

Introduction: Indigenous futurities in education

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Indigenous education is multidimensional and multifaceted. When the term “Indigenous education” is used, it could reference schooling practices, including embedding Indigenous knowledge and perspectives in the curriculum; connecting with Indigenous communities; supporting Indigenous students; employing Indigenous staff; and more (Shay et al., 2023). The enactment or inaction of these activities is underpinned by ideological dissonance between Western theories and ideals and Indigenous knowledge paradigms and values.

In this special issue of *The Australian Journal of Indigenous Education*, we draw on the concept of Indigenous futurity, particularly regarding Indigenous education, unpack discourses that differentiate the notion of inclusion in the discipline and our autonomy in the production and reproduction of our knowledges within the discipline of education and explore the concept of Indigenous futurity through understanding the role of Indigenous education scholars in (re)conceptualising the field of Indigenous education.

Keywords: Indigenous futurities, Indigenous-based evidence, Indigenous voices, sovereignty

Indigenous education has received considerable attention in Australia, particularly since Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander histories and cultures became a national cross-curriculum priority under the Australian Curriculum (Lowe & Galstaun, 2020; Salter & Maxwell, 2016). There has been a recent emphasis on embedding Indigenous knowledges and perspectives in the curriculum as an ostensible panacea to the convergence of issues in the field. However, Indigenous education has been identified as a global issue whereby colonised nations consistently show poorer educational outcomes for Indigenous students and communities (McCarty & Nicholas, 2012). The issue of educational attainment is persistently framed by student underachievement, academic attainment gaps and low year 12 and tertiary completions (Griffin & Trudgett, 2018). The emphasis on students, however, diminishes the accountability of educational institutions and their culpability in the failure to deliver quality educational outcomes for Indigenous students (Shay & Oliver, 2021). Furthermore, there is very little accountability

for those at the coalface of knowledge production (academia) and those tasked with training the teacher workforce (teacher education).

Indigenous education is multidimensional and multifaceted. When the term “Indigenous education” is used, it could reference schooling practices, including embedding Indigenous knowledge and perspectives in the curriculum; connecting with Indigenous communities; supporting Indigenous students; employing Indigenous staff; and more (Shay et al., 2023). The enactment or inaction of these activities is underpinned by ideological dissonance between Western theories and ideals and Indigenous knowledge paradigms and values. In the most comprehensive systematic review of existing “empirical evidence” in the field of Indigenous education, Lowe et al. (2019) mine existing research for Indigenous voices as a way of synthesising research in the field to date. While these findings bear relevance to claims of evidence-based decision-making in Western policy and practice settings, there are limitations in how this research attends to epistemic and ontological issues about who is producing this knowledge. Moodie et al. (2021) address issues such as “what counts as success”, “what counts as proof” and “who counts”; however, in this work, these issues are related to the research itself over who is responsible for the production of such knowledge.

In this special issue of *The Australian Journal of Indigenous Education*, we draw on the concept of Indigenous futurity, particularly regarding Indigenous education. Indigenous futurism was formed initially as a movement that emphasised expressions of Indigenous perspectives of the past, present and future through literature, art, games and other forms of media (Dillon, 2012). From this movement, Indigenous futurity emerged as a framework for resistance to the assumptions that keep Indigenous peoples consigned to the past (Teuton, 2018). Kulago (2019) proposes that futurity is not just about the future; rather, it is about how we think about the future and what we conceive as important in the past and present when we think about the future.

Paradies (2020) paints a bleak picture of the world’s future. Underpinned by the perils of modernity, entrenched poverty, environmental destruction and the presence of toxic substances in everything from water supply to breast milk, Paradies outlines the destruction caused by mass consumption and a “deeply atrophied capacity to provide people with a collective existential purpose” (2020, p. 439). We must not forget, then, that Indigenous futurities are implicitly bound with settler futurities. The logics that maintain settler ambitions of Indigenous erasure have grave implications for the space of knowledge production when considering Indigenous futurities.

It is argued that Indigenous academic scholarship seeks to make space for Indigenous ways of being, knowing and doing to exist across time, refusing our annihilation as envisioned by the process of ongoing colonialism and questioning the ways we are thought to have existed in the past (Vowel, 2022). However, much deeper analyses and consideration of where Indigenous knowledges are in “relation to disciplines within the academy” and how differences in Indigenous knowledges and Western sciences “frame possible understanding and misunderstanding” (Nakata, 2007, p. 183). Within the field of education, we propose that these analyses are in their infancy and require further development. Moreover, in this special issue, we seek to explore and develop the concept of “Indigenous-based evidence” (Shay et al., 2023, p. 76) and its implications for research and knowledge production in the context of Indigenous futurities.

