University of New England

Title

We've been doing this for a long time: the reclamation of Traditional Aboriginal Knowledge and ways of teaching in contemporary systems of the western world.

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Master of Philosophy

University of New England

For the award of Master of Philosophy

2024

This research has been conducted with the support of the Australian Government Research Training Program Scholarship.

Abstract

In this thesis I am giving priority to the recognition of Australian Aboriginal people as educators of the highest standard, and as master storytellers. Aboriginal people understand, and have practiced, the power of storytelling since ancient times. This Aboriginal practice has existed for millennia and is much older than the western education system. I also document and explain S.E.C.D.R.R.R: a model of knowledge sharing, that I have developed through my work as an Aboriginal Cultural Education Mentor in NSW. The S.E.C.D.R.R.R model was created from the principles and methods employed by Traditional Aboriginal epistemology of Lore and the Traditional pedagogy or knowledge sharing through the art of storytelling.

Certification

I certify that the ideas, experiment work, results, analyses, software, and conclusions reported in this thesis are entirely my own effort, except where otherwise acknowledged. I also certify that the work was original and has not been previously submitted for any other award, except where otherwise acknowledged.

Candidate Name **Candidate Signature**

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(January 2024)

We've been doing this for a long time: the reclamation of Traditional Aboriginal knowledge and ways of teaching in contemporary systems of the western world.

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David Newham, *'We've been doing this for a long time: the reclamation of Traditional Aboriginal knowledge and ways of teaching in contemporary systems of the western world',* Master of Philosophy, UNE, 2024.

David Newham is part of a growing network of Aboriginal Loremen working as academic researchers in the University sector, whose research is conducted within Aboriginal knowledge systems as well as academic knowledge frameworks. Like David, these individuals are qualified as higher degree and academic researchers, but are also senior, respected Loremen who are responsible for nurturing the revival of Aboriginal Men's Lore in Western NSW, and beyond, to ensure it continues, and grows, into the future. The projects these Loremen/Researchers undertake deal with Lore - the reanimation of Traditional Aboriginal cultural principles and practices and their application; and Law - Aboriginal Traditional forms of redress and punishment. David's project falls into the first category of Lore: in this case the application of Traditional Aboriginal cultural principles and practices in the context of cultural education.

What very few white academic researchers understand is that Aboriginal culture, as both material and spiritual culture, is hugely adaptive, resilient and dynamic. Over millennia, Aboriginal people in what is now called Australia adapted to changing environmental conditions, and developed cultural and spiritual systems for living in Country without the destruction of coloniality. That resilience and adaptability is what has enabled Aboriginal people to survive colonisation and, now, begin the process of reclaiming sovereignty across all aspects of their lives.

Each of these Loremen/Researchers undertake projects within the framework of academic research that have a particular purpose. David's project specifically addresses the education system, not as an insider, but as an outsider. David's research examines Aboriginal Cultural Education, which takes place outside of authorised educational curriculum. Cultural education takes place in all manner of institutional settings and has developed out of Aboriginal people being 'invited' in to institutional and organisational settings to 'tell stories' in an attempt to increase the cultural competency of non-Indigenous Australians. David's research project documents a practice framework for the delivery of Cultural Education, discusses the principles for cultural integrity, and documents the curricula he has developed as a first step in gaining formal recognition within the Australian education system, which regularly employs the expertise of

Aboriginal Cultural Educators, but does not recognise the skills and expertise necessary to deliver such education.

This project is undertaken on terms and conditions that are important and recognisable to Aboriginal people. David's research is governed, first and foremost, by Aboriginal ideas of integrity, truth, and coherence, some of which stand in direct contrast to western ideas of what is provable and rational. This is because Aboriginal cultural education and its delivery, is shaped by Aboriginal people's knowledge and experience. Aboriginal people have their own history, and their own ways of telling that history, which are not widely recognised by Australian educational institutions, because they are Aboriginal.

One of the great harms of colonisation has been that so much Aboriginal culture has been collected and interpreted by western researchers who have no understanding of Aboriginal culture and spirituality. David's project, like others being undertaken by Loremen/Researchers, is the beginning of a wider effort at knowledge sovereignty by Aboriginal people.

David Newham has the cultural permissions required by Aboriginal ethics to undertake this project and has authority to speak on these matters.

Cultural Supervisor

Part 2.
Acknowledgements

It is a humbling position to be able to access key educational networks and supports to allow the amazing opportunity to commence and complete this Masters in Philosophy with the University of New England. I wish to acknowledge the Australian Commonwealth Government Research Training Program Scholarship for providing the financial support that enabled me to do this project. Thank you.

I would like to deeply and wholeheartedly thank my deadly (excellent, amazing) Higher Degree Research (HDR) Supervisor, Dr. Eliza Kent and the remarkable Cultural Advisor, Uncle Paul Gordon. Without their belief, support, vision, understanding of the academy and amazing guidance, this thesis would not be possible. Thank you so much.

A special and profound acknowledgement to ‘Djummu’ Uncle Paul Gordon for his connection to our Ancient Aboriginal Lore. He offered me a key all those years ago that has unlocked the universal wisdom of our Country and Ancestors, a huge thank you. Also, I acknowledge the strong support offered by members of Taragara Aboriginal Corporation, especially Dr. Lorina Barker, big gratitude.

I also wish to recognise the extensive amount of support offered to me by my partner, Miranda. In particular, her hugely important support as a sounding board and willing listener. Over countless hours, days and nights, Miranda listened while I read over paragraph and page, after page of my thesis. This has been crucial in providing a perfect channel for testing my thinking and ideas. Her deep listening and gentle inquiry when needing to check my expression has been extremely helpful. It especially enabled countless opportunities to edit my writing whilst hearing my words out aloud. Sincere thanks to you “Mazz”.

I acknowledge the support and advice offered by a very large circle of peers, close friends and mentors. Also, acknowledgement to those who offered professional support and mentoring across the far-reaching pockets of the education and training sector. This has afforded me the space and learning environments to share Traditional Aboriginal knowledge whilst sharpening my craft as a Storyteller and Cultural Educator.

Special recognition to the multitude of cultural Brothers I have engaged in Lore over the decades. Those who have supported my work and helped in the sharing of it and the Lore. I especially want to recognise those who have entrusted me with Traditional Aboriginal story, dance and song. Indyamarra nurra nurrabul.

Early Years - Foundational

Most of all I need to profoundly acknowledge my mother, Moira Campbell. Throughout her life Mum has always demonstrated to me and my sisters, tremendous grace, humility, dignity, and tenacity. Mum delicately balanced stubbornness, steely determination and perpetual kindness to rise above life's constant challenges, especially as a single Mother of 3 kids! An absolute legend, one of the most beautiful humans I've been blessed to have in my life and a dear friend to so many. Love you.

I also want to recognise my father, James "Ross" Newham. Despite Dad having limited input to my direct educational journey, he did instil in me several very integral values or mottos to life from the earliest of years, and still to this day. I will always be grateful for this. So, to quote my Dad; *"Always aim high and follow through son"*; *"Always give your best, can't ask for anything more son"*; and *"Never ever disrespect your Mother, she's your best mate"*. Thanks Dad, love you.

My Mum, along with my 2 older sisters, Michelle and Nicole, gave enormous support to my learning, especially during the years of my education at Primary school. This was a period of my education that was a constant battle, and one where I was always educationally well below my peers with all aspects of literacy. However, Mum and my sisters were always in my corner. They spent many nights, over many years, helping me grind away, practicing my reading, writing and spelling. I did eventually catch-up to my peers years later. I know without any doubt that my educational achievements to date are only possible because of those early foundational years of encouragement, belief, practice and support I received from you!

I also wish to give further acknowledgement to my two older sisters, both being sharp minded and skilful learners, albeit in different areas. My eldest sister, Michelle, was a gifted mathematician, whilst Nicole shone in Creative Arts and English. Both were very talented sportswomen and highly respected by educators and peers during their school years. My sisters set an important high standard towards education and life in general, showing me what success could look like throughout those years.

As the saying goes; you cannot be, what you cannot see. I have always been so proud of their achievements, and from the earliest days I have admired their successes. I take pride in saying I am their little Brother. However, I probably haven't told my sisters this enough, and secretly, I always strive to make them proud and set high standards for myself just as they do. Indyamarra and thank you so very much, love you. And by the way, yes, I do think that I am the funniest of us three kids. [author note: currently laughing out loud].

Story-Explore-Connect-Dance-Record-Research-Recount *(S.E.C.D.R.R.R)* Model

The *S.E.C.D.R.R.R* Model (pronounced as *sector*) stands for: *Story, Explore, Connect, Dance, Record, Research, Recount* and is a model of knowledge sharing developed through my work as an *Aboriginal Cultural Education Mentor* (ACEM) in NSW. The *S.E.C.D.R.R.R* model was created from the principles and methods employed by Traditional Aboriginal epistemology of Lore and the Traditional pedagogy or knowledge sharing through the art of storytelling.

The evolution of the *S.E.C.D.R.R.R* model into its current form commenced many years prior to this thesis. An important aspect to the journey of *S.E.C.D.R.R.R* was the support and encouragement I received from two fellow educators, Mrs Annette Van Egmond and Mrs Cath Dalais many years ago. As Principal, Mrs Van Egmond encouraged me to create a one-page overview regarding my work as a cultural educator across the sector. Whilst Cath and I worked closely on all things Aboriginal Education during our time together at the same school. Up until that point, I had nothing written that explained my Traditional Aboriginal pedagogical approaches nor the epistemology that it was based on. From that request and support, I continued reworking and developing the *S.E.C.D.R.R.R* model guided by key Elders. I would like to acknowledge the respect, encouragement and support received from Annette and Cath during that period and still today, thank you both sincerely.

Taking *S.E.C.D.R.R.R* Online

During the challenges faced throughout the COVID19 pandemic, the education sector in Australia was turned on its head, having to drastically pivot and reset on two occasions. Quickly a version of learning needed to be created that could be undertaken outside of the usual educational places, and mostly moved inside to the home and almost entirely online. It was a hugely fluid, stressful and demanding time for all. During these periods the *S.E.C.D.R.R.R* model became an on-line cultural education learning resource. One institution in particular supported this journey of *S.E.C.D.R.R.R* moving online, especially in offering the time and resources to assist in the creation of the online videos used for ‘Story time with Mr Newham’ (see the 4 example videos in Part 9 of this thesis).

This school needs to be acknowledged, and the staff member instrumental in helping with the filming and editing of these videos during this period. Gratitude and recognition to the Principal and Stage 3 Assistant Principal at Barnsley Public School (NSW) during these times of 2020 and 2021. Thank you, Mrs J. Langford and Mr J. Coburn. Even in the final drafting of this thesis, Mr Coburn was still offering vital assistance associated with the video links for ‘Story Time with Mr. Newham’. Hugely appreciative for this support.

Bulowara Ngaraliko Program

This literacy and numeracy approach, built around my *S.E.C.D.R.R.R* model, has been undertaken by two schools in the greater Newcastle area in New South Wales, Australia. These educational institutions incorporated the Bulowara Ngaraliko program as additional pedagogy practices to their educational context and a part of their community engagement model. They have supported my work as an Aboriginal Cultural Education Mentor and within the constraints of current educational modes, they have become more aligned to Traditional Aboriginal ways of learning and knowledge sharing.

A special mention must be given to one of my education colleagues, Mrs. Vanessa Linstrom for her work on this initiative and the amazing level of trust, respect and belief given to Traditional Aboriginal epistemology and pedagogical practice and my craft as an educator. Thank you Mrs Linstrom and I look forward to continuing our connection and commitment to broadening the cultural education and learning experiences for those who we work with.

Additionally, during the years that Mrs Linstrom and I worked together, at both schools, we received amazing support from a dedicated and community driven Aboriginal Education worker, Mrs Renae Honeysett. Thank you sincerely Renae.

Part 3.
Preamble

Education through storytelling is the ancient practice of Aboriginal communities. Our Elders remain master practitioners of this pedagogy. They continue to set the highest of standards as educators and share Traditional knowledge as supreme storytellers.

It is with unwavering respect I acknowledge that Country is the greatest of all teachers. A vessel of knowledge held by our Ancient Creator Ancestors existing in the cultural landscape. Our stories teach us that Ancestors are all around, everywhere, all the time, waiting to teach. We just need to look, listen, and learn (Gordon, 2020; Neidjie, 1989). It is the power of spirit, found in our old ways, our Traditional Lore, that our Elders tap into. They are connecting to the Ancestors resting across our Country and pass on the stories, the teachings, the knowledge, the Lore held within Country.

One such Elder is Djummu Paul Gordon. He is a Senior Loreman, the Boss of Lore in Western NSW, and holds the status as a *man of high degree*. This status is also referred to as a *medicine man* or *clever man,* written about extensively by the eminent Australian anthropologist A.P. Elkin during the early and mid-1900s. Elkin recorded his own experiences through detailed ethnographic works over many decades and concluded that these '*men of high degree'* possessed magic powers, could heal or harm, and operated as pathways or conduits between the ancient spirit world and their own tribes and communities (Elkin, 1945). Djummu's status as a 'man of high degree' is also recognised by other significant Traditional Knowledge Holders and Senior Loremen from across key regions, such as the Flinders Ranges, the Kimberly, the Central Desert and Arnhem Land.

Djummu is my cultural Grandfather, Lore-Boss, and my significant mentor as a cultural educator and Loremen myself. What this Professor of Lore has shared and demonstrated to me, and countless others over four decades, continues to lay the path to follow as an Aboriginal cultural educator and aspiring storyteller. *Indyamarra munung* - big respect

Our Lore has connected me to this Country and my own story far beyond anything I thought possible. My connectedness and understanding of the natural world have surpassed any level attainable from any other source of knowing, or epistemology. How Lore and I came to be connected is a story, or yarn itself, and acknowledge that each Loreman has a story on how they too become connected to the Lore. My relationship to Lore gave birth to the *S.E.C.D.R.R.R* model at the nucleus of this Masters.

In developing *S.E.C.D.R.R.R* I am providing tools to assist educators in their attempts to access Traditional Aboriginal knowledges and embed them into the current educational landscape. It is also a responsibility and obligation of mine to ensure, where possible, that these educators, when embedding this cultural knowledge into their learning spaces are doing so in a culturally appropriate manner, respecting cultural practices and protocols. In this way, educators are learning from doing.

This Masters documents my practice as an Aboriginal Cultural Educator, and as such is not necessarily an education or psychology piece. While there will be some attention given to the western education systems and structures, along with some psychology and neuroscience discourse, it is not concerned with pulling it apart or providing an in-depth analysis. Regarding the western education system and 'Indigenous' knowledges, Spillman and Wilson (2016, 2021 & 2022) have provided considerable insight regarding the shortcomings and negative approaches of this system and the need for society to demand an urgent overhaul.

Spillman and Wilson (2016, 2021 & 2022) offer a simple example of the value and place in education of cultural continuity and provide many examples. See Callaghan and Gordon (2014); Davis-Warra (2017); Gorringe (2012); Grant (1998); Patrick (2008); Pawu-Kurlpurlurnu et al. (2008); SBS (2014); Spillman (2018); Yunkaporta (2009).

In this thesis I am doing two things:

I give priority to the recognition of Australian Aboriginal people as educators of the highest standard, and as master storytellers. Aboriginal people understand, and have practiced, the power of storytelling since ancient times. This Aboriginal practice has existed for millennia, and is much, much older than the western education system.

In the centuries since the Invasion, there has been a complete failure to recognise and value Traditional Aboriginal knowledge systems in mainstream Australian society, which tends to view Aboriginal knowledge as either lost, primitive or merely mythic. However, today there has been a small shift in attitudes towards recognising and valuing our Ancestors and Traditional Knowledge Holders. Aboriginal storytellers are being engaged for their universal wisdom and intelligence, interconnectedness to the natural world and as holders of complex and sophisticated knowledge that exists at a local, global, and universal level, and Traditional Aboriginal Knowledge Holders remain experts at sharing this knowledge. Aboriginal storytellers have an unrivalled interconnectedness of knowledge systems (epistemology) threaded through every Traditional process, balanced with acute awareness that we are a part of the land, the Country, the environment, and that sharing this knowledge through storytelling is best pedagogical practice.

Secondly, I document and explain *S.E.C.D.R.R.R* (Story, Explore, Connect, Dance, Record, Research and Recount*):* a model of knowledge sharing, that I have developed through my work as an *Aboriginal Cultural Education Mentor* (ACEM) in NSW. The *S.E.C.D.R.R.R* model was created from the principles and methods employed by Traditional Aboriginal epistemology of Lore and the Traditional pedagogy or knowledge sharing through the art of storytelling.

It is important to note that the work I undertake as an Aboriginal Cultural Education Mentor (ACEM), Cultural Educator or Cultural Consultant takes many forms and occurs in many locations and educational settings or learning spaces. I operate in these roles with educational institutions including Universities, TAFE, Schools, Early Education Centres and other registered training organisations. My work also includes engaging with the government, not-for-profit, and business sectors to deliver variations to my cultural education programs and training to staff, their partners and extended community connections. I engage with a wide range of learners and learning spaces which further demonstrates the fluidity, adaptability and universal manner in which our Traditional epistemology and pedagogy can be and is being applied in today's social constructs.

The *S.E.C.D.R.R.R* model is always being activated in any of the cultural education programs or sessions I deliver as it is always accessing the power of Traditional storytelling and our Lore. It is important to note that when working in any school, it sits alongside the teachers in these education settings. The materials I develop to support the *S.E.C.D.R.R.R* model, and related sessions, are additional to the resources that classroom teachers use in their work across the national curriculum. To be clear, I am not a classroom teacher, and do not operate as such within the education setting. I enter as a guest, contracted to deliver extracurricular material at the request of individual schools.

Part 4.
Growing up in *Muloobinba* (Newcastle)

Setting the Scene

Growing up and learning in the city of Muloobinba (Newcastle, Australia) my involvement in the local Aboriginal community connected me to Djummu Paul Gordon. Through this connection is how Traditional Aboriginal Lore entered my life and became central to my work as a cultural educator. It is through Lore that I became stronger in my cultural identity as an Aboriginal person, and was able to become an Aboriginal educator and storyteller. This cultural experience, this learning and upholding Lore, and strengthening of Aboriginality, is what enabled the creation of *S.E.C.D.R.R.R*, a model of cultural education which is documented in this Masters.

This thesis sits in an incipient cultural space within western education systems; an Aboriginal cultural space where it is possible for Aboriginal people to operate with Knowledge sovereignty, to continue the Traditional educative practices of pre-Invasion Aboriginal communities. This space is not yet formalised, my role is described as a mentor, not as a teacher. Aboriginal pedagogies do not have equivalent standing to western pedagogies, western educators are referred to and viewed as teachers, whilst Aboriginal cultural educators are mentors.

Aboriginal people value different things to mainstream society, and one of the things they value is Knowledge of an individual's place, in relation to kin, community, and Country. If this thesis is to have practical utility for Aboriginal people, I need to ensure it has cultural integrity. So, I will begin with a story of my background, setting the scene from a personal perspective to locate myself within Aboriginal kinship and community networks. In this manner, Aboriginal people will know who I am, where I belong and where I come from. I will also provide a brief look at the political and social history of the local Aboriginal community of Muloobinba (Newcastle) and my life growing up attached to this.

The Beginning

I want to start this story or yarn in the period of my life during my mid to late twenties, the years 1999 to 2002. I choose this for several reasons. During this period, three life changing events took place that completely and positively impacted the trajectory of my story forever, and in ways unimaginable. In fact, looking back, it turned my story on its head.

The first event was in 1999 where I secured my first full-time real job with the University of Newcastle (UoN), Australia, at the Wollotuka Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Centre. It is now known as The Wollotuka Institute, UoN, or *Wolly*, as it was and remains affectionately known by Aboriginal students and staff at the University of Newcastle. It was a place that afforded me the opportunity to matriculate from my year 12 Higher School Certificate (HSC) and eventually graduate. This is an achievement I will always be proud of, especially considering the tremendous challenges with education and learning I experienced during my primary and early high school years. In fact, it wasn't until nearing the end of my Year 10 studies that I even considered the idea of attempting my HSC.

The second event took place in 2001. I moved out of home, bought a block of land, built a new house, and got married.

The third event took place in 2002 and deserves paragraphs, if not an essay of its own, and is a central theme of this yarn. In April that year I became an initiated man under Aboriginal Lore. From that time on, I inherited a relationship with Nudgee/Djummu Paul Gordon (aka the Old Fulla, Djummu, Uncle Paul, Special Old Man). He is my cultural Grandfather, a leader, a mentor, a philosopher in every sense, a prophet, an intellect, a wise warrior, a spiritual powerhouse, and a billboard for humility. Outside of my biological Mother, *Djummu* is the most influential human being I have ever met and have the privilege of having in my life, period. There is more about the Old Fulla later in this yarn and the role Lore has played in changing and saving my life. Especially the development of the *S.E.C.D.R.R.R* Model.

Being Aboriginal, Identity Challenges and Turning Points

Growing up as an Aboriginal person in a city like Newcastle (NSW, Australia) was somewhat of a mixed bag of lollies, for varying reasons. Newcastle, comparative to other places in Australia, has somewhat of a contrasting history when it comes to Aboriginal Australians, and this comes as no surprise. It was one of the first colonies established in Australia outside of Sydney in 1797 and by the 1820s and 1830s the Lower Hunter Region areas such as Jerry's Plains, Singleton, and Denman (Merton as it was known then) were being inundated by the members of the new colony (Miller,1985; Matthews, 1896). Records and first-hand accounts highlight that there were amicable and even respectful interactions between Europeans and Aboriginal peoples of these areas (Maynard 2001; Matthews 1893 & 1907b).

From an Aboriginal point of view, this amicability was unsurprising as Aboriginal people, through Traditional beliefs and complex kinships systems, which included animals and

the natural world, respected everyone and everything in their world. Aboriginal people had personal kin relations to it all, and undertook cultural and spiritual practices to ensure it was all actively connected (Gordon, 2022; Mowaljarlai, 1993; Neidjie 1986). To this end, it was built into Traditional Lore and Aboriginal ways of being that the focus of human interactions, regardless of age, status, gender, or tribal home, were structured by ideals of sharing, caring, truth, and actively strengthening relationships to, and understanding of the surrounding world. In Traditional Aboriginal life, all of this was undertaken from a responsibility and obligations standpoint (Gordon, 2022; Neidjie, 1986).

Settler-colonials were the direct beneficiaries of this view of a connected world, and none more so than the Reverend Lancelot Threlkeld, whose relationship with Awabakal (Newcastle/Lake Macquarie) Elder and man of high degree, Birabahn or Magil, was famous during the early colonial period (Maynard, 2001). This relationship is particularly notable because, across much of NSW during the frontier years, relationships between settler-colonials and Aboriginal people was structured by violence and land dispossession, with the invading English showing little regard for Aboriginal people and knowledge systems. This was the period of massacres, most notably the atrocities of the Myall Creek Massacre (NSW) in 1838 and the other two hundred and fifty plus massacres now recognised in this country since 1788 (Ryan, 2018).

Throughout his career in NSW, Threlkeld worked to try and buffer Aboriginal people from the worst of colonial violence. Threlkeld's approach and relationship with the Awabakal and Worimi people of Newcastle and Lake Macquarie, suggests it was likely he understood he was the minority. He realised that to be more effective in his work for the church he would need to become versed in the Traditional Aboriginal languages of these groups across this area. So, in his efforts to convert the Awabakal/Worimi peoples to Christianity, which was his predominant focus (Gunson, 1967, 1974), he learnt the Traditional Aboriginal language(s) of these groups and did so with the help of his teacher and native friend, Birabahn (Gunson, 1974).

Threlkeld became such a specialist in these Aboriginal languages he was able to act as an interpreter, advocating for the protection and better treatment of the tribes from across the Hunter Region and beyond. (Gunson, 1967 & 1974; Maynard, 2001). From his work and interactions with local Aboriginal clans, Threlkeld painstakingly published a famous dictionary of the tribal peoples of the Hunter River and Lake Macquarie areas of NSW in 1834 (Threlkeld, 1834).

Fast forward to the 1900s, the opportunities and support for Aboriginal issues and community members in the Newcastle region, from varying sections of mainstream society, was like Threlkeld's approach 70 years earlier. For the most part it was advanced

and forward thinking comparatively to the rest of NSW and broader Australia. During the mid-1950's and 1960's Newcastle became a well-known hub of opportunity and greater freedoms for Aboriginal families from across regional NSW. A place where there was large-scale socio-political and emotional support from the non-Aboriginal community, as described by Deirdre Howard-Wagne

"In short, Newcastle was a progressive societal setting in which Aboriginal and non-Indigenous activists were engaged in a social and political movement for the recognition of Indigenous rights locally" (2018, p.7).

For example, the support for Aboriginal people assisted the establishment of Smith Brothers General Contracting in the mid-1950s. This was an Aboriginal owned and operated employment cooperative and labour hire company, providing Aboriginal labour to undertake repair work on the railways of the lower Hunter. This work was hugely important for the city of Newcastle, and indeed the whole Hunter region, to remedy the enormous destruction of the railway network resulting from the infamous Maitland flood of 1955 (Lake Macquarie History 2017:1). At its height, Smith Brothers, who travelled down from Uralla in NSW, employed over 130 Aboriginal people working on their railway-based contracts (Maynard, 2001).

This was not necessarily the experience for many Aboriginal people across other Australian cities and towns, where the White Australia Policy, Assimilation Policy, and the lingering Protection Era, ensured the rights of Aboriginal people were severely inhibited or on many occasions, simply non-existent (HREOC, 1997). The impacts of these policies and attitudes from "white Australia" are still being felt by Aboriginal people and communities today. For several decades Aboriginal life in Newcastle was in direct contrast to the experience for Aboriginal peoples in the violent and brutal establishment of colonial Australia during the 1800s and the early parts of the twentieth century (Ryan, 2018).

As the decades passed and the next generations were born, the experiences of Aboriginal peoples across the city of Newcastle continued to be more positive than in other rural and regional locations in NSW and Australia. In those other sections of the country Aboriginal people were still being excluded and barred from clubs and pubs, movie theatres, swimming pools, and many other public places across NSW (Jonas, 1991).

Because of this more inclusive culture in Newcastle during this period, and largely due to the increased opportunities and reduced racism, the local Aboriginal population of Newcastle exploded between 1971 and 1991. The Aboriginal population grew at a rate faster than that taking place in any other location across Australia during this period

(Arthur 1994:10). As 'Uncle' Dr. Bill Jonas wrote, Aboriginal people *"had come to Newcastle to escape the appalling conditions on reserves"* (1991, p.52).

Further demonstration of Newcastle's more socially inclusive approach to Aboriginal peoples came in 1977 when the Newcastle City Council became the first council in Australia to fly the Aboriginal flag. It also led the way with the signing of a local statement of Reconciliation, known as the *'Commitment to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples of the City of Newcastle'* in 1993 (Howard-Wagner, 2018). This commitment paved the way for the establishment of a Reconciliation advisory group in 1999 known as the 'Guraki Aboriginal Strategic Advisory Committee', the first of its kind (Newcastle City Council, website: Aboriginal Culture - City of Newcastle (nsw.gov.au). Newcastle was the first City Council to undertake a *'Peoples Inquiry into a Treaty' in 2001* (Howard-Wagner, 2018).

Newcastle was a more impartial place to grow up as a young Aboriginal person from the 1970's. For the most part, this would be accurate. However, at this point I must take a moment to recognise the existence of a stark contradiction during this period that tells of another unsettling history occurring simultaneously in Newcastle and the Hunter Region.

Throughout this early period of my life, and decades prior, there was indeed a parallel dark side to Newcastle's history playing out. This murky underbelly was specific to the removal of Aboriginal peoples and families from across rural and remote NSW with devastating impacts. These families experienced a continued insidious and deliberate campaign of forced removal from their Traditional homelands. It was a strategic continuation by the Government and associated officials of stripping away and smashing the Aboriginality of our mob and their families, or cultural genocide (HREOC, *Bringing Them Home Report*, 1997). This Government approach was also referred to throughout this period as 'De-tribalisation'.

This darker aspect to Newcastle's history was the experience of the internationally recognised Aboriginal academic and researcher, Dr. Lorina Barker and her extended family. During this period Dr. Barker's family were forcibly relocated from Bourke, in far western NSW, to the city of Newcastle. As a result, Dr. Barker was born in Newcastle in the early 1970s, well away from her Traditional homelands. Heartbreakingly, this was not the first experience of forcible removal for Dr. Barker's family. Many decades earlier her direct Ancestors were rounded-up at gun point like cattle and put into the back of trucks. They were then transported east, far away from their homelands of the Tiboburra area (far West NSW), or 'Corner-Country', the Traditional lands of the Wongkumara peoples. Their destination, some 520kms away, was to one of the oldest Aboriginal Inland Missions in Australia, known as the Brewarinna Aboriginal Mission (Brewarinna L.A.L.C, 2023).

Ironically, during this period, the continued practiced of forced removals was also contradictive to the hugely successful 1967 constitutional referendum in Australia, which was a catalyst for the establishment of a federal *'Office of Aboriginal Affairs'* (HREOC, 1997). Furthermore, it was at odds with the newly elected Whitlam Government (1972) who famously ushered in a new political platform regarding 'Indigenous' Australians known as 'self-determination' and 'self-management' (HREOC, 1997). This new policy direction by the Whitlam Government had abandoned the intensely racist and oppressive previous policy eras known as: protection; segregation; merging; absorption; and then assimilation (HREOC, 1997).

