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Language and Spirit

Exploring Languages, Religions and Spirituality in Australia Today

Edited by

Robyn Moloney · Shenouda Mansour

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Editors
Robyn Moloney
School of Education
Macquarie University
Sydney, NSW, Australia

Shenouda Mansour
NSW Ecumenical Council
Sydney, NSW, Australia

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6

Aboriginal Language and Spirituality Within the Context of Riddim and Poetry: A Creative School Program

Devrim Yilmaz and Michael Jarrett

Introduction

The school program, Riddim and Poetry, was born in Armidale, New South Wales. Armidale is a medium sized regional town, with a population around twenty-five thousand, whose care has been shared among Anaiwan, Gumbaynggirr, Gamilaraay and Dunghutti peoples. Due to the significant presence of Indigenous students in Armidale schools, the schools find ways to enrich their curriculum or implement educational programs to cater for the cultural, social and linguistic needs of Aboriginal children. One of these schools is Minimbah Aboriginal School where the Riddim and Poetry program was implemented, followed by a language program focussed on the Gumbaynggirr language. Minimbah School is

D. Yilmaz (✉)
University of New England, Armidale, NSW, Australia
e-mail: ddevrim@une.edu.au

M. Jarrett
Department of Education NSW, Parramatta, NSW, Australia
e-mail: michael.jarrett@det.nsw.edu.au

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committed to closing the achievement gap for Aboriginal students to help them become successful in their careers within Australian society and it caters for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students in a culturally safe environment.

During the program design, the views of the community were of utmost importance, because the program aimed to deliver workshops outside the curriculum content. Riddim and Poetry followed Participatory Indigenist Research (PIR hereafter) (Evans et al., 2014), which is based on the earlier work by Rigney (1999, 1997). This research paradigm places Indigenous cultures, knowledges and peoples in the heart of research design. PIR consists of eight steps: building relationships, conceptualisation, development and approval, data collection and management, analysis, report writing, dissemination and learning from experience (Evans et al., 2014). The Riddim and Poetry program followed the steps of PIR. In order to build relationships, the First Nations' protocol was followed. This included visiting elders, asking for their permission, and obtaining endorsement. The project team conceptualised the program based on the drumming and poetry work done with Indigenous children in Australia. There were established and extremely successful drumming programs in Australia at the time, such as Drum Atweme in Alice Springs Northern Territory (Atweme, 2014). We, the Riddim and Poetry team, coupled what we had learnt from the existing drumming programs with the idea of using poetry in the classroom as a form of creative writing that would provide the students with opportunities to connect with their culture (Christensen & Watson, 2015). Furthermore, our Riddim and Poetry program paved the pathway as a motivational introduction, creating a group spirit and sense of connection, towards the Gumbaynggirr language program which followed.

Literature Review

Riddim and Poetry is one of the ways in which Culturally Responsive Pedagogy (CRP) can be put into practice within the Australian context. Culturally responsive teaching has dominated educational discourses since Gay (1994) and Ladson-Billings' (1995) seminal articles analysing

how teachers could and should address the needs of African American and South American students in the U.S. This work soon extended to include First Nations students in the U.S. (Alaska Native Knowledge Network, 1998; Castagno & Brayboy, 2008), Canada (Lewthwaite & McMillan, 2010; Nicol et al., 2010), and New Zealand (Bishop et al., 2007). Gay provides a definition of CRP:

> *Culturally responsive teaching is defined as using the cultural characteristics, experiences, and perspectives of ethnically diverse students as conduits for teaching them more effectively. It is based on the assumption that when academic knowledge and skills are situated within the lived experiences and frames of reference of students, they are more personally meaningful, have higher interest appeal, and are learned more easily and thoroughly (*Gay, 2000, 2002*).*

When the above definition and the development of CRP are considered, three important objectives emerge: academic success, cultural competence and critical consciousness (Ladson-Billings, 1995; Gay, 2002). In other words, CRP allows students to become academically successful as the teaching practices are designed to be culturally responsive; due to these teaching practices, students become culturally competent and maintain this competence. Finally, CRP aims to help students and teachers become critically conscious of pedagogical practices and planning relating to classroom, school, curriculum and policy. Therefore, CRP should not be considered an approach that results in cultural essentialism, reduced to a checklist of do's and don'ts, or built on a deficit model of teaching.

