year One teachers had requested a copy of the poems and Jandai language words for their classroom literacy program. A Year Six teacher also made contact in 2023 to let me know she was enjoying being able to give more of a localised context to her HASS lessons about Australia after federation and colonial days.

I contemplate how undertaking this project was similar to throwing a small pebble into the water and watching the ripples spread out in concentric circles. How simple the answers to the research questions became: Yes, they were challenged. Partaking of opportunities to be 'in and on Country' made a lot of difference. Yes, the Arts can play a

major role in assisting non-First Nations educators to embed the CCP as there are so many opportunities for integration with other learning areas. Notwithstanding, there are challenges and hurdles to overcome, new possibilities to explore and the imperative of supporting educators in developing new ideas that strengthen their agency in the classroom and create a positive and valuable creative culture embedding First Nations' histories and cultures.

My journey on Country has been rich and rewarding and I now look to the sky, as the ancestors did for thousands of years, recognising and developing an understanding of seasons, navigation, agriculture and the behaviours of plants and animals. "Everything on the land is reflected in the sky ... sky relates to everything on the land ... virtually every aspect of life" (Hamacher & Nakata, 2023, p. 6).

In the next and final chapter, the signpost is *Mirrigin* [our guiding star] (Ngugi Elder Aunty Eileen O'Loughlin, 1995). In the poem, *Yesterday*, in Aunty Eileen O'Loughlin's, *Memoirs of Stradbroke Island* (O'Loughlin, 1995) the words, "*Mirrigin you can guide us*" and "*Let Mirrigin lead the way*" (p. 6) are appropriate, as I consider the events of 2022 at the project school, the continuing learning journeys of the arts specialists and the challenges for the school staff. I shall be guided by *Mirrigin* and the MMEIC Elders from whom I am constantly learning to ensure my pathway stays true.

Chapter 8: Signpost 8—*Mirigan* [star]

8.1 Introduction

Chapter Eight will consider the significance of my journey in relation to the various signposts provided throughout this thesis. It will discuss the significance of the research and offer recommendations based on the findings of this research undertaken with the MMEIC Elders and the school community. This chapter will also consider the challenges that can occur in relation to these types of research journeys.

I pause at this final signpost which is *Mirigan* [star] (Minjerribah-Moorgumpin Elders-in-Council, 2011, p. 174) and look up to the sky with the knowledge that changing skies are also a part of Country and the stars also tell stories and have helped lead the way for First Nations people as the Goenpul, Noonuccal and Ngugi Elders of the Minjerribah-Moorgumpin Elders-in-Council [MMEIC] have provided important guidance for this research journey. (see **Figure 71**)

Figure 71. *Mirigan* over land and sea.



(J. Macdonald, personal artwork, January 22, 2024)

8.2 Where it began

This research evolved from my deep abiding passion for the Arts in education. I hold First Nations' cultural understandings in awe realising that for over 65,000 years they have

maintained their stories, histories and knowledge through the Arts of dance, drama, music, visual, and media art, which are all forms of storytelling.

This research has sought to provide important insights for educators in implementing the Australian Curriculum (AC) and particularly the Arts Learning Area, the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Histories and Cultures Cross-Curriculum Priority [CCP], and the General Capability of Intercultural Understanding (Australian Curriculum Assessment and Reporting Authority, 2023 -b). I believe it imperative to demonstrate to educators that there is synergy between the Arts and the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Histories and Cultures CCP. When the two are intertwined there is also greater capacity for the development of the General Capability [GC] of Intercultural Understanding (Australian Curriculum Assessment and Reporting Authority, 2024d) in classroom practice.

However, being mindful of the challenges teachers have expressed in teaching the Arts and the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Histories and Cultures CCP (Taylor & Habibis, 2020), I have focussed this study on one First Nations and its stories, history and culture. If non-First Nations researchers are to gain a true understanding of the relationality between place and space, it is important to identify the geographical context of Country as it is understood from the perspective of one First Nations (Country Bawaka et al., 2016).

Making connections to one First Nations Country enables a deeper understanding of the importance of community, its protocols, and the knowledge of the interrelationships between the environments of land, sea, and sky and all creatures therein as understood in a localised concept (Bishop et al., 2021; Harrison & Skrebneva, 2020; Jackson-Barrett et al., 2015). This approach also challenges the stereotype that Australian First Nations Peoples are an homogenous group and this is clearly acknowledged in the AC: “First Nations Australians have sophisticated political, economic and social organisation systems, which include family and kinship structures, laws, traditions, customs, land tenure systems, and protocols for strong governance and authority” (Australian Curriculum Assessment and Reporting Authority, 2024a, p. 1) Therefore, throughout this research project, I have worked closely with the Goenpul, Noonuccal and Ngugi MMEIC Elders of the First Nations land and sea Country acknowledged as Quandamooka.

8.2.1 The chapters and signposts

The chapters of this thesis and the accompanying signposts indicate my travels, not only physically but emotionally and spiritually. This is outlined in the introduction, Chapter

One. Chapter Two, which includes the signpost, *muragan* [white woman] (Minjerribah-Moorgumpin Elders-in-Council, 2011, p. 53), is where I positioned myself as a non-First Nations researcher and recognised the stepping stones I had to use if I was to be ethical and responsible, culturally respectful and aware as I engaged in working with First Nations people.

I learned of the deeper meaning to *Neembeba Binang Gana* [look, listen, and understand] (Minjerribah-Moorgumpin Elders-in-Council, 2011) in Chapter Three and wondered at the hidden depths of the middens and the stories buried beneath the earth's surface in Chapter Four. The voices and writings of First Nations scholars are reviewed in both Chapters Three and Four and Chapter Four explores Indigenous research methodologies and an explanation of the metaphor of the midden layers as representational of the constructivist paradigm and the Participatory Action Research [PAR] methodological paradigm.

I then paused and reflected on education in Australia, the Australian Curriculum and my educational learning during this journey in Chapter Five and its signpost, *Terra Bulla Leumeah* [beautiful place, here I rest], named by Elders for the ancestors and Elders long-departed.

Chapter Six acknowledged the importance of *Bamira* [Brown Lake] (Minjerribah-Moorgumpin Elders-in-Council, 2011, p. 19) as at this place, for millennia, families came together to share stories and pass on cultural knowledge. At *Bamira*, I was privileged to be part of a community day-out and saw, first-hand, the strength of the MMEIC Elders as they yarned with others, watched over the children, and after lunch, shared stories. I felt emotionally caught up in the creation of new understandings both for myself as an outsider, and for the younger children of the next generation who sat quietly, respectfully listening to their Elders.

This passing on of new knowledge by Elders is significant and reflected in the approach I have taken through a PAR framework where I worked with the MMEIC Elders, and members of a school community located on this First Nations land and sea Country of the Goenpul, Noonuccal and Ngugi Peoples as part of a project. The project encouraged students and teachers to listen and share the cultural knowledge and stories of the MMEIC Elders through the Art forms of Dance, Drama, Media Arts, Music and Visual Art, creating new knowledge and understandings.

The fresh water constantly flowing from the Myora Spring into Capemba Creek became a metaphor for this new knowledge and understandings which were identified and

analysed in Chapter Seven. This chapter (signposted as Myora Spring / Capemba Creek) also identified and acknowledged problems and difficulties that arose throughout the project's duration, making a connection between these and the dilution of the fresh water by the incoming saltwater tides.