In sharing her reflections, it doesn't take long for the hugely broken, disrupted and trauma informed story to take shape. Dr. Barker laments the challenges of the oppression, control and unrelenting inhumane acts of cultural genocide perpetrated upon her family and other Traditional Aboriginal groups of far western NSW (Dr. Lorina Barker, 19.10.2023, personal communication and forthcoming).

However, despite the historical opportunities and inclusivity in the past, which persists in Newcastle today from non-Aboriginal peoples and community, one fact is unfortunately evident. Newcastle remains another outpost of white male dominated colonial culture in this country (Moreton-Robinson, 2015 & 2020; White, 2003). Any attempt to avoid this will be at your peril as an 'Indigenous Australian'. Not subscribing to mainstream hegemony as an Aboriginal person, risks spiralling into deep personal struggle navigating the impacts of colonisation on cultural identity.

This ongoing struggle for 'Indigenous' Australians attempting to reclaim and reconstruct their cultural identity has been, and continues to be, violently invalidated by the dominant culture. In this struggle Aboriginal People are continuously confronted with the pressure, guilt and stress from the metaphorical and actual finger pointing and blame from mainstream Australian society.

On an individual level, it is experienced as a constant sense of subjugation, subordination, invalidation and worthlessness (Callaghan and Gordon, 2014; Shay and Wickes, 2017). The recent Voice referendum result is evidence enough of this. This identity struggle for Aboriginal people in this Country is a multifaceted and profoundly complex issue. It is centred around redefining and understanding our cultural identity, or Aboriginality, within western colonial constructs and their administratively violent frameworks (Lyons, 2022; Shay and Wickes, 2017). Far too often the challenge of this struggle ends with death by suicide for many Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, especially those under the age of twenty-five. In 2021, death by suicide was more than twice as high for young Indigenous Australians than that of non-Indigenous young Australians (AIHW, 2023).

At this point I wish to share my own story associated with experiences of circumnavigating these deeply challenging concepts and connected issues of Aboriginality in postcolonial Australia.

Identity and Challenges

Growing up I was fortunate enough to know I was both Aboriginal and Scottish. My Dad is Aboriginal, and my Mum is Scottish. I knew that my paternal family were from the Grenfell and Cowra areas of NSW, on the *Galari* (Lachlan River). As I got a little older the pressures from mainstream society to explain my Aboriginal identity increased. I experienced this in school and beyond, realising there was an annoying identity hole I wanted to fill and I needed to understand more than just being able to say, *"yeah I'm Aboriginal"*. I needed and wanted to know more about my mob and just as importantly, who my family are and were.

This question remains poignant, for a multitude of reasons, for every Indigenous, First Nations person in this Country today. It is a question associated directly to which particular Traditional Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander Tribal group(s) an individual is connected to and what family ties you have within this. As a result of the impacts of colonisation, this is an emotional roller-coaster, a social and personal minefield for almost all 'Indigenous' peoples in this Country today (Maddison, 2013).

As I got a little older, I understood that my 'Aboriginal' family connects back to Elizabeth "Biddy" Glass (nee Williams) of the Bumbaldry-Grenfell area, circa late 1840s. Her son Samual Watt Glass, my Great-Great-Grandfather, was given the unflattering (dis)honour of wearing a brass breast plate with the title 'King Samuel Glass of Bumbaldry'. These breast plates and subsequent titles of King or Queen, were derogatory and hugely dismissive of any real Traditional kinship structures. It did not recognise these intricate and complex structures nor the connected relationships that already existed in Traditional Aboriginal groups during this period, and for millennia. It was also well off the mark in thinking that there was only a single leader, "King" or "Queen". These breast plates were handed out to Aboriginal people as a controlling and oppressive practice across the colony during the 1800's and early 1900's (Healy, 2013).

During these earlier years of my life, I knew little more regarding my Aboriginality. However, as frustratingly limited that information was, I was acutely aware it was/is often more than many other Aboriginal people know about their heritage. The impacts of colonisation, dispossession of Aboriginal people from Country, shattered kin and family networks, has broken a huge number of Ancestral stories across the Aboriginal community of this Country. As a toddler, my dad re-partnered to a prominent local

Aboriginal woman in Newcastle, Joan Peters (nee Rose). Joan was originally from the very small rural community of Dirranbandi, on the western outback border of New South Wales (NSW) and Queensland (QLD), Australia, in the Shire of Balonne. As a result, I grew up with an extended Aboriginal family which afforded me strong relationships with my Step-siblings, Garry, Nicole and Paul Peters. Many school holiday trips were made with Dad and Joan visiting extended family in Dirranbandi and other outback towns across NSW and QLD. This period of my life offered valuable experiences for me, as a city-based kid, to roam free and tackle head-on all that the outback had to offer during this time. Activities such as; game hunting, river fishing, working on sheep stations, riding motor bikes, chasing feral pigs, catching Yabby's (freshwater crayfish), and many other outback adventures.

(Author Note: I acknowledge that, compared to my experiences, these and similar trips for other members of my extended family were definitely not as fulfilling, are bad memories, and brought significant trauma into their lives).

Joan was a big support for me, offering valuable guidance and encouragement to be proud of my Aboriginality, no matter what. It was the catalyst for me becoming heavily involved in the local Aboriginal community of Newcastle from a very young age. This experience offered a clear insight into the issues facing Aboriginal people in Australia from the 1970s onwards, balanced with the sense of unity and belonging across the local Aboriginal community during these times.

Being active in the local Aboriginal community of Newcastle afforded me vital connections and insights into the notion of Community. It offered valuable experiences and learnings in building relationships, understanding more about the issues of our mob, and how black fullas were. However, through the 1970s, 80s and 1990s many of us were urban black fullas, with limited connection to Traditional Aboriginal culture and practice (Gordon, 2021 & 2023). Nevertheless, these years of my life were still very crucial in giving me key Aboriginal community, social and political experiences, lessons, memories and relationships which remain important to me today.

One such experience as a young Aboriginal kid growing up in Newcastle remains firmly engrained in my memory. I recall marching with many other members of the local Aboriginal community during the struggle of Aboriginal Land Rights in the early 1980's through the streets of the Newcastle CBD. Sadly, many of the adults and elderly members of our community from that period have since passed. However, I recognise their dedication, determination and commitment in fighting for social justice and the NSW Land Rights movements and this should never be forgotten. From these experiences, two contrasting memories really left a mark on me.

The first was the unforgiving and down-right racist attitudes we were confronted with during those years, and this was despite Newcastle having a reasonably positive history with the Aboriginal community. Secondly, the amazing feeling of solidarity, unity and a sense of purpose, even if it was more like an “us against the rest” mentality, that existed across the small Aboriginal community of Newcastle and Lake Macquarie (NSW). This was also reflected on a National Aboriginal Land Rights movement scale during these times.

However, on reflection, these marches or the many other unique experiences I had growing up in the local Aboriginal community in Newcastle, did not provide for me a clear or deeper understanding of what it meant to be Aboriginal. I still had a limited connection to my own cultural identity. Sadly, as the decades rolled along, society reinforced this point, and so too did our own Aboriginal community. The pressures and destruction from colonisation fractured the Aboriginal community, systematically tearing apart essential kinship structures, creating family and community-organisational based factions, whilst giving birth to the toxic colonial tool of divide and conquer, and lateral violence. This was a far cry from my experiences as a child in the local Aboriginal community where unity, trust, respect and solidarity were in abundance.

Additionally, attitudes towards Aboriginality from mainstream society placed a heavy emphasis on skin colour and other key stereotypes. The identity of Aboriginal people was being heavily judged, with stereotypes about who was a real Aboriginal person and who was not, being common place. These judgements and stereotypes were neither accurate or reflective of our local community, and incredibly damaging and divisive. During this period of my adult life (late 1990s, early 2000s) I found myself firmly in the sights of these identity wars. One such story stands out and I want to share this below.

As a result of my identity being so much stronger today, because of my relationship with Traditional Aboriginal Lore, I know that if this situation took place today, as per the story below, it would not have the negative and lasting impact that it did all those years ago.

Oh, you’re Aboriginal

It was early 2000 and I was being interviewed by a journalist from a local major newspaper in Newcastle. Before the juggernaut of social media, it was an influential source of social commentary, current affairs, opinion and knowledge sharing. The journalist was following-up a story as a result of me being successful in gaining a place, as an Indigenous delegate, to the prestigious *Oxfam Community Aid Abroad ‘International Youth Parliament 2000’* (IYP2000) held in Sydney in October that year. It was a gathering of 330 chosen youth leaders from across the globe. We were given stewardship to discuss

and provide broad and intellectual community-based grass roots youth solutions to human rights issues and matters impacting the world's young people and ultimately the world in general. In short, IYP2000 was working within the framework of the United Nations 'Universal Declaration of Human Rights' (IYP2000, Final Communique, 2000).

Even more exciting was the fact I had been selected to co-facilitate the dynamic and diverse *'Indigenous Caucus'* (IC) attached to IYP 2000. In addition to this task, I was given responsibility for developing and writing up the S*tandards of Engagement* for the caucus. As I was told by the IYP 2000 directors, this was a simple, yet hugely onerous task which was directly related to the success of both the caucus and the youth parliament itself. This was somewhat ironic given I did not even know how to spell the word caucus, let alone understand what a caucus was or how they worked politically. Navigating that challenge is another yarn, for another time. Overall, I was extremely excited about the opportunity and very humbled to be chosen.

Additional to being completely quoted out of context from the interview, which made me sound cocky and full-of-myself, there was another unfortunate and impactful experience that stands out from this interaction on that day. It was an issue that is very relevant to this yarn, based off the reaction from the journalist to a question very early on in our interview. The question was in regard to my passion for 'Indigenous' youth issues, followed up by a response later in the interview, to an analogy I used to describe the local Aboriginal community of Newcastle.

He asked me to explain my passion for Indigenous youth issues. Of course, I shared that it came from being a proud 'Indigenous' young person myself and wanting to change our story of disadvantage and impacts of colonisation in Australia. The journalist looked a little confused and checked his notes. I knew instantly why he reacted this way and had a good idea of what was about to come out of his mouth next. And I was correct on both accounts. He thought I was white (non-Aboriginal) and he made that clear to me, later in the interview, the mistake was indeed certainly his own.

I was explaining that infamously throughout large sections of the local Aboriginal community, Newcastle is referred to as a place of mixed-mobs, for historical reasons discussed prior, and we are more like a bag of mixed lollies. Both phrases I'd heard numerous times across Wollotuka (at Uni) and the local Aboriginal community. However, without missing a beat, he replied with a laugh, ah yeah, good one, but in this case mainly milk bottles hey. At first it slipped passed me, what he meant, then soon after I grasped exactly what he was actually saying.

It was a very hidden and sneaky swipe at my Aboriginality and sadly, it was not the first time I had experienced this. In his mind I was not really Aboriginal, rather, I was much more-white. I guess it might have been a natural assumption, however, I know what many people say about those who assume things…makes an *ass-u-me*. During these moments I am reminded of a favourite saying that was shared with me many years ago by a kind and caring Aunty from the local Aboriginal community of Newcastle, Aunty Sandra Griffin. I often share this saying with others experiencing challenges with their identity: "***doesn't matter how much milk you put in your coffee my boy, it's still coffee"*** (Aunty Sandra Griffin n.d., Elder & Pambuloong Clan descendant, Newcastle area, NSW).

This story had a huge impact on me at that time and sitting here writing this I can still tell you many things about that day and the experience, as if it only happened last year, not 23 years ago!

Turning Point - Slow Learner!

Despite the angst of the IYP 2000 interview experience, and many like it during my youth and young adult life, I continued on a similar path. This path was focused upon creating a version of my Aboriginality based around heavy involvement with other 'Indigenous' youth activists and political groups in NSW and Australia. This pathway was steered towards attempting to establish myself as an emerging leader of sorts in the 'Indigenous' youth movement and across Reconciliation circles. I was of the belief that the approach was to utilise western education structures to play the game and help transform the system from within. This would allow me to be an agent of change for my community, offering fresh perspectives on decolonisation, helping grow unity and positively addressing our socio-economic political standing as 'Indigenous' peoples. On reflection, I was not being true to myself and was also extremely lost. I was so disconnected with my identity and could not provide a clear or strong answer one huge question: What does it mean to be Aboriginal?

The colours of the Aboriginal flag, red, yellow and black, were something that I was strongly attached to. This was reflected in my pursuit of merchandise that held these colours. Stickers, beanies, shirts, caps, socks, shorts, drink bottles, wrist bands, scarfs, you name it, I think I had it. However, despite this I knew very little about Traditional Aboriginal society beyond a small exposure in senior high school, a couple of dance performances at community events as a young kid, and reading books during academic pursuits in Aboriginal Studies. Even though I was fortunate enough to have my very first experience in Traditional Aboriginal dance performance, when I was very young, about 7 or 8 years of age, I was still disconnected from culture. Despite this fact, the dance performance still left a massive imprint in my memory.

The performance was in the early 1980s for *Aboriginal Day* celebrations in the popular shopping precinct known as the Newcastle Mall, in the Newcastle CBD. The performance was taught to us by Uncle Kevin Anderson, a Gomeroi man from Central West NSW. He sadly passed away many years ago. However, even though that day was some 40yrs ago, I still remember a great amount of detail from that day. It was a hugely positive experience and one that was undertaken with my step-Brothers, Garry and Paul and step-Sister, Nicole.

Many years after that first cultural dance experience, it became apparent that the youth leadership, activism and political scene was not for me. This arena was not where I could have the greatest impact for our mob and my family, that was in fact within the Traditional Aboriginal cultural practice and education realm. By 2004, after completing my second stint with the International Youth Parliament structure, I realised clearly that I needed to pivot and change direction and headed further into the Traditional Aboriginal cultural space.

Djummu, (Uncle Paul Gordon), had told us numerous times that this was the way ahead. He clearly shared that, as we slowly grew our own stories connected to Lore and Traditional Aboriginal cultural practice, this was the road to walk, following the Lore, and the answer to universal widespread healing and improved wellbeing for all the mob.

It wasn't that I didn't listen to this special old man, I certainly did and absolutely still do. It was more about the fact that I needed further clarity about what this actually meant or looked like for me. Furthermore, I lacked the confidence to be able to personally implement the processes of sharing Traditional culture. However, the old people, our Ancestors, showed me the path that Djummu had opened to me some 2 years earlier and it was a very distinct shake-up for me.

As a result, I did indeed pivot, humbly stepping away and relinquishing roles from all the 'Indigenous' youth political movements I was connected to at a state and national level, beginning a new journey and clearer focus. This intensified a commitment to our Traditional Aboriginal cultural practices, the Lore and processes of sharing this knowledge and wisdom respectfully, humbly and under protocol, to those open and willing to listen. It has now been twenty-four years and counting since going bush out to Wollombi and reconnecting this journey for my family, my Ancestors and my spirit.

Our Lore. Life Changing: *"You interested in going bush bra"*

Aboriginal Lore changed and saved my life. Writing about my earlier years and associated experiences is far easier than explaining the impact Lore has had on my life and well-

being. In part, it is difficult to write about the impact of Aboriginal Lore in my life because it is not recognised by the wider mainstream Australian community as being a valid epistemology. However, I still must and need to write about the positive impacts of Lore anyway.

Being in Lore has given me tools to better navigate and carve a more fulfilling, impactful and healthier life. One based on ideals of responsibility, obligation, giving, sharing and a far greater connection to everything and everyone in my camp, my world. Or as Djummu has taught us, the Ngurrampaa (meaning *camp world* in Nyiampaa). Beyond that, Lore has strengthened my cultural identity beyond any of my expectations.

Lore has also positively impacted the lives of my family through my two sons, Sisters, Nieces, Nephews and even my non-Indigenous Mother. It has positively impacted the members of the local community that I have been fortunate enough to humbly engage and share aspects of our Lore. This sharing has been predominantly through Traditional story, song and dance, connectedness and relationships. Lore has filled a colossal chasm in my spirit and existence regarding who I am. It has provided me emotional and spiritual intelligence beyond any leadership course, further study, life coaching or self-help book. It has afforded me skills in dealing with high emotions such as conflict, anger, grief and trauma, whilst offering tremendous insights into helping me work with people. It has been crucial to making me a better Man, Father, Son, Brother, colleague, friend, and Human.

In 1995 was the first real exposure I had to the Lore journey when I spent time with Uncle Paul at a University of Newcastle, Australia (UoN), Aboriginal student cultural camp at Wollombi, NSW. I knew of Uncle Paul prior to this camp, he was well known across the local Aboriginal community of Newcastle, Lake Macquarie and the Lower Hunter Region as a cultural man and cultural camp facilitator, aided by his role as the Aboriginal Cultural Sites Officer attached to the Awabakal (Newcastle) Cooperative in the 1980s. These University cultural camps took place twice a year and were organised by Wollotuka.

The first cultural camp of each year took place during the Wollotuka week-long *Pre-Orientation Program* (P.O.P) established for new Aboriginal undergraduate students each year. The second cultural camp took place later each year within the Diploma of Aboriginal Studies program coordinated by Wollotuka. These cultural camps and associated experiences were a highlight for students during those years, playing a vital role in supporting new Aboriginal students navigate and settle into university life. It also assisted in connecting Aboriginal undergraduates across the university and building key relationships with staff from Wollotuka. Additionally, these cultural camps were crucial in reconnecting Aboriginal students to Traditional cultural knowledge and practice, particularly difficult to access in NSW.

There are many strong memories from that first cultural camp, however one stands out above the rest. I vividly recall being blown away at Uncle Paul's remarkable level of wisdom and knowledge regarding Traditional Aboriginal life. It left me wondering *"how the hell does this fulla know so much about Traditional Aboriginal culture and where did he learn it"*. I loved hearing and seeing this cultural knowledge. It made so much sense to me. It did contradict some of the earlier stories I had heard from Senior High School and early university lectures regarding Traditional Aboriginal culture and Aboriginal peoples.

These contradictions were challenging; however, I was ok with that. One of those memorable challenges was that Uncle Paul was suggesting that Traditional Aboriginal cultural practice was NOT dead. In fact, he was indicating that it was still being maintained and grown in NSW, even in the Hunter Valley (greater Newcastle area). This intrigued me, presented many more questions than answers, and left me wanting to know so much more. No doubt a very deliberate and clever learning strategy from Uncle Paul.

A similar feeling was held by other Aboriginal undergraduates attending that camp. They too found many challenges and contradictions between, what Uncle Paul was sharing and what they had heard from early Aboriginal Studies lectures, regarding Traditional Aboriginal culture. It was refreshing and enjoyable hearing his extensive cultural knowledge. However, a troubling issue for me was that there were a few of my student peers that believed he [Uncle Paul] was a bit gammin (not authentic). This was sadly another example of the colonial lateral violence syndrome that was growing throughout our Aboriginal community during the 1990s.

Another strong memory I hold from this, and other subsequent Wollotuka cultural camps out to Wollombi, was meeting some of the Aboriginal males he had at the camp dancing for us and hanging out with him. I now know most of those men where Loremen. At the time, none of us students were aware of this. However, there was something different, special and intriguing about these men that I couldn't really explain. Also, I remember when these men told us that they were not sleeping at the camp huts or bunk beds, like the rest of us. They were sleeping in a cave, up in the mountains, kilometres away from the Wollombi campgrounds. I remember thinking, *"are these blokes freaking nuts. No way would I bloody do that, too cold, and way too scary"*. How times have changed for me.

From that first cultural camp it took close to five years until reconnecting with Uncle Paul again via an (re)introduction by Uncle Kevin Schwager (Uncle Kev). This reconnection took place at Uncle Kev's rural property at Eagleton, near Raymond Terrace NSW, and was set as an important cultural meet and greet. I had no awareness of the processes taking place that evening, nor that I was being culturally assessed. I now know that

Djummu Paul was checking my spirit and if it was suitable for heading bush, learning Traditional Aboriginal culture and becoming prepared for Ceremonial life and a Loreman.

An important note on how I became connected to Uncle Kev. It took place through my relationship with two other cultural men during this period. One who I'll refer to as JS for this paper, and the other being Dr. Paul Callaghan, Worimi man, co-author with Uncle Paul Gordon of *Iridescence* (2014) and *The Dreaming Path* (2022). Dr. Callaghan is affectionately known as Uncle PC throughout our Lore circle. Both men were living and working in the Newcastle area during this period. I met JS whilst we were both studying at Wollotuka in the Aboriginal Studies program at The University of Newcastle (UoN) throughout 1995 to 1997.

As for Uncle PC, I remember him as a local Aboriginal education leader. He had vast involvement in the Aboriginal Education and Training sector of Newcastle and the Lower Hunter during that period, both with the University of Newcastle and TAFE NSW Hunter Institute. My relationship with these two men, especially JS, was the gateway to me commencing my Lore journey, or going bush. I still hold deep kinship relationships with Uncle PC through our Lore and he became a professional mentor, my manager at work, and a friend over the past two decades.

Commencing this journey of cultural learning, through our Lore, offered me a special cultural key that enabled culturally appropriate access to special Aboriginal sites and introductory aspects of Lore. It commenced a deeper understanding and connection to the vital ideals of respect, humility, trust, sharing, obligation, and responsibility. These values have served me immeasurably ever since and will do so for the rest of my life.

The Invite: *"You interested in coming bush bra"*

The moment that kick-started my journey of going bush, being learned, and ultimately being ready for Ceremony, was simple yet profoundly complex at the same time. As I reflect on that period whilst writing this paper, I now feel and believe, humbly, that it was not a coincidence by any means, rather it was all meant to be. My Ancestors, the Old People, were involved and certainly placed me in a story far greater than my own, and in a story far beyond and bigger than just myself connecting to Lore. I now see it as a story containing thousands of pieces to a huge cultural jigsaw, one bound to the life's work of Djummu Paul Gordon and his Old People. That is, the revitalisation of Traditional Aboriginal Lore in NSW and the ultimate antidote to the impacts of colonisation in this Country for all 'Indigenous' Peoples of this land.

The invitation to “go bush” occurred during a special student event being conducted at the old Wollotuka building (UoN), now the Student Union building on Callaghan Campus in 1999. At this event I watched JS perform a Traditional Aboriginal Smoking Ceremony or cleansing (smoking). I was shocked to see him performing this Ceremony and wondered how he got permission and learnt the skills required to undertake such a special cultural practice? Mind you, I had no idea about any of these true cultural protocols myself, I was just really surprised to see him doing it and didn’t realise he could.

From my experiences in seeing Smoking Ceremonies across our community at various events and special occasions, they were usually delivered by recognised Elders from the local Aboriginal community. Intrigued to see JS doing the smoking on this occasion, I asked him questions regarding the Ceremony. The answer was short. He simply said he had earned and been given permission to do the Smoking Ceremony from “going bush”, learning the Old Cultural ways. Promptly following that answer, was a question he asked that has completely changed the trajectory of my life: “*you interested in coming bush bra”.*

With two more invites and about six months of time passing, I did just that, and went bush one Wednesday evening. We headed out to the village of Wollombi, in Yengo National Park (Yengo), which was somewhat familiar due to the several cultural camps and fields trips I had undertaken in previous years out that way. I did not realise just how instrumental Yengo was going to become to my Lore story. From that night onwards I went bush like an athlete attends training or a religious person attends their place of worship. The more I went bush, the deeper the quest for knowledge grew and the stronger my connection became. However, this presented an ironic twist of fate during this period. This contradiction kept me humbled, grounded and will always be acknowledged.

What I was experiencing is a famous paradox and ultimately the basis for many associated well-known quotes from famous scholars (Ghosh, 2021). This juxtaposition is also shared by many ‘Indigenous’ Australians today attempting to address the impacts of colonisation by reconnecting to the Traditional Old Ways (Alfred, 2015; Gordon 2022; Williams, 2018). The paradox was, as my cultural knowledge grew, so too did the chasm between the knowledge I had and how much I realised there was to still learn in this space. This dilemma has been known for a long time, as Aristotle famously wrote, “*the more you know, the more you realise you don’t know*,” then echoed many more centuries later by Albert Einstein who said*, “the more I learn, the more I realise I don’t know”* (Church, 2022).

Since 2004 every career change or job that I have held is a result in some manner from the knowledge imparted to me through Aboriginal Lore. The same can be said for the relationships developed through the upholding of Lore, the deep notions of responsibility

and obligation, sharing is caring, and giving, all based in this Traditional belief system. Further to this, Lore has given me a level of inner strength, resilience, and insight incomparable and beyond any wellbeing course, health regime or health specialist that I've engaged (Williams, 2018). I have a far greater understanding of who I am and where I fit in this world because of our Lore.

I am well aware this is sadly not the case for many of our Indigenous Brothers and Sisters in Australia as a result of the impacts of colonisation (Callaghan and Gordon, 2014; Williams 2018). Having access to my Ancestors & a spiritual force unexplainable by western science or medicine, gives me a sense of being able to tackle the issues today's society throws at me and my family. It has afforded me an ability to engage and connect with the world around me, and for the better of those within my extended professional and social circle.

Our Lore has passed onto me relationships with other Lore Men that I know have saved my life and added the most amazing depth, colour, and uniqueness to my world and that of my family. My two boys have inherited relationships and support from many of these Men that I know will empower and help them continue to grow into the young Men that I and our Ancestors wish them to become. Respectful, humble, kind, honest, dedicated, considerate and connected to ideas of giving not taking, responsibility and obligation. A reality today is that these human qualities are in short supply.

In Summary, at the end of the day, all roads lead to Unc, the Old Fulla, Djumu, Nudgee, Uncle Paul Gordon, or simply, Uncle Paul. He has connected thousands of men and women across the eastern states of this Country, and beyond, to Lore and Traditional knowledge which has opened a way of being and feeling that is second to none. Through his wisdom, passion, and a lifetime dedicated to acquiring knowledge and fulfilment, has been responsible for positively changing the stories of community, so many families, and individual peoples.

I believe Uncle Paul has positively impacted NSW and Australia regarding reconciliation to and between Country and people, like no other person in our post 1770 history! I am not sure how I repay or truly thank him for this. I will commit to do as he has done since he became an initiated man, that is: to follow the Lore; believe it; respect it; live it always; and share it as it was shared with me. Then, aspire to one day become it.

Part 5. *Storytelling and the S.E.C.D.R.R.R Model*

Pt 5.1 - Storytelling: Traditional Knowledge and Sharing Story

For thousands of generations, Traditional Aboriginal knowledge sharing, or teaching, was holistic in nature and absolutely interconnected with every aspect of the natural world. Sharing of knowledge was fundamental to ensuring that people were able to understand all aspects of their world, or *Ngurrampaa,* meaning *camp world* (Gordon, 2014) and their place in this world. I will expand on the idea and concept of Ngurrampaa, as shared by Djummu Paul Gordon, further in this portfolio. Storytelling explains the Lore, Creation, Country, language and significantly, it mapped-out people's relationships, obligations and responsibilities to everyone and everything within this world. The practice of knowledge sharing itself, was simply another one of these responsibilities or obligations and bound with strict protocols and rules (Gordon, 2014 & 2022).

"The right story connects us intimately to our country giving us our place and our identity" (Milroy and Milroy 2008:24)

A central process of sharing knowledge Traditionally sits with one of the most creative, interactive, engaging, recognisable and instrumental cultural practices, that of storytelling. From within these stories Ancient Lore is passed down (Gordon, 2014). Within the Lore we learn and connect to vital values, morals, ways of being and critical rules to follow (laws). These Ancient stories and the telling of them also cleverly encompassed avenues for learners to be deeply engaged with them. Learners were not only just hearing the story, but also seeing the story appear across our Country in many forms, and then had opportunities to become or do aspects or sections of the story. An example of the visual, audible and kinaesthetic (VAK) ways of learning, which are well recognised, and also debated, western learning styles, as I will expand below.

The *VAK* learning styles model was first discussed by Western academics in the mid twentieth century. The *VAK* model and more broadly, learning styles as an educational instruction tool, are used widely today in educational systems. However, they are also heavily questioned and debated by many in the education and psychology sectors (Geake 2008; Newton 2015; Pasquinellie, 2012). I will summarise this debate.

As mentioned, the *VAK* learning styles are summarised into three main ways in which humans are said to prefer to take knowledge onboard, or ways of learning: Visual (looking), Auditory (listening) and Kinaesthetic (doing), abbreviated to *V.A.K* (Cuevas, 2015). Walter Burke Barbe, et al (1979), then later Neil Fleming (2001), are credited as more modern designers and developers of the *VAK* model. The model sits under the

umbrella of *Neuro-Linguistic Programming* (NLP), or the relationship between how the neurological (mind) and linguistics (language) in each of us impacts or influences our behaviours or programming (Dilts, 2016).

Since their development, the *VAK* learning style preferences have been well recorded, researched and written about by academia and the education and training sectors. The debate around *VAK* centres mainly upon the effectiveness and accuracy of this model and the evidence to support it as an education taxonomy (Rohrer & Pashler, 2012). Furthermore, the *VAK* learning styles model is in fact labelled by some as a neuromyth and viewed with great scepticism by educational psychologists (Newton 2015; Scott, 2010; Cuevas 2015; Dekker et al., 2012).

Whether one supports the *VAK* Model or not, I am very clear about one obvious fact. There exists an ever-ready presence of opportunities for us to see, hear, and do, as a way of learning our Lore. It's all around us just like Djummu Paul Gordon says in his '6-L's Model: *Look, Listen and Learn* (Callaghan and Gordon, 2014 & 2022; Gordon 2023).

