

Transformative school leadership that privileges the voices of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples in Australian education

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The negative positioning of Indigeneity and the dominant Eurocentric structures entrenched in schooling structures in Australia continues to impact educational success for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people. This deficit discourse of Indigeneity and imposed structures, such as policy, are key factors in the educational success, or what is defined as success, of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people. This paper argues that an absence of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander scholarship within school leadership approaches impacts the building of Indigenous futures. A relationally responsive approach centres Indigenous axiologies, ontologies and epistemologies, and supports Indigenous futurity praxis. The critical concern is how education as a discipline supports any notions of Indigenous futurity if it lacks Indigenous voice, research and scholarship in educational leadership. This paper synthesises existing literature to develop a conceptual framework, underpinned by existing evidence and gaps, for transforming educational leadership in Indigenous education. Using a transformative school leadership approach, it locates Indigenous voice, research and scholarship in the field of educational leadership with application for primary and secondary schooling contexts, and for government and non-government school contexts. The paper culminates with a tool for school leaders that supports critical self-reflection.

Keywords: Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander education, school leadership, culturally responsive pedagogies, transformative school leadership, Indigenous futurity, settler futurity, relationally responsive

Introduction

As an emerging Indigenous scholar in the field of education, exploring Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander voice and agency in school leadership is critical to responding to the inequity that continues in Australian education for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. The underrepresentation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander teachers and school leaders contributes to the approaches used in education. McKenzie et al. (2014), in their *Staff in Australia's Schools* report in 2013, found that less than 1% of school leaders identify as Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander. This poses major challenges with the lack of Indigenous representation, voice and agency into the current reform efforts in educational leadership. The dominant discourse of Western school structures continues to replicate systemic forms of oppression and inequity. Thus, they continue to privilege the dominant discourse of Eurocentric structures, and continue to fail and negatively position disadvantage as part of Indigeneity in Australia. This paper contributes to existing research in school leadership and argues for urgent attention in exploring school leadership approaches, informed by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander voices in educational research and scholarship. It analyses and synthesises the literature to identify how

current school leadership approaches continue the maintenance of settler-colonial structures in Australian education, rather than support notions of Indigenous futurity.

This paper begins with an introduction to my positionality, praxis and agency as an emerging scholar in education in Australia. It locates how I came to approach the research on educational success and its positioning of young Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples in Australian education. Next, the paper provides an analysis of the relevant literature in the field of educational leadership to describe the gap between school leadership and Indigenous scholarship. This includes the legacy of the historical and socio-political context of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander education in Australia and the limitations of defining educational success within the current measures. Third, it raises the criticality that education requires Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander voices, agency, scholarship and research to support notions of Indigenous futurity in the field of educational leadership. Fourth, the paper synthesises school leadership, proposing a transformative school leadership approach. Next, it reimagines the transformative school leadership approach to enact the mechanisms and tools that support Indigenous futurity in an educational context. Finally, the paper provides a critical self-reflection tool that school leaders can engage with to reflect on the mechanisms that support Indigenous futurity. The tool allows school leaders to reflect and engage critically in understanding systemic forms of oppression and inequity in Australian education for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.

Positionality, praxis and agency

Positionality

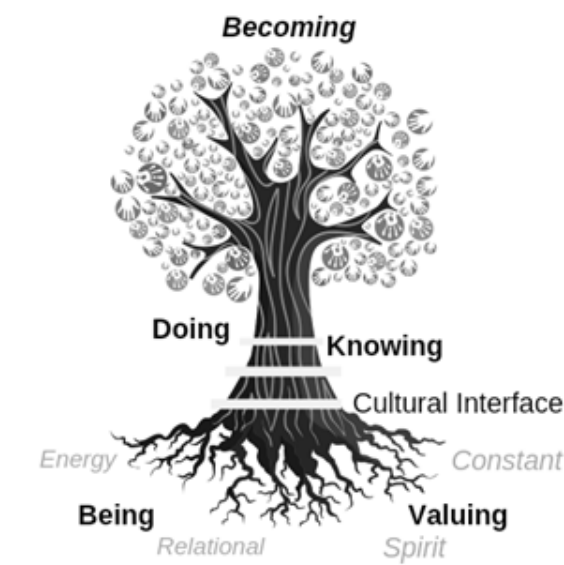
My connection to country is through my maternal bloodline to Boigu Island and Erub (Darnley Island) in the Torres Strait. As a proud Torres Strait Islander descendant, I bring the strength of my rich cultural identity and standpoint to the educational research space that my first teachers, my grandmothers and my mother, have taught me. It is through this worldview, alongside my experiences in Australian education, that I approach my research to further understand school leadership approaches that enable culturally responsive practices in Australian schools. As an emerging Indigenous scholar, I note that, in using examples of my story, positionality, and cultural standpoint, I do not speak on behalf of all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, but from my own experiences in education and educational leadership, and my emerging research.