I chose *Mirigan* [star] (Minjerribah-Moorgumpin Elders-in-Council, 2011, p. 51) as a metaphor for this final chapter as the stars of the night sky have guided First Nations people's navigation, seasons, and cultural practices for millennia (Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies, 2022). I have been guided by the MMEIC Elders and I ponder the words of Elder Auntie Eileen O'Loughlin (nee Borey) who wrote:

*Mirrigin*¹⁸ (*our guiding star*) *you can guide us to find their tribal pathways*

*Come forth sons of ancestors, be Dutta (strong)*¹⁹

Let Mirrigin lead the way... (Elder Auntie Eileen O'Loughlin, 1995)

(Extract from *Dreams of Yesterday*, written for Margaret Iselin, Elder who supplied Aboriginal words and meanings, 1995, p. 6)

This final chapter acknowledges the meandering pathways of my research journey, and the strength of the MMEIC Elders, who, as the *sons of ancestors*, have kept me strong and led me along the way to new understandings and knowledge.²⁰ *Mirigan* beckons a pathway to the future in spite of the dark clouds across the night sky which become a metaphor for the challenges of contested spaces and contexts of both educational institutions and government education policies.

However, *Mirigan's* light is weakened by cloud cover, it is still there as I outline the outcomes and findings from my research and offer clear recommendations for the ways in which educators can strengthen their own cultural understandings and knowledge. ... *let Mirrigin lead the way.* (Elder Auntie Eileen O'Loughlin, 1995 p. 6)

¹⁸ For the heading of this chapter, I have used the spelling of *Mirigan* as it is found in the *Jandai Language Dictionary* (p. 51). However, it is respectful to Elder Auntie Eileen O'Loughlin to use her spelling *Mirrigin* as she wrote it, in the context of her poetry.

¹⁹ Datta¹⁹ the word 'strong' in the *Jandai Language Dictionary*, is spelled *dada* (p. 26) and is acknowledged as being of Ngugi origin.

²⁰ 'sons of ancestors' [sic] The MMEIC Elders have requested that Auntie Eileen's words are not to be altered in any way out of respect.

Personal reflections

As a *muragan* [white woman] (Minjerribah-Moorgumpin Elders-in-Council, 2011, p. 87), I struggled with writing this thesis and keenly felt the challenges of working within Nakata's cultural interface (Nakata, 2002, 2007a). I acknowledged the disjunct between two knowledge systems and questioned my temerity in attempting to find a way in which a better understanding of the Australian Curriculum's Cross-Curriculum Priority (CCP) First Nations histories and cultures could be gained through the arts learning area. Questions within the academy leading up to my confirmation of candidature included: "Why are you doing this / you shouldn't be doing this when you aren't a First Nations person?" and "This is an interesting topic but so difficult when you aren't Aboriginal; is it worth your while?" These questions made me personally and academically aware that my research and thesis would disrupt the normative discourses in education with their prioritisation of literacy, numeracy science and technology (Baguley et al., 2022; Barton et al., 2018; Belbase et al., 2022; Ewing, 2020b; Falloon et al., 2020; Tytler, 2020). I sensed the comments were reflective of the words of Kamilaroi First Nations scholar, Dr Marcus Woolombi Waters, who wrote of the "contemporary Indigenous binary structures that continue to censor our Aboriginal voice today" (Woolombi Waters, 2018, p. 5). This perception serves to emphasise the inherent Westernised colonial narrative embedded in academic discourses that compete for knowledge production within our educational institutions (Ewing, 2020b; Rom, 2022a).

However, it is important to note that at this university, First Nations topics are a priority and at my Confirmation of Candidature presentation there were many positive responses from faculty members and colleagues. Throughout my research journey, I have felt encouraged and supported by both the university and colleagues who have consistently expressed their interest and enthusiasm for my research. I feel heartened by the words of Narungga man and scholar, Professor Peter Buckskin, who encourages "non-Indigenous academic staff" (Buckskin, 2016, p. 10) to take up and support the perspectives of First Nations knowledges, beliefs and values.

Throughout my thesis writing, I have endeavoured to avoid Westernised narratives and acknowledge the voices of First Nations scholars within my review of the literature which has provided important connection and perspective to the voices of the MMEIC Elders.

I realised my passion for the Arts in education was not enough and that I was initially making assumptions from my ingrained colonial, westernised perspective that the

art works of Australia's First Nations artists, musicians and performers could be easily adopted and adapted for the classroom, presenting their communities as homogeneous (Brown, 2019). During this research journey I have learned that First Nations cultures are not buried in the past, they are contemporary, fluid, evolving, and locally contextualised. In accepting this, I embarked on a reflective process through *Neembeebe Binang Gana* [look, listen, understand] (Minjerribah-Moorgumpin Elders-in-Council, 2011, pp. 37, 51, 53), described in Chapter Three, with the understanding that my personal past knowledge, viewpoints and assumptions needed to be put aside or discarded, in order to develop a critical conscience.

Throughout this process, I also gained awareness of the invisible superiority that comes with the privilege of being a white woman and how I was ignorant of post-colonial history, the Frontier Wars, Aboriginal laws and languages, and the “complexity of contemporary Aboriginal lives” (Taylor & Habibis, 2020, p. 359). In the earlier stage of this research journey, I had defaulted to the concept of ‘niceness’ reframing in my mind what I found uncomfortable or disruptive in ways that would reaffirm my good intentions as a researcher in a First Nations space (Castagno, 2019). It was alarming to consider that through my ignorance I was creating a barrier that would obstruct positive and genuine interactions with the MMEIC Elders (Taylor & Habibis, 2020). I sought to understand this experience through the context of Nakata's cultural interface (Nakata, 2002, 2007a, 2010) taking heed of the Jandai language words, *Neembeebe Binang Gana*, in order to strive for genuine cultural competency and to challenge my preconceptions.

8.3 Significance of the research

With its localised context of the MMEIC Elders who are Goenpul, Noonuccal and Ngugi Peoples of the land and sea Country recognised as Quandamooka, the research has significance as it demonstrates the importance for educators of understanding and acknowledging the context of local First Nations communities and respecting the dissimilarities and divergence between the histories, stories, and cultural knowledge of all First Nations people of Australia. The Arts provide important opportunities for educators to support students in developing intercultural understanding through exploring a range of arts forms and diverse cultures, and particularly those First Nations on which their schools are located.

It is imperative to demonstrate how non-First Nations educators can develop a stronger understanding of the distinctive diversity of the histories and cultures of the many

First Nations groups across Australia.²¹ The Arts project undertaken in a small school on the mainland of the First Nations land and sea Country recognised as Quandamooka has significance for all educators as it clearly demonstrated that First Nations histories, stories, and cultural knowledge can be successfully embedded through engagement with the Arts strands of Dance, Drama, Media Arts, Music and Visual Art as delineated in the Australian Curriculum (Australian Curriculum and Assessment Reporting Authority, 2023f), with the understanding that Elders are respectfully invited to share, where appropriate, their knowledge and their stories.

Other projects which have been conducted in collaboration with local First Nations Elders have focussed on visual arts in community (Elliott & Clancy, 2017; MacGill, 2017), botanical science and a school's environmental habitat (Turner et al., 2017) and early childhood role play, dance and art in a preschool (Somerville, et al. 2019). My research is significant with its focus on the cultural knowledge of the Goenpul, Noonuccal and Ngugi MMEIC Elders of one First Nations and how all five art strands can be utilised to strengthen the cultural understandings of teachers, and their students in a primary school context.

It also reveals that when teachers are supported by Elders, they feel empowered to make changes to their classroom planning in other curriculum areas including English, HASS, Science and Technologies. This is also significant as it demonstrates clearly how the AC's Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Histories and Cultures CCP can be embedded to strengthen students' cultural understandings "through engagement with learning area content" (Australian Curriculum Assessment and Reporting Authority, 2024a, p. 3).

8.3.1 The research project

The aim of this research project was to investigate the capacity of the Arts to strengthen the knowledge and understandings of non-First Nations educators and was conducted throughout 2022 at one small school on the First Nations land and sea Country known as Quandamooka in South-East Queensland, Australia. It was conducted through a Participatory Action Research (PAR) paradigm that enables research to be undertaken in a

²¹ First Nations Peoples are the first Peoples of Australia. They are not one group but comprise hundreds of groups that have their own distinct set of languages, histories, and cultural traditions (Australian Institute of Health and Welfare. (2024). *Profile of First Nations people*. Australian Government <https://www.aihw.gov.au/reports/australias-welfare/profile-of-indigenous-australians>.

variety of ways that bring people together, around a specific concern or interest, with the possibility of creating positive changes that can lead to actions impacting on practices and policies (Brydon-Miller et al., 2020; Kemmis et al., 2014).