Stepping away from the *VAK* learning styles debate, I wish to recognise another amazing skill that our Ancestors possessed and passed down through the millennia regarding story-telling. Our Ancestors possessed an intricate and highly obligatory set of skills and mechanisms dedicated to ensuring the accuracy, authenticity and protocols of story (Gordon, 2021; Neidjie 1989). These mechanisms today may be best referred to as *quality assurance* measures. Our old stories contain relational threads to many other aspects in the broader fabric of Traditional Aboriginal society. These threads connect to song, dance, cultural sites and Ancestral beings, or creatures connected to them. It also includes story connectors in which members of respective Traditional groups across the lands used and recognised.

Preserving these Ancient connectors and ensuring their safe keeping and transmission are the responsibilities of Traditional storytellers, especially to each component of the story. These responsibilities also extent to the many other groups and people across the entirety of that Lore story or Songlines (Callaghan and Gordon, 2014 & 2022; Neidjie, 1985 & 1989). The sections of the story that a group or individual have obligation to must be shared explicitly as it was told to them, accurately without change or variation to the meanings and values, or the Lore within (Gordon, 2023).

As Djummu Paul Gordon tells us often, in this Traditional quality assurance process all peoples who have these varying roles, their responsibilities and obligations in being able to hold those stories in the first place are hugely important in Lore. These key roles can be acknowledged and categorised to include: the owners of the story (possibly

deceased); the keepers of the story; the tellers of the story; the singers of the story; and the dancers of the story (Gordon, 2018, 2021 & 2023). A genius blend of story mechanics, built to ensure that the Lore was not lost or passed down incorrectly and importantly placed an essential need for multiple strong respectful relationships to exist. Each of these roles that have pieces of the story also have kinship relationship amongst each other and share the same overarching responsibility and goal of ensuring the story survives through time. Traditionally, we were taught by our Elders, passed down from our Old People, that these stories, our Lore, could not be changed and it must be passed down the right way.

"Law (Lore) never change…always stay the same. Aboriginal law (Lore) never change. Old people tell us, "you got to keep it", it always stays" (Big Bill Neidjie, 1985, p.39)

In my research for this Masters, specifically, scholarly searches pertaining to the value, power and relevance of storytelling as a learning or educational tool, there was a notable void. Little credited or recognition was given to the true origins of storytelling being here in Australia and by Aboriginal peoples. This position of the true origins of storytelling is based off several key facts: Aboriginal people have been here in Australia for over 120,000 years (Bowler et al., 2019); we have some of the oldest landscapes in the world (Geoscience Australia, 2023) with Lore stories that locate these landscapes in our places; and we are well recognised as a people as being storytellers. It is not a difficult leap to make, that if Aboriginal people in Australia are recognised as the oldest living culture in the world, then we are therefore also the first Storytellers. Maybe this is difficult to recognise and easier to ignore, if it means avoiding completely rewriting history, denouncing tens of thousands of scholarly articles, associated research and hundreds of academic programs and courses. That will have to remain a yarn for another project.

In my scholarly searches I found more broader recognition that Indigenous peoples were practitioners of storytelling, however again, nothing clearly mentioned or acknowledged Aboriginal people of Australia. The articles that did focus on the origins of storytelling (Lopez, 2016; Anderson 2010) managed to draw a line towards the Ancient peoples in and around the Dordogne Valley, of present-day Western-France, from the Magdalenian period. They claim that this location and period was the origins of storytelling, a time in history said to be around 12,000-17,000 years ago. Thus, the peoples of this region and time are also referred to as the *Late Glacial Madgalenian* groups (Lefebvre et al., 2021; Street & Turner, 2012).

This is an interesting contrast and inaccuracy when we look at just a few facts. There are Ancient Aboriginal fish traps in Australia used by Traditional people, for tens of thousands of years, older than the Late Glacial Madgalenian period. In particular, the Ancient Aboriginal fish traps of the Darling-Barwon River in Central Western NSW, near the small

township of Brewarrina. They have been scientifically dated to be approximately 38,000 years old (Brewarrina L.A.L.C, 2023). To support the ancient dates of these fish trap networks at Brewarrina, there are accessible and clear Traditional Aboriginal stories, songs, dances, and intricate artworks (recorded in caves) of the surrounding region combing to reflect this story and hold similar dates from the scientific community (Gordon, 2022). The story also imparts important knowledge of the fish traps regarding its' Traditional uses, origins, and protocols (Gordon, 2018 & 2023).

On a far more positive note, a reassuring fact stood out from my academic inquiry. Reading more recent research and articles by esteemed academics and leaders in fields of education; human behavioural sciences; business and the corporate sector, a strong and familiar picture was being painted regarding the positive impacts of storytelling. Even more evident was the relatable connection these articles and research held directly to the feedback and first-hand accounts I had received from my own experiences as a cultural education mentor and that of Djummu Paul Gordon. One distinct attention-grabbing aspect was the noted magic of storytelling. The aspects of their research that spoke about this magic or s spell-binding elements of storytelling exist in our Old Traditional ways, our Lore, and is possibly the most powerful component.

As an Aboriginal cultural education mentor and under Lore, our Elders know it as something different than magic, however it still refers to and explains the same paradigm. A perfect example of the saying *"little bit different but same",* used by many Traditional Knowledge Holders and Loremen from across Australia (Gordon, 2023). These cultural teachers, the old people, or men and women of high degree and knowledge, are our Elders and our story tellers. They know and refer to this magic or spell-binding elements of storytelling as spirit or feeling. It is all encompassing, in everything and everyone, and very powerful for many reasons and on multiple levels (Neidjie 1985, 1989; Gordon, 2021 & 2023).

I have lost count regarding how many people, including myself, who share comments regarding how mesmorising, spell-binding and warm they find Djummu Paul's sharing style and stories. By far the most common version of this feedback would have to be something similar to this: *"I could just sit and listen to that old fulla talk all day".* This is a sentiment I also hold regarding Djummu, and wish to delve deeper into the phenomena referred to as spirit or feeling of story.

The phenomena of spirit or feeling exists in our stories and therefore in our knowledge, it lives in everything, including our bodies, and is a point 'Big' Bill Neidjie shares in his first book, *'Australia's Kakadu Man - Bill Neidjie'*:

"This story e can listen careful and how you want to feel on your feeling. This story e coming through your body e go right down foot and head fingernail and blood…through the heart and e can feel it because e'll come right through" (1989, p.1).

The man known as "Big" Bill Neidjie, is a Gagagu Elder (Western Arnhem Land) and Senior Loreman, spoke and wrote much about this idea or phenomena of feeling. 'Big' Bill, as he preferred to be called, spoke about such paradigms pertaining to storytelling and the need for this feeling to exist in any story being told. 'Big' Bill even referred to stories as the one doing the teaching, not himself or the teller. Such a humble and hugely insightful view and one contrasting western epistemology and pedagogy (Wilson and Spillman 2020). 'Big' Bill would say: "*Someone can't tell you. Story e telling you yourself. E tell you how you feel..."* (Neidjie, 1989, p.170)

He also shared that feeling in story can exist even if being read from a book (Big Bill Neidjie, *Story About Feeling*, 1989). The point that 'Big' Bill makes here is poignant and encapsulates the true essence of the power and impact that Traditional Aboriginal Knowledge Holders and story tellers possess(ed) when they share story. This is also acknowledged by Anthropologist and acclaimed author, Ian White in his book, *'Clever Man: The Life of Paddy Compass Namadbara'* (2020).

White's book gathers and threads together personal stories and shared accounts of highly acclaimed Western Arnhem Land Elder, Paddy '*Compass'* Namadbara. A man of astonishing cultural knowledge and special abilities. A man however, up until 1988, that White himself knew nothing about nor even knew existed. In fact, the first of many stories and accounts shared to White took place ten years after the passing of Paddy 'Compass' in 1978.

This story in 1988 was told to Ian White by Jim Wauchope, another prominent Aboriginal man originally from Central Australia. Jim had lived in the Western Arnhem Land areas for more than forty years where White was working as an anthropologist for the Northern Land Council (White, 2020). Jim was tasked with assisting White in his consultation work with local Clan groups of Western Arnhem Land during this period (White 2020). It was from that first story shared about Paddy 'Compass' that White became captivated and infatuated with this amazing man of high degree, his life, and special abilities. It became the catalyst for his book:

"I was fascinated by this account. Jim didn't tell me much more [about Paddy 'Compass']...he implied the old man was gifted,…'clever'. He said I should go speak to another old man [Big Bill Neidjie]…which is what I did…I was hooked" (White, 2020, 'Preface, p.IX)

The theme of White's book honours and recognises the magic and psychic abilities or intuition of very wise and powerful Traditional Aboriginal Knowledge Holders, with a particular focus on that of Paddy 'Compass'. These Traditional Aboriginal Knowledge Holders, are Men (and women) of high degree, possessing exceptional storytelling abilities, profound knowledge, and special powers which included the ability to heal, read country intimately, feel spirit and see the future. A term used in his book to describe such individuals as Paddy 'Compass' is clever man (2020, 'preface', p.X). Or as shared with him, "a properly number one marrkidjbu" (or a powerful clever man of the highest degree) (2020, 'preface', p.*X*). 'Big' Bill Neidjie is one of the main Traditional Aboriginal Knowledge Holders that shared their accounts and love for Paddy 'Compass' in White's book (2020) back in 1988.

The power or magic of Traditional Aboriginal knowledge is not something that can be learnt from a book or taught at any western University or College. If anything, the learning space for this skill, or feeling, exists out in the bush, or out in and with Country:

"Our story is in the land…it is written in those sacred places. White people got computer, but Aboriginal, me…I just write in cave" (Neidjie, 1985, pp.29 & 47)

Contrastingly, the essence of this and the harnessing of its power or magic, sits in a place that western science and medicine, for centuries, has failed to recognise or understand. This lack of understanding and recognition is also supported by White's book (2020) and his brief discussion on the work of prominent Australian Anthropologist, A.P Elkin during the 1940's. I will take a brief look at Elkin's work and experiences below.

Much of Elkins anthropological work focused on Aboriginal society and culture, and as such, he visited many places across Western NSW, South Australia, Western Australia, and the Northern Territory (Elkin, 1946). During this work he became convinced of the magic or psychic abilities of old Aboriginal Knowledge Holders, especially Men, or clever people. Attempting to explain these special gifts and do so in a way understandable in western constructs, Elkin wrote his acclaimed book, *'Aboriginal Men of High Degree: Initiation and Sorcery in the World's Oldest Tradition'* (1946), and which White (2020) subsequently refers to in his book. Despite the work of Elkin and his efforts to impart this thinking and have it recognised, the dominant thinking of his field and the broader scientific community of the time gave this aspect of his work little support or interest:

"However, the intellectual and scientific climate of the times, driven by a prevailing mechanistic scientific worldview, was decidedly unsympathetic" (White, 2020, p.78)

As such, the disregard and devaluing of the magic and feeling of Traditional Aboriginal epistemology and connected stories continued for generations and still remains today.

This disregard can be seen in the terminology that mainstream society in this country has used for generations when referring to Traditional Aboriginal stories. Some of these terms are still used today. Terms such as, fables, myths and mythology, legends, and fairy tales are found in a plethora of publications discussing Aboriginal peoples and culture. Some of these publications were highly acclaimed at the time, still remain pronounced today, and/or were written by very prominent authors (Gordon, 2021 & 2023). Such publications include the many by Charles P. Mountford (1948 to 1969 et al); celebrated authors, A.P Elkin and TGH Strehlow; and later works from Baglin and Moore, (1970); Isaacs (1980), and Reed (1998).

I acknowledge that the work and consideration provided by some of these and other authors did demonstrate other complex and key aspects of Traditional Aboriginal society in a more positive manner, whilst still using the above-mentioned terms. None more than acclaimed Anthropologist and Aboriginal human rights supporter W.E.H Stanner (1905-1981). However, the terminology was still used and it highlights a bigger issue. None of these terms regarding Traditional Aboriginal knowledge instils a sense of truth, value, respect or belief that it is real knowledge worth taking notice of or comparable to that of western knowledges.

Reading many of these publications a clear picture of lesser-than-knowledge is painted and highlighted no better than in the words of prominent Australian Anthropologist and Ethnologist, Charles P Mountford OBE, in his book, *'The Dawn of Time: Australian Aboriginal Myths'* (1969). In explaining Traditional Aboriginal beliefs pertaining to the 'Bunyip', his comments clearly highlight the dismissive attitudes of mainstream society regarding Aboriginal knowledges. He said; *"Nobody has ever seen a Bunyip, nobody ever will, for the creature exists only as a fantasy in the myths of the aborigines".* (Mountford, 1969, p.74).

Such terminology and thinking continue to undermine the legitimacy of Traditional Aboriginal epistemology and pedagogy (Gordon, 2023; Spillman & Wilson 2022). A point supported by Dr. Ben Wilson at a recent *'Country as Teacher'* forum at The University of Canberra who said:

"Mainstream society is still reluctant to acknowledge the value, connectedness, relevance and complexity of traditional Aboriginal epistemology and pedagogy. ...for far too long, our traditional stories and knowledges have been reduced to nothing more than myths and legends to be read to children for fun" (Professor Ben Wilson, Dec 8, 2022, 'Country as Teacher' forum, University of Canberra)

Traditional Aboriginal knowledges and stories are Ancient, very real and play a crucial role in explaining the natural world and everything within it. Direct experience of looking,

listening and learning from Traditional Aboriginal Knowledge Holders such as Djummu Paul Gordon (2014, 2022), 'Big' Bill Neidjie (1985, 1989 & 2015), Paddy 'Compass' Namadbara, and David Mowaljarlia (1993) offers direct evidence of this. Those who have done so have come to feel these stories and see that the information being shared is indeed real, extremely relevant, multifaceted and inter-connected. They certainly are not a myth, a legend, a fantasy world, nor a fairy tale.

The magic, spirit, feeling, power of storytelling sits directly with and belongs to the paradigm of Ancient Aboriginal Australian Lore systems. Aboriginal peoples of Australia are the first and oldest peoples in history, as supported by modern science. It is accurate to then ascertain that any person who is recognised or acclaimed as a gifted and skilled storyteller, ultimately owes recognition of that to our Ancestors, the Traditional Aboriginal people of this land.

Pt 5.2 - Storytelling: Practice and Power

Before I expand and share the *S.E.C.D.R.R.R* model, I wish to take some time to focus on the practice and power of storytelling in a modern context. Storytelling was a fundamental aspect of human communication for millennia. It is a powerful tool that can be used to convey information, as well as entertain, and inspire. Storytelling is the oldest form of education and the most powerful. Storytelling and its cousin, yarning (Indigenous based ways of talking and sharing) also play an integral role in the research methodology of modern academia and the business world today (Bessarab et al, 2010; Fredericks et al, 2011; Remnyi, 2005; Rooney et al, 2016; Zemke, 1990).

Additionally, in our contemporary world, the practice of Traditional 'Indigenous' storytelling and connection to Country can play a central role in decolonising processes for 'Indigenous' peoples. Storytelling is seen as an effective tool for pursuing social justice, securing truth telling and self-determination for 'Indigenous' peoples. (McIsaac, 2008; Corntassel, 2009; Brown & Strega 2005; Tuiha Smith 1999). Several Indigenous academics have also recognised the significance of land or Country to decolonising practices and approaches (see Iseke 2013; Whiteduck 2013). Gordon, Spillman and Wilson (2020, p.39) share this view and give the below examples:

"…in 2013, Sium and Ritskes edited an edition of Decolonization, Indigeneity, Education & Society that focused on the power of Indigenous storytelling for decolonising practices and acts. Many of the authors in this edition speak to the sustaining, loving, reciprocal relations between Indigenous people and land (Country)"

Stories are at the core of all that makes us human and connects us to the world around us. Cultures around the world have always told stories as a way of passing down beliefs, traditions, and history to future generations. First peoples of Australia, Aboriginal people, my Ancestors, have undertaken and utilised the processes of storytelling since the beginning of time, well before scientific dates can establish our beginnings:

"The scientists can give you a small story of our origins possibly 40,000 years ago, but we can tell you many more…since before time could be counted, since the Dreaming" (Wandjuk Marika, 1980, Foreword)

As discussed in the preceding paragraphs, my Ancestors, were the first storytellers and understood the power and impact of this craft. Aboriginal peoples of Australia remain the oldest continuing culture in the world to maintain this practice (Wilson and Spillman, 2018; Callaghan and Gordon, 2014 & 2022). Stories are the most powerful way we store information in the brain (Bruner, 2009). A list of facts will be forgotten, but stories are remembered. Stories help us to organise information and tie content together. The reason why this is the case is relatively straightforward. Stories are much easier to remember, a skill known and utilised by Aboriginal people of Australia for tens of thousands of years (Callaghan and Gordon, 2022; White, 2022; Neidjie 1985 & 1989).

The power of storytelling and its associated benefits to learning is a fact supported by the research of renowned American Organisational Psychologist, Peg Neuhauser (1993), and eminent American Psychologist, Jerome Bruner (1990, 2003 & 2009). In their works, Neuhauser and Bruner found that learning which stems from a well-told story is remembered more accurately, and for far longer, than that of learning derived from facts and figures. Jerome Bruner's research (1990 & 2009) showed that facts or key information are *20 times* more likely to be remembered by the listener when they are embedded or sit within a story.

The research and work of Bruner, Neuhauser, Remenyi (2005) et al, combined with the experiences of many other storytellers, shows us that stories go straight to the heart and stir emotions. As a result of the listener becoming more emotionally involved, they feel and become emersed in the story (Neidjie, 1985 & 1989) and truly enjoy the storytelling experience. In the case of the *S.E.C.D.R.R.R* model being utilised in a school setting, storytelling also plays an integral and positive role in the educational journey of learners (Remenyi 2005; Hamilton and Weiss, 2007).

Storytelling promotes critical thinking, creativity and offers a deeper understanding for learners of the world and their place in it (Miller & Pennycluff, 2008). This also plays a crucial role in creating a positive attitude toward the learning process and experiences.

Time and time again, I have witnessed this through my work as an Aboriginal Cultural Education Mentor (ACEM) and supported by many of my educational peers:

"Those engaged in Mr Newham's' storytelling sessions consistently demonstrate an increased ability to recall significant details in the story, the language, and the messages within the story. They are also deeply interested when following up the story with further learning" (Personal communication, requested feedback for ACEM role, Classroom Teacher, Macquarie College, Newcastle, NSW, Australia).

Neuhauser (1993) also explains that listening to stories instils a much deeper appreciation for language in children and motivates them to read. Bruner and Neuhauser explain that stories teach lessons, are very useful tools for teaching positive and desired behaviours in learners, along with growing strength of character (Miller & Pennycluff, 2008). This belief is supported by Brian Legget in his blog titled *'The Power of Story Telling'* (2012). Legget cites renowned occupational psychologist, Julie Allen (2002) and her work with the power of storytelling and narrative for organisational success:

"They (memorable tales) promote speedy comprehension, effective dialogue, human values and good judgment. Stories are not a nice-to-have embellishment; rather, they are a vital resource for getting the right thing done". (Allen, J, 2002).

Storytelling develops listening skills. Storytelling helps learners develop concentration, and the pure pleasure that they experience while listening to a story helps them to associate listening with enjoyment. Stories act as a humanising element, and they help to counteract the increasing emphasis on technology at home and in school. Today, telling stories from around the world or from around one's world, or ngurrampaa, creates an awareness and appreciation of different cultures and aspects of your world beyond just yourself (Gordon, 2022).

The point shared by Gordon (2022) is supported by the work of Dan Remenyi (2005) in explaining that storytelling, or narrative, is a fundamental process of humans understanding our natural world and relationship in it. He reports that storytelling is a fundamental method for sharing knowledge among people as it allows participants to be transported to another time and place. And as Michael Roemer says, *"…story integrates and relates"* (1995, p.11)

Hamilton and Weiss (2007) share that storytelling by educators motivates learners to also tell stories. Learners will be encouraged to recognise narrative and storytelling as a genuine activity, and a skill that is well-worth attaining. They found this to be the case whether they are telling global yarns (stories), works by other authors, or even more impactful stories from their own lives. Importantly, the educator needs to lead and show

the value of storytelling for learners, and in doing so it will highlight the position and significance in the present-day education architype and the world around us today (Hamilton and Weiss, 2007; Zemke, 1990). Additionally, Professor Amanda Kirby, Neurodiversity campaigner, shares her poignant thoughts about the importance of connecting with people, sharing story and listening, especially in this tech-dominated world today:

"Tools like ChatGPT can help information to be more accessible to more people. How wonderful! I live in a world of tech as a CEO of a tech-for-good company. At my heart I am a clinician, a researcher and a teacher. Tech helps me to do what I want to help others but what I have built has come from the stories, voices and experiences of real people. This is the heart of the information sources and we must not lose sight of this". (Pro. Amanada Kirby, Neurodiversity 101, LinkedIn Newsletter, Jan 7, 2023)

I would like to now shift focus for a moment from the power and practice of storytelling to the current teaching and education approaches and paradigms in Australia. In particular, its purpose and the associated measures used to gauge its success and from here highlight the need for some important changes. These changes involve utilising Ancient Aboriginal epistemology and pedagogies from the Ancestors of our land, Indigenous Australians.

In their work and associated papers, Gordon, Spillman and Wilson (2017a, 2020 & 2022), discuss and unpack the recent position of education in Australia. They propose drastic and urgent educational changes aligning with and utilises ancient Aboriginal knowledges and teaching, or as they say, *"re-placing of schooling in Country"*. (p.41, 2020)

These changes will and need to challenge the recent and current thinking and attached approaches regarding the purpose of education in Australia. So, I will redirect for a moment and take a brief look at the work of Gordon, Spillman and Wilson regarding recent education in Australia and thus why we need the aforementioned changes.

As highlighted in their work, Gordon, Spillman and Wilson (2020) shine a light on the question of purpose of education processes in Australia. They argue that it remains heavily influenced by politics, especially considerations of our financial future and position in the global marketplace. Highlighted clearly in 2020 by the Australian Government and their view that education [in Australia] needed, "…*to ensure Australia's future prosperity and to remain competitive internationally"* (Australian Government, 2019: para.1, Department of Education and Training [DoET] 2019 'Schooling', Australian Government, Canberra, accessed 21 January 2020)

In 2023 there is a similar view held by the Australian Government regarding the purpose of education in this country, in that, *"The Department of Education contributes to Australia's economic prosperity…"* (2023: homepage, para.1). This educational viewpoint and approach is considered by many educationalists and social commentators such as Doherty et al. 2012; Lingard and Sellar 2013; Reid 2013 to be a continuation and mirroring of neoliberal marketisation that only looks outwards globally without localised thinking (Lingard et al. 2013) and driven by capitalist ideals (Mackay 2018; Pors 2017; Robinson, K 2015).

As such, Gordon, Spillman and Wilson (2020) argue that the result for Australia, educationally speaking, has been *"the standardised reform movement" (2020; p.32*). This has been led by the introduction of the '*National Assessment Program - Literacy and Numeracy',* commonly known as NAPLAN*,* and is used to steer curriculum, teaching and school accountability (Guenther, 2013).

Over the past decade or more, there have been many papers, extensive reviews and in-depth critiques of NAPLAN, the *standardised reform* approach of *neoliberal marketisation* education in Australia and the shortcomings within (Boston 2017; Lingard et al. 2013; Spillman 2017a; Mackay 2018). There have been no significant educational improvements in this country for our learners over the past decade or more (ACER 2019; Robinson, N 2018), especially for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. However, despite these outcomes, we still see the *standardisation* approach to education in Australia remaining the dominant go to education paradigm.

Returning to the required big changes to education approaches in this country, Gordon, Spillman and Wilson (2020) provide one such change, or an *"altered vision of schooling"* (2020, p.1) to that of the current approaches. In short, they call this change, *'Country as Teacher'* (CaT) and utilises ancient Aboriginal pedagogy. The *CaT* pedagogy centres on the art and power of storytelling and the essential relationship with and to Country, the environment, or as they state: *"story-focused, place-responsive ecocentric pedagogies"* that raise social and ecological wellbeing (Gordon, Spillman and Wilson, 2020, p.1),

"…*which we propose is contributing to ever-deepening social and ecological demise in this country. We put forward the case for a revision of unaware anthropocentrism, rampant individualism and unfettered capitalism, all primary drivers of the current Australian schooling agenda, and argue that economic prosperity and associated 'learn to earn' schooling agendas should never be elevated above social and ecological wellbeing" (Gordon et al, 2020, p.1)*

S.E.C.D.R.R.R is a practical, applied response to the issues that Gordon, Spillman and Wilson raise. It highlights the interconnectedness and complimentary nature of Traditional Aboriginal ways of knowledge sharing.

Part 6.
S.E.C.D.R.R.R: An Aboriginal Cultural Education and Knowledge Sharing Model

S.E.C.D.R.R.R (pronounced sector) stands for: *Story, Explore, Connect, Dance, Record, Research, Recount*. The *S.E.C.D.R.R.R* model was created to capture the manner in which my role as an *Aboriginal Cultural Education Mentor* (ACEM) takes place. This work involves the sharing of Traditional Aboriginal cultural knowledge. As discussed earlier in this paper, my role as a cultural educator and the *S.E.C.D.R.R.R* model, is a direct reflection of my relationship with the old ways of Aboriginal knowledge sharing. It is also as result of my journey as an Aboriginal cultural practitioner and Loreman. The following paragraphs and pages will expand on the *S.E.C.D.R.R.R* model and give an insight into its philosophy and the way in which it lives in the modern teaching paradigm.

A powerful application of *S.E.C.D.R.R.R* is the transferability and universal use across various learning environments, formal and informal, inside, or outside. Wherever and whenever I am undertaking any cultural education, as in this thesis, *S.E.C.D.R.R.R* sits firmly in the middle of this process. That is the power of Traditional Aboriginal storytelling as an educational tool, based on Ancient Aboriginal epistemology and pedagogy. Whether I am delivering a cultural education session to corporate leaders, staff in the not-for-profit sector, government departmental staff, or with learners and staff of other education institutions, *S.E.C.D.R.R.R* is applicable and being implemented.

Before explaining the *S.E.C.D.R.R.R* model, it is important for me to acknowledge several leading examples in the education sector across Australia regarding the triumph of creatively moulding-in 'Indigenous' cultural practice and knowledges through cultural continuity process (Gordon, et al 2020). These include: *Country as Teacher* (Gordon, Spillman, Wilson, 2020); the *'*Six-L's Model' (Gordon, 2018; Callaghan and Gordon, 2014 & 2022); Engoori, a strength-based conversational process from the Mithaka-Tjimpa people of Far Western Queensland (Gorringe 2012; Gorringe and Spillman 2008); *Pawu-Kurlpurlurnu et al.'s* (2008) ngurra-kurlu for working with Warlpiri in the Northern Territory; *'Eight Ways of Learning'* (Yunkaporta, 2009); Davis-Warra's (2017) *Durithunga* process for growing urban Indigenous educational leadership; and Uncle Ernie Grant's (1998) '*My land my tracks: a framework for holistic approach to Indigenous studies'*. (Gordon, Spillman and Wilson, 2020, p.39)

The implementation or practice of the *S.E.C.D.R.R.R* model has an integral pre-curser. It is utilised when undertaking cultural education in a learning space. This pre-curser allows to set the scene in a teaching space and start sessions the right way. And by right

way, I mean, observing old cultural protocols and those especially pertaining to Traditional ways of sharing knowledge. This process also enables the establishment of a strong connection between participants and myself, growing a relationship that is built with respect, trust and clear expectations between all of us in the learning journey. In fact, the ability to establish and maintain a strong relationship between educator and learner is more highly regarded by many families of Aboriginal participants and learners, then their knowledge of the curriculum (Burgess & Berwick, 2009).

This process of starting the right way, takes place in every learning space in which I work. It occurs at the beginning of each year or when I first commence with any group of learners. I refer to this process as *Ngadhi Ngurra*. In my ancestral language of Wiradjuri (NSW), *ngadhi ngurra*, pronounced “nah-dee noo-rah”, translates to *my camp*. It encompasses all the cultural protocols, based in obligations and responsibilities to our Lore, in the special places we spend much of our time, commonly known as the camp site or campground. When applied in more broader terms, observing these same protocols and associated processes regarding everyone else’s special places, is called, *ngianni ngurra,* or, the camp of all you people. Whether it is my camp or everyone else’s camp, enduring and fundamental cultural protocols and observations exist and must be observed.

Pt 6.1 - *‘Ngahdi Ngurra’ (My Camp)* and Establishing Connection

The 3 Steps to commencing Ngahdi Ngurra.

Step 1. Announcing my Arrival:

Standing outside the teaching space I knock on the door and humbly announce my arrival by calling out “Yaama”, then await a response. The word *yaama* is an Aboriginal informal greeting in Gamilaraay/Gomeroi language of North Western NSW and is well recognised by all learners. I hold strong connections to this language, and it binds closely with the other key Aboriginal languages I am familiar with, connected to and use, including my own tribal language of Wiradjuri and neighbouring Wongaibon, both of NSW.

Step 2. Acknowledging my Arrival:

After calling out *yaama,* I wait patiently for a response. This response enables participants to acknowledge they’ve heard me call out. Their reply is generally enthusiastic and is a signal to proceed to the next step. Although this may seem like a simple step, it is

essential that both participants and myself are able to establish that I have been heard and acknowledged otherwise I cannot proceed.