Education for me commenced in my early years prior to formal schooling and was shaped by three strong women: my mother, my grandmother and my great-grandmother, as they modelled their ways of knowing, being and doing. As a young person navigating the school system, my experience was that value was placed on a Western education perspective. This not only impacted my experiences of education as a student, but then further went on to impact my role as an educator. After almost 30 years as a practitioner in the field of education, I have come to understand the complexities of education for young Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and how educational experiences impact on educational success and post-schooling opportunities. Through my positionality and educational experiences, I approach my research topic on the role of culturally responsive pedagogies in school leadership practices to determine the connections between school leadership and the engagement of Indigenous learners (Shay, 2018). The teachings of my first teachers have been embedded in my holistic ways of knowing, being and doing, nurtured by the strong women who continue to guide how I be and become, as a learner, educational leader, and now an emerging researcher in my praxis discussed next.

Praxis – My way

My ways of knowing, being and doing are characterised by my connectedness to self, my family, my totem/clan, my community, and the world, and come with expectations, obligations and responsibilities in the interconnectedness. These expectations continue to inform my behaviours and practices and will always align with this connectedness and relationship with self, others and all things. My way (Figure 1) is shaped by the core elements of valuing, being, knowing and doing. These relationally responsive ways (Yunkaporta & Shillingsworth, 2020) provide the mirror to view how I engage in the world and underpin my practice as an educator and as an emerging researcher. My way is relationally responsive, and it is through valuing, being, knowing and doing that my expectations continue to be nurtured and revisited.

Figure 1. My way



My way is the metaphor used to capture these ways, and is informed and underpinned by Indigenous scholarship (Martin / Mirraboopa, 2003; Nakata, 2002; Nakata, 2007; Yunkaporta & Shillingsworth, 2020). It encompasses my relatedness, connectedness and ways that are relationally responsive in navigating the cultural interface (Nakata, 2002; 2007) between Indigenous and non-Indigenous knowledge systems. This metaphor continues to guide me in honouring, sustaining and inspiring the wisdom of Indigenous futurity in my research praxis in the path that has been already paved (Gutiérrez, 2022).

Indigenous futurism, a term first coined by Grace Dillon, expresses Indigenous perspectives, and confronts past and present, and the impact of colonial constructs, to build better futures for Indigenous peoples (Vowel, 2022). Indigenous futurity builds better futures and centres the focus on (re)membering and healing (Gutiérrez, 2022). The wisdom of Indigenous futurity understands the past, acknowledges Indigenous existence in the present and future, and intertwines in the reimagination of better futures for Indigenous peoples. The wisdom of Indigenous futurity can be understood in the context of education through the application of school leadership approaches that encompass (re)membering and healing towards better futures. Indigenous futurity influences how I bring myself, my positionality and my agency to the research, honouring the past, inhabiting the present and reimagining the future. Indigenous futurity differs to notions of settler futurity and is discussed in the next section.