This special issue will unpack discourses that differentiate the notion of inclusion in the discipline and our autonomy in the production and reproduction of our knowledges within the discipline of education. Fredericks (2009) cautions that inclusion is much more than an invitation to be part of an Indigenous-

focused project or study. We propose that this special issue is timely as we pass the one-year anniversary of the highly politicised vote on the Indigenous voice and change to the constitution (Fredericks & Bradfield, 2021), where the result was “no”. As debate rages socially and politically about Indigenous voice, Raciti (2022) reminds us by posing critical questions that Indigenous people have always had a voice: “Why is it only now that you choose to see me? I’ve not been hiding. So, now you say it’s my turn to talk? But I have been talking, so why did you choose to have me on mute?” (p. 3). Indigenous futures must involve Indigenous peoples, but the precarity of how Indigenous peoples and knowledges are embraced by disciplines such as education must also be addressed at this critical juncture.

This special issue seeks to explore the concept of Indigenous futurity through understanding the role of Indigenous education scholars in (re)conceptualising the field of Indigenous education. This includes the location of the problem/s, methodological approaches, theoretical underpinnings and where the focus should be in moving the field forward. Each article by an emerging Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander education scholar will span the different dimensions of Indigenous education and outline how the researcher has shaped the research and how each author’s perspective brings a new way of knowing to the field. Although there is much diversity across the conceptual design of the research, there were two distinct themes to emerge from this special issue: Indigenous voices and sovereignty.

Indigenous voices

“Texts, voices and stories: Indigenous education futures are Blak and bright”, written by Gamilaroi woman and scholar Tamika Worrell, outlines the urgency of prioritising Blak voices in all classrooms by considering the role of Indigenous-authored texts. Tamika was motivated by her own experiences, where there was a distinct lack of Indigenous voices and representations throughout her schooling. The paper highlights some key findings from doctoral research investigating how teachers include (or exclude) Indigenous texts in their curriculum. Tamika’s findings showed that teachers of years 9 and 10 were more likely to use Indigenous texts in their classrooms than when teaching younger students (years 7 and 8). In the qualitative data, it was reported that personal relationships, contexts and conceptions shaped representational practices. This culminated in a representational framework to provide an Indigenous-informed understanding of how educators might improve Indigenous representations in classrooms.

In “Transformative school leadership that privileges the voices of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples in Australian education”, Antoinette Cole, a Torres Strait Islander researcher whose bloodlines are to Boigu and Eurub Islands, offers a cleverly crafted study to demonstrate how the negative positioning of Indigeneity, and the dominant Eurocentric structures within schools and the schooling system itself, continues to impact on Indigenous student success in Australia. Cole asserts that this dynamic underpins policy development and implementation and hinders opportunities for better outcomes. Moreover, if these practices do not change to include Indigenous school leadership approaches and Indigenous scholarship as to what might and will work in educational contexts, it will seriously impact future Indigenous successes and, thus, broader Indigenous futures. Cole asserts the need for transformational educational leadership in education, which includes Indigenous people, Indigenous scholarship and Indigenous school leadership approaches, along with a different understanding of futurity. Only in this way, Cole explains, will we see real outcomes for Indigenous futures.

“Proppa way: Literature as truth-telling and Indigenous futurity in subject English” by Mandandanji scholar Amy Thomson explores how the notion of truth-telling through Indigenous voices will both inform and legitimise Indigenous futurities. As Amy articulates, Indigenous futurity is not merely about

the future; it is about collective knowledge and envisioned futures. Through using Indigenous standpoint theory and decoloniality, Amy reports on findings from her doctoral research on how principles of self-determination and codesign can influence subject English teachers in private schools in how they embed Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures, histories and perspectives. This paper demonstrates the importance of Indigenous young people's voices in developing concepts of futurities, particularly in relation to reflecting on their past and present experiences in education settings.