Step 3. Seeking Permission to Enter:

Once I have received their response, I ask participants for permission to enter their ngurra (camp) or learning space. It is imperative I wait for a positive answer that grants permission to enter. Never do I enter these spaces without permission, regardless of how long or strong my connection is with participants and the learning environment. It is important that participants understand this point as it allows me to show respect for their ngurra, recognise their connection to this learning space, and acknowledge that I am a guest in that place always.

Ngadhi Ngurra emphasises the shared connections to Ancient Aboriginal cultural protocols. Specifically, the connections associated to responsibilities and obligations one holds regarding entering another person's camp or special place (Gordon, 2023). This cultural protocol and related considerations from a research context, is discussed by Karen Martin in her book, '*Please knock before you enter: Aboriginal regulation of outsiders and the implications for researchers'* (2008). The title of her book is a perfect reflection of *ngahdhi ngurra*.

Essential to the success of the *ngadhi ngurra* concept is time spent in that first session helping participants connect to their special places within the teaching environment. I work with them in this first session to build an understanding of their responsibilities and obligations to that special place, and importantly everything and everyone within that environment. This also supports participants to better understand how they can play an integral role to assist people visiting their special place, their *ngurra*, to also fulfil the responsibilities and obligations to follow the rules. This process of starting the right way, via *ngadhi ngurra*, is a crucial element to the power and positive impact of the *S.E.C.D.R.R.R* model, an outlook supported by Professor Ben Wilson below:

"Mr Newham skilfully navigates the balance between observing Ancient cultural obligations and responsibilities with his obvious commitment to increasing the cultural education of those in his presence. He is a masterful storyteller with the unique ability to connect deeply with all learners, take them on a journey and have them feeling better about themselves and the world around them. It is one of his strongest pedagogical gifts". (personal communication, requested feedback, Professor Ben Wilson, University of Southern Queensland, February, 2023)

When in the learning space, I ask participants to ensure I'm following the rules and doing the right thing whilst in their special place. An important aspect with this question is encouraging each participant to ponder how they might best ensure I am following these

rules. On occasions, this section of *ngadhi ngurra* can take extra time. However, this additional investment of time and focus is a vital link within *S.E.C.D.R.R.R*, paying dividends throughout the entirety of subsequent sessions and the overall strength of the participants and cultural educator relationship.

Ultimately, the goal is to have participants come to the conclusion that one of the strongest ways to help me follow the rules in their *ngurra* (learning space), is in fact to show me how to follow the rules themselves, or demonstrate '*WAGOLL'.* This clever literacy acronym stands for, '*what a good one looks like'* (Structured Learning, online, 13.2.2022). When I say what a good one looks like, I mean, a participant that is fulfilling their obligations and responsibilities in following the rules across their *ngurra.* I will assist the participants in reaching the desired *WAGOLL* answer if they are struggling to find the words or provide a response.

This is a deliberate strategy to support participants to feel more connected to their learning environment and respect everything and everyone within this space. Furthermore, it plays an important role in providing extra positivity to the day for participants and more broadly their everyday life. It acknowledges and recognises the efforts of participants fulfilling their obligations and responsibilities during my sessions. This can be an additionally powerful and poignant experience for some participants, playing a crucial role in addressing the increasing levels of childhood trauma that underlie the educational experience for Aboriginal children.

Today, we are seeing a concerning increase in the number of students dealing with trauma during their schooling in Australia. It is having a detrimental impact on their ability to engage with and learn whilst at school (Parker & Hodgson 2020; Miller & Berger 2022; Kolk, 2003). As a result, education institutions are now more than ever, required to consider and respond to these ever increasing social, emotional, and relational needs of the learner (Parker & Hodgson, 2020). I will briefly touch on the need to consider the increased social, emotional and relational needs of learners.

Over the many years working and sharing story with Aboriginal learners, especially in the ACEM role utilising *S.E.C.D.R.R.R*, I have experienced a marked increase in the levels of trauma. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander learners have an alarmingly increased risks of experiencing disadvantage and trauma in this Country (Miller & Berger, 2022; 2018; Herring et al., 2013). This is directly linked to the huge and ongoing damaging impacts of colonisation, also referred to as significant historical and intergenerational trauma (Miller & Berger, 2022).

The traumatic family histories and broken wellbeing stories that some of these learners bring with them each day is tough to read, hear and witness the impacts. Their trauma is complex and multifaceted (Miller & Berger, 2022) and with this in mind, I am cognisant that many of the Aboriginal learners I have shared with over the years, may have limited experience in receiving positive reinforcement, praise, or recognition for anything they have undertaken or completed in their young life. Not to mention, having a place where they feel safe, valued, loved and respected. The seemingly small process of praising and encouraging learners to keep doing their best, may be one of these very few opportunities, occasions or moments in their lives, that they do receive positivity, gratitude and respect from an adult, and an adult male especially.

"Having Mr Newham in our school is not just about utilising his extensive cultural knowledge, connections to Country and magical teaching skills. He is a fabulous role model for our boys and imparts an amazing amount of care, kindness, humility, respect and positivity to all in our school. Students absolutely admire and respect him" (Personal communication, requested feedback, regarding ACEM role, R/Principal, Newcastle, NSW)

Furthermore, having participants recognise and embrace these responsibilities and obligations to the rules of their *ngurra* is a powerful relationship and wellbeing tool. It nurtures and helps grow solidarity, respect and unity within and across the cohort, particularly as they realise the need to work together in meeting these obligations and responsibilities. Participants share this as a common goal. Similarly, participants are reminded that for tens of thousands of years Aboriginal peoples, our Ancestors, from across this Country practiced the same. They came together to celebrate what they had in common always, not what their differences were (Gordon, 2023), and this assisted to build relationships, grow unity, show respect, and follow the rules, just like the participants have and continue to work towards.

The *ngadhi ngurra* approach encourages participants to take extra care of the learning space as a collective. As participants begin to feel a strengthened connection to the notion of this space actually genuinely being their *ngurra*, their special place, so too does their desire or enthusiasm to care for it. A version of this collective approach to keeping the learning space clean, safe and a functional educational environment, already exists in many learning environments that I've worked and connected with.

For example, institutions do their best to provide safe, clean and suitable learning spaces and grounds. However, many miss an opportunity to make a cultural and ancient connection for Aboriginal learners. This practice of educator and learner jointly looking after the learning space, their *ngurra*, has existed as an imperative cultural protocol in Lore for tens of thousands of years. It was created by and therefore belongs with Aboriginal peoples of Australia (Gordon et al, 2020). This notion and its practice of caring

for your place, including everything and everyone within, is explained very eloquently and yet simply, by Djummu Paul Gordon as *Ngurrampaa*.

As mentioned extensively in this paper, Djummu is an acclaimed Aboriginal cultural educator and recognised Traditional Knowledge Holder. He describes this interconnected Ancient cultural concept of everyone and everything as *ngurrampaa,* pronounced ngoo-rum-pah (Spillman and Wilson 2017a & 2020; Callaghan and Gordon 2014 & 2022). The word *ngurrampaa* belongs to the Wongiabon Traditional Aboriginal language group from Ngemba lands. More specifically, of Karulkiyalu country, in western NSW around such places now known today as; Byrock, Cobar, Hermidale, Coolabah, and Mt Grenfell National Park. Djummu Paul shares with us that *ngurrampaa*, in simple terms, means *camp-world* (Callaghan and Gordon, 2014 & 2022; Gordon, 2023). However, it represents much more than this.

Ngurrampaa is the holistic understanding of ones' entire world and the relationships, obligations and responsibilities that is held to everything and everyone within this world. It's the understanding that our world, our Country, is far more precious and valuable than any one person or any one thing. This includes everything on, above and below the land, living and non-living…everything and everyone. There are no parts or sections of Country or the world that our Ancestors are not connected to, or hold story of and a level of responsibility to.

"Country is a 'spatial unit'…It encompasses everything that dwells below, on and above ground, including the cosmos…Everything, including humans, belongs to Country, which is far more precious than any one of us" (Callaghan and Gordon 2014, p.17, in Gordon et al 2020, p.34)

The *ngurrampaa* is most importantly where our old stories, our Lore belongs. This ancient Lore explains the world we live in and how things began, our creation. Nothing can exist outside our world, our *Ngurrampaa*, and Traditionally nothing can exist outside of, or separate to our Lore. Thus, in this thinking, the *ngurrampaa* and our Lore are one in the same, and yet can be very different at times. It may sound complex, confusing or even contradictory to some. However, if you spend time in Country, in the bush sitting, looking, and listening you will learn. The old ways and Traditional Knowledge Holders like Djummu Paul will teach you and help you realise it really isn't that hard to understand at all (Callaghan and Gordon, 2022; Gordon, Spillman and Wilson, 2020).

"Nothing can exist outside of our Lore, outside of the ngurrampaa. It is about our connectedness, relationships, responsibilities and obligations to everything and everyone in our world. And if you want to learn more about the ngurrampaa, go sit with country and it will teach you". (Djummu Paul Gordon, cultural capability training session, 2023)

Furthermore, an understanding of *ngadhi ngurra* and its relationship to ancient ideals of *ngurrampaa*, offers a clear and powerful cultural construct and protocol for educators to utilise regarding the care for their learning spaces and other educational places. Educators can utilise this cultural construct to explain to participants why they are being asked to look after and care for their special places.

Additionally, educators can play a role in helping participants take this *ngadhi ngurra* approach with them more broadly into their world beyond places of learning. This will strengthen their connection and respect for the world around them and everything within, beyond thinking inwards and only about themselves (Gordon, 2023). This is even more poignant today regarding the gross disconnection we have with people and especially our places, or the natural world. This is certainly a post 1788 issue because under Traditional obligations and responsibilities to the Lore, there was no section or aspect of the world around us that our Ancestors did not have knowledge about and relationship with... *"There was no wilderness"* (Gammage, 2011, p.2)

At this juncture of my paper is the best position to broaden a discussion regarding the large-scale disconnection many people have today with the environment, or nature, and the concerns many hold regarding this. Social-psychologists, educators, environmental scientists, urban planners, nature-based therapists, geographers and many alike, hold grave concerns pertaining to the disconnection we humans have with nature and its impact on us and the world. The apprehension is that our modern preferences to feel and act disconnected to nature, is bad news for our well-being and the future of this planet (Folke et al. 2011; Kesebir & Kesebir, 2017).

Such is the reality of this environmental disconnection, acclaimed author, journalist and advocate for child development, Richard Louv, coined a phrase to describe this growing phenomenon. With the release of his best-selling book titled, *'Last Child in the Woods: Saving Our Children from Nature-Deficit Disorder* (2005), Louv began the journey of a term he developed called, *'Nature-Deficit Disorder* '(NDD). He briefly explains NDD as the following:

"Nature-deficit disorder" is not a medical diagnosis, but a useful term, a metaphor, to describe what many of us believe are the human costs of alienation from nature: diminished use of the senses, attention difficulties, higher rates of physical and emotional illnesses, a rising rate of myopia, child and adult obesity, Vitamin D deficiency, and other maladies". (Louv, 2016, in Kesebir & Kesebir, 2017)

There is a plethora of scholarly articles, research and books that discuss the human disconnection to the natural world, or nature. They cover the issues of this disconnection from a detrimental impact view or reversely, the positive influence nature can have on

human development and our health and wellbeing. Some of these include; Abson et al, (2017); Charles et al (2020); Folke et al (2011); Hinds et al (2008); Mayer & Frantz (2004); Nabhan & Trimble (1995); Schultz (2022); and Sparks et al (2014), to name just a few.

Renowned child psychologist and childhood trauma informed specialist, Dr. Karyn Purvis, also understood the power of nature and play, especially the role in learning, healing and reconnecting humans, particularly for children experiencing trauma. Dr. Purvis famously co-created, with Dr. David Cross, the transformational and highly acclaimed *'Trust-based Relational Intervention'* (TBRI) model which was specifically developed for healing children from "hard places", (Purvis et al., 2007; Purvs et al, 2011; Purvis et al, 2013).

Dr. Purvis is also famously recognised for her work on brain synapses and its relationships with play. Purvis found that science could prove it takes 400 repetitions to create a new synapse in the brain, however, if done with play it only takes between 10 to 20 repetitions (The Karyn Purvis Institute of Child Development, 2023)

When reading all these celebrated works, the many related abstracts, or even the simple explanation by Louv of *NDD*, a striking fact keeps appearing. All of these scholars, unbeknownst to them, were also validating and reinforcing significant Ancient knowledge, beliefs and universal awareness held by Aboriginal peoples of Australia. This old knowledge was and is the awareness of the absolute power of the natural world, our planet, our Mother Earth, and the unbreakable relationship we hold with her, and the immeasurable influence it has upon us eternally (Gordon, 2022; Neidjie 1984; Spillman and Wilson, 2020). It also reinforces the notion that the stories within Lore connect us intimately to place, the expanded environment, and help build the right relationships and knowledge needed to care for Country.

"The right story connects us intimately to our country giving us our place and our identity. The right story embeds us deeply in nature, connecting us to the living spirit" (Milroy and Milroy 2008: p.24).

Hughes et al. (2021), in their *yarning with country* article (pp.353-363), agree that we need to connect with and listen more to Country. The assertion is that we humans would flourish from increased engagement with and relationship to Country. They believe that for this to happen we must acknowledge the ancient skills of listening, respecting, sharing and letting be. Djummu Paul Gordon sums up this thinking:

"The Lore is very much relevant to people today. The old principles of caring for one another, looking after the place we live in and being connected to the environment around us are just as relevant to us today as in traditional times. This is because without each other and without a healthy natural environment, what have we got?" (Uncle Paul Gordon, 2022, p.34)

Pt 6.2 - *S.E.C.D.R.R.R* Unpacked

S - Story

Story is the beginning of the *S.E.C.D.R.R.R* process. It commences with the sharing of a Traditional Aboriginal story from the *Ngurrampaa*. From my experiences as an Aboriginal Cultural Educator, and the many sessions I have witness delivered by Djummu Paul Gordon, nearly all people do not recognise the term *ngurrampaa*, or it's philosophy. To support learners on their cultural capability journey, we meet them at the cultural interface and as such use other terms they are far more familiar with, despite the inaccuracy and minimising nature of these. These terms are *'Dreamtime'* Stories and *'Dreaming'* Stories.

It is a choice of mine to NOT use the dreamtime and dreaming terms as a first option where ever possible. Why? Simple, they are not Aboriginal terms or language and were not created by Aboriginal peoples. Furthermore, as mentioned, they actually work to minimise and devalue our Lore and cultural stories. I choose to use the term *ngurrampaa* and inform participants that I am sharing stories from the *ngurrampaa.* It is a far more positive, culturally accurate and appropriate strategy. I will take this opportunity, in the spirit of sharing, to expand on the words *dreaming* and *dreamtime*.

***Ngurrampaa* - not dreaming or dreamtime**

The creation of the term *dreamtime*, and to a lesser extent, the *dreaming*, historically is credited to Sir Walter Baldwin Spencer (1860-1929) and Francis James Gillen (1855-1912) back in the very late 19th and early 20th Centuries (W.E.H Stanner, 1970). These terms began to take hold in the English lexicon in Australia significantly from the work of A.P Elkin (1938) and then W.E.H Stanner (1970). Gillen and Spencer undertook extensive field work in the interior of Australia to study the Aboriginal peoples of these areas, mainly the Arrernte people, in and around Alice Springs. Spencer became an influential voice regarding 'Native Australians' in this period and his ethnography, *'Native Tribes of Central Australia' (1899)* became celebrated and a go-to source of information to understand Aboriginal culture and peoples during this time (Stanner, 1970).

Spencers' ethnographic work hugely swayed negative public perception regarding Aboriginal people and culture, and combined with his extensive policy influences in this area, the results were devasting. The impacts were far reaching, negative and still felt to this very day for 'Indigenous' peoples in Australia (Anderson 2003; HREOC 1997). Spencer became *Chief Protector of Aborigines* in the Northern Territory from 1911-1913, and was a firm believer in the forced removal policies regarding native peoples in Australia. These policies, that forcibly removed Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander

children from their families for generations, led to what is known today as the *Stolen Generations* (HREOC, 1997). The forced removal policies that targeted 'Indigenous' children and families was a proven act of cultural genocide, as defined by the *Geneva Convention 1949* (HREOC 1997). Spencer made his thinking clear during this period, as quoted below from the *'Bringing Them Report'* (HREOC, 1997):

"No half-caste children should be allowed to remain in any native camp but they should all be withdrawn and placed on stations. So far as practicable, this plan is now being adopted. In some cases, when the child is very young, it must of necessity be accompanied by its mother, but in other cases, even though it may seem cruel to separate the mother and child, it is better to do so, when the mother is living, as is usually the case, in a native camp." (p.133)

Furthermore, Spencers' work aspired to demonstrate a lack of any intellect held by Aboriginal people and seek to prove they were nothing more than mere savages and the missing link to a past and inferior race of people. Warwick Anderson (2003) demonstrates these beliefs from Spencers' own words regarding Aboriginal people. Spencer said, they: *"represent the most backward race extant and, in many respects, reveal to us the conditions under which the early ancestors of the present human races evolved." (p.201).*

During this period, other highly influential authors, academics and politicians, both locally and abroad, held similarly racist views as Spencer regarding 'Indigenous' peoples of Australia. In 1902, a Tasmanian politician, in supporting the exclusion of 'Indigenous' peoples from the national census, stated that the exclusion should be on the grounds that *"there is no scientific evidence that he [sic] is a human being at all"* (Parliament of Australia, House of Representatives, *Debates*, Commonwealth Franchise Bill, Second Reading, 1902, p.11,930, Mr King O'Malley; cited in Neale and Kelly 2020).

That sentiment and degrading thinking were also destructively shared by famous Austrian born Neurologist, and founder of Psychoanalysts, Sigmund Freud (1856-1939). In one of his many publications, '*Totems and taboo'* (1913), Freud declared that 'Indigenous' Australians were *"the most backward and miserable of savages"* (Freud, S., 'Totem and taboo', 1912-13, Vol.1-2, pp.1-2; cited in Neale and Kelly, 2020).

Unfortunately, today the terms dreamtime and dreaming are still predominantly accepted and used by mainstream to refer to Traditional Aboriginal stories and beliefs. These words completely minimise, trivialise, devalue, and misrepresent the ancient cultural beliefs and Lore of Aboriginal people. Additionally, these terms are born from an insidious period in Australia history and perpetuated by people who held no regard whatsoever for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and culture, viewing our Ancestors as sub-human. No more will be said about Spencer. I wish to continue discussing the Ngurrampaa and its relationship to story.

Ngurrampaa Stories

An example of Traditional stories from the Ngurrampaa include well known stories such as: Tiddilik the Frog; How the Birds Got their Colours; How the Koala got its Stumpy Tail; Gilah and Garnie; The Rainbow Serpent; Why Emu Cannot Fly; How the Kangaroo got its Tail; and How the Echidna got its Spikes. The story of How the Echidna got its spikes was shared in my University of New England (UNE) Graduate Certificate presentation in February 2020. The story of Gilah and Garnie, a Ngemba story belonging to Djummu Paul Gordon, was developed into an easy reader booklet by two of my participating Kindergarten classes in 2019. This was also shared at my Grad. Cert. presentation and remains one of my highlights from the past 9 years as an ACEM. The artwork for that story was created by the participants themselves as an activity within the *S.E.C.D.R.R.R* process.

All the stories are delivered in a culturally appropriate manner for learners aged 6 to 12 years and the connected information is subsequently pitched for their knowledge standing. Stories are retold as they have been shared with me, unless there is a requirement to adjust or adapt a section of the story for cultural reasons or age appropriateness. The protocols and quality assurance mechanisms regarding the sharing of Traditional stories have been addressed earlier in this paper, below I share examples of when a story may be adjusted, adapted or not told in its entirety as necessity and protocol dictates.

For example, Elders may share deeper aspects of a story with me because I am a Loreman, or even a Senior Loreman. Those aspects and knowledge segments of that respective story remain with me only and are absolutely not shared with participants. This does not mean that the story can't be shared, just those certain scared aspects of the lessons, morals or knowledge within that story imparted specifically as an extra share for my learning. Also, there are some stories that need a softer touch in the details or require rewording. Such as retelling the well-known local Awabakal (Newcastle, NSW) story of *The Giant Kangaroo in Nobby's Headland*.

On the surface, this story is an explanation of seismic activity in the Newcastle and surrounding Hunter Region. It relates specifically to explaining the unique geological formation of Nobby's Headland at the entrance to Newcastle Harbour, originally known as *"Whibaygamba"*. The story also explains unbreakable rules pertaining to marriage, kinship and environmental relationships, forbidden love and sexual assault.

The story takes place at the highly culturally significant mountain, known originally in one capacity as *Warrawolong* (or Mt. Sugarloaf) in the western suburbs of Lake Macquarie

and Newcastle. This mountain is infamously recognisable across many coastal and lower Hunter suburbs across Cessnock, Maitland, Newcastle, Lake Macquarie and Port Stephens, because of the huge twin radio towers situated at the summit. The main character is a male member of the Kangaroo clan. He has been told explicitly that he cannot marry, nor have a physical relationship with any of the females in the neighbouring Wallaby Clan. This is taboo under the ancient rules of the Lore as they are not the right way, or wrong kinship blood. However, despite this, he doesn't listen and becomes fascinated by one of the female Wallabies. His fascination develops into a worrying obsession. The male Kangaroo, overrun by his urges and desires, loses control and rapes the female Wallaby, breaking big Lore (Rev. L.E Threlkeld, 1855, from *Hunter Living Histories*). This can be a confronting story for people.

When telling this story to younger learners I refrain from talking about or using the word rape, rather I share that the male Kangaroo stole a kiss from the female Wallaby. For the early learners, I go one step further and explain that he was forcing the female Wallaby to love him and you are not allowed to do that, it's against the ancient rules/Lore and still is the case in our world today. I only use the word rape when sharing this story with adult learners.

Importantly, when retelling these old cultural stories, the source or owner(s) and the tribal and geographical location is also always shared. The fact these stories were one of the strongest and most common ways in which Lore was handed down to children of the clan is shared also. It is explained that through participating in these storytelling sessions, they are undertaking a significant cultural practice that is over a hundred thousand years old. As a result, participants feel a much stronger connection to this pedagogy realising they are doing as our Ancestors did all those millennia ago.

"At our school, the students and staff feel so privileged and honoured having these opportunities to hear Mr Newham share such ancient stories and in the traditional way" (personal communication, requested feedback ACEM role, School R/Principal, Newcastle, NSW, 2021)

It is humbling to be in a position that affords access to a core suite of ten to twelve Traditional Aboriginal stories from the *Ngurrampaa* to share throughout the year with each group. This humbling position also holds multiple obligations and responsibilities. Additional to these core stories, I have access to approximately twenty or more cultural stories to support those twelve. It's worth noting that some of the organisations and institutions I work with, the relationship and connection with participants spans as many as 8 years. During that period more than thirty Traditional Aboriginal stories have been shared and knowledge utilised through my *S.E.C.D.R.R.R* model and associated sessions. I share the experience from one such institution below:

At the end of 2020, I undertook an activity with a combined group of participants for some fun and to test their memory. I asked the group how many Traditional stories I had shared with them throughout the six or so years of their educational journey. What transpired even took me by surprise. Together we established that 35 Traditional Aboriginal stories, and close to the same number of Traditional dances, had been shared. Participants could still remember key aspects or lessons from each story, some even able to recall where they were when we shared the stories together. So, there we were, sitting in the hall, 85 plus participants and I having our minds slightly blown away by how many stories we had experienced together. It was also a powerful moment to sit and reflect on the impact that so much story could have on so many young people. It was also humbling to realise from these experiences we hugely connected in each other's story.

It is important to note that with each story shared, there is also a connected Aboriginal dance attached. The dance is either one that I have created specifically as a result of the story; an existing dance that connects to the story or various aspects of it; or the dance that belongs Traditionally to that story under Lore. Any of these approaches is culturally appropriate and demonstrates the adaptability and fluidity of our Lore. This will be discussed further on with more detail in the *Dance* aspect of *S.E.C.D.R.R.R.*

E.C - Explore and Connect (or contextualise)

Explore and Connect components of *S.E.C.D.R.R.R* are placed together purposefully as they play a vital linking role for participants once the story has been shared. Up until this point the learner is listening and responding to the story and storyteller's energy, actions, voice and expressions. It is another entry point for an essential component in the power of Traditional Aboriginal storytelling, the phenomena of feeling. This aspect of *S.E.C.D.R.R.R* is a clear difference from most other popular resources, especially in the educational sector, regarding Traditional Aboriginal story. In this section we explore the story's values, morals, lessons, and importantly, the connection these hold for participants in their *ngurra* (camp) or social circles and the natural world today. Traditionally, this was something that occurred also for all Aboriginal children where they inherited the right stories from their world and about their world:

"For Aboriginal people the land is full of stories, and we are born from our Mother, the land, into these stories. The old people tell us stories that nurture and sustain us through life into old age so that we can tell children the stories that will sustain them. The great life-story cycle has been the way for millennia. It is the birthright of all Aboriginal children to be born into the right story. Indeed, it is the birthright and greatest gift we can give all children. The right story connects us intimately to our country giving us our place and our identity. The right story embeds us deeply in nature, connecting us to the living spirit (Milroy and Milroy 2008:24)" (Spillman & Wilson, in Australian Aboriginal Studies 2020/2).

It is encouraging to see now-a-days, especially over the past ten or so years, a far greater selection of Traditional Aboriginal stories to read or share with participants pertaining to Aboriginal culture. Some notable stories include: Tiddalik the Frog; The Rainbow Serpent; Mirram and Warreen (Kanagroo and Wombat); Gilaa and Gaani (Galah and Thorny Devil); How the Echidna Got It Spikes; How Koala Got a Stumpy Tail; When the Snake Bit the Sun; Dinnawan and Googaa (Emu & Goanna); Dinnawan and Purralka (Emu & Brolga); How the Birds Got Their Colours. In the Hunter Region of New South Wales (NSW), where much of my work as an ACEM takes place, there is extensive recordings of old Aboriginal stories and language by several early Europeans. None more recognised than the Newcastle and Lake Macquarie Missionary, Reverend Lancelot Threlkeld (b.1788-d.1859).

Threlkeld's ability to record such stories became possible due to an extraordinary relationship with celebrated Awabakal Elder (Newcastle/Lake Macquarie area of NSW) and man of high degree, 'Biraban' (c. 1798/1800-d.1846), also referred to as 'McGill' by many early Europeans during this era (Maynard, 2001) Their relationship extended over twenty plus years and contrastingly, during a time when one of Australia's most brutal and violent colonial out-posts was expanding in Newcastle, NSW (1820's-1840's). More recently the relationship between *Biraban* and *Threlkeld* was cleverly portrayed in film from the *'Living Histories'* series, led by Newcastle City Council and The University of Newcastle, titled *'Biraban and Threlkeld: Finding the Third Space'.* The Traditional Aboriginal stories that can be accessed as a result of this relationship, ideals of sharing, and reconciliation in practice, include: *When the Moon Cried*, *The Giant Kangaroo in Nobby's Headland*, *The Monster of Sugarloaf, How Coal Was Made* (the ancient Volcano at Redhead), and *'How Mt. Yengo Came to be Flat'* (Yengo National Park, NSW).

Whether it be Traditional Aboriginal stories of the Hunter Region (NSW), or stories from further a-field in Australia, a common missed opportunity occurs by educators when retelling these stories in a learning environment. They offer minimal explanation and connection or feeling for learners to these powerful Lore stories. This approach does not honour the connectedness and holistic nature of Aboriginal Education and indeed Traditional Aboriginal culture, as compared to having firstly, an Aboriginal Education representative explain, unpack or guide users through the resource in an ongoing relationship. Even more so, it does not have the impact compared to an experienced Aboriginal cultural practitioner, educator, Traditional Knowledge Holder, Elder, or Ceremonial person delivering these stories and lessons. These individuals will build connection, grow their relationship with the information and strengthen the confidence of the respective education staff to continue or even commence using these strong Aboriginal education cultural resources in their pedagogy.

"I have witnessed David's use of narrative to make connection and bring alive strong moral values as a discussion and reflection point." (personal communication, requested feedback, ACEM role, School Assistant Principal - Curriculum & Instruction, Newcastle, NSW, 2022)

When there is a lack of exploration of the themes in Traditional Aboriginal story and when the lessons or morals are not clarified to the listener, there is a deficit regarding a real and deeper connection for participants. There are limited examples given regarding where these lessons or Lore in the story that takes place in their day-to-day life. There is a missed opportunity for participants to be plugged into the story, reflect on their own histories and the relevance of it in today's world, their world. Similarly, as Bruner (2009) highlighted in his work, storytelling for learners can inspire creativity, especially because it encourages them to think and reflect about their own stories and experiences in new ways. *S.E.C.D.R.R.R* works to change that disconnection paradigm through the *Explore* and *Connect* stages.

In this section of *S.E.C.D.R.R.R*, story becomes a tool for strengthening personal development, creating more self-awareness, building greater understanding and connection to the world around the learner and many of the things that exist within. Additionally, this enables the learner to grasp Traditional Aboriginal concepts that focus on placing humans simply as a part of the natural world rather than the centre of it. The opposite can be said for the prevailing mainstream western individualised thinking we see today (Callaghan and Gordon, 2014 & 2022).

This Ancient Aboriginal world view, that places us humans simply within and a part of the natural environment, allows for far greater understanding of responsibilities and obligations to our planet, our Mother Earth. From this world view, we humbly understand we are merely one tiny component or thread of the greater fabric of the world around us (Gordon, 2021 & 2023).