Agency

Through agency, I bring critical Indigenous consciousness (Kulago, 2019) to address settler futurity. Bringing critical Indigenous consciousness as a mechanism (Kulago, 2019) to understand settler-colonial structures in educational leadership supports notions of Indigenous futurity. Such consciousness is an opportunity to reimagine approaches that are different to those entrenched in settler futurity. Settler futurity as defined by Pewewardy et al. (2018) is “the permanent existence and property of the settler on Indigenous lands” (p. 43). In the context of education, settler-colonial knowledge and practice is entrenched. This includes the renaming of Indigenous bodies of knowledges, theory and practice as settler-colonial property (Pewewardy et al., 2018). Settler futurity claims the existence of Indigenous bodies of knowledges, and its reimagination of the future (Kulago, 2019; Pewewardy et al., 2018). My contribution to educational research in Australia is to speak back to settler futurity through voice and agency. My research draws inspiration from Indigenous scholarship and worldviews to better understand how Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples in this country are culturally and appropriately represented in Australian schools.

Locating the gap in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander education in Australia

For many years, traversing what constitutes educational success through a neo-liberal focus (Bishop, 2021; Bodkin-Andrews & Carlson, 2016) exemplified in standardised testing and bolted on funding and initiatives, I came to realise that if I am not part of contributing to a solution through scholarship, I am continuing (in my silence) to perpetuate the problem. The problematisation and negative positioning of educational success of young Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples have always been validated by my experiences as an educator. My experiences in exploring the literature as an emerging researcher validate my experience in the field as an educational leader.

There is a sense of urgency to address the dissonance between rhetoric and reality, rather than continuing to contribute to the imperial agenda and its existence in Australian education (Burgess & Lowe, 2022). The legacy of racism and the historical and socio-political context of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander education have impacted, and continue to impact, on the educational success of young Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples (Bishop, 2021; Bodkin-Andrews & Carlson, 2016). Understanding how to address systemic forms of oppression and inequity in Australian education, and work towards factors that contribute to safe learning environments for young Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, is not only critical, but timely.

To do this, it is an intentional endeavour to privilege Indigenous scholars and co-authored Indigenous scholarship in the field of education to better understand the educational gap and how school leaders enable culturally responsive pedagogical practice in schools. It is also intentional to draw parallels from non-Indigenous scholars that support the scholarship of Indigenous scholars. This section analyses the relevant literature in the field of educational leadership to better understand school leadership in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander education, and what Indigenous Australian scholarship offers to such approaches. In this paper, school leadership refers to principals, assistant principals and those who assume the role of a leader within a school. A school leadership approach is also defined as a dynamic, collective approach to school leadership, and one where a multi-level distributive approach, co-design and co-leadership are visible (e.g., Alfadala et al., 2021; Hameed et al., 2021), through multi-layered application (Netolicky & Gollege, 2021).

Indigenous Australian scholarship in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander education

The research of Indigenous Australian scholars outlines how current deficit thinking continues to perpetuate the status quo of low expectations and negative positioning of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander learners (e.g., Bodkin-Andrews & Carlson, 2016; Buxton, 2017; Hogarth, 2017; Hogarth, 2019; Sarra & Shay, 2019). It continues the intent of historical policies on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples to disrupt Indigenous Australians in exercising our ways of knowing, being and doing by either erasing or assimilating them into mainstream Australia (Bodkin-Andrews & Carlson, 2016). The dominance of Eurocentric models in education is a critical and key factor that continues to contribute to the ongoing fuelled debate and dissonance between the rhetoric of policy imposed in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander education, and the reality of educational success for young Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.

In Australia, the aim of the National Agreement on Closing the Gap is for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and government to work in partnership to overcome the inequalities experienced by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples to achieve parity of life outcomes equal to all Australians. The rhetoric and targets outlined in the Closing the Gap strategy has left wider gaps, evaluated by attendance and engagement, literacy, and numeracy, to measure educational success for young people. There are limitations to current definitions of educational success for young Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. The defining of educational success continues to contribute to problematisation and deficit discourse for young Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.

The current neo-liberal focus remains complicit with the historical positioning of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples (Bodkin-Andrews & Carlson, 2016). Education continues to assimilate working towards individual gain, rather than the collective good. However, educational success needs to consider scholarship and research that considers the factors and strengths of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander identities, histories and cultures, and their rich contribution to Australian education (Hameed et al., 2021; Shay & Sarra, 2021; Shay et al., 2022). Rather than focusing on gaps measured by attendance and engagement, literacy and numeracy, the fundamental question could be, what are the gaps in school leadership approaches that are required to support and nurture the educational success of young Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples?