As a non-First Nations researcher of Anglo-Saxon heritage, I was aware of the imperative for the central positioning of the Goenpul, Noonuccal and Ngugi Elders of the Minjerribah-Moorgumpin Elders in the project. This was in accordance with the ethics and protocols outlined in the AIATSIS Code of Ethics for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Research (Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies, 2020a). Ethics approval was gained from the University of Southern Queensland's Human Resources Ethics Committee (Approval No: ETH2021-2-0122, see Appendix A) and the Brisbane Catholic Education Office (see Appendix B). Working with Elders must be done respectfully with awareness of the responsibilities they also hold in their communities. These include responsibilities to kin, caring for Country, leadership obligations, and cultural activities that inform their identity and everyday activities (Gibson et al., 2020). The wisdom of Elders, their knowledge and access to stories, histories and cultures of their respective First Nations Countries can only be shared with their permission and approval.

This understanding resulted in the research project being located to one school so that the MMEIC Elders' time was respected. The important and complex nature of providing time and space for the MMEIC Elders to work with the school community was also a consideration as was the pressures and challenges for the teachers in engaging with this project in order to support their teaching of the Australian Curriculum's Cross-Curriculum Priority of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Histories and Cultures.

8.3.2 The project—the aftermath

Overall, the integration of the Arts Learning area with the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Histories and Cultures CCP at the school, with its focus on the First Nations land and sea Country recognised as Quandamooka was effective particularly from the perspective of the Arts Specialist educators (PG3), and the students. Classroom teacher participants (PG2) were also able to embed new cultural understandings across the learning areas of English, Humanities and Social Science (HASS), Science, and Technologies. The collaboration between the two Arts specialists and their willingness to learn about the First Nations cultures of the Goenpul, Noonuccal and Ngugi Peoples was enthusiastically shared as they, with the MMEIC Elders, guided the students through authentic arts activities.

The visits to the school from the MMEIC Elders enabled the students and the Arts specialists to engage in a wide range of creative representations of the Elders' different stories, utilising all Art forms (Dance, Drama, Media Arts, Music and Visual Art) as presented in Chapter Five. Unfortunately, the Elders' visits, while well-received and acknowledged by individual teachers as supportive of classroom programs, did not appear to create a permanent change in relation to future school planning and teacher professional development to further embed the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Histories and Cultures CCP. It would seem that with the constraints of highly-structured lesson planning for prescriptive units of work there was little incentive for teachers to gain more understanding of cultural perspectives and a lack of motivation to embed culturally responsive teaching practices (Booth & Allen, 2017; Burgess & Harwood, 2023).

However, one classroom teacher (PG2) authentically implemented positive action and change across several learning areas in their classroom, providing thoughts on potential ways in which schools and the government could nurture these types of initiatives.

My concerns are still around being able to build and maintain connections with the Elders of Minjerribah and Moorgumpin ... As time passes if those connections are not maintained then meaning is lost. We can still teach the content, but the connections to the people who make it memorable isn't there to back it up ... it is almost like we need Elders of each area who are employed by the State Government to go to schools and do small activities that can then be built on by the teaching staff. Not sure how that would work, but it is just such an important part of sharing the story, building cultural understanding and knowing that the teaching and learning is true to traditional peoples of the area. (Participant Group [PG] 2 teacher, personal communication, June 20, 2023).

This insight calls attention to the need for scaffolded and practical support and guidance from Elders in relation to education contexts (Burgess, Fricker, et al., 2022; Burgess & Harwood, 2023; Funk & Woodroffe, 2023). In addition, a systemic change in educational

institutions to a more culturally responsive perspective to schooling is required (Bishop, 2021, 2022, 2023; Bishop & Vass, 2021; Lowe & Galstaun, 2020; Vass, 2018). There is a clear need for ongoing support for educators at all levels, from pre-service training at a tertiary education level, to individual and structural levels in schools, if practices are to be changed (Buxton, 2020; Guenther et al., 2019; Hollinsworth, 2016; Walton et al., 2018).

The project overall proved challenging because the Arts learning area was not part of the classroom teaching content and was solely the domain of the two Arts specialists at the school. This was unfortunate, as not engaging with the Arts as a way of learning in the classroom weakened the underlying premise that the Arts would strengthen cultural understandings for teachers and their students.

Further, it is concerning to think that this delegation of the Arts to specialist teachers, removes it from mainstream curricula devaluing it in the day-to-day context of classroom learning. Having specialist arts teachers in a school can legitimise and support authentic Arts learning for students but, if it is marginalised and paid little attention to by school administrators and teachers, the collaboration and collegiality among staff will often exclude the Arts educators, damaging self-esteem and self-efficacy regardless of the arts backgrounds, experiences, and qualifications.

I can go weeks without anybody even stopping to say hello or ask how I am. It is very lonely and that's why I enjoyed the project so much and working together with someone who understands and loves the arts as much as I do. (Anna, Arts specialist, PG3, personal communication, February 3, 2023).

This perception of the sidelining of the Arts is recognised in research (Gibson & Ewing, 2020; Lorenza, 2021; MacGill, 2022) as is the frustration and exhaustion that comes from being the sole Arts educator in a school (McFerran et al., 2023). Encountering the reality of the research in the context of a school's environment was confronting. One of the Arts Specialist teachers in a follow-up post-project meeting acknowledged that:

... the general lack of support from administration was hard and our work with the students was not reinforced in the classrooms by teachers so it was difficult for the students to develop deeper cultural

understandings. I did feel that neither the Arts nor First Nation perspectives were truly valued or prioritised in the same way as literacy and numeracy (Heidi, PG3, arts specialist, personal communication, March 8, 2023).

The difference between the rhetoric of the aforementioned documents and frameworks that underpin Australian education, and the participants' experiences of the project were in tension. The school principal initially articulated their desire to engage with a project that would develop and foster an understanding of the histories and cultures of the local First Nations land and sea Country recognised as Quandamooka with staff and students working together with the Elders. However, in the post-project feedback, it became evident that their endorsement was also partly related to supporting the school's Reconciliation Action Plan (RAP).

There was also post-project planning for a Bush Tucker Garden and a school wall mural (through an external art commission), but the communication did not demonstrate an inclusive approach that would engage staff and students in collaboration with the MMEIC Elders, nor did it translate into a focus on cultural capability and learning for the staff and students (Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies, 2020b). This was further emphasised in 2023-24 as the MMEIC Elders have not been invited back to the school post-project to share further cultural knowledge with the staff and students.

It is very disappointing; children forget and need us there to remind them. Ongoing education is what's important (Goenpul Elder, Aunty Mary Iselin-Burgess, July. 18, 2023).

At the conclusion of the 2023 school year, the two Arts specialists had their contracts terminated and a single (newly appointed) Arts teacher has been appointed to cover the five Arts forms. I am unaware of the decision-making process that prompted this rearrangement of school staffing and resource support for the arts learning area but feel concern that the visibility of the Arts within the school community will be further reduced leaving the school's Arts program in a tenuous position. There is nothing to indicate that this approach

will include embedding of the CCP and interactions with the MMEIC Elders, leaving the staff and students at the school without recourse to the Arts knowledge and cultural understandings acquired by the two Arts specialists who were so proactive in their engagement with the Elders. They visited with them on Country, and effectively immersed themselves in cultural experiences which were shared with the school community.

8.4 Pathways to the future

Mirigan leads the way and there are always pathways between the stars. The Arts have the capacity to link learners to the broader story of humanity enabling complex issues to be more easily understood through artwork, song, and dance. Caruana (2012) states that the spiritual life and links to ancestral beings in Australian First Nations people centres on the Dreaming—“the ideological framework by which human society retains a harmonious equilibrium with the universe” (p. 10). However, dark clouds sweep across the night sky, dimming the light. This is an appropriate metaphor for the challenges that face all educators working within both the Arts and the requirement for embedding of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Histories and Cultures CCP across all learning areas.