Another important component of *Explore* and *Connect* in *S.E.C.D.R.R.R*, is the value-adding offered to learners by assisting in the development and maintenance of the best versions of themselves. They do this by becoming more connected to Ancient Aboriginal ideals of responsibility, obligation, giving, respect, humility, honesty, sharing, being kind and following the rules no matter what the circumstances (Gordon, 2018). These values still remain of high importance today, evidenced in all the learning environments I work. It clearly aligns to those found in our Lore system and philosophy, the most common being; Respect, Responsibility, Safety, Resilience and Ready to Learn.

This similarity held between educational values and that found in Traditional Aboriginal culture is not lost on educators and participants. As an Aboriginal Cultural Educator, I highlight this connection and commonality to learners. It is a process of helping growing

an understanding that the rules they are being asked to uphold in and around their learning spaces are actually just a newer revised edition of rules that have existed since the beginning of time and from this land (Gordon, 2021 & 2023). This approach is powerful, relevant, and helps build connection and greater relationship to these modern expectations.

"Every word, gesture and genuine connection that is made during these learning sessions gives each individual purpose and a natural connection to learn." (Personal communication, requested feedback, ACEM role, School Assistant Principal - Curriculum & Instruction, Newcastle, NSW, 2022)

Additionally, when we move beyond just simply reading a story to learners and into the exploring and connecting phase, we are enabling the feeling aspect of storytelling to flourish. This offers the opportunity to deepen the impact of the knowledge being shared and stronger connections to take place. In this scenario the power of storytelling excels above all other means of knowledge sharing, or learning. Again, demonstrated by Jerome Bruner's research (1990, 2009) showing that storytelling can be up to twenty times more powerful than any other form of sharing information.

"It is like a soft magical mist that creeps into the room and slowly builds into a strong dense fog that helps the participates become 100% focussed and engaged". (Personal communication, requested feedback, ACEM role, School Assistant Principal-Curriculum & Instruction, Newcastle, NSW, 2022)

Explore, Connect **and the idea of "Feeling"**

In the *Explore* and *Connection* section of *S.E.C.D.R.R.R* I take a deeper exploration into the ideas regarding feeling of story, a notion discussed so powerfully by Traditional Knowledge Holders, 'Big' Bill Neidjie (1985, 1989 & 2015) and Uncle Paul Gordon (2014, 2022). The first phase of the process used to achieve this is encouraging learners to share with the group what emotions they are or were experiencing during the ngurrampaa story. Alternatively, learners are asked to consider how they might feel in a similar situation or be in the story themselves. It may be a broader view and approach to the notion of feeling that 'Big Bill' or Uncle Paul specifically speak off, however it is all still connected. My experiences, combined with the knowledge held from Lore, have shown that when there is feeling in teaching or storytelling, the more powerful and impactful the lessons or learning become.

Therefore, in this process, learners are specifically encouraged to ponder how they would feel if they were the various characters in any specific Ancient Aboriginal story being shared. Such as, if they were *Gilah* the Galah, or if they were the tribal peoples that Thikkabilla (the Echidna) ate their Kangaroo; or if they were Brolga betrayed by their friend

Dinnawan (Emu); or if they were the animals that Tiddalik the frog didn't share with; or if they were Bagu the man who turns into the Glider Possum after being chased and threatened by his own tribe.

Importantly, during this process participants are given time to sit in that moment, be present, think and feel the different scenarios that are playing-out in these Old Aboriginal stories. This highlights another fundamental aspect of Traditional Aboriginal pedagogy. It is not bound by time constraints nor a rush to complete a unit of work or task as per a limiting lesson time. This process of sitting and feeling the ngurrampaa story also nurtures the practice and art of patience and humility (Gordon, 2023).

The essential connection point with this approach is that it allows the learner to genuinely feel the ngurrampaa story, just as if it was them in that time period. It builds a stronger relationship to the story as learners are better able to empathise and relate to the characters and landscapes within. Following this approach aide's participants to better grasp the idea that, we as Aboriginal people, in our Lore, view the land like it's alive, human, personified (Neidjie, 1989; Gordon, 2018, 2021 & 2023). Additionally, the feeling aspects of the *S.E.C.D.R.R.R* approach assists learners to strengthen an understanding with and navigation of the big emotions and personality traits occurring in the story. These include emotions such as: anger, violence and rage; sadness and revenge; showing off and recklessness; greed and stealing; honesty and lies; or laziness and arrogance.

"David sets the scene to share knowledge and culture with great energy and purpose…participants seem to be drawn to hear, wonder and create a connection and set themselves personally in the stories he shares." (Personal communication, requested feedback, ACEM role, School Assistant Principal - Curriculum & Instruction, Newcastle, NSW, Aust.,)

In this connection phase of *S.E.C.D.R.R.R*, the learner is given the opportunity to sit in real time contemplating and navigating examples of where and how this Traditional story appears in their *ngurra* (camp) or world today. Examples include asking them simple yet deeper questions to ponder regarding their day to day lives. Examples of these types of questions during this stage of *S.E.C.D.R.R.R* include:

"You know that Thikkabilla (Echidna), well he wasn't sharing, can you think of a time where at school, home, or work, when someone was being selfish and not sharing, especially if you are someone that always shares".

"Imagine the feelings you would have if in your friendship circle or family, you were the only one giving and sharing, or it felt like no one ever gave back to you".

"Can you think of a time where you or someone in class, at home, or at work, were behaving like "Gaanie" (the Thorny Devil), being a show-off and only thinking about what their needs were?".

“Can you remember a time when a friend or family member broke your trust, lied to you or were nasty to you, like Dinnawan (the Emu) was to their friend Brolga”.

After suitable time is given to contemplate and navigate these above questions, or similar, participants are then given other poignant questions to ponder. They are asked either, how could they deal with that situation differently? Or what could have been done differently to achieve a more positive and emotionally healthier outcome for them and/or others involved in that story?

Key to this process is that the second set of questions are utilised as an extension to the learning. Participants first need to consider answers for themselves and then discuss this with their peers in a group or group session. This discussion in a group style format is perfect for most to share their thoughts and feelings regarding the different scenarios from the story, and in a combined effort, unpack and discover alternative solutions to these real-life challenges.

Once again, this helps build a stronger sense of connection, relevance and feeling to Ancient Aboriginal stories, while offering solutions to possible future personal relationship-based challenges in their lives. It also grows a greater connection, awareness and familiarity to their feelings and emotions, which also assists in nurturing empathy, self-respect and cultural understanding for the learner. The process of considering alternative and healthier resolutions to these relationship-based events in the stories encourages learners to problem solve and become more familiar with being adaptable, flexible and fluid in their day-to-day lives. This is yet another powerful parallel to crucial aspects of Aboriginal Lore and the myriad of lessons within (Gordon, 2018, 2021 & 2023).

Additionally, this approach helps develop and strengthen the emotional intelligence of participants, crucial for their personal and educational growth (Marquez et al 2006). Today, there has been much research regarding the role of *Emotional Intelligence* (E.I) in our lives (Goleman, 1998; Zeidner, 2013; Ciarrochi et al, 2013; Keefer et al, 2018 and 2018a; Salovey and Sluyter, 1997). We now understood the critical role that E.I has on humans. It is the central aspect of emotional adjustment, our personal wellbeing, the varying relationships we hold in our day to day lives, understanding the world around us, and ultimately our life’s successes (Puertas Molero et al, 2020; Fernandez-Berrocal and Ruiz, 2008)

“The change in behaviour, wellbeing and learning have been exceptionally strong. Intuitive thinking, learning how to listen and learn are all outcomes of David’s pedagogical structure.” (Personal communication, requested feedback, ACEM role, School Assistant Principal - Curriculum & Instruction, Newcastle, NSW, 2022)

Furthermore, this phase of *S.E.C.D.R.R.R* helps me, as the storyteller and knowledge holder, fulfil my responsibilities and obligations to Elders, the Lore, and our Country. It supports learners to feel more aligned to the world view held in Lore, one based in deep connections to ideals of responsibilities, obligations and humility. Today, we see the opposite dominating mainstream western society where there is a colossal focus only on people's rights not responsibilities, what they're entitled to, growing narcissism and an ever-present mindset of what's in it for me (Fornda et al, 2016; Piff, 2014; Tamborski et al., 2012).

Having participants experience and ponder the ideas of responsibilities, obligations and humility, allows them opportunity think and feel more broadly about how their actions, words & attitudes hold impact. Importantly, it also encourages participants to consider these impacts beyond themselves and take into account others around them, in their *ngurra* (camp) or social circle, and indeed the world itself.

It is worth noting that during the two *COVID19* home schooling periods of 2020 and 2021, my extension questions were still offered to learners through the creation of my cultural education worksheets titled, *'Story Time with Mr Newham'*. There are several examples provided of these worksheets in **Part 9 - APPENDIX: *S.E.C.D.R.R.R* Resources**. The worksheets were created and contextualised with the appropriate scope and sequence relevant for each of the Stages of school learning. The worksheets were combined into two categories, Infants (Kindy to Year 2) and Primary (Year 3 to Year 6). I discuss this further at **Part 6.3** in this paper regarding the use of the *S.E.C.D.R.R.R* model during the COVID19 pandemic and the onset of the home-schooling journey.

D - Dance (and Song)

As expected, this component of *S.E.C.D.R.R.R* is by far the most interactive and movement-based. This is an area well suited to the kinaesthetic or hands-on learners as it is the doing part of my sessions.

Dance has moved, healed and connected people since the beginning of time. Today, there is much research and understanding on the explicit positive impacts on health and wellbeing regarding dance and movement beyond the broader idea of just being active (Hanna, 1995; Jain, 2001; Miller, 2006; Olvera, 2008). This is the case regarding Traditional cultural dance and song of 'Indigenous' groups from across the globe, including Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. In recent years there has been vital recognition of the crucial role that Traditional dance and song has played for 'Indigenous' Australians surviving and dealing with the devasting impacts of colonisation

in this country (Haebich, 2018). Furthermore, the concept of *Song-lines* has played an essential role in knowledge acquisition and memory (Neal & Kelly, 2020).

All of those considerations, and much more, are actioned and relevant to this aspect of the *S.E.C.D.R.R.R* model. As such I will focus on the *S.E.C.D.R.R.R* model and the role Dance (& song) play in my sessions. I haven't the scope nor space in this Masters to adequately delve deeper into the mechanisms or the socio-political, ethnological, anthropological, musicology, or linguistic discourse of Traditional and contemporary Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal dance and song (music) across our time.

As a cultural educator my performance skills have been humbly developed and crafted for more than two decades of practice and sharing of Traditional Aboriginal dance and song. Despite having first performed in this style Aboriginal dance when I was a young boy, it wasn't until I commenced my journey and relationship with Aboriginal Lore, years later, that I honed my performance skills and observance of protocols connected to Traditional Aboriginal dance.

This skill set has been afforded to me by several key cultural mentors and Elders as a result of having fulfilled and observed strict cultural obligations, responsibilities and protocols of Lore through. Importantly, from that point onwards, I have gained deeper understanding of the connection between Aboriginal story, dance, Ancestors, Country, Lore and life more broadly.

Much has been written pertaining to Aboriginal dance and song regarding how it is much more than just a process of reaffirming cultural identity for First Nations peoples. For me, it offers relationship to multiple, interconnected and complex threads of our cultural fabric. It makes up the holistic nature of our being as 'Indigenous' peoples, linking us to our past and helping understand our present (Callaghan and Gordon, 2020; Magowan, 2005).

It is humbling to hold knowledge of Traditional Aboriginal dance and song to utilise in my *S.E.C.D.R.R.R* model, as a cultural educator, is another unique skill that myself and other cultural practitioners bring to such a role. Possessing the skills and experiences of performance to add to the storytelling journey sets the *ACEM* role apart from other mainstream educators when or if they share a *ngurrampaa* (dreaming) story. Each ngurrampaa story I share has a Traditional Aboriginal dance and song connected to it and are either directly or indirectly related to aspects or features within the story. This plays a crucial role in the process of imparting knowledge.

A flexibility exists with each Traditional dance and song I choose. At times the dance and song directly belonging to the story may be chosen, or a dance and song related to certain

aspects or themes within the story. Either or both is acceptable. An example of using Traditional dance and song indirectly connected to the story, is explained further below.

In sharing the story of *Tiddalik the Frog',* or reading the associated book, *'Tiddalick: the frog who caused a flood'* authored by Robert Roennfeldt (1980), the Traditional Aboriginal dance and song I choose to share with participants focuses upon our *gaalin*, or water and associated knowledge. It does not directly focus upon frogs or the broader story specifically. The dance and song I choose, known as *Makoro* (Fish), was shared with me by two cultural Brothers, and among other teachings, centres on our various waterways, tells of fish swimming and celebrating with the rest of the school of fish (their own mob).

This dance and song will also help remind learners of a central theme often missed by mainstream educators when utilising the Tiddalik story (Roennfeldt, 1980). They understate or completely overlook the sacredness and importance of water Traditionally. This undervalues and misses an opportunity to also highlight our strong relationship with water, the enormous responsibilities and obligations we hold to it under Lore, and the strict rules bound in its use.

Additionally, from the Tiddalik story and the Makoro dance and song, discussion takes place regarding the significant water Creation Ancestor *Waa Wae* (Rainbow Serpent), and the tremendous importance this scared being holds in Lore and the vital relationship to all forms of water as we know (Gordon, 2021, 2022 & 2023). It is one of my favourite lesson cycles to share.

There are many other examples of this indirect approach when utilising Traditional dance and song for ngurrampaa stories in my *S.E.C.D.R.R.R* sessions. These include the dances and songs performed for the stories about or that are associated to the: *Dhinnawan* or *Ngurrie* (Emu), *Thikkibilla* (Echidna), *Bundaar* (Kangaroo) and *Werakata* (Kookaburra).

A critical point needs to be considered regarding the respective Traditional dances and songs I choose for each *S.E.C.D.R.R.R* session. Attached to each ngurrampaa story being shared through *S.E.C.D.R.R.R*, are strict cultural protocols and Ceremonial commitments to Lore pertaining to dance and song that must be upheld (Neidjie 1985; Gordon, 2023). These protocols and commitments are constantly observed. It has been discussed earlier in this Master's, the considerations and observations of cultural protocols and associated permissions required to pass on Ancient Aboriginal stories and knowledge shared through *S.E.C.D.R.R.R*. The ngurrampaa stories that are shared will always be suitable, culturally appropriate, and open for all to hear in an educational setting. The same rules apply regarding Traditional Aboriginal dance and song.

There are many scared and thus secret dances and songs that I have responsibility and obligations to Ceremonially, under Lore. Under these strict Lore considerations there are particular songs and dances that cannot be shared publicly or outside the realms of our Lore and kinships structures. Despite how relevant these dances and songs may be in any particular ngurrampaa story being shared in that *S.E.C.D.R.R.R* session, they cannot and will not ever be used. The term we use for these more public dances and songs, relevant to my work in the education sector, is children's dances and songs, and are generally created in more recent generations or decades. This term was shared with me by Djummu Paul Gordon many years ago (n.d).

This notion of children's dance and song mechanism is a useful approach in avoiding the many challenges of cultural misappropriation. In particular, it limits the opportunity for more powerful and older cultural dances and songs being copied, stolen or adapted without permission. I wish to be clear; there is willingness to share if all cultural protocols and processes are being followed, however in these cases there is no observation of these deep and ancient protocols of respect, responsibility and obligation, especially regarding where and who these dances and songs belong to. This is an integral issue associated with a concept I have redefined in this thesis known as *Cultural Literacy* and is a complex, difficult and challenging matter to navigate as an ACEM, one bound by deep historical factors.

The original concept of *Cultural Literacy* (Hirsch, 1980), my redefining of it, and the crucial relationship it holds to *S.E.C.D.R.R.R,* is discussed in more detail further on in this paper

Despite personally experiencing Traditional dances and songs being reused without cultural protocols being followed, and as frustrating as this can be, it is critical to remember an important point. There is a much deeper and poignant cause for this situation occurring. It is the direct result from the destructive and traumatic impacts of colonisation on 'Indigenous' Australians, especially with the disconnection, broken and fractured nature of our old stories and cultural structures. Colonisation has given rise to huge losses of cultural practice, identity, and a wide spread destruction of universal Traditional philosophies and understandings.

These crucial Traditional understandings include; that everything and everyone remained connected and held a deep and intimate relationship, along with hugely inclusive notions of sharing and celebrating what we had in common. These ideals were the nucleus of Aboriginal Lore and life (Gordon, 2023; Callaghan and Gordon, 2014 & 2022; Neale and Kelly, 2020; Haebich, 2018). However, I will move on from this point and continue discussing *S.E.C.D.R.R.R.*

One very notable facet to this aspect of *S.E.C.D.R.R.R* is how quickly participants can learn the dances being shared and importantly remember them for a longer period of time. They are able to recall the particular movements and cuts (or changes in the dance or final movement to signal the end) and hence the story, far quicker than lessons on numeracy or literacy skills. Participants thoroughly enjoy this feature of the *S.E.C.D.R.R.R* sessions. On every occasion the excitement and energy levels rise, laughter and chatter engulf the learning area, and the many smiles visible on their faces, become contagious. Even those who find it challenging to perform or do learning in front of their peers, manage to engage in this part of the learning. During the dance and song aspect of *S.E.C.D.R.R.R* the strength of relationship and connection between myself and respective learning groups is vital. Supporting this construct is the sense of comfortability offered to learners from their understanding of the connectedness of the dance being taught and that it is generally not a one-off or a stand-alone activity. They are aware that the dance is a component to the full learning cycle of *S.E.C.D.R.R.R* and therefore holds a crucial role with in it.

In asking participants to learn the Traditional Aboriginal dance and perform it in the learning space, I am asking them to trust me, work with the process and find a happy enough median between stepping out of their comfort zone and enjoy themselves. On many occasions I witness participants experience the thrill of having a go and enjoying the benefits of being active. Safe to say, in this section of *S.E.C.D.R.R.R*, there are lots of red faces and happy learners.

A quick comment regarding situations where learners become particularly concerned, worried or ashamed about getting involved in dance, or feel they cannot do it. It is something I am well aware of and ready to always share my stories and experiences regarding when I first started to learn Aboriginal dance. I am open about how I felt scared, worried about messing up or making mistakes, worried about what people might think of me, or even worse thinking people would tease me or laugh.

This is followed by sharing how I was encouraged and nurtured by my Elders/mentors when first learning Traditional Aboriginal dance. They encouraged me to trust them, slow my mind, focus on the instructions and movements and enjoy the experience. They also helped me understand that most people who do laugh or tease you, deep down inside wish they could be proud and brave enough to have a go themselves. Importantly, I explain how those Elders/mentors also shared similar stories of their experiences in being a beginner and the challenges they faced.

This approach is empowering, built from the established relationships with the participants, produces magic moments often and almost works every time. Furthermore,

it is utilising the ideals of *S.E.C.D.R.R.R* based around exploring and connecting story. In these situations, it isn't an ancient Aboriginal story being shared, it is a modern story from my life and experiences being explored and relevant connections made.

All these experiences mentioned are evident from both my own observations over the past eight years in the ACEM role, and that shared with me by other educators, executives and families of younger participants that I am connected to. Such as:

"Not only have I witnessed learners reciting many aspects of Mr Newham's traditional stories, I've seen them practising dances he has taught and the songs they have heard in connection to his lessons. And I see this with every education level. Wish I could get my learners to recall and enjoy our numeracy lessons like this". (Personal communication, requested feedback, ACEM role, School Assistant Principal - Curriculum & Instruction, Newcastle, NSW, 2022).

"The manner in which Mr Newham ensures everyone is included, comfortable and engaged in his lessons is amazing. He is a gifted storyteller and also a fabulous educator. It is a joy to watch him work his magic and see everyone having so much fun". (Personal communication, requested feedback, ACEM role, School Stage 1 classroom Teacher, Newcastle, NSW, 2022).

"Dave is a talented cultural educator and especially excels at teaching our student's Aboriginal dance. The speed at which they learn his dances is impressive and a reflection of his skills" (Personal communication, requested feedback, ACEM role, School Principal, Newcastle, NSW, 2021).

The above accounts and experiences from families, learners and other educators is uplifting and provides even greater reward in showcasing that the manner in which *S.E.C.D.R.R.R* engages and educates participants is profoundly effective and impactful for the right reasons. Our Ancestors knew this to be the best practice and were well aware of the effectiveness and power of Traditional storytelling, dance, and song, and its ability to infiltrate a learner's wellbeing on a far greater level than any other way of learning. (Bruner, 1999 & 2009; Web and Bracknell, 2021).

I now wish to move to the next section of the *S.E.C.D.R.R.R* model, known as *Record.*

R - Record (Art Practice)

The *Record* feature of *S.E.C.D.R.R.R* is the first of the three *R's*. From a western education perspective, this is the major entry point for the literacy thread of my sessions. In these sections of *S.E.C.D.R.R.R* participants undertake activities in writing, several types of research or associated extended learning, reading, arts and crafts opportunities. Additionally, an important feature of *Record* is having the learners art/craft pieces of work

placed in and around their respective *ngurra* (learning space) for the rest of the year or longer. This aspect is a powerful link to Traditional Aboriginal cultural practice with the record feature of *S.E.C.D.R.R.R.*

Traditional Aboriginal Cultural Links of *Record*

An important link is identified between the *Record* aspect of *S.E.C.D.R.R.R* and Traditional Aboriginal cultural practice. This helps rebut a major misconception and inaccuracy held by many Australians and indeed the world regarding Aboriginal society and cultural practice. Aboriginal culture Traditionally was NOT just an oral culture.

We had many ways that our epistemology and pedagogy, our Lore, was recorded and written down. This was undertaken specifically to ensure that stories, their messages and learnings remained for future generations. Some of these very special places containing Lore, or story, were recorded by great Ancestral beings or Creators (Neidjie 1985; Callaghan and Gordon, 2022). Sentiments shared by 'Big' Bill Neidjie in his book *'Kakadu Man'* (1985):

"White people got computer, but Aboriginal, me…I just write in cave" (p.29). "Law written in cave. That painting is law" (p.30).

Our stories were recorded in such ways including; cave paintings, rock carvings, tree carvings and scaring, carved designs in wooden artefacts, body designs with Traditional ochres (paints) and designs cut or mounded in the earth (sand and dirt). All of this knowledge or teaching, was recorded and thus remained in and with the land, our natural world (Gordon, 2018 & 2023). It remains in our Country so it can continue to teach us. "*Our story is in the land…it is written in those sacred places"* (Neidjie, 1985, p.47).

This point is shared, explaining that this practice of recording story and having it continue to reinforce and teach us, is an ancient practice undertaken by Aboriginal peoples for over a hundred thousand years. Therefore, having the learners work placed on the walls or hung across the learning space to see and remember the stories and messages shared, is following that ancient process. Additionally, an important link is made for participants regarding the similarities of learning between this process of *S.E.C.D.R.R.R* and when I visit our ancient Aboriginal sites, such as cave paintings or rock carvings. At these special ancient knowledge places that we can see, just like in their learning space, we are able to sit in and with Country, we look, listen, and feel story, it enables teaching and knowledge to be shared over and over and over again. These stories stick and remain firmly embedded in spirit and mind (Callaghan and Gordon 2022; Gordon et al, 2020).

“The connection David makes for learners and staff to traditional pedagogy and cultural practice is unique and very clever. The examples he provides by sharing his own experiences makes sense and is truly empowering” (Personal communication, requested feedback, Professor Dr. Ben Wilson, *S.E.C.D.R.R.R*, Dec 9, 2022).

This is the most flexible phase of the *S.E.C.D.R.R.R* model. It can take place in a sperate session following the first four stages. The *Record* component of *S.E.C.D.R.R.R* does not necessarily need to have me involved to be completed. Many educators and supporting staff are experienced in leading similar literacy-based art activities or lessons. Therefore, they are well equipped to undertake the completion of the *Record* phase themselves. However, it is essential that I provide an explanation of how *Record* best operates.

Another educator may undertake the *Record* aspect of *S.E.C.D.R.R.R* later that day, directly after my session, or in the following days. A reminder is given that best practice for this section of *S.E.C.D.R.R.R* is to undertake it shortly after my first session. This helps ensure the story, associated lessons and learning, and importantly the feelings from the story, are front of mind for all involved.

How Does *Record* work

As the word suggestions, learners are encouraged to record, in both art/craft and written modes, facets of the ngurrampaa story that they feel a stronger connection to or they really enjoyed. They can draw with pencils, ink, charcoals, paint, crayon or even use craft to record their visions and or feelings from hearing the story, dance and song.

Participants are also encouraged to use recycled materials from around the learning space and surrounding area. Materials such as plastic lids, paddle pop sticks, toothpicks, straws, grasses, sand and dirt, sticks, leaves, bark, pebbles or even feathers. Unless prearranged or requested in collaboration, I do not stipulate or even give suggestions on what materials can, could or should be used. This is a deliberate choice as to not inhibit the creative side of learners and supporting educators alike. On many occasions I marvel at the creative and clever ways in which participants choose to *Record* their versions of the story and the wide variety of materials used beyond the standard art and craft resources.

Participants are also asked to write a few lines or paragraphs, pending their age/grade, briefly explaining their art work or creation and why they elected to record that aspect of the story. Others may record or recreate a blended version of the Traditional story. In this option, participants choose aspects of the story combined with their own experiences and connections to the morals, values or lessons shared, or situations in their own life relatable in the story. Some will also choose to give an overview of the ngurrampaa story

in their own words. I explain that this is acceptable if they understand the cultural protocols and obligations that we, together, must uphold. That is, we are not allowed to change the story and we especially must ensure the Lore, themes within the story, remain the same.

I explain these options and considerations with two examples below:

Example 1.

If the story shared explains how the Thikkibilla (Echidna) got its spikes, the leading themes centre around: always follow the Lore; don't be greedy, the importance of sharing, don't touch or take things that are not yours or without permission; don't steal; the significance of speaking the truth, and do not tell lies. Each participant must ensure their version of the story being recorded aligns with these themes and understand that they cannot record in their story a completely altered version, such as:

"Thikkibilla got its spike because it fell into a cactus from not watching where they were going. Therefore, the story tells us how it is important to always watch where you're walking and you will now never see a Thikkibilla hanging around a cactus!

Example 2.

In the story of Gilah and Garnie (Galah and Thorny Devil) some participants may connect with or recall a time where they or someone they know was being a show-off or a big-noter. While others may connect with the specific throwing incident in this story where Gilah got hit in the head by Garnie's Boomerang. In these instances, participants will record those events from their lives in direction relation and connection to the ngurrampaa story of Gilah and Garnie that was shared in the S.E.C.D.R.R.R lesson.

It does not matter which specific approach the participants choose. The magic and value to this aspect of *S.E.C.D.R.R.R* exists with what they personally connect to and are feeling as a result of the story, its morals or lessons. The recording of this in word and illustration offers another clever technique that helps evoke stronger, deeper and more positive responses and relationships to the story, the related morals and lessons.

When undertaking ACEM work, this component of *S.E.C.D.R.R.R* offers an added bonus. The *Record* facet is easily linked to many *Key Learning Areas* (KLA's) of the NSW Department of Education syllabus and the respective units of work in these KLAs. Such as: Science and Technology, Human Society and its Environment (HSIE), Personal Development Health and Physical Education (PDHPE), and Creative Arts (NESA, 2023).

For example, the group may be working on a specific Physical Geography unit focusing upon features in our natural environment such as rivers, creeks, mountains, rain, wind, fire or extreme heat. The *S.E.C.D.R.R.R* model can be activated with associated Traditional Aboriginal stories regarding all these features of the natural world being

shared and blended to those units. This approach has taken place on numerous occasions over my time as an ACEM. Strengthening of this method occurs when educators and myself have opportunities to preplan these units ensuring the blended content flows and links even more, deepening the learning impact. The feedback and experiences from this style of combination has been overwhelmingly positive.

"*Having Dave in our school helping embed 'Aboriginal' perspectives into our classrooms has added so much vibrance to content, depth of understanding for Aboriginal culture, and connection to our places for all".* (Personal communication, requested feedback, ACEM role, School Principal, Newcastle, NSW, 2022).

Record **and the positive impact on learner behaviour management**

There is extensive conceptual and empirical research regarding perspectives and knowledge pertaining to learning environments, associated behaviour management (or similar terminology) and the relationship with effective and professional teaching in Australia (Egeberg et al, 2016). The research on this area of education illuminates vast differences in the thinking, approaches and definitions used to label it. Furthermore, there are strong opinions and robust discourse regarding whether educators need to study this area of pedagogy before they commence their careers or not (O'Neil and Stephenson, 2012).

The aim here is to not weigh in on that discourse, but to provide comment from my own experiences and feedback, and those shared with me by my education peers, regarding this aspect of knowledge sharing. I have identified an extra usefulness of the *Record* aspect within the *S.E.C.D.R.R.R* model. It can be utilised as a learning space tool and technique to strengthen the provision of an effective, safe, inclusive and appropriate learning space, becoming an impactful education space management technique.

A strong example of the *Record* phase of *S.E.C.D.R.R.R* being an impactful education space management technique is having participants place their work across the *ngurra* or the learning environment. This practice offers educators a powerful opportunity to activate a discussion and involvement style technique to behaviour management (Hepburn et al 2019; O'Neil and Stephenson, 2011). It offers a relationship-based option for educators to consider if needing to address behaviour challenges in the *ngurra*. This is a formidable and positive alternative to learning space management styles compared to the punitive or aggressive techniques (Hepburn et al, 2019). These punitive and aggressive approaches I have experienced as a learner and witnessed other educators utilise over the years. Lewis (2013) agrees with the centrality of positive relationship-based approaches to learning spaces, stating that "*…positive teacher-student relationships are seen as the very core of effective classroom management"* (p.1203).