The role of school leadership in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander education in Australia

School leaders make decisions that affect students, staff and their communities that can leave long-lasting effects. As noted earlier, with only 1% of school leaders in the profession identifying as Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander, it is critical that non-Indigenous school leaders find alternative and more culturally responsive models of school leadership both in and for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander education. Culturally responsive models of school leadership reimagine new ways in and for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander education that steer away from deficit thinking. There is an opportunity to further explore and focus on alternative school leadership models not currently considered in the dominant discourse in education and how they relate to educational outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students.

Alternative leadership models are ones that allow new ways to lead (Netolicky & Golledge, 2021). It is vital to note the importance of school leadership to lead Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander education

through strengths-based and whole-of-school approaches (e.g., Armour & Miller, 2021; Sarra et al., 2020; Shay et al., 2021) that harness Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander knowledges and perspectives. Educational leadership models in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander education require taking up alternative approaches. Alternative approaches in Australian and international Indigenous scholarship consider different methods to traditional Eurocentric leadership (Santamaria, 2014), and use holistic and positive approaches aligned with the strong identities of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples (Shay et al., 2021). This includes shifting the focus from results (Burgess & Lowe, 2022) to focusing on school processes and being more culturally responsive to the needs of young Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. It also includes opportunities for school leaders to understand how they lead, to engage with their assumptions and biases, and to foster new ways of being (Hameed et al., 2021; Netolicky & Golledge, 2021).

International models of culturally responsive leadership (Khalifa et al., 2016) have provided insights into the role of cultural responsiveness in the practice of school leadership. However, there is limited research to understand the Australian context and the need to focus on leadership in new ways (e.g., Burgess & Lowe, 2022; Hameed et al., 2021; Netolicky & Golledge, 2021; Shay et al., 2021; Wynter-Hoyte et al., 2019). New ways contribute to the corpus by providing new knowledge from a non-Eurocentric leadership perspective (Santamaria, 2014). Although the discussion on models and approaches to school leadership continues to evolve in education, it is imperative that new and alternative approaches are considered that position Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander voices central to the improvement of models of leadership that impact the education provided within their educational contexts. Otherwise, we continue deficit thinking and negative positioning of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples in Australian education.

Whose gap is this?

Key findings in the literature evidence the role of the school leader and the systems that support them, yet there is little evidence as to how school leaders enable culturally responsive leadership (Hattam, 2018). In Australia, the Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership (AITSL) is the national organisation that supports the education profession in quality teaching and leadership. AITSL argues that preparing school leaders is critical in the Australian education workforce and outlines recommendations in the *Building a Culturally Responsive Australian Teaching Workforce: Final Report* (AITSL, 2022) for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people's educational success. A constant theme identified in the literature is the provision of a counter-narrative to include Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander voices to inform educational leadership that supports moral and ethical decision-making of school leaders and that address inequity and disparity.

The scholarship of Shields (2017) argues for a transformative approach to leadership that addresses inequity and disparity. Transformative leadership theory is grounded in Freire's (1996) critical approach that builds upon critical awareness, critical reflection, critical analysis and critical action (Shields, 2017). While there is some confusion on the differences between transformational and transformative leadership, there are some clear distinctions. Blackmore (2011) contends that transformational leadership continues to push power and inequity into the background, maintaining the focus on the prevailing discourse. However, transformative leadership emphasises the necessity of addressing inequities and power imbalances (Shields, 2017). It recognises that schools frequently function as environments where the realities of race and racism remain unspoken, despite being understood by students (Stovall, 2006). Transformational leadership has limited mechanisms internally and externally to address or understand

diverse perspectives, needs and aspirations. Transformative leadership provides purposeful and intentional practice to counter inequitable distribution of power through understanding the internal and external factors affecting young people, and their families, locally, nationally and globally (Shields, 2017). Such an approach fosters socio-political consciousness (Ladson-Billings, 1995; 2009) and aims to deconstruct and reconstruct knowledge frameworks that perpetuate inequity, injustice and homogeneity (Shields, 2017). Transformative leadership calls for the moral courage to challenge the status quo to disrupt power, privilege and underlying assumptions (Shields, 2017; Stovall, 2006). It requires a multi-layered approach that centres the perspectives of diverse backgrounds and experiences emerging from the politics of difference to understand power and power relationships.