8.4.1 Dark clouds and challenges

The Arts and First Nations histories have been intertwined through millennia, informing us of the past, communicating in contemporary society, and contributing to an emerging and unknown future. If the Arts are becoming as marginalised within the classroom as the research indicates (Baguley, 2019; Barton et al., 2018; Chapman et al., 2019; Ewing, 2020b; Gibson & Ewing, 2020; Lane, 2020; Lane, 2019; MacDonald et al., 2016; MacGill, 2022; McFerran et al., 2023) there is little hope that they will become integral to exploring and understanding Australian First Nations people’s identities, knowledge, cultures and histories.

There are consistent concerns from educators including lacking the confidence, skills, time, support, and the privileging of other curriculum areas, including literacy and numeracy (Chapman et al., 2018; Chapman, 2015; Ewing, 2020b; Gibson & Ewing, 2020). There is also a misalignment between the educational requirements set down in the Australian Curriculum and the reality of classroom practices that presents a dilemma for all educators (Dinham, 2023).

Throughout the chapters and signposts of this thesis, it is apparent that through the Arts non-First Nations educators can strengthen their cultural understandings and embark on the pathway to cultural competency. However, when faced with the seemingly insurmountable challenges within the contemporary classroom, it is apparent that a major shift must be made. Hiding behind requirements of a standardised curricula and achievement standards, is no longer an acceptable reason for neglecting either Arts education or First Nations education particularly when the Australian Curriculum requires integration of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Histories and Cultures CCP in pedagogical practice (Bishop et al., 2021; Heaton, 2019).

8.4.2 *The big picture—professional development, policies and funding*

Whilst considering possible recommendations in an educational context to conclude this thesis, I have felt concern at the disconnect between the expectations of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Histories and Cultures CCP (Australian Curriculum Assessment and Reporting Authority, 2023 -b), the requirements within the learning area of the Arts (ACARA, 2023f), and the reality of educator concerns at the school and classroom level. Teaching is complex and multi-dimensional (Graham et al., 2020) and teachers require ongoing “professional learning, practice and engagement” opportunities, as outlined in the Australian Professional Standards for Teachers (APST), endorsed in 2010 by the Ministerial Council for Education, Early Childhood Development and Youth Affairs (MCEECDYA – now the Education Council) (Australian Institute for Teaching and Leadership, 2022, p. 2). The issue of limited professional development both in the Arts and the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Histories and Cultures CCP is intertwined with funding and time and contributes to low educator self-efficacy.

Neither the Arts or the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Histories and Cultures CCP will be appropriately and authentically included in classroom programs unless there is continued support and professional development for educators which requires funding at both the local school level, the district level and the government level.

8.4.3 *Implications for action*

The findings of this study indicate that there are several challenges that educators face in authentically integrating the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Histories and Cultures CCP through arts-based approaches. Working closely with the participants whilst also being an Arts educator has enabled me to identify several recommendations for the

Australian education sector for consideration. These would assist in addressing some of the challenges faced by educators but also the education sector more generally.

As outlined in previous and current research there has been an “overwhelming failure to deliver effective policy reform in Indigenous education” (Shay et al., 2023, p. 74). Educational policy should explicitly advocate for all non-First Nations educators to be provided with the opportunity to meet regularly with representatives of their local First Nations community (Barney et al., 2014; Bishop, 2021; Bodkin-Andrews & Carlson, 2016b; Lowe, 2017; Lowe & Galstaun, 2020; Lowe & Yunkaporta, 2018; Rogers, 2018; White et al., 2022). Lowe et al., (2021) write of “a culturally nourishing approach to schooling” (p. 471) with opportunities to learn on Country with First Nations people, building positive relationships that enable the incorporation of local First Nations perspectives in to school curricula. Such an approach is found in the educational pedagogy of ‘both ways’ learning as practiced in the Northern Territory.

The dominant and hegemonic western school model that is the foundation of the Australian education system has now espoused neoliberal education (Dadvand & Cuervo, 2020; Desmarchelier, 2022; Gavin et al., 2021) with its prioritisation of standardisation and benchmarking of national assessment, accountability measures, and the narrowing of curriculum and pedagogies. This has seemingly led to a generalised practice of knowledge transmission with the presumption “that all children and young people grow and develop cognitively at the same rate, in the same chronological year and have linear learning patterns” (Dadvand & Cuervo, 2020; Desmarchelier, 2022; Sellars & Imig, 2023 p. 174).

The Arts learning area in the Australian Curriculum has in its rationale that Arts participation enriches wellbeing through Arts knowledges and practices that enable students to “play, explore, question, challenge and imagine new possibilities as they create, embody, design, represent, collaborate and communicate ideas, emotions, observations and experiences” (Australian Curriculum and Assessment Reporting Authority, 2023f para. 2). Research concurs regarding the significance of the Arts in education with its premise and encouragement of imagination, creativity of thought, aesthetic development, and originality (Dinham, 2023; Garrett & MacGill, 2021; Gibson & Ewing, 2020). It is through the Arts that students can work within their preferred learning styles which can range from the visual, the verbal, the kinaesthetic to the spatial and auditory (Baguley et al., 2022).

Using the voices of the participants as a guide, whilst considering my own experiences as an Arts educator, I have formulated several recommendations for the education sector, the aims of which are to promote the importance of genuine integration

of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Histories and Cultures CCP through Arts-based approaches in classroom practice. This approach also recognises the critical inclusion of Elders from the Country on which the school is located. The recommendations are divided into four categories and relate to the areas of professional development, policies and practice, the arts, and funding.

8.4.3.1 Professional development

During this research project, the teacher participants expressed their appreciation for the opportunity to obtain professional development about the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Histories and Cultures CCP through the opportunity to engage in a cultural awareness workshop on Country with the MMEIC Elders, and for subsequent visits by the Elders to work with them in their classrooms. The school administrators were also supportive of this opportunity to engage with the Elders to discuss the school's Reconciliation Action Plan (RAP), also seeing this as an important form of professional development. However, there were several challenges that impacted on these authentic forms of professional development.

To address the issue of professional development it is imperative that continual and long-term innovative and relevant professional development is made available for educators, principals, and administrators. This should include schools working with local First Nations people with a focus on “collaborative leadership, being open to learning conversations, engaging in reflective learning conversations, giving and receiving feedback, relationships and trust” (p. 416).

It is recognised that professional development and educational reforms are interconnected (Mukan et al., 2019). If professional development could cross the traditional boundaries of English, Maths, Science, and embrace long-term interventions for the Arts and the CCP it could open a pathway to the systemic changes needed in the education system overall. This of course would require continuous follow-up support and opportunities for group collaborations, as well as appropriate resources and materials (Conradty & Bogner, 2020; Gore & Rosser, 2022). Without such long term professional development workshops and programs, Australia's educators will be denied the opportunity to understand how the Arts can be effectively utilised within the classroom to support and strengthen cultural understandings of First Nations Peoples.

8.4.3.2 Policies and practice

During the research project, the Year Three and Year Five classes were being prepared for the National Assessment Program – Literacy and Numeracy (NAPLAN) in Term Two. This preparation took priority over the Arts project and reinforced the concept of a print-based learning context and an analytical cognitive formula that disregards diversity and individual differences that can include variations in language, sensory, kinaesthetic, and social behaviours (Cranley et al., 2022; Frazer & Yunkaporta, 2021).

There were similar findings from a project undertaken with teachers on the implementation of the Torres Strait Islander Histories and Cultures CCP and the Intercultural Understanding General Capability (Desmarchelier, 2022) which, although based in a secondary education context, aligned with the findings in my project in relation to educators acknowledging the pressures of the NAPLAN assessment, the requirement for accountability, the lack of time to effectively pursue opportunities to implement the CCP, and the challenge of gaining support from the hierarchy within the institution.