In action, if a learner is not upholding the values and morals that are known to connect with a particular shared story, educators can refer to the recorded artworks completed by participants that are hanging up in and around their learning space. Rather than maybe saying, *"stop that behaviour, you know that's not what we expect from you"* (or something similar), educators may be able to say something comparable to:

Well, look up on the wall at the artwork we did from Mr Newham's story last week/month/term. That story taught us about the dangers of being a show-off, or losing control in anger, or how it's far better to share than be greedy. And we learned the dance and song that goes with that story. Are you fulfilling your obligations and responsibilities to Mr Newham, that special story and to your fellow learners.

On rarer occasions I have utilised this approach to assist in settling the group or to remind a participant of the rules they have agreed to follow in their special learning space. This offers a far more positive and powerful method. It provides a stronger connection to that learning experience as a result of the feelings and energy the learner has dedicated to the *S.E.C.D.R.R.R* sessions. This becomes especially impactful when the educator points towards the artwork steering the learner's attention towards their own artwork and the connections to that previous session. The experience and feelings they had during that lesson are reconnected and can come flooding back.

Over the years as an ACEM, I have also been asked by educators to revisit certain stories because of the behaviours (re)occurring in and around the learning space during my absence or between visits. On these occasions, the artworks from previous *S.E.C.D.R.R.R* sessions are invaluable, because that is my starting point. One such occasion sticks with me, I share below:

After being away from a class for a few weeks I was approached by a Year 5 staff member, Mrs D, in the staff room prior to engaging her group later that morning. Mrs D shared that 3 boys had been involved in some minor trouble since my previous session with her group. It had occurred both in her learning space and out in the playground. The boys were showing off and being unusually disrespectful to others. I knew these boys well and importantly had also spent a decent amount of time building a respectful and strong relationship with these boys and the group as a whole. Mrs D. is a fabulous educator and huge supporter of Aboriginal education and culture.

That morning in the 5D's class, after I followed my usual entry protocols, I redirected my lesson and refocused on an earlier S.E.C.D.R.R.R session; The Gilah and Garnie Story (Galah and Thorny Devil). During this review session I didn't single out or "shame" those 3 boys, rather I took a generic approach in revising the ngurrampaa story. However, when asking questions of the class that dived deeper into the lessons of the story, I deliberately steered questions towards the 3 boys that Mrs D has spoken to me about. I also gave an important reflection from an incident where I was showing off, upset a good friend and got me into a lot of trouble from my favourite

educators who was a mentor and someone I really respected in our community. They did not turn a blind-eye or let me off easy, and it cut me deep that this respected mentor expressed their disappointment in me.

It was a successful strategy. After I left, Mrs D reported back to me that all 3 boys realised they had not been at their best and stood up in front of the group and apologised for their behaviour. They also sought me out later that day and apologised to me. I strategically gave the impression I wasn't entirely sure what they were talking about, however I acknowledged their words and accepted their apology. I think the 3 boys knew why I chose to revisit that story and associated lessons earlier that morning.

The extension to this story is that I still often see those 3 boys around the neighbourhood, especially the local shopping village. They are now in Year 10 and the level of respect those young men afford me and I to them, is genuinely uplifting and authentic. Often these young men spot me first in the shop or near-by and always acknowledge me with the standard greeting I use; *Yaama* Mr Newham they call out. I reply with a *Yaama Boys*. We roll-out a fist-pump, high-five or tricky hand shake, have a quick yarn (talk) and then I am always sure to ask how they're doing in life and of course at high school.

R - Research

"Research is probably one of the dirtiest words in the Indigenous world's vocabulary" (Tuhiwai Smith, 1999, p.1).

It is important to recognise historically the field of research and its relationship with 'Indigenous' peoples and knowledges in Australia, indeed globally, has not been a positive one. It's an old story of 'Indigenous' peoples constantly being the subjects of and dehumanised by research that speaks of us, not for us (Shay, 2016), viewing us merely as informants in the research paradigm (Gordon, 203; Louies, et al, 2017).

Over the centuries, research for and on 'Indigenous' peoples have been pervasive, intrusive, violating, culturally inappropriate, driven by racist thinking and one that reinforces imperialist agendas and advances institutional Western hegemony (Tuhiwai Smith 1999; Ryder et al 2020; Gone 2019; Datta, 2018). Additionally, during all these years of research there was almost zero consideration regarding the intellectual and cultural property rights of these 'Indigenous' peoples being researched or the knowledge they were sharing (Heiss, 2010; Jenke 2003; Jenke et al 2012; Zografos, 2010).

More recently there has been a ground swell of changing attitudes and methodologies by the research sector in this space. This includes a long overdue move towards stronger

recognition, value and belief in Aboriginal epistemology and pedagogy and it being a legit methodology in the research field (Kovach, 2010). Traditional 'Indigenous' methods of sharing and acquiring knowledge are not only being recognised, they are now being used successfully in the research paradigm. This shift is simultaneously bringing a clearer understanding and willingness of non-Indigenous researchers to recognise their own colonising mindsets and the limitations this offers broadly to research. (Krusz, 2020; Althaus, 2020).

The ideas and practice of Traditional 'Indigenous' yarning techniques as a research tool is one such example. Scholarly articles and research around its use are becoming more prominent. The highly acclaimed, and heavily cited, works of Dawn Bessarab and Bridget Ng'Andu, titled, '*Yarning about yarning as a legitimate method in Indigenous research'* (2010) is one such example. Even more poignant is that this yarning methodology in the education field has now also been specifically researched along with its value and power in other broader sectors beyond academia (Shay, 2021; Fredericks et al, 2011).

In late 2022, I was engaged by The University of Newcastle, Library Services, to work on a project to develop a set of accessible *Yarning Kit Resources* for internal and external use. As the name suggests, this resource is built from Traditional 'Indigenous' yarning style of sharing story. It has the understanding that this approach is a universal and powerful way for people to come together and share story, build relationships and grow knowledge. The *Yarning Kit Resource* was launched by the university during *N.A.I.D.O.C Week* 2023 celebrations. It was a humbling experience and an exciting opportunity to help lead this project with Library Services staff and the project team. It is another clear example of how our ancient Aboriginal epistemology and pedagogy is deepening the educational journey of all peoples in this Country. Below are two links for the Yarning Kit Project; an *Introduction* video and *Cultural Guidance* video:

Specialised resources / Search and borrow / Library / The University of Newcastle, Australia

Yarning kit cultural guidance / Specialised resources / Search and borrow / Library / The University of Newcastle, Australia

The use of *Yarning* is a key component of Traditional Aboriginal storytelling and similarly in the *S.E.C.D.R.R.R* model. The research that participants undertake in *S.E.C.D.R.R.R* is self-determining, culturally appropriate and holds multiple positive educational and wellbeing impacts. *Research* is the second of the three R's in *S.E.C.D.R.R.R*. At this stage educators are encouraged to have participants undertake their research at the completion of my session. This is an educator-led activity to be completed prior to me returning to the learning space in a follow up session. Assisting this learning is a process I created called, *The 3F's*. This catchy phrase is a simple learning strategy more

commonly referred to as, *"Mr. Newham's 3F's"*. The three F's stand for *Five-Fun-Facts* and this approach is used to find five fun facts pertaining to direct or indirect aspects of the story.

On most occasions the *3F's* will focus upon key characters or features of the story shared. If the story is *How Thikkibila* (Echidna) *Got Its' Spikes*, then the participants will complete the *3F's* (Five Fun Facts) focusing on Echidna's. If the *Dhinawan* (Emu) and *Brolga* story is shared, they are asked to complete the *3F's* focusing on both the Emu and Brolga. It is simple, catchy and very clear. The overall response to the 3F's approach is positive and is a complimentary task to other learning outcomes and routine. The *3F's* activity can be undertaken in groups or individually and participants will often choose to add their *3F's* research onto the artwork or craft they have created from the story in the *Record* section of *S.E.C.D.R.R.R*. Additionally, some choose to create an information corner in the learning space that is an amalgamation of all the research uncovered by all and placed with selected or combined artworks from the previous session. It creates a repository of story and a learning hub in the corner of their *ngurra.*

The *3F's* model became extremely useful when I was engaged by a number of schools as a cultural educator during the two home-schooling phases of the COVID19 pandemic. They were integral in structuring and guiding learners through the *'Story Time with Mr Newham'* videos and worksheets, see *Part 6 - APPENDIX: S.E.C.D.R.R.R Resources* in this paper. These worksheets were developed to cover all learning stages during this period.

R - Recount

The power of retelling stories

There is a skill and art to being a storyteller. There are deep ancient protocols and rules associated with Aboriginal storytelling. We are taught by our Traditional Knowledge Holders, our Elders, that story sits in and with Country and everything in our Country has a story (Gordon et al, 2020). When we are retelling any Traditional story or giving a recount of an event or experience, it is essential to ensure details are true and the context is accurate. Another highly important process to storytelling is having the awareness and humility to understand that before you can share or retell any ngurrampaa story, it needs to sit with you and grow in spirit first (Neidjie 1985 & 1989).

As mentioned earlier in this paper, one of the crucial cultural protocols regarding storytelling shared by Djummu Paul Gordon, is before you consider retelling one of our

Old Aboriginal stories, one must first feel and connect with the story, and deeply understand the Lore and lessons within that story. This can only truly and authentically happen when you sit with that story. Just as 'Big' Bill Neidjie says:

"This story e coming through your body, e go right down foot and head finger nail and blood…through the heart and e can feel it because e'll come right through" (Story About Feeling, 1989, p.1).

This is a point always reinforced with learners and other educators undertaking *S.E.C.D.R.R.R.* That is, with every story being shared with a group, a strong connection has been built and permission granted to retell that respective story, always. Additionally, as a result of upholding these protocols, there also exists a clear understanding of the themes, lessons and Lore of these stories. Just as importantly, those that participate in my *S.E.C.D.R.R.R* sessions understand that I live my life by these stories and the teachings.

Participants are supported to better understand that we have a responsibility to respect other people's stories and not retell them without permission. If we do have permission to tell their story, we do so honestly, in context and without change. Furthermore, participants are encouraged to think about and practice the ancient cultural tradition of being patient, listening when people are talking, and be mindful that we do not always need to speak. These are in short supply in this western world of ours today…the practice and power of silence and listening. This skill of silence is a central component to Aboriginal ways of learning and as such assists Aboriginal people to be far more comfortable sitting with and in silence, *"Aboriginal people to this day are very comfortable with silence"* (Callaghan and Gordon, 2022, p.134).

Today we are often rewarded for being the loudest, talking the most, and interrupting others when they are speaking is apparently a leadership trait. One only needs to watch question time in our Federal Parliament in Australia to witness the behaviour of our so-called leaders. They are rude, arrogant, closed-off to alternative ideas or thinking and so disrespectful in the manner they conduct themselves during this parliamentary process. It is a disgrace, and a monumental display of arrogance and stupidity, yet these people are entrusted with leading our nation, making decisions that impact us all, and get paid very well to do so (Callaghan and Gordon, 2014 & 2022; Gordon, 2023).

Interrupting others is one of my most loathed personal traits. Our Elders would not behave like this nor accept this from anyone else in their company. We have learned from our Elders that in fact sitting in silence can be more powerful and can often provide more profound moments as compared to sitting and always speaking. If only our so-called

leaders today could understand just how much we can learn from being silent and listening to Country and people (Gordon et al, 2020; Gordon, 2023).

There is a great passage regarding the power of silence from Lakota Dakota (Sioux) educator, anthropologist, ethnographer and linguist, Ella Cara Deloria (aka Anpetu Waste Win, 1889-1971) when she recited Lakota narrative on “silence” (Deer Women and Elk Men: Lakota Narratives of Ella Deloria, in Hoilman, 1994):

“We Indians know about silence. We are not afraid of it. In fact, for us, silence is more powerful than words. Our Elders were trained in the ways of silence, and they handed over this knowledge to us. Observe, listen, and then act, they would tell us. That was the manner of living. With you, it is just the opposite. You learn by talking. You reward the children who talk the most at school. In your parties, you all try to talk at the same time. In your work, you are always having meetings in which everybody interrupts everybody and talk five, ten or a hundred times. And you call that ‘solving a problem’. When you are in a room and there is silence, you get nervous. You must fill the space with sounds. So, you talk compulsively, even before you know what you are going to say.

White people love to discuss. They don’t even allow the other person to finish a sentence. They always interrupt. For us Indians, this looks like bad manner or even stupidity. If you start talking, I’m not going to interrupt you. I will listen. Maybe I’ll stop listening if I don’t like what you are saying, but I won’t interrupt you. When you finish speaking, I’ll make up my mind about what you said, but I will not tell you I don’t agree unless it is important. Otherwise, I’ll just keep quiet and I’ll go away. You have told me all I need to know. There is no more to be said. But this is not enough for white people.

People should regard their words as seeds. They should sow them, and then allow them to grow in silence. Our Elders taught us that the earth is always talking to us, but we should keep silent in order to hear her. There are many voices besides ours. Many voices…” Anpetu Waste Win (aka Ella Cara Deloria) 1889-1971.

Another powerful aspect of retelling our ancient stories is that it helps the narrator remember the story and the feelings connected to it. This is a process known and utilised by ‘Indigenous’ peoples across the globe (Iseke, 2013). Many of the stories shared with participants have not been recorded or written down anywhere, they exist in spirit and in my memory. And, as I have mentioned in previous pages, when I retell these stories, it feels like I am simply giving an eye witness account of the story as it once happened. It transports me to that time and event, feeling like I am actually there in the story.

***Recount* in action**

Once the craft/artwork, writing and research activities have been completed in previous *S.E.C.D.R.R.R* sessions, on my return, selected participants do a recount of their story and work. If the recount session is occurring in a school, learners are asked to chin it (put their work under their chin and explain/read their story and or facts). *Recount* is another important literacy aspect of *S.E.C.D.R.R.R*. Having participants recount or read their stories and explain their artwork to the group offers further opportunities to strengthen their reading, public speaking and confidence with literacy. The learning space is generally a safer and more comfortable environment to undertake these activities. Participants hearing my own personal stories regarding literacy challenges also assists in creating a safer and inclusive learning environment.

As a result of building strong relationships with groups and participants that I regular engage, I share my own personal stories with the battle and challenges I faced with my reading, spelling and public speaking at their similar ages. As discussed in my acknowledgement, as a learner I had great difficulties navigating these areas of education during primary school. These challenges resulted in being well below the average literacy standards of my fellow classmates and remained the case until the end of Year 8 in High School.

Importantly, it is explained to the group that I made a conscious decision to change this story, share the steps I took to make this change take place, and importantly identify that there were key people in and out of school that supported me during this period. It is humbling yet interesting to note that, when first hearing this story, many are surprised to hear of my struggles. However, they soon change that opinion when, as a group we delve deeper into this part of my story and they can hear and feel the challenges, pain and hard work I undertook to positively change this story.

Despite it still being a little uncomfortable at times sharing this story with others, it is rewarding to share the triumph in this story, and also explain that the positive changes did not happen magically. I ensure that participants clearly understand that a huge reason why I succeeded in positively changing this literacy story, was the incredible support I received from others during these challenging times, balanced with my determination to be better.

It is important for learners to understand that the people who supported me were instrumental and that they genuinely cared and wished to see improvement. There is an important connection to be made here for all participants. That is the recognition and awareness of those in their *ngurampaa*, their camp world, who want the best for them

and wish to see them do better in their education and more broadly in their life. I ask participants to respect the time and energy these people are offering to support them and that it's important to work with them, not against them.

Pt. 6.3 - *S.E.C.D.R.R.R* as an online learning tool

The *Why*

As stated earlier, the notion and impact of storytelling can transcend differing modes or delivery. The power of storytelling, from a Traditional Aboriginal perspective, rests in the feeling or spirit of the story and the storyteller. Acclaimed Cultural Knowledge holder and Senior Loreman of the Kakadu region, 'Big' Bill Neidjie authored a book entirely dedicated to this notion of feeling. In this book, 'Big Bill', shares with us the power and spirit of storytelling, and how he believed that even when reading a book, the story still possess feeling and spirit (Neidjie, 1989). This notion, and understanding of feeling or spirit in story became evident when utilising *S.E.C.D.R.R.R* during the COVID19 pandemic and the subsequent impacts on education across NSW and Australia.

As a result of the global COVID19 pandemic and its impact across Australia, two large blocks of home-schooling periods were mandated in NSW. The first being in 2020 and then again in 2021. During these home schooling periods, educators alike were required to learn on the run and adapt many new skills and associated educational plans, in conjunction with tried and tested approaches, to ensure participants remained on-track educationally. As an *Aboriginal Cultural Education Mentor* (ACEM) it was humbling and fortunate that during these periods my services were requested and I continued delivering *S.E.C.D.R.R.R* and connected cultural education programs. This played a role to support a maintain commitment to Aboriginal Education, culture, learners and utilised my experience and services to lead this commitment. So, like many of my Ancestors before, this meant I needed to adapt, adjust, be fluid and in-tune with the circumstances, the environment and situation around me.

Ultimately this meant that the new approach for *S.E.C.D.R.R.R* was to also take it online aiding participants to still be engaged, connected to and learning cultural education. This approach was not a decision made lightly, and for two key reasons: concerns regarding the culturally appropriateness and integrity of recorded/online delivery; and concerns regarding my/our Indigenous Cultural and Intellectual Property (ICIP) protections. Putting it bluntly, I was concerned with having our stories and knowledge stolen and/or misappropriated (Arts Law Centre of Australia, 2022).

Further consultation and engagement with key education executives and clear advice from significant cultural mentors and senior Traditional Knowledge Holders took place. The result was the establishment of several robust and non-negotiable cultural protocols and requirements to facilitate and strengthen my online home-schooling cultural education program, relevant for each learning group. This also demonstrated the power and positive impacts of developing respectful, genuine and balanced relationships that allowed an appropriate and impactful outcome to be achieved for key stakeholders.

Skills in developing, maintaining and understanding genuine, healthy, obligational-based relationship approaches are taught to us through our Lore. This Lore also teaches us to view the world from a place of responsibility and obligation, giving, sharing, caring and recognising our commonality, not our differences (Callaghan and Gordon, 2022). So, it was not difficult to reach these agreements and work to develop a slightly adjusted format for *S.E.C.D.R.R.R* and ensure I was still fulfilling all my obligations and responsibilities to people and place.

The *How*

With clear protocols and new procedures in place for my online cultural education sessions, it was time to take action, get the resources developed and activate the supporting technology. With the vital support of staff from two educational institutions, we utilised the online conferencing and educational technology of *Zoom* and *Google Classroom*. This technology was utilised to support a clutch of short videos taken of me sharing ngurrampaa stories, accompanied by scaffolded, learner specific and national curriculum aligned worksheets uploaded for each story (ACRA, 2022). These videos were filmed and edited on location each week. In a sign of collaborative education and generous sharing of resources, all participants and educators of each group I was working with were given permission to access these videos each week.

The *What*

While the hero of these online sessions most definitely was the Traditional stories each week, recorded or told live, I recognise that the supporting worksheets I developed also allowed all aspects of *S.E.C.D.R.R.R* to be implemented. To add further insights to these worksheets I have provide several examples of their format. I chose to keep them uncomplicated, connected, impactful and appropriate, as a way of honouring the manner in which our Ancestors also shared knowledge. For examples of these *S.E.C.D.R.R.R* worksheets, see Part 9 - *S.E.C.D.R.R.R* and Home Learning Resources.

The eight example *S.E.C.D.R.R.R* worksheets for this paper provide an insight to the approach taken with the worksheets. Despite each week delivering a different story and content, worksheet format, questions and tasks still remained in a similar structure. At times variation occurred with the *Extension* tasks in some worksheets. There was also a requirement to develop two worksheets each week for each ngurrampaa story shared. This afforded a separation between the different educational stages of learning for each group. In a school sense, this was a worksheet for Kindergarten to Year 2, and then a worksheet for Year 3 to Year 6 learners.

The *Result*

The roll-out of my cultural education sessions, supported by *S.E.C.D.R.R.R*, continued without too many hitches or challenges and received highly positive feedback from educators, participants and families from each group. So, just as 'Big Bill' had told us decades ago (Neidjie, 1989) in his book, sharing story with feeling and spirit is a key component, even if done via a book or in this case, online and supported by worksheets.

The online version of *S.E.C.D.R.R.R* still maintained the links to the Australian Professional Teaching Standards as per any of the in-school delivery I undertake. Whilst for some groups, my weekly on-line cultural education sessions became their main and only approach to ensuring 'Indigenous' perspectives were still being shared each week to participants:

"The work Dave [Mr Newham] did during the home schooling periods, with his weekly storytelling videos and worksheets, was enormous. It meant we were still able to receive valuable 'Aboriginal' perspectives in the learning whilst at home. Without this, we all would have missed out". (Personal communication, requested feedback, ACEM role, School Aboriginal Education Officer, Lake Macquarie, NSW, 2022).

During this time, it was humbling to hear feedback from staff regarding my activities of weekly storytelling videos and related worksheets. Many shared that each week my lessons were completed at the highest percentage and in the quickest time frame of all their work provided. They also shared how they built much of their weekly lessons and associated activities around my videos and worksheets. Additionally, educators shared that it was a benefit having access to my storytelling-based learning tools each week as it provided a powerful and vital positive boost for learners in dealing with the challenges of both home-schooling periods.

"The resources Dave [Mr Newham] provided us were so valuable. It allowed staff to mould their week around his videos and worksheets. Everyone absolutely loved his lessons and it also became a very important connection and wellbeing tool. It helped navigate the unprecedented

challenges during this period offering further positive, real, fun, engaging and dynamic educational experiences every week for our children". (Personal communication, requested feedback, ACEM role, School Principal, Newcastle, NSW, 2022).

There was positive feedback from parents and carers of learners indicating very rewarding and unexpected outcomes. During both home-schooling periods, parents and careers shared that they themselves were also learning lots of new knowledge regarding Aboriginal culture and more broadly, the natural world. Parents commented that they really enjoyed watching the videos together with their learners and found it helpful that I read through and explained all of the tasks each week. Whilst many also shared their reflections on just how little they had been taught during their schooling years regarding Aboriginal culture and history.

"…we received a lot of positive feedback from parents and carers regarding Mr Newham's videos and worksheets during this period. Many reflected on how much more they were learning, regarding Aboriginal culture, compared to their own schooling years and they also learnt more about the natural environment of Australia". (personal communication, requested feedback, Aboriginal Education Officer, Edgeworth Heights Public School, NSW, 2022).

It was uplifting, hugely rewarding and very humbling as a cultural educator to realise that the impact of my craft still held value during this difficult time. It far exceeded my expectations, especially hearing how it engaged many family members along the cultural education learning journey. It was a powerful realisation of it was having a much bigger impact on the reconciliation journey of learners, their families and the broader education sector.

"The work that Mr Newham does in connecting all people to story and culture is amazing. The respectful and engaging manner in which he undertakes his work is a testament to himself and those whom have taught him. His work as a cultural educator is a shining light for true Reconciliation by sharing story and bringing people together". (Personal communication, requested feedback, ACEM role, School Principal, Newcastle, NSW, 2022).

Even more empowering was the realisation that during this home-schooling period, I was still able to fulfill many of my cultural obligations and responsibilities. This was one of my greatest reservations at the beginning of the home-schooling period. I guess, once again, I learned to never underestimate the power of spirit, feeling, our ancient craft of storytelling and Country as teacher. In fact, on reflection, I learned never to underestimate the positive impact and sway of our Ancestral Lore and the absolute need for it in todays' world.

Pt. 6.4 - *Bulowara Ngaraliko* and the application of *S.E.C.D.R.R.R* in educational programming

Utilising the *S.E.C.D.R.R.R* model, I have developed a collaborative literacy and numeracy approach that focuses on Aboriginal learners and inclusive of their non-Aboriginal peers. It is called *Bulowara Ngaraliko (Listening and Believing 2 Ways): A Collaborative Aboriginal Literacy and Numeracy Initiative.* In the language of the Aboriginal peoples of Muloobinba/Awaba area (Newcastle/Lake Macquarie), bulowara ngaraliko represents the process of listening and believing in two ways.

The Bulowara Ngaraliko program is being undertaken by two schools in the greater Newcastle area of New South Wales, Australia, working to incorporate Aboriginal pedagogy additional to their educational context and part of their community engagement model. These schools have supported my work as an Aboriginal Cultural Education Mentor and demonstrated a stronger commitment during this period to be aligned to Traditional Aboriginal ways of learning and knowledge sharing. *Bulowarra Ngaraliko* is an addition to their standard curriculum and syllabus requirements and below is an overview of this literacy and numeracy approach.

Acknowledgement (within Bulowara Ngaraliko)

"I want to recognise and pay respect to Country, our Mother, and all that she gives us. I want to recognise and pay respect to all my ancestors and Elders who have demonstrated the notion of sharing and spirit of story since the beginning of time. I also wish to give mention to a special man, Djummu Paul Gordon. The school is to be congratulated for building genuine and open relationships across the education community that have strengthened their approaches and commitment to Aboriginal culture and education. When we build strong community and healthy relationships first, knowledge sharing can continue to take place... the right way". (Mr David Newham Aboriginal Cultural Education Mentor).

Summary

The *Bulowara Ngaraliko* initiative is a collaborative Aboriginal literacy and numeracy program currently being applied in the school setting. It was developed by myself in response to many years working as an Aboriginal Cultural Education Mentor in many different education settings. It is designed to provide support for Aboriginal learners to achieve their potential through education. It can be delivered in schools as an extra curricula activity, but also in community and other learning settings.

Bulowara Ngaraliko aims to support equality of learning outcomes for Aboriginal participants using new and innovative approaches that accesses proven Traditional ways of learning. This is built around ancient Aboriginal storytelling techniques supporting the lifelong learning approach of Aboriginal Lore. All participants are given the opportunity to gain a clearer understanding of the true history of the lands on which they live and grow a deeper connection to Country through this process.

This initiative is an acknowledgment of two ways of learning: Traditional Aboriginal ways of knowing, learning from this land and the stories within, and the western contemporary ways of learning and knowing. They both have their place and complement each other if given the opportunity and authentically led by the right people with the appropriate skills, experience, and knowledge. As the name *bulowara ngaraliko* suggests, its listening and believing in two ways.

It is important to recognise a crucial and deliberate structural approach taken with *Bulowara Ngaraliko.* It is built from Traditional Aboriginal ways of knowledge sharing and storytelling, while western literacy and numeracy approaches and strategies have been assembled around this framework. This reverses the methods found in almost all approaches taken regarding Aboriginal Education by the system. That is, they fit Aboriginal frameworks into western pedagogies, and it does not, nor has not, yielded good results for young Aboriginal learners in this Country (NIAA, 'Closing the Gap Report', 2019). It is this crisis in Aboriginal Education that *Bulowara Ngaraliko* seeks to address. It is ironic that these programs, which aim to support Aboriginal Education, have to be developed outside of mainstream pedagogy, and are delivered outside mainstream curricula.

The educational gaps between 'Indigenous and non 'Indigenous' learners in Australia are not closing. They are in fact widening. The key national policy created by Governments to address closing the gap, especially within the education sector, is reported as not on track. (NIAA, 'Closing the Gap Report', 2019). We continue to see challenging levels of disadvantage firmly in place for 'Indigenous' learners in Australia (Fahey, 2012; Anderson, 2012). With this in mind, we are due for a new approach and big changes (Gordon, Spillman and Wilson, 2020). Utilising the *Balowara Ngaraliko* initiative, built from the *S.E.C.D.R.R.R* model, is one such approach providing solutions from Aboriginal culture, not western deficit modelling.

Bulowara Ngaraliko - Unit Overview

We believe that all participants are entitled to rigorous, relevant, and engaging learning programs drawn from a challenging curriculum that addresses their individual learning

needs. This learning initiative recognises that the needs of all students must encompass cognitive, affective, physical, social, ecological, and aesthetic curriculum experiences. This unique unit of work provides opportunities for learners to develop understanding of and respect for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander histories, cultures, and languages. Indigenous perspectives, particularly in our classrooms and schools.

The unit follows a fortnightly cycle where participants have the opportunity to connect and engage with the ACEM through the cultural education or storytelling lessons of *S.E.C.D.R.R.R.* In these sessions participants: listen to a Traditional Aboriginal story; are guided by the ACEM to explore the story and context in their world today; experience the story through Traditional Aboriginal dance; are asked to record the story through painting, art/craft activities connected to the story; undertake research with fun facts pertaining to the story selected by the ACEM; then share with the class by retelling the story in a speaking and listening, writing and reading activity.

Bulowara Ngaraliko and the Australian Professional Standards for Teachers

The *Bulowara Ngaraliko* model was developed to align to the 'Australian Professional Standards for Teachers' (APST or the Standards). The APST are overseen by the Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership (AITSL) and inform teachers what they should be aiming to achieve at all stages of their career, inside and outside the classroom (AITSL, 2023).

The Standards are an open mandate of what comprises quality teaching and teachers. They clarify the work of teachers and set clear components of high-quality and effective teaching in our modern world. It aims to improve the educational outcomes for all students. The Standards consist of seven categories grouped into three domains of teaching, they include: Professional Knowledge, Professional Practice, and Professional Engagement (AITSL, 2023). Below is a list of the Standards that *Bulowara Ngaraliko* is aligned to:

Standard 1 - Know Students and How They Learn

1.3.4 Evaluate and revise school learning and teaching programs, using expert and community knowledge and experience, to meet the needs of students with diverse linguistic, cultural, religious and socio-economic backgrounds.