While moral and ethical considerations are outlined in the AITSL school leadership profiles (2014), further evidence is required to understand how leaders consider ethical decision-making that informs and provides a counter-narrative to the existing one that continues to dominate the space. When school leaders know their own positionality, cultural identity and standpoint (Proud & Morgan, 2021), they can acknowledge and understand their school leadership capacity in leading their school community to better understand the legacy of racism (Bodkin-Andrews & Carlson, 2016). Additionally, absent in the literature is a two-way process for school leaders that considers positive Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander identities and ways that contribute to success for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students, and addresses past and contemporary policies for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander education. While some Indigenous scholars (Proud & Morgan, 2021; Shay et al., 2022; Shay et al., 2021) are identifying strengths-based practices that build positive identity and promote excellence, it is an area that remains under-researched. Research is required to understand the ethical decisions and practice of school leadership that enables pedagogical practice that positively contributes to support Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander identity and excellence.

Shifting the gaze towards a counter-narrative

Indigenous scholarship in Australia has acknowledged strengths-based approaches as a key and critical factor in providing safe learning environments counter to the narrative of deficit discourse (Hameed et al., 2021; Shay et al., 2021). While this is an emerging space in Indigenous education, it has application to school leadership. Strengths-based framing towards positive language that we use in education provides hope and promise when we speak about educational success of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. This involves Indigenous leadership in the co-design of solutions through discussion and decision-making processes (Shay & Miller, 2021; Shay & Sarra, 2023). Indigenous leadership offers a lens towards collective good that is different to the current neo-liberal focus of individual gain, exemplified in standardised testing. Understanding the need to emphasise the collective good alongside the individual good provides a balance to education that brings global awareness and application (Shields, 2017).

Urgent attention is required in exploring school leadership approaches that draw the perspectives of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander voices and work towards notions of Indigenous futurity. First, models of educational leadership located in the literature in more recent times have been focused on instructional, transformational or turn-around approaches. With the focus on such approaches, the reality is that these models have done little to improve educational success for minoritised students (Khalifa et al., 2016). Rather than supporting notions of Indigenous futurity, they continue to maintain notions of settler futurity in their homogeneity and recipe-based approaches. Additionally, current leadership models of practice continue to endorse settler futurity in Australian education, where whiteness and settler status continue to remain invisible (Kulago, 2019). Rather, Khalifa et al. (2016) argue

that a focus on the social culture should be considered. What is not evident in the literature is how school leaders build positive identities (Shay et al., 2022) that consider their own moral and ethical decision-making to speak back to their own bias and positioning, which includes neo-liberal testing regimes such as standardised testing of numeracy. Understanding how school leaders engage authentically in their ethical and moral decision-making to shift thinking about how students' success is measured is critical and timely.

Second, while there is emerging Indigenous scholarship on educational success in Indigenous education (Hameed et al., 2021; Shay et al., 2022; Shay & Sarra, 2021; 2023) Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander voices are absent in the construction of new knowledge on school leadership approaches in Australian education and are underrepresented in school leadership roles across primary and secondary contexts (McKenzie et al., 2014). What is important to note here is that notions of Indigenous futurity are critical in knowledge production, including the relevance of experience and narratives of Indigenous voices (Harjo, 2019). What is not evident in the literature on school leadership is a counter-narrative to address inequity and disparity, negative positioning and deficit thinking (Burgess & Lowe, 2022). This includes school leadership approaches that are informed and co-designed with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples (Shay & Sarra, 2023). A recurring theme in the literature by Indigenous Australian scholars is that it is critical that Indigenous people and their leadership capability are part of decision-making, partnerships and co-designing the solutions in Indigenous education (Shay & Miller, 2021; Shay & Sarra, 2023). Privileging Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander voices within school leadership models commits to Indigenous futurity using approaches that position Indigenous epistemologies and practices as central.