Recently, there have been significant developments in Australia aiming to provide students with culturally responsive teaching, and the educational programs designed for Indigenous children should place Indigenous knowledges and spirituality in the heart of these programs. John Greatorex emphasises this:

> *We always wait for seasons to come. When the time is right for young children to be told about certain stories, to be taught about the land, learn about the history, the time comes when the elder of a clan of the land decides and says it*

*is right for me to go and tell these certain stories about this land to these people (*Guyula*,* 2010*).*

Driven by this ancient philosophy, Yunkaporta and McGinty (2009), in their action research, explore how the mainstream curricula and the local Indigenous knowledge should meet to create productive processes. The researchers use a theoretical model joining traditional, local knowledges, non-local knowledges and contemporary local knowledges inspired by the joining of Gamilaraay, Yuwalaraay and Wayilwan countries. The teachers in the study include Indigenous knowledges in addition to Western knowledge in their lessons, and this results in successful learning and behaviour outcomes, as well as student autonomy and creativity. Based on the same motive, (Osborne & Guenther, 2013) introduce the idea of red dirt thinking and discuss the importance of Indigenous knowledges grounded on the land rather than the blue sky. Red dirt thinking provides the means for creativity in very remote Aboriginal and Torres Strait Island schools.

In another action research, Rioux et al. (2017) present how Aboriginal and Western knowledge were integrated into the biology curriculum in a Montessori classroom in regional Queensland. This integrated approach strengthened students' identities as Aboriginal people and science learners as well as the status of local Aboriginal knowledge. In her doctoral thesis, McCarthy (2010) investigates the disparity between the mainstream education and the way Indigenous people learn. The study is conducted at a metropolitan Aboriginal secondary school where a sporting program is developed and implemented to reengage Aboriginal learners in schooling. The program, the Girls' Academy, leads to significant personal and academic improvements and achievements.

In relation to Indigenous mathematical knowledge, Treacy et al. (2014) investigate Aboriginal students' conceptualisation and thinking strategies in counting tasks. The tasks were designed within the local Indigenous knowledge and the findings suggest that the participating students do not use counting to make equal sets. Similarly, Ewing (2012, 2014) presents a study which investigates the situated mathematical knowledge of mothers and children in one Torres Strait Islander community. According to the researcher, the use of daily practice of fish giving, Indigenous

knowledges and object familiarity would improve children's engagement with school and their learning of mathematics in the early years of schooling. Most recently, Rigney et al. (2020) investigate the ways in which early career teachers implement creative and body-based learning (CBL) in mathematics as a way of enacting CRP for Indigenous and ethnically diverse students. The study, which uses an ethnographic case study approach, reveals that the teachers managed to implement CBL in their math teaching which resulted in student engagement and made students feel clever and competent.

These research studies explore culturally responsive pedagogical practices for Indigenous children in Australia and document the ways in which Indigenous children's engagement with school and their learning improve when Indigenous knowledges and spirituality guide planning, implementation and reflection processes. Inspired by CRP, the Riddim and Poetry program aims to use creativity as a means to teach Indigenous languages to Indigenous school children; as music (Yob, 2010) and language (Bradley, 2011) are unquestionably important elements of spirituality.

In this chapter, we will firstly recount the design of the program and then discuss the ways in which we implemented the drumming and poem writing workshops, following the steps of the PIR paradigm. Subsequently, the chapter focuses on the Gumbaynggirr language lessons delivered by Michael Jarrett (Gawa Micklo) in relation to Aboriginal spirituality. The chapter concludes with the important lessons we have learnt from the Riddim and Poetry experience and what needs to be done in order to share and maintain Indigenous languages in Australia.