1.4.4 Develop teaching programs that support equitable and ongoing participation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students by engaging in collaborative relationships with community representatives and parents/carers.

Standard 2 - Know Content and How to Teach It

2.4.4 Lead initiatives to assist colleagues with opportunities for students to develop understanding of and respect for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander histories, cultures and languages.

Standard 7 - Engage Professionally with Colleagues, Parents/Carers and the Community

7.4.4 Take a leadership role in professional and community networks and support the involvement of colleagues in external learning opportunities.

Part 7.
S.E.C.D.R.R.R, Cultural Literacy and Authenticity of Cultural Knowledge

Earlier in this thesis the term cultural literacy was introduced and its fundamental connection with the *S.E.C.D.R.R.R* model. The strength of my cultural literacy is foundational from my relationship with Aboriginal Lore and connected practices. It is an essential aspect of securing and assuring the effectiveness, power, impact, and cultural appropriateness of this Ancient Aboriginal pedagogy. However, much of the past and ongoing theorising, research and associated discourse of the cultural literacy construct is not aligned to my view and understanding of this concept.

For cultural literacy to be a far more appropriate fit in relation to my cultural education and consultancy work, I have elected to redefine and reconceptualise the term and thinking. However, before I expand on this new idea, it is essential to explore the original concept of cultural literacy. I will take a brief look at its beginnings and the plethora of discourse that has formed its' current standpoint.

Pt. 7.1 - Cultural Literacy

The concept of cultural literacy is accredited to the extensive works of celebrated American educator and literary critic, Dr. Eric Donald Hirsch Jnr. (b.1928).

The term specifically emerged from Hirsch's far-reaching research in the education and literacy space (Hirsch 1980, 1983, 1985 & 1987; Hirsch et al, 2002). It was his specific focus in considering both culture and literacy, in the education paradigm, that led to his journal article of the same title, *Culture and Literacy* in 1980. This paper offered vital momentum to his emerging theory and several years later he published *Cultural Literacy* in the American Scholar (Hirsch, 1983). Then in releasing his highly acclaimed book *Cultural Literacy* in 1987, Hirsch firmly placed the term across scholarly circles of North America, Europe and beyond (Paul, 1991; Shamshayooadeh, 2011).

In its simplest terms, Hirsch views cultural literacy as the idea or notion that reading comprehension needs to not just hold decoding skills, but also contain a wide scope of background information or knowledge (Gibbon, 2016; Reedy, 2007; Hirsch, 1987). It is this background knowledge that, according to Hirsch's theory, enables a person with good cultural literacy to understand the traditions or activities, beliefs, combined with history, of a group of people from any given culture. This sounds like an inclusive approach to

education; however, over the years Hirsch has provided contrary thinking to this and other educational approaches (Paul, 1991; Gibbon, 2016).

Hirsch's contradictory ideals and thinking over the years in his educational and literacy works are intriguing. He supports democratic education, social justice, civil rights and the advancement of minority learners to close the educational gap. Yet Hirsch strongly advocated Americanisation; nationalism; assimilation; tyrant approaches to education; and criticised the emergence of romanticised structures to education (Hirsch, 1987; Reedy, 2007: Gibbon, 2016). Furthermore, Hirsch acknowledged the need to understand peoples' story and backgrounds to improve literacy, with a focus on common knowledge that brings people together. Yet he also pushed for education that is strict, impersonable and less individualised, with standardised testing. In an American context, Hirsch has been viewed both as a conservative and a liberal (Reedy, 2007; Gibbon, 2017).

I have elected to focus on Hirsch's cultural literacy mechanisms that support an understanding of Traditions or activities, beliefs, combined with history, of a group of people from any given culture. This cultural literacy notion has become even more significant today considering the rapidly globalised world we live in (Shliakhovchuk, 2021).

As a result of this fast-paced globalised trajectory of our world, we continue to interact with many more cultures and peoples from different backgrounds and world views, than any other time in the worlds history. Many commentators and researchers believe that with this globalised nature of our world today, cultural literacy has become hugely important and a must have (Zadja, 2009; Santoro, 2015; Hajisoteriou et al, 2016; Salo-Lee, 2007; Flavell et al, 2013; Ochoa et al, 2018).

Other scholars hold strong views that cultural literacy is critical in developing the skills of higher education graduates to navigate multiple disciplines and cultures effectively and appropriately, (Brossard and Harnes, 2020; Halbert and Chigeza, 2015; Ochoa, McDonald, and Monk, 2016). Additional research suggests that cultural literacy should in fact be the standard practice in higher education institutions (Palfreyman, 2007; Trahar, 2010; Ochoa and McDonald, 2019) and seen as a threshold concept (see Meyer and Land, 2003 & 2006; Cousin, 2006).

Furthermore, there has been extensive work undertaken exploring the position, importance, and levels of cultural literacy, intercultural education, or cultural diversity, of educators and the broader education sector (Flemming, 2009; Palaiologou et al., 2017; Coulby, 2006, 2011 & 2019; Vass, 2017; Hilferty, 2008; Hickling-Hudson, 2004; Maged, 2014). Much of this specific research has highlighted a vital need for all involved in the education and training sector to develop stronger levels of cultural literacy and capability

beyond their own, then place this centrally in their pedagogical practice (Allard and Santoro, 2006; Mills and Ballantyne, 2010; Santoro, 2009).

The research Hirsch did on cultural literacy was vast, groundbreaking, thought provoking and a change agent in educational theory and discourse. This is evident by the subsequent research and review of his studies becoming far greater than his original body of work. Some of this research includes: Smith 1989; Sledd and Sledd, 1989; Paul, 1991; Mullican, 1991; Macedo, 1999; Heyward, 2002; Shamshayooadeh, 2011; Flavell, Thackrah and Hoffman, 2013; Gibbon, 2016 & 2017; Maine, Cook and Lähdesmäki, 2019; Ochoa and McDonald, 2019; Shliakhovchuk, 2021.

However, in recognising the scope of this thesis, I need to shift focus toward explaining the redefining and reconceptualisation of Hirsch's cultural literacy term and its inextricable relationship with the *S.E.C.D.R.R.R* model.

Pt. 7.2 - Reconceptualising Cultural Literacy

Colonisation and Cultural Literacy

Before expanding on my reconceptualising of cultural literacy and the following discussions, it is imperative to absolutely acknowledge and recognise, based off extensive historical evidence and personal accounts (HREOC, 1997), a very dark and shameful side to the history of this country we now call Australia. This history universally dismantled and poisoned the inherited and Ancient cultural of a whole people. All 'Indigenous' peoples and families of Australia have been and continue to be, enormously compressed by the insidious and shameful processes of colonisation in this country. In particular, the 'protection era' was catastrophically destructive as it executed heinous acts of cultural genocide. This happened to such an extent, that it sadly rebirthed a group of 'Indigenous' peoples in Australia referred to as the '*stolen generations'* (Read,1998; HREOC 1997).

So, it is with this heavy knowledge and an understanding of my own family connection to this history, that I write measured, considered and cautious words, balanced with honest reflections and shared experiences pertaining to my new concept of cultural literacy. Especially in the coming paragraphs and pages regarding the authenticity of Traditional cultural knowledge held by Aboriginal people operating as cultural educators, consultants or similar.

I also wish to note that, I do not have the scope in this thesis to undertake the necessary and appropriate in-depth examination of colonisation and its destructive relationship to cultural literacy for Aboriginal peoples of this country.

Reconceptualising Cultural Literacy

From my inquiry, the research and discourse on cultural literacy and connected concepts, whether in agreeance with Hirsch's original theory or not, clearly provides an inter-cultural understanding and utilisation. That is, it focuses more on the level of understanding and capability someone possess regarding another person or groups culture, world views, or traditions, different to their own or that of the dominant culture. However, my approach in reviewing cultural literacy is situated from the reverse; an intra-cultural perspective. Or, viewing the level of understanding and capability one possesses regarding their own culture, world view or Traditions. In the context of this thesis and the *S.E.C.D.R.R.R model*, I am referring to the cultural literacy held by Aboriginal peoples of Australia.

More explicitly, in reconceptualising cultural literacy framed within the *S.E.C.D.R.R.R* model, I am defining the level of Traditional cultural knowledge held by Aboriginal ('Indigenous') peoples operating as cultural educators/trainers, cultural consultants or similar in Australia. Furthermore, I propose that the standing of this cultural literacy is attached to the level of knowledge acquired authentically and in ways that observe the myriad of cultural protocols existent in Ancient Aboriginal epistemology and pedological structures. Additionally, I suggest that establishing a high level of cultural literacy is inseparable to the credibility, accuracy and legitimacy of any existing Traditional Aboriginal cultural knowledge.

Some researchers suggest (Shliakhovchuk, 2021; Grant and Portera, 2017; Stein 2021) that in fact, there is an urgent need for a renewed model of cultural literacy and reimagining of education that brings an age of increased care, social responsibility, unity and outward thinking. One that operates as a formidable mechanism for navigating the challenges of a world that has become far more complex, volatile, unassured and confusing than ever before. I propose that *S.E.C.D.R.R.R* and my reconceptualising of cultural literacy, is one such renewed model.

Pt. 7.3 - Cultural Literacy: Authenticity of Cultural Knowledge

Possessing a strong level of cultural literacy is an extremely inseparable and fundamental element of *S.E.C.D.R.R.R*. It is a huge responsibility for me as a cultural education mentor. Cultural literacy is paramount and speaks directly to the authenticity and

legitimacy of this work. However, simultaneously this work presents ever increasing challenges that are complex, delicate, profoundly problematic and fast growing. For this reason, in the following pages, I expand on some of these challenges connected to my concept of cultural literacy.

Over the past decade or more there has been a significant influx in demand and interest regarding Ancient Aboriginal cultural knowledges and associated practices across Australia. The education and training sector is one of these areas. There are several key factors driving this, including but not limited to, the resurgence of *Reconciliation* as a political philosophy. Coinciding with this reconciliation resurgence has been a sturdier move by many organisations to either create or strengthen a related Reconciliation Action Plan (RAP) or similar (Reconciliation Australia, 2022).

More recently, the *Black Lives Matter* (BLM) movement and association with the ongoing and appalling Aboriginal Deaths in Custody statistics in this country, has drawn stronger focus and attention to the lack of awareness and understanding of 'Indigenous' issues in Australia and the true history of this country. As such, many Australians have made attempts, or hold a desire, to address their lack of knowledge and seek opportunities to correct this.

Furthermore, recently (October, 14, 2023) we as a country we were asked to vote in *The Voice* referendum. This too brought an increase in the need for some non-Indigenous Australians to ask more questions pertaining to 'Aboriginal' Australia. Their inquiry has also included a want to understand more about Traditional Aboriginal culture and knowledges and/or the impacts of colonisation on 'Indigenous' peoples in Australia. The referendum has now concluded. I will make some brief clarifications regarding *The Voice* referendum below and nothing further.

In the Voice Referendum we were being asked as a nation to vote *'Yes'* or *'No'* to the creation of a new chapter in Australia's Constitution, specifically; *Chapter IX-Recognition of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples to the Constitution.* (Australian Electoral Commission, Referendum 2023, at: https://www.aec.gov.au/referendums/learn/the-question.html). This chapter would include a new section, '*129 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Voice'* (AEC, 2023). During the campaigning process, we witnessed horrendous amounts of misinformation, lies, the spreading of hate, racist ideology, and biased ill-informed opinions. Sadly, as expected, an enormous amount of cultural load was placed upon Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples by mainstream Australia.

To clarify, *The Voice* referendum was asking us to vote on three points, shared below as stated directly from the Australian Electoral Commission website (Referendum, 2023):

129 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Voice:

In recognition of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples as the First Peoples of Australia:

i. *there shall be a body, to be called the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Voice;*
ii. *the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Voice may make representations to the Parliament and the Executive Government of the Commonwealth on matters relating to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples;*
iii. *the Parliament shall, subject to this Constitution, have power to make laws with respect to matters relating to the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Voice, including its composition, functions, powers and procedures.*

A broad influx in demands for Aboriginal cultural knowledge has also been reflected in the education sector. This is especially the case in NSW where I focus much of my cultural education work. To the credit of the education sector, many institutions are looking to seek out individuals or organisations from the Aboriginal community that hold this Old cultural knowledge. They are pursuing support and guidance in the work to place Traditional Aboriginal cultural knowledge into their learning spaces. More common terms used to describe this approach in the education sector include, 'Indigenising' the curriculum or embedding 'Indigenous' perspectives into the syllabus. Over the past 10 years especially, I have witnessed, both as a parent of two Aboriginal learners and as an Aboriginal cultural educator, a positive shift in this direction. However, it presents concerns and challenges regarding the level of cultural literacy of those educational institutions engage from the Aboriginal community and the authenticity of their cultural knowledge (Gordon, 2023).

The harsh reality of these increasing demands on Aboriginal cultural knowledge speaks directly to the challenges and importance of seeking Aboriginal cultural educators that hold strong cultural literacy. That is, ensuring that individuals or groups being engaged are authentically connected to Traditional Aboriginal cultural knowledge and practice. Several questions need to be asked at this point: where does their cultural knowledge originate, is it accurate; do they hold relationship to Country from where the cultural knowledge and/or story exists; have these individuals connected authentically with Traditional Knowledge Holders; do they have permission to pass-on the Traditional knowledge shared with them.

Even larger and more complex question arise when we consider who is best placed to make the assessment of the held cultural literacy of cultural consultants or cultural educators? And how do non-Indigenous institutions or organisations ensure the cultural

literacy of the cultural consultants or educators they engage? These huge issues can be reframed essentially as questions centred on quality assurance and associated processes. I reflect on these issues briefly in **Part 8 - Conclusion** of this thesis as they are highly important question to raise and challenges to test. I recognise it is highly contentious and a can of worms, one well beyond the scope of this project and therefore will not delve into any deeper.

Another challenge is the large disparity between the increase in demand for strong cultural literacy and those that can authentically deliver this from our community. This is hugely problematic, and as mentioned previously, a direct impact of colonisation. However, with this influx of demand, there are members of the local Aboriginal community that have stepped into this cultural education realm with limited knowledge, understanding and/or experience. With this situation, a raft of complicated and demanding issues drifting along with this.

From my experiences and research, these challenges can include; a complete misunderstanding of the relationship and connection between our Lore, our stories and the harmony that once existed between all tribal groups in Australia; perpetuating myths regarding our Traditional cultural practices, such as men didn't weave or women didn't do smoking ceremonies; an unwillingness to work collaboratively with other cultural educators, demonstrating a *we're in competition approach* with others; sharing misleading and culturally inaccurate knowledge.

At times these cultural consultants operate destructively and in total contradiction to the very knowledge or lessons they are passing on, such as respect and humility. They are not working from a place of sharing, giving-back, walking with others, growing relationships, and remaining humble. Rather, working from a place of cashing in, always taking, greed, and at times demonstrating a large level ego and arrogance Gordon, (2018, 2021 & 2023).

Another complex issue experienced within the cultural literacy paradigm, is the practice by some cultural consultants and educators (or similar) to Christianise Traditional cultural knowledge and Lore. And they do so to its detriment. Before I go further, I reference the following story shared numerous times by Djummu Paul Gordon associated to this point.

On many cultural immersion sessions and camps, he explains that our Lore and the holders of this have always demonstrated a natural openness and willingness to accept other peoples' stories or versions of stories different to their own. That in fact is an important part of Lore (Callaghan and Gordon, 2022; Gordon, 2023). It is based on an important mentality of, little bit different but same, and its integral to this belief. The key

to accepting other peoples' stories in the Lore structure is simple yet deep. A new story can be accepted if it does not diminish or take away from the Lore. It is especially important that these new stories or beliefs do not harm Country. However, if other peoples' stories or beliefs contradict, devalue or diminish Lore, or damage our Country, it cannot sit or exist within this Ancient system (Neidjie, 1985; Gordon, 2023).

I share with permission, Djummu's own experiences to illustrate the openness of accepting other beliefs within Lore. As a young Lore man Djummu had the relationships and opportunity to sit with Traditional Knowledge Holders in Central Australia in the early 1980's. On the first Saturday during their secret men's business, the Old Men informed the others that Ceremony would be paused so they could all travel back into town the next day to observe, what they called, *Jesus day*. This approach was not a one-off occurrence, it took place every Sunday during Ceremony (Gordon, 2023).

Having grown up around and with one of the largest inland Aboriginal Missions in Australia as a child (Brewarrina Aboriginal Inland Mission), Djummu had witnessed and experienced personally the destruction to Lore and cultural practice by Christianity and the practices of the religious based mission. Djummu was confused and unsettled by the instruction to pause Ceremony. He respectfully inquired with his old Grandfather why they were pausing for this *Jesus day*. He was then calmly told by that Old man: *that Jesus story, he a good one and it can fit into our Lore. He's a healer, a special fulla, he cares for his people and preaches love. It's a good story* [sic] (Gordon, 2023). Powerful, humble and an inclusive view from that Old Man.

To clarify the point regarding the challenges with some that Christianise cultural content, the concern and issue is not Christianity itself. Rather, the fact that these cultural consultants or educators incorrectly intertwine Christian views into Ancient cultural knowledge that contradicts, devalues, and diminishes Lore. Frustratingly, I have experienced this particular issue regarding a planned Traditional Smoking Ceremony in a local Christian College. However, that is a story for another time and also well beyond the scope of this project.

It is not easy writing about these cultural literacy challenges, and wish this wasn't my experience. I have attempted to be subjective, cautious, and steer away from being negative. Also, I am careful to avoid committing lateral violence, an insidious syndrome of colonisation and one I loaf. As a recipient of lateral violence on too many occasions from our own mob, I am acutely aware of its detrimental impacts on the health and wellbeing of those on the receiving end. It is also of upmost importance for me to always recognise my own story and cultural identity journey, as shared in this paper. I

acknowledge this story and share that I did not always have Traditional cultural knowledge and connection to our Old ways, or a strong cultural literacy.

However, simultaneously, I also need to recognise and humbly identify that it has been a very long and arduous path to gain the levels of cultural literacy I hold. In fact, it's been several decades of looking, listening and learning from both Traditional and contemporary mechanisms of cultural knowledge and upholding my responsibilities and obligations as a practicing cultural man of Lore. And that point is abundantly clear to me and this journey has placed me in the position I am today as a cultural educator. I hold an authentic and stronger connection to the cultural literacy standpoint. And for that I will be eternally grateful.

In navigating these complex and challenging issues with cultural literacy, I once again reflect upon the teachings of Djummu Paul Gordon and our Lore. Djummu encourages and demonstrates to us often, the importance of raising difficult conversations, especially shining a light on issues that poignant and principal to improving our wellbeing. In that way, the practices and claims of some across our community in relation to their cultural literacy need to be raised. I speak this authentically and in truth from reflecting on my experiences and research, along with that of many other cultural peers who have had similar, if not worse, experiences in this cultural education/mentor space.

However, before expanding on this any further, it is important to acknowledge and briefly mention a poignant and associated factor to this issue. The pressures placed upon the local Aboriginal community regarding the pursuit of cultural knowledge by non-Indigenous institutions and organisation, and individuals in Australia.

Cultural Load: Cultural Literacy Pressures

It is crucial to acknowledge today there is an unhealthy and unrealistic amount of pressure and expectation placed upon many local Aboriginal community members to firstly possess a level of Traditional cultural knowledge and then be willing to share. This is also an aspect of the cultural load challenge for the Aboriginal community, briefly discussed in my conclusion. Additional challenges to cultural load are the burdensome colonial intitled attitudes of non-Indigenous Australians thinking that Aboriginal peoples will share knowledge free of charge and/or in their own time. When there is a budget allocated to sourcing Aboriginal cultural knowledge, these mainstream entities proceed to dictate what fees or costs should be charged by the Aboriginal community member and knowledge holder being engaged.

Having experienced this myself on many occasions, I use the following analogy (or similar) to once again, under cultural load, take time to educate the ignorant. I explain that for me, this experience is no different to engaging a specialised builder to renovate your dwelling, then proceeding to tell that specialist how much they should charge and what their skills, experience and time is worth, despite that person having zero to little expertise in that field themselves.

These experiences are common, they're unreasonable, demanding, entitled and add destructive pressures, especially during cultural education mentor work. It is frustrating, draining, uninformed, lacks awareness of the impacts of colonisation for all our mob, and can quickly take a toll on the individual or many families. Furthermore, I have also witnessed on many occasions, members of the local Aboriginal community being placed in comprising, challenging and uncomfortable connected situations.

In these situations, Aboriginal community have to navigate the coercion of providing some level of cultural knowledge to an individual or group, appeasing these demands of mainstream operating in a culturally contradictive manner, dominated by a mentality of *I need it now*, and therefore *I must know now.* To this extent, the challenges of cultural load and this mentality of, you must tell me, led me to coin the phrase and acronym to explain this culturally out-of-step syndrome that many mainstream practitioners and broader society subscribe. I refer to this as the *A.T.M*, (automatic "telling" machine) syndrome (Newham and Kember, 2023). And when I say A.T.M, I am referring to the one associated with the banking and financial sector.

The *A.T.M* syndrome explains the developed phenomena of today's mainstream society in Australia automatically expecting that Aboriginal peoples will tell or impart with them Traditional knowledge or specific cultural information that they require and request. These inquiries or requests are often devoid of observing or understanding the profound obligations and responsibilities attached to sharing of knowledge. Nor does it consider the Ancient cultural protocols, modern cultural etiquettes and expectations of the Aboriginal community regarding knowledge acquisition and sharing.

In 2023, at the 'Planning Institute of Australia' (PIA) NSW Annual Conference held in Newcastle (NSW), I co-delivered a session discussing the impacts and causes of cultural load within the infrastructure and planning sector. One of the points we discussed focused on the syndrome of an *A.T.M* mentality, how it contravenes cultural protocols and adds weight to the expanding issue of cultural load (Newham and Kember, 2023). On a deeper level, the *A.T.M* mentality continues the colonial syndrome of our modern mainstream society, where the above-all-others attitude of whiteness and its reasoning, or Eurocentric thinking thrives (Rose and Kalathil, 2019; Crowley and Smith 2015).

Mainstream “white” society and all its tentacles, hold incredible levels of perceived and real entitlement and privilege. These attitudes stem from and maintain white dominant culture in this country and across the globe (McIntosh, 1989, 1990; Sullivan, 2006; Bhopal, 2023). There is a plethora of research and supporting papers regarding the theory of white privilege and entitlement, hegemonic systems that protect white identities, the toxicity of white supremacy, and the specific impact this has within employment and education realms (Ansley, 1997; Giroux, 1997; Carangio et al., 2021; Munroe, 2010; Solomon, 2007; Sullivan, 2006; Cabrera, 2017; Crowley and Smith, 2020; Bhopal, 2023).

Sadly, this mainstream paradigm of cultural load and an associated *A.T.M* mentality also weighs heavily on many Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander (‘Indigenous’) learners during their educational experiences. Additionally, damaging stereotypes, generalisations and assumptions can be placed upon those learners, particularly on their cultural identity or Aboriginality. Some of these assumptions and stereotypes include: Aboriginal learners will know their Traditional cultural group or family; they hold a level of cultural knowledge or experiences; all Aboriginal learners will want to participate in culturally based activities or programs. These attitudes are ill-informed, generalised and lack cultural awareness and sensitivity. Below is a personal experience of one such assumption made by my youngest sons’ school. I refer to him as JJ in the account below:

During his final years at the local primary school (Stage 3), JJ chose to withdraw from the school Aboriginal Dance Group. As context, I had worked previously as an Aboriginal Cultural Education Mentor in this school while both JJ and his older Brother (KJP) were attending. I maintained good relationships across the school afterwards. JJ had been a member of the dance group in past years. So too had his older Brother, KJP, during his time at the same school. Also, for additional context, JJ was very familiar with Traditional Aboriginal dance outside of the school community, having performed with myself and his cultural Uncles on many occasions at gigs and in large community Corroborees over many years. JJ was also well aware that I helped establish the first school Aboriginal Dance Group at this school and was the original dance teacher for a couple of years prior. None the less, JJ made his choice to withdraw and stuck with that. Curiously, the school felt it important to specifically speak to me about JJ’s decision re the dance group, and felt the need to comment that “they were very surprised by the decision”. They made the assumption that JJ would naturally want to remain in the dance group. Wrong! I had an inkling as to the reasons behind that decision, and seemingly unlike the school, I decided to ask JJ why! Interestingly, and as I thought, when asked why he hadn’t rejoined the group, JJ casually and confidentially replied; *“Dad, the dance group always practices at lunch time, and all my mates play soccer then, I’d rather hang with them”*. End of story!

These points and the story above can be a tricky and complicated paradigm. One that itself needs further discussion outside of this Masters. I now wish to return to my earlier discussion regarding cultural literacy and share another in depth yarn pertaining to this.

Cultural Literacy Challenges: Shared Experiences

Earlier in 2023 whilst attending a gathering of cultural men, several esteemed and experienced community members and cultural practitioners shared with me their observations, experiences and concerns regarding cultural literacy and associated issues. They noted the rapid growth in the number of Aboriginal cultural consultants (or similar) across professional circles and online platforms or pages such as LinkedIn.

Their concerns especially pinpointed how some of these cultural consultants, who they knew, are relatively new to their Traditional cultural knowledge journey. It was also noted that some of these cultural consultants were new to their Aboriginal identity journey all together. This I know could be opening pandora's box, I do not wish this point to become an identity issue as such and I must clearly recognise the impacts of colonisation on all Aboriginal and Torres Strait peoples whom identify or not, as highlighted in earlier pages.

However, the issue here is one associated directly to the authenticity and credibility of their cultural literacy. This is an issue pertaining to the accuracy of knowledge and the need to continue holding high standards, observe deep protocols associated to cultural knowledge and processes of it being shared. All of this was and still is, held and observed by our most experienced Traditional Cultural Knowledge Holders and Elders in our Lore.

On a more in-depth yarn at this cultural gathering, there was a particular interest and application regarding cultural protocols that all cultural consultants were/are following. There was special attention concerning: where and who is the Traditional knowledge coming from; when and how was this knowledge attained; and do these cultural consultants (or similar) have the correct permission to share that knowledge. It became a very powerful and timely opportunity for all of us to reflect on our own standards of cultural literacy, our pedagogical practices and the accountability that is attached to these.

Therefore, a very poignant question needs to be raised, as it was by the group at the cultural gathering. It is also a question that is often asked of us by Djummu Paul Gordon:

"Have they/you spent time sitting with that story, AND have they/you sat with Country, looking, listening and learning the spirit and feeling of that story" (Gordon, 2023).

At the cultural gathering it was shared that some cultural consultants operating in community and appearing on professional pages alike, have spent minimal time looking, listening and learning from Traditional Knowledge Holders and with Country. Some in fact have attended just one cultural camp, or participated in a few professional development cultural sessions. Yet, despite the infancy of their Traditional knowledge, these same cultural consultants promote themselves as Aboriginal cultural subject matters experts.

Some strategically position themselves as the only accessible cultural specialists of their area and/or being the answer to the increasing demands of acquiring Traditional Aboriginal cultural knowledge across Australia. The questions to ask here are:

What and where is the accountability and obligations of/to Traditional cultural knowledge for these individuals or organisations who undertake these practices? And, where is their cultural literacy?

When I hear of situations and scenarios as described above, or witness these myself, it's a clear reminder of the words from Djummu Paul Gordon regarding Lore. He speaks often about the importance of holding the sacredness and high value of acquired Traditional story and knowledge. Djummu challenges us to ensure that when we hear Traditional story (knowledge), especially for the first time, that we sit with that story and strengthen our relationship, feeling and spirit of the knowledge within that story. Djummu encourages us to be patient and not run off to tell everyone and anyone as soon as we can. That approach of rushing to tell all is not connected to humility and respect. Djummu tell us that some stories may take decades to understand, even a lifetime, and sometimes there are stories only ever meant for you alone, especially if we dream it (Callaghan and Gordon 2022; Gordon, 2023). It is no surprise that 'Big' Bill Neidjie (2015), another very powerful and special cultural Old Man, shared similar ideals:

"You dream something. He come to you…You don't have to tell us, or tell somebody. Because that dream he run away from you… More better, you keep him, so he can dream again. Because he'll belong your feeling, body" (p.159).

Powerful words and lessons from two very wise Knowledge Holders and philosophers. Thinking and lessons missing in some of the mob operating in this cultural education and consultancy space. This is a fundamental requirement working with *S.E.C.D.R.R.R* and sharing Traditional Aboriginal knowledge in any educational setting.

The only stories I share are those that I have strong relationship with, have received permission to impart, and humbly understand where the stories and knowledge sits in our *ngurrampaa*, our world.

Consequently, having strong cultural literacy to work with in the *S.E.C.D.R.R.R* model is paramount and inextricably linked to this model.

Part 8
Conclusion

Pt. 8.1 - Oldest Pedagogy in the World

Aboriginal peoples of Australia, my Ancestors, hold the oldest pedagogy and epistemology in the world, they are ontologically connected. Our Old People were the first inventors, first healers, the first philosophers, the first educators, and the first storytellers. Western society has slowly recognised most of this as fact, however there is a slower recognition of the latter. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples were and are the first story-tellers. It must be recognised that if a peoples hold the oldest pedagogy in the world built around the oldest epistemology and ontology, that this knowledge, wisdom, and ways of knowing, holds the answers to the big issues in our world today, especially caring for Country or environmental sustainability practices.