Finally, Price et al. (2019) argue that, in the Australian context, focusing on school leaders is critical in preparing educators in their communities to counter deficit thinking. Continuing to pathologise Indigeneity as the problem must be contested, and transformative thinking is required to address the systemic barriers in education and their impact on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. Shields (2017) argues that current transformational leadership approaches and practices continue to inform or misinform leadership processes, and provides the frame to move from transformational approaches to a transformative approach that allows for deep and equitable change. Deep and equitable change requires community building through approaches that work through tools of futurity, such as collective power (Harjo, 2019). Collective power in an educational context can change the way we view Indigeneity and shift the notions of gaps to thriving and strong identities, positive energy and safe spaces (Harjo, 2019). It is critical that mechanisms that support Indigenous futurity are considered, whereby privileging Indigenous voices provides agency to consider new possibilities and approaches to school leadership in Australian education and its future (Kulago, 2019). The next section synthesises school leadership and supports a transformative school leadership approach. In its conceptualisation, a transformative school leadership approach is an approach that steers away from Western leadership models that educational leaders can apply to their own practice.

Reimagining school leadership in Australia – a transformative approach

Moving beyond traditional Western models of school leadership in Australia

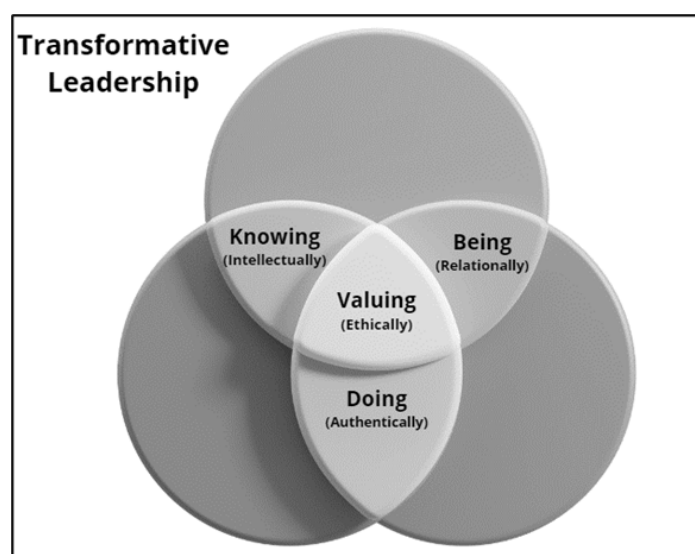
The literature has been synthesised into four elements that school leaders require. This approach draws inspiration from the scholarship of Yunkaporta & Shillingsworth (2020) through a critical juncture of a

relationally responsive approach to school leadership that privileges ethical, relational, intellectual and authentic practices at the heart of transformative school leadership practices. It understands the need to deconstruct and reconstruct such knowledge in education that perpetuates inequity (Shields, 2017). These are argued as ethical (Buxton, 2017; Eacott, 2015; Hameed et al., 2021; Shay et al., 2021; Wynter-Hoyte et al., 2019), relational (Brearley, 2015; Eacott, 2015), intellectual (Bishop et al., 2021; Bodkin-Andrews & Carlson, 2016; Burgess & Lowe, 2022), and authentic (Bishop et al., 2021; Burgess et al., 2019; Ladson-Billings, 1995; Sarra et al., 2020) approaches for positive change to improve educational success for young Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.

This multi-layered approach of school leadership considers what Yunkaporta and Shillingsworth (2020) articulate as ways of valuing, ways of being, ways of knowing and ways of doing. It also promotes and seeks solutions in the pedagogical gap evident in Australian education that requires urgent attention. This relationally responsive approach (Yunkaporta & Shillingsworth, 2020) synthesises and draws on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander knowledge systems as equal to Western knowledge constructs (Buxton, 2017). The common threads of school leadership might be understood and explored through this transformative approach that considers ethical, relational, intellectual and authentic approaches of new knowledge and practices. It provides opportunity for a multi-layered approach to school leadership. This argument addresses the gaps in the literature towards transformative school leadership by ways of valuing, being, knowing and doing that harnesses Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander identities, perspectives and knowledges.