Similarly, and again aligning with my findings, a West Australian study across two secondary schools (Booth & Allen, 2017) found that the embedding of the CCP was problematic and dependent on the school culture as espoused by school leadership and their willingness to support and encourage all staff to educate all students in First Nations histories and cultures.

When considering the government policy document of the Australian Performance Standards for Teachers (APST) Focus Area 2.4 “Understand and respect Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people to promote reconciliation between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians” (Australian Institute for Teaching and Leadership, 2022, p. 13), one can see the disconnect between the “logics of practice” in the field of education policy from whence come the professional standards and the logics of practice of teachers’ work within their school contexts (Mockler, 2022, p. 168). Research emphasises the pedagogical challenges faced by educators in relation to this focus area and the attendant Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Histories and cultures CCP of the Australian Curriculum (Buchori & Dobinson, 2015; Forrest et al., 2017; Harrison & Greenfield, 2011; MacGill, 2022; Moreton-Robinson et al., 2012; Peacock et al., 2015; Stern & Burgess, 2021).

Classroom teachers are faced with increasing accountability and demands on their time (Booth & Allen, 2017; Chapman et al., 2019; Desmarchelier, 2022; Lowe & Galstaun, 2020). It is not possible for teachers to progress satisfactorily through the APST career stages from graduate to proficient, highly accomplished and lead teaching

(Australian Institute for Teaching and Leadership, 2022) unless there is appropriate and supportive professional development and involvement and mentoring from school leaders and their district and government department counterparts.

8.4.3.3 *The Arts*

The willingness of the Arts specialist teachers in the research project to meet with, listen to, and work collaboratively with the MMEIC Elders in planning arts classroom activities emphasises to all educators the importance of two-way learning and the recognition of First Nations knowledge production through relationality with Country (Bishop, 2022; Coff & Lampert, 2019; MacGill, 2022).

In relation to the pre-service training received by educators at tertiary institutions, there is still the consideration of the marginalisation of the Arts leading to a lack of pre-service teacher professional learning in the Arts with low status and little resourcing (Ewing, 2020a). The low self-efficacy in the Arts, expressed by many pre-service teachers (Garvis, 2013; Lemon & Garvis, 2017), does not augur well for their contribution to Arts practices in the classroom as there is also a marginalisation of the Arts as a learning area in schools (Baguley et al., 2022; Chapman et al., 2019; Ewing, 2020a; McFerran et al., 2023). This was also a concern throughout my research project as it contradicts the rationale for the Arts in the Australian Curriculum and appears to pay little heed to the aim of “engagement with the diverse and continuing cultures, arts works and practices of First Nations Australians “ (Australian Curriculum and Assessment Reporting Authority, 2023f para. 3).

Arts educators and classroom educators, principals and other education leaders need to be united in their advocacy for Arts education and provision. There is a need to advocate for changes to policies that can reshape “the competing and competitive academic discourse” (Ewing, 2020a, p. 80) in order to move away from the settler-colonial agenda of a government-mandated curriculum. It must be acknowledged that the rhetoric of curricula standards has a rigidity that precludes innovative and creative approaches to the Arts learning area which includes learning about First Nations Peoples, their languages, cultures and histories. Arts education needs professional development and support for all educators (Bishop, 2021; Bishop et al., 2021; Heckenberg, 2018).

8.4.3.4 *Funding*

Although school autonomy policies are considered ideal for allowing a localised context for school decision-making and budgetary control, there is concern that external market

forces and accountabilities impact negatively on the implementation of new school strategies and programs (Keddie et al., 2020; McGrath-Champ et al., 2019; Niesche et al., 2023). This does not augur well for professional development in relation to the strengthening of local First Nations cultural understandings and implementing the Arts strands of Dance, Drama, Media Arts, Music, and Visual Arts. Further, it is of even more concern when one considers that accountability in schools is invariably linked to student outcomes and performance which all too often hinges on standardised literacy and numeracy testing which in turn become the learning areas that are prioritised for funding (Chapman et al., 2018; Lane, 2020; Lorenza, 2021; Macqueen et al., 2019; Roberts et al., 2019).

The allocation of funding from educational districts, regions, states and the Commonwealth to schools needs to include an increase in budgeting for professional development.²² Specifically, it should be mandated to prioritise making connections with local First Nations communities, which include appropriate remuneration and a long-term professional development strategy that enables educators to reach out and take the time to sit, listen, and observe on Country. It cannot be done hastily, nor should it be confined to one professional development cultural workshop program to satisfy school requirements. Genuine connection means respecting local culture, history, and acknowledging the challenges that have been faced in maintaining First Nations knowledge and histories. It also means educators being made aware of the protocols and responsibilities that non-First Nations educators have when undertaking to build relationships and interact with local communities (Guenther et al., 2019; Janke, 2024).

From the perspective of the Goenpul, Noonuccal and Ngugi MMEIC Elders, the project at one small school that demonstrated and shared students' deeper understandings of the knowledge of the First Nations land and sea Country, recognised as Quandamooka was seen as a potential stepping stone to wider engagement with schools in the area.

8.5 Further research

Recent research exploring initiatives to support educators in integrating Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander histories and cultures into their practice has included a cultural

²² Schools in Australia are funded through a combination of Australian Government (Commonwealth) funding, state and territory government funding, and funding from fees, charges and other parental or private contributions. Department of Education. (2024). *How schools are funded*. Australian Government <https://www.education.gov.au/schooling/how-schools-are-funded> .

mentoring project (Burgess & Harwood, 2023) in which First Nations community members led a mentoring program for non-First Nations teachers to inform the teachers about local histories, cultures and present-day issues. Acknowledged as a short-term project, the authors considered that a more sustained approach through the long-term would engage teachers in professional learning that encouraged the re-contextualisation of classroom practices.

Other projects undertaken through immersion on Country, and with the authentic engagement of First Nations communities (Bartleet et al., 2019; Bishop et al., 2021; Burgess, 2019; Burgess & Harwood, 2023; Dolan, Hill, Harris, Lewis, & Stenlake, 2020; Elliott & Clancy, 2017; Lowe, 2017; MacGill, 2017, 2022; Somerville, Powell, et al., 2019; Turner et al., 2017) have also demonstrated that participants knowledge and understandings of First Nations histories and contemporary cultures were strengthened. With this awareness came respect and a determination to embed these knowledges and their sources into classroom pedagogies. This resonates with the project journey and findings that underpin this thesis.

8.5.1 Recommendations for future research

This thesis has identified several opportunities for future directions in research which may positively impact educator's self-efficacy with integrating the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Histories and Cultures CCP into their classroom practice. Below are three main areas of research which have been identified as possible areas for future exploration.

8.5.1.1: PAR, the arts and the integration of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Histories and Cultures CCP in rural and regional schools

This study was conducted at a metropolitan school site on a designated Native Title area known as Quandamooka. Due to the complexity of Native Title arrangements across Australia, it would be beneficial for a similar study to be undertaken in a regional and remote area to understand the challenges facing educators implementing the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Histories and Cultures CCP in these areas. This may include challenges for some schools in understanding which First Nations Elders or Custodians they should approach to undertake a similar project as there may be several groups that need to be contacted. Respecting Elders' time and commitments to family, local community and other such priorities is also an important consideration. These complexities are important to understand given the significance of educators being aware

of and working with First Nations Elders or Custodians on the Country on which their school is located. The concept of ‘both ways’ learning could be introduced to future research to further address the interface of two cultures and the requirement for respectful and informed relationships.

8.5.2.2: The arts and the integration of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Histories and Cultures CCP in pre-service teacher education

Research has shown that several Australian universities are actively engaged in providing pre-service teachers with opportunities to engage with the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Histories and Cultures CCP through course work and sessions on Country. It would be advantageous to conduct a research project on campus at a university that investigates the potential of an elective / specialisation course for pre-service teachers to effectively integrate the Arts with the CCP.