As Gordon, Spillman and Wilson have highlighted in their work, '*Country As Teacher'* (Country, K, Gordon, et al, 2021), our Elders and Ancestors help us understand that indeed, Country is our teacher. Country is constantly sharing with us the knowledge it possesses and this information is crucial, allowing us to thrive in our place, not just survive. Today, so many of us simply do not see, hear or slow down enough to receive this information. An even bigger issue is we struggle to find places and mechanisms to connect to and with Country.

S.E.C.D.R.R.R has demonstrated that when we share story, in the way our Aboriginal Ancestors did, magic happens. This magic is well described and explained as a special feeling or spirit of story (Neidjie 1989; Gordon 2021 & 2023; Callaghan and Gordon, 2022) that has sat within Country, our storytellers and the story itself, for millennia. When we hear story and especially when it is in the presence of skilled storytellers, knowledge is shared far deeper and it stays with the listeners far longer and with greater impact (Bruner 1990 & 2009).

The *S.E.C.D.R.R.R* model offers a process and paradigm in which the power of Traditional Aboriginal storytelling enables learning outcomes and human experiences to be strengthened and connections to the world around us positively impacted. The supercharger to the *S.E.C.D.R.R.R* model is having cultural educators that are upholding responsibilities and obligations to Aboriginal Lore. Furthermore, this is the cultural literacy required for *S.E.C.D.R.R.R* to truly flourish.

Pt. 8.2 - *S.E.C.D.R.R.R* and improving educational outcomes for Indigenous learners in Australia

There have been no significant educational improvements in this country for our learners over the past decade or more (ACER 2019; Robinson, 2018), especially for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. Despite these neutral outcomes, we still see the *standardisation reform* approach to education in Australia remaining the dominant go to paradigm. There is a requirement to make drastic educational changes in Australia that align with and utilise Ancient Aboriginal knowledges and pedagogy practice. These changes need to challenge the current thinking and approaches regarding the purpose of education in Australia.

Education in Australia has been significantly influenced by politics, particularly considerations of our financial future and position in the global marketplace. Still, in 2023 there is a similar view held by the Australian Government. This educational standpoint continues a neoliberal marketisation approach that looks outwards globally without localised thinking and driven by capitalist ideals. This is where *the standardised reform movement* to education in Australia has taken hold bringing with it the introduction of *NAPLAN.* The suggested urgent changes to educational approaches in this country can be stated as a need for an altered vision of schooling. Gordon, Spillman and Wilson (2021) have developed a model for such change and call it, *'Country as Teacher'* (CaT, 2021).

Like *S.E.C.D.R.R.R*, the CaT model utilises Ancient Aboriginal pedagogy centred on the art and power of storytelling with an essential relationship with and to Country. It is story-focused, place-responsive ecocentric pedagogies that raises social and ecological wellbeing (Gordon et al, 2020, p.1). Proposed in this paper is the combination of *S.E.C.D.R.R.R,* the CaT paradigm and Djummu Paul Gordon's 'Six-L's model, offers the right approach to address this educational standardisation reform issue. All three models are based in Traditional Aboriginal epistemology and pedagogy, importantly working in harmony together.

Pt. 8.3 - *S.E.C.D.R.R.R*, *Aboriginal Cultural Educators and Cultural (over)Load*

On reflection, one of the crucial catalysts behind the creation of the *S.E.C.D.R.R.R* model was the commitment of upholding Aboriginal Lore and essential philosophies such as; always giving back; sharing knowledge; connecting and caring to and for Country. With

this in mind, for *S.E.C.D.R.R.R* to have its continued impact, and on a far broader landscape, institutions and respective peak bodies, are being asked to address a considerably challenging issue. The limited number of accessible and authentically experienced and credible Aboriginal cultural educators and mentors or similar, across NSW and beyond.

Those working in these roles across multiple sectors are also experiencing issues pertaining to a lack of recognition and respect of their cultural literacy expertise, knowledge and pedagogical skill, combined with issues of disproportionate remuneration and status. To support this, there needs to be a vast shift in attitudes and assumptions from western institutions and the wider mainstream community. Assumptions such as, expecting Aboriginal workers or local Aboriginal community members to always share knowledge, the A.T.M mentality, need to stop. These assumptions and attitudes I have experienced in varying ways too many times.

In educational institutions particularly, common challenges experienced by Aboriginal workers is being culturally overloaded by their non-Aboriginal peers and managers. This issue of cultural overload is widely driven by a *modus operandi* from non-Aboriginal co-workers that perceive anything and everything deemed or identified as being Aboriginal, automatically passed onto the respective Aboriginal worker(s) in that organisation. This work is flicked across to these staff members with limited consideration if relevant qualifications and experiences are held, nor does it respect their existing workloads or capability. Adding to these pressures is the sentiment that many of our mob working in Aboriginal identified roles feel an overwhelming sense of responsibility and dedication to always saying yes to these unrealistic, unfair and unsolicited extras.

This is a situation that I myself have experienced on many occasions, over many years. It is only now, after nearly 25 years of working in and around the education and training sector, that I feel comfortable, affirmed and established enough to even consider saying NO to such requests.

It is important at this time to also demonstrate the issue of cultural overload is not only limited to the education sector. It remains a poignant issue across many other sectors in Australia. For example, changes to the NSW planning regulations and design approaches in 2018, as a result of amendments to the NSW Environmental Planning and Assessment Act 1979 (Hromek, 2020). New approaches from these amendments include the promotion of good design of the built environment and a requirement for sustainable management of built and cultural heritages, including Aboriginal cultural heritage. In attempts to better understand what these new approaches meant and need to look like, the Government Architect NSW (GANSW) discussion paper, *‘Designing with Country’*

(2020) was released. Following from that, in July 2023, the *'Connecting with Country Framework'* (2023) was launched by the NSW Government.

From these positive changes, albeit overdue, a challenging conundrum is now prevailing. The desire and need to engage and consult with 'Indigenous' peoples and communities across NSW has sky rocketed, especially with those holding Traditional cultural knowledge and strong connection to Country. This has placed significantly more pressure and demand upon a limited talent pool of cultural consultants or similar. A talent pool that is already bursting at the seams, feeling drained, strained, undervalued and overloaded.

These circumstances also provide another contributing factor to the issues of cultural literacy pressures and expectations mentioned in previous pages. In these frequent settings for Aboriginal staff, there is a destructive assumption held by their non-Aboriginal peers. It is a misplaced cultural construct that presumes by default, that all Aboriginal staff in that organisation, large or small, will have some level of cultural literacy. This is even more prevalent in educational settings across NSW.

I have witnessed on many occasions such situations take place, where the designated Aboriginal worker(s) in an educational institution has been asked to conduct cultural-based group sessions without any thought or discussion with that respective worker(s), on many occasions with limited prior warning. Additional activities that they can be expected to coordinate and or conduct include; 'didge' workshops, boy's and girl's cultural groups, weaving sessions, storytelling workshops, Aboriginal dances, or even teach some local Aboriginal language.

These demands on Aboriginal staff can be relentless, often coming from a place of gross misunderstanding of the protocols associated to those cultural practices. Furthermore, it fails to recognise the impacts of colonisation on Traditional Aboriginal cultural connections for our mob. It also does not consider levels of willingness and ability of the respective workers to be able to undertake these additional task(s). These circumstances add unnecessary and unwanted weight to the situation of the cultural load and cultural burn-out syndrome we have witnessed over the past few decades, and continue to see today in Australia.

A proposed strategy to address and mitigate some of these challenges, is to have a strategic approach with appropriate structural support and financial measures, to nurture and grow the resource pool of suitably experienced, authenticated, qualified, and supported Aboriginal cultural educators. It is a recommendation of this paper done so built around the *S.E.C.D.R.R.R* model, or at least with *S.E.C.D.R.R.R* in mind.

Pt. 8.4 - *S.E.C.D.R.R.R,* Cultural Literacy and Authenticity of Knowledge

Earlier in this paper the term cultural literacy (Hirsch, 1987) was explained, along with associated social and educational discourse. In this thesis I have reconceptualised cultural literacy and placed it as a nucleus to the *S.E.C.D.R.R.R* model. Rather than an inter-cultural approach of cultural literacy, as Hirsch and many others have and continue to take, I have chosen an intra-cultural approach and use this to redefine the concept. This also addresses a call by some researches for a renewed and updated model of cultural literacy (Shliakhovchuk, 2021; Grant and Portera, 2017; Stein 2021) that responds to our volatile, uncertain, complex ambiguous, or VUCA, world today (Barber, 1992; Mark and Khare, 2016; Buchashvili et al, 2022).

Possessing a strong level of cultural literacy is an inseparable and fundamental element of *S.E.C.D.R.R.R* and a huge responsibility for me as a cultural education mentor. Cultural literacy is paramount and speaks directly to the authenticity and legitimacy of this work. Over the past decade or more there has been a significant influx in demand and interest in Aboriginal cultural knowledges and associated practices across Australia. The education and training sector is one of these areas. As discussed earlier, there are several key factors driving this, and as such, many Australians have made efforts or hold a desire to address their lack of knowledge and seek opportunities to correct this.

The harsh reality of these increasing demands on Aboriginal cultural knowledge, speaks directly to the challenges and importance of seeking Aboriginal cultural educators that hold strong cultural literacy. That is, ensuring that individuals or groups being engaged are authentically connected to Traditional Aboriginal cultural knowledge and practice.

Several important and uncomfortable questions were asked regarding the cultural literacy of those working and engaging as Aboriginal cultural educators, consultants or similar. They are: Where does their cultural knowledge originate and is it accurate? Do they hold relationship to Country from where the cultural knowledge and/or story exists? Have these individuals connected authentically with Traditional Knowledge Holders? Do they have permission to pass-on the Traditional knowledge shared with them?

Even larger and more complex questions arise when we consider who is best placed to make an assessment and credential the levels of cultural literacy held by cultural consultants or educators? How do non-Indigenous institutions or organisations respectfully and appropriately ensure the authenticity and credibility of the cultural consultants or educators they engage? These large and ongoing issues can be reframed essentially as questions centred on quality assurance and associated processes.

Work needs to be undertaken to engage and consult a wide range of significant Senior Aboriginal Cultural Knowledge Holders and Men and Women of Lore. In this process of engagement, the idea of establishing a body or group on a state and national level, recognised as a cultural authority, would be discussed and tested. This group would reflect the Traditional cultural structure of a Council of Elders, operating to support and credential cultural educators, consultants and similar. It would also offer a place to hold a framework for this validation and authenticating process.

A structure or body similar to the above proposal would greatly assist mainstream paradigms and associated white institutions. It would provide engagement with and access to the services of culturally authentic and appropriately credentialed cultural educators, consultants, and Traditional Knowledge Holders. Securing the credentials and validation from this Traditional cultural body would be earned and proven. It would reflect our Lore structures connected to knowledge scaffolding, possess levels of accreditation, and could include offering guidance to the modern construct of ‘Eldership’.

This is a first share regarding such a concept for a Traditional cultural knowledge authority or similar. It is anticipated that if consultation and engagement take place and agreement found, that there would be a need for far more rigour on and around such a Traditional cultural body or group by key Knowledge Holders and stakeholders. This specific work is beyond the scope of this project.

Pt. 8.5 - *S.E.C.D.R.R.R* and Strengthening Connections to Nature and Sustainability

Nature Deficit Disorder (NDD), or the depletion of direct contact with nature and out-door play or activities (Louv, 2008), has had an enormously detrimental impact on the health and wellbeing of humans. This is even more evident in children, where their lives, in the Western world as we know it, have taken a vast shift in-doors and have become very structured (Driessnack, 2009). In regards to children, Louv (2008), claims that NDD has led to an alarming increase in childhood obesity, a range of attention-deficit disorders, diminished social skills, increases in violent behaviour, and concerning changes in mental health, particularly depression.

It is these concerns of NDD directly impacting children, that the *S.E.C.D.R.R.R* model offers an integral antidote. Through Traditional Aboriginal ngurrampaa stories and information sharing, a strengthening of connection and feeling for participants to the natural world takes place. This sharing of story and knowledge is contextualised where-ever possible, to their local area, their *ngurra* or camp. Participants are encouraged and

supported to understand that we humans are merely one part of the environment, or nature, and we rely heavily on our planet to survive. Reinforcing this benefit of *S.E.C.D.R.R.R*, is the powerful values and attitudes found in Aboriginal Lore, such as humility, respect; responsibilities and obligations, not rights or entitlements. These morals are melded around integral actions of always sharing, only taking what you need, speaking truth and the essential human act of building relationships, not armies.

Participants are also helped to navigate an understanding that Traditional Aboriginal philosophy understands the natural world, the planet, with a personified lens. All of these combined approaches and impacts of *S.E.C.D.R.R.R* play a vital role in a sustainability function and connection to nature. With greater knowledge and story, Lore, of their local places, the connection and appreciation of Country will grow for all participants. As Djummu Paul Gordon shares with his *Six L's Model*, when we gain more story or knowledge, we expand our relationship and understanding on those topics, or in this case, Country/nature.

Working as an Aboriginal Cultural Education Mentor and a Cultural Consultant across my region, participants often remark how they love Australia, or specifically, the Australian bush. Reflecting on many cultural immersion and cultural capability sessions I have undertaken with Djummu Paul Gordon, these sentiments are always shared by the group being educated. In these moments Djummu identifies an opportunity to share the below philosophy and ask thought provoking questions.

Djummu will respectfully challenge participants with a simple statement/question of, what do you love about this place? This is promptly followed by, what do you know about this Country/place? Often the responses to these poignant questions uncovers that participants love this Country or the bush, because of how it makes them feel, the opportunities it offers and what they are receiving. This is thought provokingly reframed by Djummu to enable participants to recognise that their proclaimed love and appreciation for this Country is in fact based around what they are taking:

"What it comes down to is, you love what this Country or place gives you. And that means you love what you're taking from this Country. So, I ask you, what are you doing to give back to this Country or place that is giving you so much, all the time?" (Djummu Paul Gordon, 2022)

Another powerful point that Djummu makes is the association between growing knowledge and growing connection. He makes the point; how can we love something when we know little or nothing about it? This is why the sharing of story about Country, about the land, plays such an essential role in expanding peoples' connection to the environment, to nature. It increases their knowledge and appreciation of these places.

Pt. 8.6 - *S.E.C.D.R.R.R* and Reconciliation Applications

S.E.C.D.R.R.R is a potent tool for growing and strengthening Reconciliation. It allows the imparting of key knowledge from and about this magical Country from the First Australians. It affords learners an opportunity to deepen their connection to Country and help look after the world around them. It offers opportunities to also strengthen personal and professional development attributes and characteristics, along with being incredibly beneficial for strengthening wellbeing. It provides an interface for hearing, seeing and connecting further to universal values threaded through the philosophy of Aboriginal Lore.

These hugely important and universal morals and values include: respect, humility, sharing and giving always, building positive relationships, speaking truth, not stealing, avoiding violence as a conflict resolution and always following the rules no matter who you are. Today there is a cavernous deficit of these human values and characteristics.

In recent years many businesses, not-for-profits, educational institutions, and community groups, have reached out for support to grow their Reconciliation journey. A key to this process is and has been strengthening the understanding of 'Indigenous' cultures, peoples, and communities in this Country. Some of these groups have or are developing associated *Reconciliation Action Plans* (RAPS) or similar strategies and policies around inclusion and engagement with our mob. From this Reconciliation resurgence the demand for Aboriginal cultural knowledges and ways of thinking has dramatically increased.

This increased demand is reflected also in greater desire for opportunities to experience in-Country cultural tours or camps. The power of storytelling plays an instrumental role in this entire process. It is fundamental to the true success of Reconciliation. Where and when ever I am utilising Traditional Aboriginal storytelling, I am always working from the *S.E.C.D.R.R.R* model as a foundation.

Through the power of Traditional Aboriginal storytelling and the *S.E.C.D.R.R.R* model, participants are supported through a process of being able to connect to Country and people in a far more meaningful, respectful, authentic and profound manner. These attributes are key in building and growing healthy strong relationships, viewed as central components of Reconciliation. Additionally, when *S.E.C.D.R.R.R* is utilised in the primary school age learner group, Reconciliation impacts are also broadened. Learners frequently share story and knowledges imparted in *S.E.C.D.R.R.R* sessions into the family home and throughout friendship circles.

THE END…*Marinmarra Marang* (go good)

APPENDIX'S

Part 9
S.E.C.D.R.R.R and Home Learning Resources

Pt. 9.1 - *S.E.C.D.R.R.R* Home Learning Work Sheet Examples (Schools)

Example 1: Story Time with Mr. Newham - Kindy & Stage 1

How The Birds Got Their Colours
(a story from the Bardi People of Western Australia)

Task 1:
A - Each student is asked to find 'Five Fun Facts' (The 3 F's) about:

- Australian Dove (Native Pigeon)
- Australian Parrot (any)

B - Choose one of these birds (above) and do your best drawing of them.

Task 2:
A - Do you have any pet birds? (If 'yes', answer B. If 'No', skip to C)
B - What type of bird(s) is it and do they have a name?
C - What is your favourite bird and why? (if you do not have any pet Birds)

Task 3:
Make a list of the birds you see this week and briefly describe their colours.
(If possible, students are encouraged to do this as a group or team activity and get help from those involved)

Task 4:
Where else might you find or see birds in Australia? (can be in real life or image based)

Extension

Task 5:
A - Think about Crow's actions and choices in this story. Why do you think Crow did not help?
B - Can you think of a time or incident where you were involved in a similar situation as this story? If so, which character relates most to you?

Example 2: Story Time with Mr. Newham - Stage 2 & 3

How the Birds Got Their Colours

(a story from the Bardi People of Western Australia)

Task 1:

A - Each student is asked to find 'Five Fun Facts' (The 3 F's) about:

- Australian Dove (Native Pigeon)
- Australian Parrot (any)

B - Choose one of these birds (above) and do your best drawing of them.

Task 2:

A - Do you have any Pet Birds? (If 'yes', answer B. If 'No', skip to C)
B - What type of bird(s) do you have? Does it have a name?
C - If you do not have any pet Birds, what is your favourite Bird and why?

Task 3:

Think about the Crow's actions and choices in this story. Why do you think Crow did not help Dove? (5-10 lines)

Task 4:

In Australia we are fortunate to see many birds in their natural environment. Make a list of the birds you see this week and briefly describe their colours and some of their other features.

(tips: the noises they make, their behaviours, sizes and shapes, where you mostly see them - trees, on the ground, high in the sky, by the water)

Task 5:

Where else might you find or see birds in Australia? (can be in real life or image based)

Extension

Task 6:

Can you relate to a time or incident where you were involved in a similar situation as this story? If so, which character relates most to you and why?

Example 3: Story Time with Mr. Newham - Kindy & Stage 1

Tiddalik: The Frog who caused a flood

Task 1:

A - Find a picture of a Frog. Ask if you can cut it out and paste onto a large piece of paper.
B - Next to this picture (of the Frog) draw your own Frog and add some different colour to it
C - Do they look the same?

Task 2:

A - Each student is asked to discover Five Fun Facts (The 3 F's) about:
- Frogs in Australia

B - Can you think of **3** animals that live in water?
C - Are these animals bigger or smaller than you?

Task 3:

Sharing is a wonderful way to show people you care. Sometimes there are things we do not or cannot share with others.
A - List 5 things you WOULD share with others
B - List 5 things you WOULD NOT share with others

Task 4:

Choose one WOULD and one WOULD NOT and tell us WHY (2 in total)

[Its ok to have things you do not like sharing, Mr Newham even has things he does not share]

Task 5:

Our water is a very special natural resource, we need to care for it.
A - Can you think of one way you could (safely) use less water?

Extension

Task 6:

A - Do you like being around or in water? Why or Why not? (1-3 lines)
B - Can you think of or see any places close to your home that have water in or around them?
C - Describe this place the best you can (1-3 lines)

Example 4: Story Time with Mr. Newham - Stage 2 & 3

Tiddalik: The Frog who caused a flood

Task 1:
Each student is asked to find Five Fun Facts (The 3 F's) about:

- Frogs in Australia
- 1 other animal from the story (Emu, Kangaroo, Kookaburra, Eel or Platypus)

Task 2:
List 5 things you WOULD and WOULD NOT share with others, be creative (10 in total)

Task 3:
Choose 3 WOULD and 3 WOULD NOT and tell us WHY (6 in total)

Task 4:
Think about the things you listed as WOULD NOT share. Are there any of these you may be willing to change your mind about? Why?

Task 5:
Water-based environments are known as Aquatic Ecosystems and there are 2 types. What are they?

Task 6:
List Five Fun Facts (3F's) regarding one of the above Aquatic Ecosystems.

Task 7:
How many sports can you list that were played on or in water at the recent Tokyo 2020 Olympics? Which was your favourite and why?

Task 8:
Write a paragraph relating to an experience you have had connected to an 'Aquatic Ecosystem'. If you do not have an experience to recount, creatively write a story titled, A Day at the Beach or My Favourite Water Based Activity.

Extension

Task 9:
Are there any examples of water environments in the Wallsend and surrounding areas? If so, how many and which of these would you say is dominant (most common) in the area?

Example 5: Story Time with Mr Newham - Kindy & Stage 1

Gilah and Gaanie (originally shared by Djummu Paul Gordon)

Task 1:

A - Find a photo of the *Thorny Devil* and the *Galah*.
B - Draw and colour in your own picture, copying the photos you found.
(tip: pay attention to the different colours and shapes of each animal)

Task 2:

Each student is to find **'**Five Fun Facts' (The 3 F's) about:

A - Gilah the Galah
B - Gaanie the Thorny Devil.

Task 3:

A - Have you ever seen these animals in the wild? (Y/N)
B - If 'Yes', where was this and who was with you?
C - If 'No', where do you think you might see them?

Task 4:

A - What material do we use to make a Boomerang? Where would you find this?
B - Have you ever seen a Boomerang? If Yes, where and when?
C - What is a Boomerang used for?
D - Draw and colour in a Boomerang (Tip: Students are encouraged to use 'Aboriginal' inspired designs)

Extension

Task 5:

A - Which of the two animals is your favourite?
B - Why is that animal your favourite?

(Tips: Kindy write 1 line; Year 1 write up to 3 lines; Year 2 write up to 5 lines+)

Example 6: Story Time with Mr Newham - Stage 2 & 3

Gilah and Gaanie (originally shared by Djummu Paul Gordon)

Task 1:
Each student is asked to find 'Five Fun Facts' (*The 3 F's*) about:

- *Gilah* the Galah
- *Gaanie* the Thorny Devil.

Task 2:
A - Choose one of the above animals and create a piece of art. Students may choose different techniques and resources to complete this activity, be creative.

(students could consider using pencils, pens, crayon, paint, fibres and other craft materials)

Task 3:
A - An Awabakal word for Boomerang is *"Tararma"* (tar-arm-ah). What is a Boomerang used for?
B - Find 3 more Traditional names for the Boomerang (tips below).

- Other NSW Aboriginal languages; Wiradjuri, Worimi, Gamilaraay, Bundjalung, Gumbaynggirr.
- Access the *'50 Words'* app. for other words from Aboriginal languages https://50words.online
- Access the NSW AECG Languages App or go to https://www.aecg.nsw.edu.au

Task 4:
A - Besides the returning Boomerang, can you find other types of boomerangs?
B - What are some of the differences? (Tip: think about uses and shapes)

Task 5:
A - Have you ever had the chance to throw a Boomerang? Yes or No
B - If 'yes', how successful was your effort(s)? (tip: did it return near you)
C - If 'No', would you like to try it one day?
D - List 3 things you need to consider before you throw a Boomerang?

Extension

Task 6:
A - In the video/story, who do you think was most at fault, Gilah or Gaanie? Why? (5-10 lines)

Task 7
A - Think of a time when you or someone you know got upset by a person "losing their cool" (getting angry) OR being a show off?

B - What other approaches could have been taken to avoid this situation? (3-5 lines)

Example 7: Story Time with Mr. Newham - Kindy & Stage 1

Video 2 - Preparing a Coolamon (an Aboriginal wooden dish/bowl)

Kaayi/Yaama yarnteen/ngianni - hello all (in Awabakal and Wiradjuri Aboriginal languages)

We hope you enjoyed the break and found time to relax, have fun, get ready for Term 4 and an exciting return to school grounds (soon). Mr Newham is keeping things a little easier for Week 1 with just one Task connected to the second Coolamon Video. Enjoy and catch up soon.

Task 1:

A - After watching the second 'Coolamon' video (cleaning and shaping), write down 3 things you remember most from the clip. (up to 1 line for each)

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

B - Which one did you find most interesting? Why? (up to 2 lines)

_____

_____

Extension

Task 2:

A - In the beginning of Video 1: Making a Coolamon, Mr Newham talked about other types of Aboriginal tools and weapons. How many can you list?

B - In the same video, what type of tree did Mr Newham cut the Coolamon from?

Task 3:

List 3 different "modern" things you can use to carry items around with you today.

1._____
2._____
3._____

Example 8: Story Time with Mr. Newham - Stage 2 & 3

Video 2 - Preparing a Coolamon (an Aboriginal wooden dish/bowl)

Kaayi/Yaama yarnteen/ngianni - hello all (in Awabakal and Wiradjuri Aboriginal languages)

We hope you enjoyed the break and found time to relax, have fun, get ready for Term 4 and an exciting return to school grounds (soon). Mr Newham is keeping things a little easier for Week 1 with just one Task connected to the second Coolamon Video. Enjoy and catch up soon.

Task 1:
A - After watching the second 'Coolamon' video (cleaning and shaping), write down 4 things you remember most from the clip. (1 line for each)

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____

B - Which one did you find most interesting? Why? (1-2 lines)
_____
_____

Task 2:
A - In Video 1: Making a Coolamon, name the tree Mr Newham cut the Coolamon from?
C - What can the bark from this tree also be used for?
B - Can you find any near your home or local area?

Task 3:
At the beginning of Video 1: Making a Coolamon, Mr Newham also showed us different Traditional tools and weapons used by Aboriginal people.

A - List the items. What are some of their uses?
C - Can you think of other tools or weapons used by Aboriginal people?
D - What material(s) are needed to make them?

Extension

Task 4:
In Video 1: Making a Coolamon, Mr Newham shared some important things he needed to do before he could start cutting the Coolamon from the tree.

A - What were they? (1-3 lines)
B - Why did he do this? (1-5 lines)

Pt. 9.2 - *S.E.C.D.R.R.R* 'Story Time with Mr Newham' Videos

See the below four (4) video links for 'Story Time with Mr. Newham' that align with the *S.E.C.D.R.R.R* home learning worksheet examples in previous pages. The videos are a combined time of 35 minutes, 28 seconds (35':28").

Video 1: 'How the Birds got their Colours' (5':37")

Link: How the Birds Got Their Colours

Video 2: 'Tiddalik: The Frog that caused a flood' (8':22")

Link: Tiddalik

Video 3: 'Gilah and Gaanie' (9':21")

Link: Gilah and Gaanie

Video 4: 'Coolamon Making No.2 - Preparing the Coolamon' (12':08")

Link: Cleaning & Shaping the Coolamon: Video 2

Pt. 9.3 - Example of NSW Dept. of Education Syllabus Unit and *S.E.C.D.R.R.R*

Science/Geography Unit - 'Australia and Its Animals'

Aboriginal Perspectives Component with Aboriginal Cultural Education Mentor (Mr. David Newham)

Duration: Weekly (Wk. 2 to 10), Term 2 **Students:** Stage One **Days & Time**: Wednesday & 50 mins (see timetable)

GEOGRAPHY Outcome: GE1-1

Features of Places Students will:	**Local Connections Students will:**
Investigate features of places and how they can be cared for, for example: (ACHGK005) discussion of the natural features of places identified in Aboriginal Dreaming stories and/or Legends of the Torres Strait	investigate connections that people, including Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples, have to local and global places, for example: (ACHGK010, ACHGK011, ACHGK012) discussion of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples' connections with land, sea and animals of their place

Week	Content Focus	Learning Activities
2	Athletics Carnival	Indigenous Games (coordinated and lead by Mr. Newham with parent/teacher volunteers)
3	Australian Reptile Park Excursion	Mr Newham to assist with supervision and gather information to incorporate into future lessons (making connections).
4-7	Four Sacred Ancestor Animals (1 per week) Kangaroo/ Emu/ Echidna/ Goanna	Students learn: Traditional Aboriginal story, song and dance; Aboriginal word for each animal; the tracks they make; the importance each animal has in Aboriginal culture; and how Aboriginal people care for that animal. (A concept sheet is provided each week by Mr. Newham). Classroom teacher can choose to: complete the sheet as a class; complete in small groups (with Mr. Newham' support); have focus groups; have students complete individually after class discussion of task.
8	**Ngurrampaa* Story linked to 'Belmont Lagoon' + Indigenous Game	Focus on links to land, importance in Aboriginal culture, significance of the Traditional story, song and dance shared. Link Indigenous game back to one of sacred animals (ie - game to practice hunting skills).
9	**Ngurrampaa* Story linked to Redhead - 'how coal was made' + didge	Focus on links to land; importance in Aboriginal culture; significance of the Traditional story song and dance shared; examples of coal use. **Didge lesson**: it's significance; obligations; 'Didge' (Yiddaki) story; how they're made & relationships to the natural world; demonstration (lengths of PVC tubing can be used for inclusivity during demo)
10	NAIDOC Day Celebrations	Refer to specific sheet provided for the day

**'Ngurrampaa' Story* = Dreaming or Dreamtime Story

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