Designing Drumming and Poem Writing Workshops

In order to follow the first step of the PIR paradigm, which is *building relationships*, we contacted two Indigenous elders for endorsement. One of the elders was Uncle Colin Ahoy, the elder in residence at UNE's Oorala Aboriginal Centre who liked the Riddim and Poetry idea and

endorsed the program. He also suggested that we contact Minimbah Aboriginal School and enquire about their availability. Following the suggestion from Uncle Colin, we contacted Minimbah School and discussed the possibility of implementing drumming and poetry workshops there. The management of the school was quite positive and agreed to the implementation of Riddim and Poetry workshops. After getting the endorsement from Uncle Colin and permission from Minimbah School, we had a meeting with another Aboriginal elder, Uncle Steve Widders. The meeting focused on the program and how the program could be implemented in relation to the Aboriginal protocol. Uncle Steve stated that he fully supported the project and emphasised mentoring young Indigenous artists into facilitating Riddim and Poetry workshops would be another good idea. Following these productive meetings, the team submitted a funding application to the School of Education at UNE and an ethics clearance application to the UNE Ethics Committee. Both of these applications were successful and two Aboriginal artists were employed as research assistants for the program development and implementation. The Aboriginal research assistants organised meetings with the principal and staff at Minimbah School to inform them about the Riddim and Poetry program and take their ideas about the development and implementation of workshops into consideration.

The second step of the PIR was *conceptualization.* The method we adopted in Riddim and Poetry was inspired by the genre-based pedagogy of the Systemic Functional Linguistics (Martin, 2009; Rose & Martin, 2012; Martin & Rose, 2008), however, the pedagogy was adapted to amalgamate drumming and poem writing to help students create songs. Unlike genre-based pedagogy, Riddim and Poetry aimed to improve students' creativity through poetry rather than the school genres such as explanation, description, recount or narrative. While the program drew on Vygotsky's notions of scaffolding and zone of proximal development (Vygotsky, 1978), it also included *play* as Vygotsky's other important contribution to understanding child development (Vygotsky, 1967). Since Riddim and Poetry aimed to enable students to work collectively, the Teaching Learning Cycle (Rothery, 1994) needed to be adapted and renamed as the Riddim and Poetry Cycle (RPC). Figure 6.1 presents the RPC.

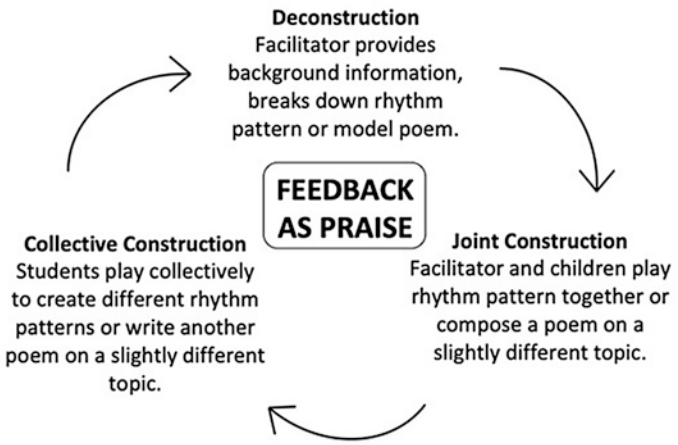

Fig. 6.1 Riddim and poetry cyclea

The RPC consists of three stages: *deconstruction, joint construction, collective construction*, and immediate verbal or non-verbal feedback is central in the cycle. While the first stage focuses on deconstructing e.g., a rhythmic pattern or a model poem; the *joint construction* stage aims to engage students in playing the deconstructed pattern with a facilitator and writing a poem similar to the deconstructed model. During *collective construction* stage, the students would form small groups and play drums or work on their poems collectively. This stage is dedicated to thinking about ways to improve what has been created. The RPC was followed in each drumming and poem writing workshop with the aim to expand students' creativity and help them learn from each other.

As the drumming workshops centred on basic four-beat rhythmic patterns; we needed a simple poem to be used as the model text in poetry workshops, so we explored Exley's *communal noun/verb poetry* and adapted it (Exley, 2016). *Communal noun/verb poem* is written collectively to recount an outdoor activity. In Exley's case, this was a family camping trip. Following the trip, the whole family got together and wrote a poem describing the surroundings and events using only nouns and verbs, such as "cars passing, kangaroos hopping, daddy running". In our context, we adapted the *communal noun/verb poem* focusing on native

Australian animals in order to bring in more cultural elements. We included *circumstance,* as another language element in addition to *noun* and *verb*. *Circumstance* is a clause constituent that defines the functions of prepositional or adverbial phrases. Adding the *circumstance* into the mix would bring more context to the poems. We wrote the following simple poem to be used as a model text in poetry workshops.