Sovereignty

In "Aboriginal students' journeys to university – privileging our sovereign voices", Noongar and Yamitji woman and scholar Renae Isaacs-Guthridge explores the lived experiences of Indigenous students, highlighting the failings of Australia's education system. The paper commences with a historical description of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander education before and after invasion, holding a mirror up to settler-colonialism that has dismantled Indigenous knowledge production. Grounded in anticolonialism, each journey in the article is narrated through a strengths-based counter-story that generates key teachings for Indigenous education futurity, centring the notions of *relationality*, *responsiveness* and *regions*. The author also offers *reimaginings* as a fourth Indigenous futurism component, calling for foregrounding non-linear pathways. These curricula disrupt the status quo and the recognition of the significant influence of Aboriginal women. Now, in post-referendum Australia, the article points to the heightened need for an anticolonial stance to subvert deficit narratives to make space for promising and unburdened Indigenous futurities in education.

Gamilaroi scholar Michelle Bishop authored "Envisioning Indigenous education sovereignty through story: our education, our way". The paper is a dynamic and innovative exploration of what educational sovereignty means to mob and how Aboriginal people imagine this for their children, grandchildren and grandchildren's children. Michelle invites readers to consider what being a good ancestor means. Deeply considered in relation to Indigenous futures, Michelle shares her perspectives on the great responsibility she felt in gathering these knowledges and perspectives, and found that storying was a method for Indigenous decolonising, reclaiming and re-presenting the important insights without compromising on cultural integrity. It was clear that the process was just as important as the outcomes in considering Indigenous education sovereignty.

This special issue explores the concept of Indigenous futurities in education. Indigenous worldviews support an enmeshment of past, present and future; one cannot consider the future without the past and present, nor can we consider the past and present without the future (Paradies, 2020). We highlight the role of emerging Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander educational researchers in reimagining Indigenous futurities in education through knowledge production, and the intersection between past, present and future is a prevailing theme throughout the papers. Indigenous-based evidence requires Indigenous intellect, conception and practice in research. This special issue demonstrates the possibilities and the importance of growing this significant group of discipline-based Indigenous scholars.

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About the authors

Marnee Shay is a Principal Research Fellow in the School of Education at The University of Queensland. She is an Aboriginal woman whose maternal family is from the Ngen’giwumirri language group (Daly River, Northern Territory), born in Brisbane, with strong connections to Indigenous communities in South East Queensland. Dr Shay is an experienced and qualified secondary teacher. Associate Professor Shay has an extensive, externally funded research program that spans the fields of Indigenous education, policy studies, flexi schooling and youth studies. She has published in many journals, books and

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Maria Raciti (Kalkadoon-Thaniquith/Bwgcolman) is a social marketer who uses marketing tools and techniques to bring about social justice and behaviour change. Professor Raciti is Co-Director of the UniSC Indigenous and Transcultural Research Centre, co-leader of the education and economies theme in the Australian Research Council Centre of Excellence for Indigenous Futures, a member of the executive of the Australian Association of Social Marketing, the 2018 Research Fellow with the National Centre for Student Equity in Higher Education, and was part of an Australian Government departmental task force assisting with the 2019 National Regional, Rural and Remote Tertiary Education Strategy. Professor Raciti is a Principal Fellow of the Higher Education Academy (UK), a QUT Centre for Behavioural Economics, Society and Technology Fellow, a member of the International Social Marketing Association's Board of Directors, and has long been affiliated with the Australian Centre for Student Equity and Success.

Bronwyn Fredericks is an Aboriginal woman living in Central Queensland. She has spent over 30 years directly involved in organisations working to improve educational outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, especially in regional and remote Australia. Professor Fredericks's multidisciplinary research has a strong practice-based commitment to social justice and improving health, education and life outcomes for Indigenous peoples. As The University of Queensland's Deputy-Vice-Chancellor (Indigenous Engagement), Professor Fredericks is responsible for leading the implementation of the Indigenous strategy and strengthening leadership within the university in relation to Indigenous engagement. She is also leading the implementation of The University of Queensland's first Reconciliation Action Plan and building strong links with the community.

Tracey Bunda is a Ngugi/Wakka Wakka woman and grew up on the lands of the Jagera/Jugera/Yuggerapul peoples. Tracey is The University of Queensland Professor of Indigenous Education. During the course of her extensive three-decade career, she has held senior Indigenous leadership roles in each of the universities in which she worked. Professor Bunda's research interests are informed by critical theoretical approaches for understanding how race and power ideologically manifest in white institutions, storying as methodology and the agentic role of Aboriginal women in Aboriginal community uplift.

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