Preparation for this would utilise the expertise of Arts educators and the knowledge of members of a university’s First Nations / Aboriginal / College / Institute of Studies. The project outcomes would indicate the success or otherwise of such integration and provide information regarding further similar courses.

8.5.2.3 Provision of professional development in the Arts

Integrating the Arts learning area into all other learning areas is a recommendation of the AC (Australian Curriculum and Assessment Reporting Authority, 2023f). This requires professional development in the Arts to strengthen the self-efficacy of primary school teachers. To determine the state of the Arts in primary schools, a survey of principals and school administrators would be beneficial. This would provide data revealing the allocation of hours for the Arts, the implementation of the Arts in schools by school educators, and the challenges faced by school administration teams when considering Arts education at the primary schooling level. Once this information is collated, steps can be taken to undertake further studies and projects within school cluster groups to determine how professional development in authentic Arts learning for classroom teachers can be presented.

I recommend that the steps I took on my journey to new understandings of the histories and cultures of one First Nation be extrapolated and followed in other places on Country and with other voices. Wherever you are it is necessary to reach out, introduce

oneself, sit quietly, listen with your ears and hear with your heart, reflect and return again. Such positive actions will enable educators to become agents for change.

It behoves all educators to consider and critique our systems and institutions and how they evolved through a colonial legacy of power, whiteness and privilege to foster and embed racial advantage (Burgess, 2019; Taylor & Habibis, 2020). Only then will it be possible to re-consider and re-plan within the construct of the classroom.

8.6 Conclusion

In this chapter, I have provided an overview of the core purpose of this research and highlighted the extent to which this was achieved. I have also discussed how the research has been informed by the writings of First Nations scholars and guided by the MMEIC Elders. The alignment of Participatory Action Research with the project through its four phases provided important insights into how the project was created with the MMEIC Elders and implemented in the school community.

Implications from this research project were discussed and offer key insights into how the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Histories and Cultures CCP can be integrated into pedagogical practice using Arts-based approaches which value and celebrate diversity. The signposts used throughout each chapter in the thesis, which highlight significant locations on the First Nations Land and Sea Country recognised as Quandamooka, provide important recognition to the Goenpul, Noonuccal and Ngugi MMEIC Elders and their guidance during this research journey. By undertaking this journey in the cultural interface, this research has also provided important insights for both educators and the MMEIC Elders about how stories told through the Arts can provide important opportunities for learning and understanding.

This thesis ends with the words of acclaimed Aboriginal actor and director, Wesley Enoch, a First Nations Ngugi man from Minjerribah / Terrangee with kinship to the MMEIC Elders. He has spoken of the importance of the centrality of stories and the Arts in First Nations curricula, emphasising that it should not be about teaching content but about being curious, questioning and having cultural conversations that will give educators the momentum to go with hope into the future.

... we need the stories and the songs that will take us into the future because without them we will fall off the edge...the art and the stories are the centre of our culture;

everything can be taught through culture. We need new Dreamings and new structures to take us forward. (Enoch, 2019)

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APPENDIX A: Code of Ethical Conduct MMEIC Elders



Minjerribah-Moorgumpin Elders-in-Council Aboriginal Corporation (MMEIC)

Code of Ethical Conduct

Background:
Minjerribah, Moorgumpin Elders in Council Aboriginal Corporation (MMEIC) promote the true value of our meaning and worth as Original First Nations People. MMEIC has been a not-for profit incorporated entity since 1994 under the Federal Aboriginal Councils and Associations Act 1976, and then, by regulation, under the Corporations (Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander) Act 2006. Since 2002 MMEIC have been a registered Charity with the Australian Charities and Not-for-profits Commission (ACNC). MMEIC was created as a cultural organisation/body for preserving, recording, communicating, and teaching communities the culture and language of the Goenpul [Goren-pul], Ngugi [Noog-ee] and Noonuccal [Noo-knuckle] Traditional Owners of their tribal regions.

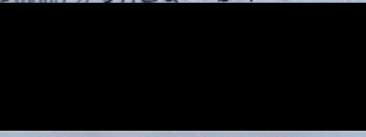
Commitment and Accountability We are accountable to our community and stakeholders for our actions and decisions. We conduct ourselves with honesty, integrity, and transparency, and fulfil our cultural obligations with diligence, professionalism and pride.

Standards of Behaviour for Members, Directors, Employees, Partners, Volunteers, Contractors, and other Representatives:
Behaviour is the foundation of MMEIC's reputation as a community-driven organisation:

Respect	- Behaves with sensitivity to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and cultures and keeps their needs at front of mind. - Shows respect for diversity of people, shows empathy, and treats others with fairness, courtesy, equity, and respect.
Character	- Behaves in a professional, honest, constructive and ethical manner. - Acts in the best interests of our community and our organisation. - Conveys a positive attitude to work through hopeful, optimistic and realistic behaviours.
Teamwork	- Shows commitment to MMEIC's purpose by expressing to others the positive value and benefits of our work. - Works for the good of the team by acting cooperatively, sharing knowledge, being constructive and flexible. - Shows awareness of impacts on others and shows an openness to learn and grow.
Diligence	- Strives for excellence and continuous improvement. - Stays informed of responsibilities as part of the team and behaves accordingly. - Demonstrates a conscientious approach to completing work to a high standard.

"I state that I will adhere to the listed Code of Ethical Conduct conditions outlined throughout this document whilst engaged by or working collaboratively with MMEIC both during my professional engagement and when interacting with the community".

Full Name (print): JACQUELINE MACDONALD Date: 24-05-2024

Signature: 

May 2024 | Page 5 of 5

WITNESS :- MH Bujgen
CHAIR (MMEIC)

APPENDIX B: Group One (1) Participant Information sheet and Consent Form

	University of Southern Queensland Participant Information Sheet G1 Questionnaire/Interview USQ HREC Approval number H21REA242
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Project Title

Learning with the Elders of the Minjerribah Moorgumpin Elders-in-Council (MMEIC) on the Land and Sea area commonly known as Quandamooka. Exploring how to support non-Quandamooka teachers' cultural understandings of the Quandamooka area through the Arts (Dance, Drama, Media art, Music, Visual Art).

Research team contact details

Principal Investigator Details

Mrs Jacqueline Macdonald
[Redacted]
[Redacted]

Supervisor/ other investigator details

Professor Margaret Baguley
[Redacted]

Dr. Jacinta Maxwell
[Redacted]

Wiradjuri Elder, Associate Professor Robyn Heckenberg
[Redacted]

Nguigi Moorgumpin Elder Norman Enoch, Minjerribah-
Moorgumpin Elders-in-Council Corporation Chairperson
[Redacted]

Description

This project is being undertaken as part of a Doctor of Philosophy program through the University of Southern Queensland.

The purpose of this project is to:

- (1) explore the educational experiences of non-Quandamooka Primary School educators in teaching the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander histories and cultures Cross-Curriculum Priority (CCP) of the Australian Curriculum with professional development learning on the land and sea area commonly known as Quandamooka with the Minjerribah-Moorgumpin Elders-in Council (MMEIC) and Uncle Norman Enoch, their Chairperson.
- (2) Collaboratively work with Nguigi Moorgumpin Elder Uncle Norman Enoch and the MMEIC Elders to develop a relevant and culturally appropriate set of arts-based recommendations to assist non-Quandamooka educators working on the land and sea area commonly known as Quandamooka to thoughtfully teach about Quandamooka history and culture.

Participation

our participation will involve partaking in three questionnaires (10-15 minutes of your time for each questionnaire) and three interviews (approximately 45-60 minutes of your time). These will occur at the beginning of the project, a mid-way point and at the conclusion of the project.

Topics in the questionnaires and semi-structured interviews will focus on arts-based experiences and classroom activities; knowledge of Quandamooka nation and classroom activities that support the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander histories and cultures Cross-Curriculum Priority of the Australian Curriculum and the perceived progress of the project across the school.