Wombats digging in their burrows
Wombats sleeping peacefully
Wombats snoring loudly
Wombats grazing on the grass

In the wombat poem, all the lines start with wombats and continue with wombats' daily activities in *-ing* form. The third language element in each line is the *circumstance,* which answers the *how, when, where,* and *why.* During the *deconstruction* phase of the RPC, this model poem would be deconstructed by the facilitators by asking questions to the students.

Implementing Drumming and Poem Writing Workshops

Once the *conceptualisation*, *development* and *approval* steps of the PIR paradigm were completed, it was time to implement workshops following the RPC. There were two groups at Minimbah school that the program targeted: Year 3/4 ($N = 16$) and Year 5/6 ($N = 24$). The older group attended the workshops from 9:30 am until 10:30 am and the younger group attended the later workshop (11 am–12 pm) on Fridays during Term 4. The workshops aimed to prepare students for the End of Year Awards where they would present their songs. In the Riddim and Poetry context, a song refers to students' short compositions amalgamating various drumming patterns and poems including words or phrases from Aboriginal languages. In order to create songs, the students worked collectively on developing their knowledge and experience in drumming and poem writing.

Collective Drumming

The workshops were held in a classroom where the students sat in chairs organised in a semi-circle, while the facilitator sat in front of the white board facing the students. The drumming part of the workshops started by greeting the students and having a brief casual conversation to build rapport, and then we started with talking about the drums during the *deconstruction* stage of the workshop cycle. During this stage, the students were provided with information about the three different types of drums: Tubano, Timbau and Djembe and shown the correct sitting position and posture; sitting towards the front of the chair to keep the body in a straight position. Also, the students were told about the various sounds of each drum. After talking about each drum, the workshop moved onto the correct technique to play them. While the correct posture was retained through sitting towards the front of the chair, the arms and shoulders were relaxed, and the arms moved through the elbows without bending the wrists or moving the shoulders. Following these general points, the facilitator presented a basic four-beat rhythmic pattern with simplified drumming notification and explained how to play it in relation to dexterity and tones. This stage formed the *joint construction* where the facilitator played with the students.

During *collective construction*, the students were placed in small groups with each student having a different type of drum and they were asked to play together. At the beginning, there was some noise in the classroom. However, each group started playing collectively in a harmonious way after a couple of minutes. The students were not instructed about what to play or how to play, but they were told to play together as if they are playing in a band. During each *collective construction* stage, the students played patterns well above the complexity of the ones they practiced previously. And this was the stage where the magic happened. The students were jumping above their regular behaviour (Vygotsky, 1967). The following drumming workshops followed a similar structure starting with stretching shoulders, arms and hands. The students were reminded the patterns practiced during the previous workshop and introduced to new patterns and fill-ins. The patterns got richer and more colourful each

week. The collective drumming of the students unleashed their creativity and gave them opportunities to be more creative.

Collective Poem Writing

The poetry workshops started with the Wombat poem, which was adapted from Exley's *communal noun/verb poetry (*Exley, 2016*)*. The students were asked questions about wombats in order to activate their prior knowledge and prepare them do discuss the poem. Similar to the drumming workshops, the poetry workshops also followed the RPC, so the first stage of the cycle was *deconstruction* where the facilitator activated the students' background knowledge and broke the poem into its components. The students were extremely engaged, as wombat is a native Australian animal and has cultural significance for Indigenous peoples.

Each line of the wombat poem was studied in detail. The facilitator read the poem first and then focused on each line. The first line "Wombats digging in their borrows" was written on the white board and the students were asked questions that helped them identify the subject: *What are digging in their borrows?* and other questions to elicit the part of speech: *Is that a noun or a verb?* Similar questions were asked to help students identify the process and part of speech: *What are wombats doing in their borrows?*, *Is it a noun a verb?,* and *how do you know it is a verb?*. The third part of the first line *in their borrows* was again elicited from the students: *Where are the wombats digging*?, the students provided the answer collectively: "In their borrows!". This manner of eliciting the constituents of the first line of the poem continued with the subsequent lines. Following the *deconstruction* stage, we moved to the *joint construction* stage.

In *joint construction* stage, the facilitator and students wrote a poem about another native Australian animal. This selection of the theme animal was done in a democratic way. The students shouted out animal names and the facilitator wrote them on the white board, and then the students were asked to vote on the animal they wanted to write a poem about. The kangaroo had the highest vote, so we started writing a poem about the kangaroo using the structure of the wombat poem. The

facilitator started with the word *kangaroos* on the board and asked the questions: *Kangaroos doing what?* and *What are kangaroos doing?*. The collective response was: "hopping!". And the second set of questions followed: *Where are they hopping?*. From a linguistic perspective, there are four types of circumstance: time, place, manner and cause, and they can be identified by asking the following prompting *wh-* words: when, where, how and why. During the first cycle employed in the Riddim and Poetry workshops, we focused on circumstance of time, place, and manner leading up to circumstance of cause. The kangaroo poem was finalised jointly by the facilitator and students:

Kangaroos jumping in the bush
Kangaroos hopping reckless
Kangaroos resting in the shade
Kangaroos sleeping at night.

The final stage of the cycle was *collective construction* where the students were put into groups of three or four and were given butcher papers. They brought their drums close to each other and formed a 'desk' to write on. The students were given instructions to pick another native Australian animal and write a poem similar to the wombat and kangaroo poems. The following poem was written by one of the groups and it was about the emu.

Emu, emu, emu, emu
Running through the dusty dessert
Trying to fly in the summertime
With the butterflies

Working collectively, the students managed to go beyond the model text and included more complex language features in their poem. It was now time to bring it all together; the students were given time to create a song incorporating their poem and the rhythm patterns they practiced earlier. They went well beyond what they have practiced earlier and composed a song matching the syllables to the beat and they presented the song in front of the class. As Riddim and Poetry placed Indigenous

cultures, knowledges and peoples in the core of the program, it is also possible to identify elements of Aboriginal spirituality in drumming and poem writing workshops. Having developed a spiritual connection through the drumming and poetry program and a sense of cohesion within the students, the groundwork had been laid for the Gumbaynggirr language lessons with their spiritual dimension, which will be discussed in the following section.

Aboriginal Spirituality in Gumbaynggirr Language Lessons

Gumbaynggirr language lessons were delivered after the drumming and poem writing workshops, which followed the Riddim and Poetry Cycle; however, the Gumbaynggirr lessons were prepared and implemented by Gawa Micklo, and Gumbaynggirr spirituality guided his thoughts, words and actions. In order to put this into perspective, we will present a yarn (chat) we had about Aboriginal spirituality within the context of the Riddim and Poetry program. The yarn started with Gawa's expression of what he understands from Aboriginal spirituality in general and specifically Gumbaynggirr spirituality. Following this, we talked about the way he prepared for his lessons at Minimbah School and then watched a few segments from his Gumbaynggirr lessons where he commented on the spiritual and cultural elements within each segment. Our yarn took place in a friendly manner, and this is represented in the following section. Also, we provide in brackets what Gumbaynggirr words and phrases mean, and in some cases complement this with the way they function in English to provide more context. In the following, Devrim refers to the first author and Gawa refers to the second author.

Devrim: Giinagay (meaning: acknowledgement of someone's existence; function: hello), gawa! I will ask you a few questions, but please feel free to expand on them as you see appropriate. What is your understanding of Aboriginal spirituality?

Gawa: My understanding of Aboriginal spirituality is that all things are in a relationship with each other. There are relationships between

people, there are relationships between the land, there are relationships between the spirits. There are relationships between the creators and the whole universe, so we are all in a relationship no matter what it is. For example, Gumbaynggirr people have totems, and they are related to their totems, to their family clan, to their land, and to their ancestorial beings, to their stories and to their songs. Gumbaynggirr people say every part of the universe is connected to the other parts of the universe, so when we do our ceremonies, our spirituality resonates all the way out to the universe. The spirituality of the Gumbaynggirr people is that we are connected with everything. One of our philosophies is to keep the life going and make it better. And the way Gumbaynggirr people did this is through respecting the autonomy of everything and not threatening the existence of anything, because everything has a spirit; the rock, the tree, the water; everything is spiritual in Gumbaynggirr culture.