A sample of draft questions are included below:



University of Southern Queensland

Consent form

PG1 Questionnaire/Interview

USQ HREC Approval number: **H21REA242**

Project Title

Learning with the Elders of the Minjerribah Moorgumpin Elders-in-Council (MMEIC) on the land and sea area commonly known as Quandamooka. Exploring how to support non-Quandamooka teachers' cultural understandings of the Quandamooka area through the arts of Dance, Drama, Media Arts, Music and Visual Art.

Research team contact details

Principal Investigator Details

Mrs Jacqueline Macdonald
[Redacted]
[Redacted]

Supervisor/ other investigator details

Professor Margaret Baguley
[Redacted]

Dr. Jacinta Maxwell
[Redacted]

Wiradjuri Elder, Associate Professor Robyn Heckenberg

Email: robyn.heckenberg@curtin.edu.au

Nguigi Moorgumpin Elder Norman Enoch, Minjerribah-Moorgumpin Elders-in-Council Corporation Chairperson
[Redacted]

Statement of consent

By signing below, you are indicating that you:

- Have read and understood the information document regarding this project. ☐ Yes
- Have had any questions answered to your satisfaction. ☐ Yes
- Understand that if you have any additional questions, you can contact the research team. ☐ Yes
- Are over 18 years of age. ☐ Yes

- Understand that interview/s will be audio recorded ☐ Yes
- Agree to participate in the project. ☐ Yes
- Understand that any data collected may be used in publications and/or conference presentations ☐ Yes

Name (first & last)			
Signature		Date	

Please return this document to a research team member before undertaking the interview.

APPENDIX C: Group Two (2) Participant Information sheet and Consent Form

	University of Southern Queensland Participant Information Sheet G2 Questionnaire/Interview
	USQ HREC Approval number: H21REA242

Project Title

Learning with the Elders of the Minjerribah Moorgumpin Elders-in-Council (MMEIC) on the Land and Sea area commonly known as Quandamooka. . Exploring how to support non-Quandamooka teachers' cultural understandings of the Quandamooka area through the Arts (Dance, Drama, Media art, Music, Visual Art).

Research team contact details

Principal Investigator Details

Mrs Jacqueline Macdonald
[Redacted]
[Redacted]

Supervisor/ other investigator details

Professor Margaret Baguley
[Redacted]

Dr. Jacinta Maxwell
[Redacted]

[Redacted] au
Wiradjuri Elder, Associate Professor Robyn Heckenberg
[Redacted]

Nguigi Moorgumpin Elder Norman Enoch – chairperson
Minjerribah-Moorgumpin Elders-in-Council Corporation
[Redacted]

Description

This project is being undertaken as part of a Doctor of Philosophy program through the University of Southern Queensland.

The purpose of this project is to:

- (1) explore the educational experiences of non-Quandamooka Primary School educators in teaching the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander histories and cultures Cross-Curriculum Priority (CCP) of the Australian Curriculum with professional development learning on the land and sea area commonly known as Quandamooka with the Minjerribah-Moorgumpin Elders-in Council (MMEIC) and Uncle Norman Enoch, their Chairperson.
- (2) Collaboratively work with Nguigi Moorgumpin Elder Uncle Norman Enoch and the MMEIC Elders to develop a relevant and culturally appropriate set of arts-based recommendations to assist non-Quandamooka educators working on the land and sea area commonly known as Quandamooka to thoughtfully teach about Quandamooka history and culture.

Participation

Your participation will involve partaking in three questionnaires (10 – 15) minutes of your time for each questionnaire) and three interviews approximately 45-60 minutes of your time. These will occur at the beginning of the project, a mid-way point, and at the conclusion of the project.

Topics in the questionnaires and semi-structured interviews will focus on arts-based experiences and classroom activities; knowledge of the Quandamooka area and classroom activities that support the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander histories and cultures Cross-Curriculum Priority of the Australian Curriculum and the perceived progress of the project within your classroom. You are asked to bring a copy of an arts-based unit or set of activities that you have designed/implemented before this project commenced and then to share an arts based unit you have designed/implemented during this project to the final interview.

A sample of draft questions are included below:



University of Southern Queensland

Consent form

PG2 Questionnaire/Interview

USQ HREC Approval number: **H21REA242**

Project Title

Learning with the Elders of the Minjerribah Moorgumpin Elders-in-Council (MMEIC) on the land and sea area commonly known as Quandamooka. Exploring how to support non-Quandamooka teachers' cultural understandings of the Quandamooka area through the arts of Dance, Drama, Media Arts, Music and Visual Art.

Research team contact details

Principal Investigator Details

Mrs Jacqueline Macdonald

Supervisor/ other investigator details

Professor Margaret Baguley

Dr. Jacinta Maxwell

Wiradjuri Elder, Associate Professor Robyn Heckenberg

Nguigi Moorgumpin Elder Norman Enoch – chairperson
Minjerribah-Moorgumpin Elders-in-Council Corporation
Chairperson

Statement of consent

By signing below, you are indicating that you:

- Have read and understood the information document regarding this project. ☐ Yes
- Have had any questions answered to your satisfaction. ☐ Yes
- Understand that if you have any additional questions, you can contact the research team. ☐ Yes
- Are over 18 years of age. ☐ Yes
- Understand that interview/s will be audio recorded ☐ Yes
- Agree to participate in the project. ☐ Yes
- Understand that any data collected may be used in publications and/or conference presentations. ☐ Yes

Name (first & last)			
Signature		Date	

Please return this document to a research team member before undertaking the interview.

APPENDIX D: Group Three (3) Participation Information sheet and Consent Form

	University of Southern Queensland
	Participant Information Sheet G3
	Questionnaire/Interview
USQ HREC Approval number: H21REA242	

Project Title

Learning with the Elders of the Minjerribah Moorgumpin Elders-in-Council (MMEIC) on the Land and Sea area commonly known as Quandamooka. Exploring how to support non-Quandamooka teachers' cultural understandings of the Quandamooka area through the Arts (Dance, Drama, Media art, Music, Visual Art).

Research team contact details

Principal Investigator Details	Supervisor/ other investigator details
Mrs Jacqueline Macdonald	Professor Margaret Baguley
	Dr. Jacinta Maxwell
	Wiradjuni Elder, Associate Professor Robyn Heckenberg
	Nguigi Moorgumpin Elder Norman Enoch – chairperson
	Minjerribah-Moorgumpin Elders-in-Council Corporation

Description

This project is being undertaken as part of a Doctor of Philosophy program through the University of Southern Queensland.

This project is being undertaken as part of a Doctor of Philosophy program through the University of Southern Queensland.

The purpose of this project is to:

- (1) explore the educational experiences of non-Quandamooka Primary School educators in teaching the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander histories and cultures Cross-Curriculum Priority (CCP) of the Australian Curriculum with professional development learning on the land and sea area commonly known as Quandamooka with the Minjerribah-Moorgumpin Elders-in Council (MMEIC) and Uncle Norman Enoch, their Chairperson.
- (2) Collaboratively work with Nguigi Moorgumpin Elder Uncle Norman Enoch and the MMEIC Elders to develop a relevant and culturally appropriate set of arts-based recommendations to assist non-Quandamooka educators working on the land and sea area commonly known as Quandamooka to thoughtfully teach about Quandamooka history and culture.

Participation

Your participation will involve partaking in three questionnaires (45 to 60 minutes of your time for each questionnaire) and approximately three interviews (approximately 60 minutes of your time). These will occur at the beginning of the project, a mid-way point, and at the conclusion of the project.