Devrim: Darruy (meaning: good, nice; function: thank you), gawa! What did you think before you came to Armidale? Did you think about what you were going to teach and how you were going to teach? How were your decisions inspired by Gumbaynggirr spirituality and Aboriginal spirituality in general?

Gawa: When I was leaving my *bari*. In Gumbaynggirr, we have a *jagun*. *Jagun* is the whole of the Gumbaynggirr homeland. *Wajaarr* is the ground and *bari* is the special place that you belong to in the whole of the *jagun*, the homeland. My *bari* is Nambucca Heads and that's my clan area. When I was travelling to Armidale, I knew I was going up to see some Gumbaynggirr people. You know, I left early in the morning and looked to the East it was still very early and the evening star was still out. In Gumbaynggirr, the evening star is *gawnggan*, our mother; the first woman, so I was travelling from that way to see Gumbaynggirr people and I was leaving my *bari*. I was making a connection to *gawnggan*, the evening star. And I was saying to her:

> *Keep me safe, take me to Gumbaynggirr people, I want to share my language, I want to share my knowledge. I want to inspire these young children to learn their language, learn their culture, get their identity and be proud of who they are, be strong people who can rely on mother earth and mother earth takes care of them.*

We don't own this land. We are custodians of her, we look after her because she looks after us. This is what I want to instil in these young people; if we look after the land, the land will look after us. When I was going out there, I was thinking about the Gumbaynggirr dreaming stories I was going to tell, the songs I was going to teach.

Devrim: Did you have a plan for your lessons?

Gawa: My plan was all the Gumbaynggirr knowledge and the teaching skills that are inside me. When I get into the presence of the children and look at them, I feel which way to go. There were no classrooms in Aboriginal culture, there was no plan or program either. When we are in country, we just talked about the country, talked about the sacred places, talked about the ocean, talked about the totems. That was what I wanted to do. I wanted to fill them with all this knowledge that I have got in my head.

Devrim: That's beautiful. Do you want to have a look at some videos?

Gawa: Ngii (meaning: yes)! Let's have a look.

Video clip 1 context: *Gawa and the children are sitting in a circle in their chairs. Gawa is telling a story from his childhood about his encounter with a shark. The story is told in Gumbaynggirr and the children can follow and understand the story. During this extract, Gawa teaches them ngii (yes) and biiway (no) using hand gestures and facial expressions.*

Gawa: That was the first thing I did, told them the story of the shark. What I did then was to capture their attention. By doing it in language, I wanted them to hear the rhythm and understand my body language. I wanted to get their attention first and get them curious about language.

Devrim: What was the story about?

Gawa: It's a made-up, gammin story. It is about me swimming in the ocean with my cousin and getting bitten by a shark. When I tapped on my leg brace and the children thought it was a wooden leg. This makes the story very real. Also, I have got a shark tattoo on my arm which is one of my totems on my father's side. In our culture, if you are totem of the shark then you are related to the shark. That is your relative and you do not harm the shark in any way. This is spiritual connection between the shark and humans. That's our totem. Also, sitting in a circle like that is also a part of tradition as well. Everybody is enjoying themselves and you

are not targeting one person and singling them out. That was to get their attention.

Devrim: This is a beautiful example of how Aboriginal spirituality inspires children. Darruy, gawa! Thank you. Let's have a look at the second clip.

Video clip 2 context: *Gawa and the children are sitting in their chairs in a circle. Gawa is singing a Gumbaynggirr song keeping the beat clapping his hands.*

Gawa: That song was to get them to the rhythm and sounds of Gumbaynggirr. Because, when we speak, we speak like rhythm, like when we are talking. You speak in rhythm. When you sing, it's all so in rhythm, singing songs I does something with your brain. You remember the rhythm of the song more when you sing it. When I start singing: *bindarray jurriiyay waarri gaagalgu, bindarray jurriiyay waarri gaagalgu* (singing), so I sang that song I can actually say it, because I know the song: the river flows down to the ocean, so singing the song also they can hear it and remember it better with songs and rhythm. That's why I was clapping. That's the rhythm as well (clapping). You know it activates something in their little brains where they can take it on and remember it, it is something about the sounds.

Devrim: Beautiful. Thank you. And you had the other song. I don't remember the words, but it was something like that (humming).

Gawa: Ha, *nagarrambi guunyjumbi*. That was the traditional song, it got only four words in it. *Nagarrambi guunyjumbi* and then you use hand movements with it. You know, so you can hear the words and the rhythm, but you use the hand *nagarrambi guunyjumbi, nagarrambi guunyjumbi ngaarri ngaarri la.* You know our communication with each other has lots of body language you know in our communication we use lots of facial expressions, lots of hand movements, lots of where we sit, where we're looking and stuff like that. So, you know, using the hand movements, the facial expressions, and the sounds and the rhythm, that all gets into their little brain. And all joins together.

Devrim: What do the words say in this traditional song?

Gawa: *Nagarr* is your chest, *ambi* is across the chest of a mountain, *guunyju* is valley, *guunyjumbi* down the valley, *ngaarri* is play, *ngaarri*

ngaarri la is let's play. Walking across the chest of a mountain, down the valley, let's play.

Video clip 3 context: *Gawa and the children are sitting in their chairs in a circle. Gawa is teaching the children three Gumbaynggirr words. He asks them to repeat and the children do. He explains the meanings of these words using body language only, the children get the meanings and pronounce the words correctly.*

Gawa: *Miimi*, *nyirrnaa*, *gaagal nyirrnaa*. It is an idea of what's effective in the way I teach this language. My body language is really important as well for the children. *Gaagal* is our spiritual totem, of Gumbaynggirr people. *Gaagal* is the totem of all Gumbaynggirr people: the ocean. To us the ocean is our energy, our life. That gives us our energy and our life. And *miimi* is mother, you know. *Miimi* is mother who also gives life to us. And *nyirrnaa*: they are both beautiful. *Miimi*, *nyirrnaa*, *gaagal nyirrnaa*. This is a little bit of cultural stuff coming into them to show respect for their totem and for the mothers.

Devrim: Beautiful. Thanks, gawa!

Gawa: Ngii (meaning: yes, function: no worries)!

Devrim: Let's move on to the next one.

Video clip 4 context: *Gawa is sitting in a circle with the children. He has props (animals) and is putting the animals in the box. While he is talking about the animals, he asks intonation questions to the children in Gumbaynggirr and affirms their answers using ngii and biiway. The children look extremely motivated and race to answer Gawa's questions. The students give answers in English, but Gawa does not speak a word of English.*

Gawa: You can see children with a little short attention span. Every now and then, you've really got to switch from one activity to another activity or the activity you are doing, you are playing with that activity you are doing so they are not getting in a trance sort of thing; you know what I mean. You just focus on one thing.

Devrim: So, you were using the props to teach them verbs.

Gawa: Yes, *waru maana waanyji: I pick up the dog*, *ngaaja muuga waanyji bili-bagula*: *I put the dog in the box*. I named these nouns first and then the verbs. With these props, the children connected the sound to the prop. *Waanyji* is the sound that goes with dog. *Bili-bagula* that go with box, *nunguu* is the sound that goes with kangaroo. And they can see

that. They can watch me play with that thing and say the words. With the prop, the sounds and the actions they put it all together. That rhythm again: *waru maana waanyji*, *ngaaja muuga waanyji bili-bagula*, it is like duh duh duh duh… It's the rhythm.

Devrim: Beautiful. Thanks, gawa. Let's have a look at the last clip.

Gawa: Ngii!

Video clip 5 context: *Gawa and children are standing up scattered around the classroom. This clip is a short segment from the last activity in this sequence where children play heads and shoulders knees and toes in Gumbaynggirr.*

Gawa: Again, gross motor skills. If you are sitting them too much, their bodies need to move, and these kids have got lots of energy. Using language with growth body movement is another good way to connect the language, words with the body movements, and make it fun. You know I go around in that classroom walking around the classroom, revving them up, making them really nice and fun for all the kids, and some of the adults were doing it as well, so fun is another way of teaching language.

Devrim: Darruy, gawa! Do you want to add anything else that you remember from the Armidale experience or in relation to Gumbaynggirr spirituality?