Topics in the questionnaires and semi-structured interviews will focus on arts-based experiences and classroom activities; knowledge of the land and sea area known as Quandamooka and classroom activities that support the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander histories and cultures Cross-Curriculum Priority of the Australian Curriculum and the perceived progress of the project in relation to your arts teaching area across the year levels. You are asked to bring a copy of an arts-based unit or set of activities that include the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander histories and cultures Cross-Curriculum Priority that you have designed/implemented before this project commenced and then to share an



University of Southern Queensland

Consent form

PG3 Questionnaire/Interview

USQ HREC Approval number: **H21REA242**

Project Title

Learning with the Elders of the Minjerribah Moorgumpin Elders-in-Council (MMEIC) on the land and sea area commonly known as Quandamooka. Exploring how to support non-Quandamooka teachers' cultural understandings of the Quandamooka area through the arts of Dance, Drama, Media Arts, Music and Visual Art.

Research team contact details

Principal Investigator Details

Mrs Jacqueline Macdonald

Supervisor/ other investigator details

Professor Margaret Baguley

Dr. Jacinta Maxwell

Wiradjuri Elder, Associate Professor Robyn Heckenberg

Nguigi Moorgumpin Elder Norman Enoch – chairperson
Minjerribah-Moorgumpin Elders-in-Council Corporation
Chairperson

Statement of consent

By signing below, you are indicating that you:

- Have read and understood the information document regarding this project. ☐ Yes
- Have had any questions answered to your satisfaction. ☐ Yes
- Understand that if you have any additional questions, you can contact the research team. ☐ Yes
- Are over 18 years of age. ☐ Yes

- Understand that interview/s will be audio recorded ☐ Yes
- Agree to participate in the project. ☐ Yes
- Understand that any data collected may be used in publications and/or conference presentations ☐ Yes

Name (first & last)			
Signature		Date	

Please return this document to a research team member before undertaking the interview.

APPENDIX E: Interview questions

PARTICIPANT GROUP 1

What prior experiences have you had in teaching or facilitating arts opportunities for students?

As one of the school education administrators what is your vision for this school and the students in relation to arts learning?

To what extent have you introduced or embedded Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander histories and cultures Cross-Curriculum Priority (CCP) into any of the schools where you have worked?

Can you describe any challenges you may feel or have experienced in relation to incorporating the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander histories and cultures CCP as part of your leadership role?

Can you describe any activities that you have incorporated at a whole school level and/or seen in a classroom that have highlighted the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander histories and cultures CCP and supported children's understandings?

In reflecting on the school's curriculum framework where do you see opportunities to embed the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander histories and cultures CCP in different learning areas?

To what extent did you see the arts included in the cultural awareness program on Quandamooka?

The arts are often able to express complex meanings without the use of words. Did you experience this during your participation in the cultural awareness program on Quandamooka?

What connections do you think can be made between the knowledge gained from the cultural awareness program on Quandamooka and how the arts could be used to help support this learning with students?

As one of the school education administrators what is your vision for this school and the students in relation to the embedding of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander histories and cultures CCP?

PARTICIPANT GROUP 2:

Do you remember engaging in the arts during your primary schooling? If so, can you briefly describe this experience?

Did you choose to pursue the arts during your secondary schooling? If so, can you briefly describe which arts forms and why chose them?

Did you undertake any extra-curricular arts activities outside of school? If so, can you briefly describe what these were?

Do you see any art forms as being easier to prioritise in class activities? If so, in what ways?

Can you share any units of work or classroom activities that you have created to support children's knowledge and understandings in relation to the arts and/or Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander histories and cultures?

To what extent did you see the arts included in the cultural awareness program on Quandamooka?

What connections do you think can be made between the knowledge gained from the cultural awareness program on Quandamooka and how this could be presented through the arts?

What ideas do you have for implementing arts activities and programs that could support the knowledge and understanding you have gained in relation to Quandamooka histories and cultures?

PARTICIPANT GROUP 3:

Do you remember engaging in the arts during your primary schooling? If so, can you briefly describe this experience?

Did you choose to pursue the arts during your secondary schooling? If so, can you briefly describe which arts forms and why chose them?

Did you undertake any extra-curricular arts activities outside of school? If so, can you briefly describe what these were?

Can you share any units of work or classroom activities that you have created to support children's knowledge and understandings in relation to the arts and/or Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander histories and cultures?

To what extent did you see the arts included in the cultural awareness program on Quandamooka?

The arts are often able to express complex meanings without the use of words. Did you experience this during your participation in the cultural awareness program on Quandamooka?

What connections do you think can be made between the knowledge gained from the cultural awareness program on Quandamooka and how the arts could be used to help support this learning with students?

What ideas do you have for implementing future arts activities and programs that could support the knowledge and understanding you have gained in relation to Quandamooka histories and cultures?

APPENDIX F: University of Southern Queensland

Ethics Approval

From: human.ethics@usq.edu.au <human.ethics@usq.edu.au>
Sent: Tuesday, November 23, 2021 9:14 AM
To: Jacqueline Macdonald [REDACTED]
Subject: [RIMS] USQ HRE - H21REA242 - Ethics Application Approval Notice (Expedited Review)

Dear Jacqueline

I am pleased to confirm your Human Research Ethics (HRE) application has now been reviewed by the University's Expedited Review process. As your research proposal has been deemed to meet the requirements of the National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Human Research (2007), ethical approval is granted as follows.

Project Title: H21REA242 - Learning with the Elders of the Minjerribah Moorgumpin Elders-in-Council (MMEIC) on the land and sea area commonly known as Quandamooka. Exploring how to support non-Quandamooka teachers' cultural understandings of the Quandamooka area through the arts of Dance, Drama, Media Arts, Music and Visual Art. (Title for the project created in conjunction with the MMEIC.)

Approval date: 23/11/2021

Expiry date: 23/11/2024

USQ HREC status: Approved with conditions

- (a) responsibly conduct the project strictly in accordance with the proposal submitted and granted ethics approval, including any amendments made to the proposal;
- (b) advise the University (email: ResearchIntegrity@usq.edu.au) immediately of any complaint pertaining to the conduct of the research or any other issues in relation to this project which may warrant review of the ethical approval of this project;
- (c) promptly report any adverse events or unexpected outcomes to the University (email: ResearchIntegrity@usq.edu.au) and take prompt action to deal with any unexpected risks;
- (d) make submission for any amendments to the project and obtain approval prior to implementing such changes;
- (e) provide a progress 'milestone report' when requested and at least for every year of approval;
- (f) provide a final 'milestone report' when the project is complete.
- (g) promptly advise the University if the project has been discontinued, using a final 'milestone report'.

Additional conditionals of approval for this project are:

- (a) Nil.

Please note that failure to comply with the conditions of this approval or requirements of the Australian Code for the Responsible Conduct of Research, 2018, and the National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Human Research, 2007 may result in withdrawal of approval for the project.

If you have any questions or concerns, please don't hesitate to make contact with an Ethics Officer.

Congratulations on your ethical approval! Wishing you all the best for success!

Kind regards,

Human Research Ethics

University of Southern Queensland
Toowoomba – Queensland – 4350 – Australia
Ph: 07 4687 5703 – Ph: 07 4631 2690 – Email: human.ethics@usq.edu.au

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(CRICOS Institution Code QLD 00244B / NSW 02225M, TEQSA PRV12081)

APPENDIX G: Brisbane Catholic Education Ethics Approval

From: Research Brisbane Catholic Education <Research@bne.catholic.edu.au>

Sent: Thursday, November 11, 2021 4:59 PM

To: Jacqueline Macdonald [REDACTED]

Subject: Re: Research Application form and required documentation

Hi Jacqui

I am pleased to advise that your research application *Arts-based learning with the Quandamooka Elders of Minjerribah* has been approved.

Please ensure you provide us with PDF of the final report within one month of completion of the project or final report.

If you have any questions, please let us know.

Kind regards
Michelle



BCE Research Secretariat | Strategy and Sustainability

Strategy and Performance

Brisbane Catholic Education

2A Burke Street, Woolloongabba QLD 4102 | GPO Box 1201, Brisbane

QLD 4001

Phone 3033 7000 |

Email research@bne.catholic.edu.au | Website

www.bne.catholic.edu.au



Brisbane Catholic Education acknowledges the Traditional Custodians of the Land and pays respects to Elders past, present and future.