Gawa: Teaching Gumbaynggirr and telling stories is one of the best ways to learn and retain the Gumbaynggirr language and culture. But for me, when I'm doing it I am connecting to my land, I'm connecting to my spirits, connecting to the creators and my ancestors. Keeping not only the language and the stories alive but keeping the land and all the creatures and all the sites that are alive as well. As I said before, every part of the universe is connected to the other parts of the universe. And when you sing, when you make sounds, these sounds resonate all the way. Because everything is alive, when you sing to the wind, rain or sand; they can hear. And the old people knew how to speak to the spirits, they knew how to talk to the elements, and they had these special sacred places they went to talk to the elements, talk to the spirits and do their ceremonies. Learning all this makes me grow as a man, as a Gumbaynggirr man and helps me keep my culture alive so that I can pass on all I've got inside me.

But I'm still learning myself, gaining knowledge as well. So, we'll never stop learning. We are lifelong learners.

Devrim: Absolutely. How important is what you are doing in Aboriginal schools and what needs to be done?

Gawa: What needs to be done is more community language learning, maybe at TAFE, at Muurrbay Aboriginal Language and Culture Co-operative, building up the capacity of the general public in language and culture, and getting those guys trained. Some of these guys want to go on and teach language and culture, have a pathway to university or a pathway to TAFE, and then get them qualified where they can go into teach the language and culture, the Gumbaynggirr language and culture. Hopefully, they will come out of their schools and become language and culture teachers. I taught a couple of guys in kindergarten who are now still training to be teachers to go to schools, they will be Gumbaynggirr educators. It is very important that we train Aboriginal people in their language and culture and ensure that they are qualified to go to schools.

Devrim: Darruywumba (meaning: very good; function: thank you very much)! Thanks a lot, gawa!

Gawa: Ngii!

Conclusion

This chapter documented the design and implementation of a school program that aimed to unleash Aboriginal school children's creativity through drumming and poem writing. The program, Riddim and Poetry, prepared the ground for motivating the children for Gumbaynggirr language lessons, which were implemented by Uncle Michael Jarrett. In other words, the Gumbaynggirr language program was built on the motivation established by drumming and poem writing workshops, and drew on Aboriginal spirituality.

The Riddim and Poetry program was funded by the University of New England and implemented in Armidale's Minimbah Aboriginal School. Riddim and Poetry followed the Participatory Indigenist Research paradigm placing Indigenous cultures, knowledges and peoples in the heart of the program (Evans et al., 2014). Therefore, it is an example for CRP

(Gay, 1994; Ladson-Billings, 1995), as the design of the program was finalised based on the views of Indigenous elders and the staff at Minimbah Aboriginal School. This was crucial in creating a culturally responsive program, as Indigenous knowledges guided the program design and implementation similar to the research studies and programs conducted in the Australian context (Guyula, 2010; Yunkaporta & McGinty, 2009; Osborne & Guenther, 2013; Rioux et al., 2017; McCarthy, 2010).

The recent CRP related research conducted in regard to mathematical knowledge highlights the distinct ways of Indigenous reasoning, which should inform school curricula (Treacy et al., 2014; Ewing, 2014; Ewing, 2012; Rigney et al., 2020). The inclusion of Indigenous reasoning in mathematics instruction increases engagement and creativity according to these studies. Similarly, Riddim and Poetry assisted students to become more engaged with school, and the conceptualisation of creativity as a collective process allowed the children to go beyond what they would create individually.

Furthermore, the Gumbaynggirr language program that followed drumming and poem writing workshops also had extraordinary positive effects on students' engagement and creativity, as Gawa Micklo emphasises there is an inseparable relationship between Aboriginal spirituality and Aboriginal languages. Therefore, the school programs that are designed and implemented prioritising Aboriginal knowledges, spirituality and languages should be promoted within the Australian education system. While the schools diversify their course offerings with such programs, the Aboriginal language teaching programs should proliferate within the communities. Institutions such as TAFE, Aboriginal language and culture centres as well as universities' adult education centres should offer Aboriginal language courses to the public and train more language ambassadors and teachers. These kind of public, independent or private initiatives are some of the vital tools we have in order to protect, maintain and share Indigenous knowledges, languages and spirituality.

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