A holistic conceptualisation of school leadership addresses the underachievement of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students and the impact of past policy and contemporary policy in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander education (e.g., Bishop, 2021; Morrison et al., 2019; Vass et al., 2019; Wynter-Hoyte et al., 2019). It also provides insight into current models (Eacott, 2015; Yunkaporta & Shillingsworth, 2020) and new models of leadership (Khalifa et al., 2016; Netolicky & Golledge, 2021). The transformative school leadership model in Figure 2 moves beyond traditional Western models of school leadership in Australia and provides purposeful and intentional practice to counter the inequitable distribution of power.

Figure 2: Transformative school leadership approach

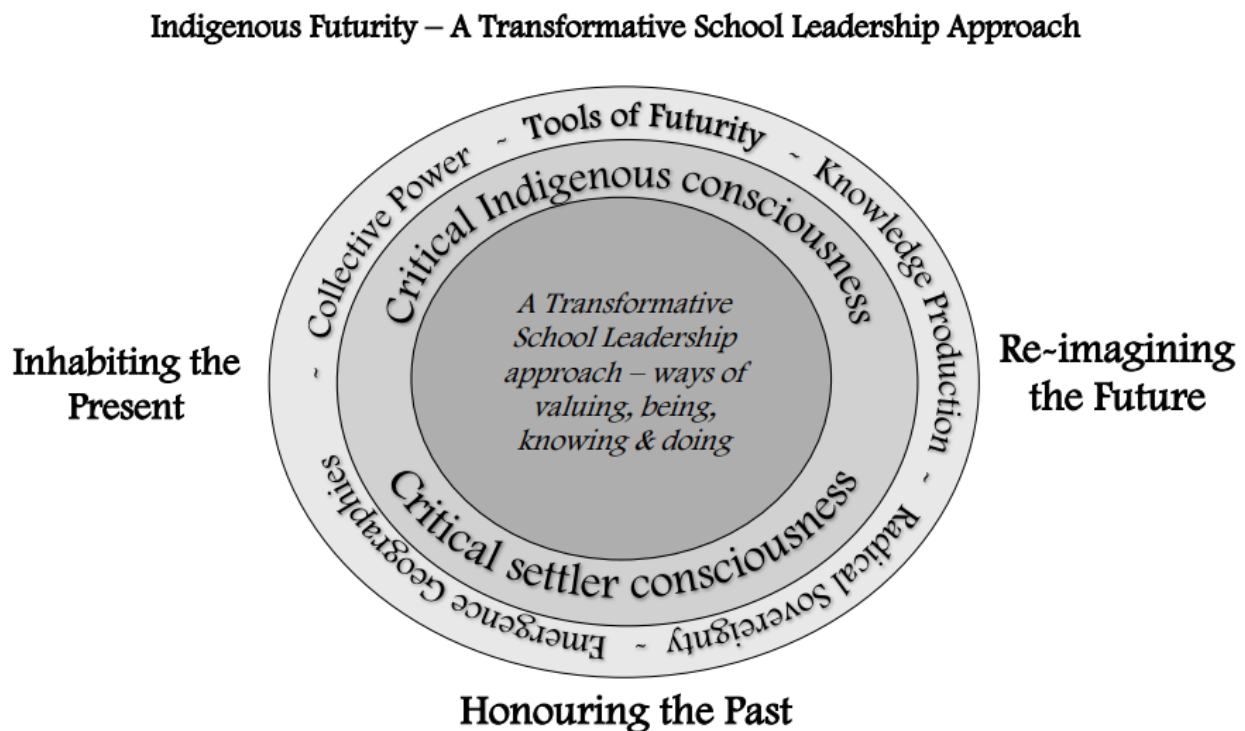


Yunkaporta and Shillingsworth (2020) outline relationally responsive ways as processes in leading ethically, relationally, intellectually and authentically. These ways have relevance and application not only to educators, but to school leadership. This multi-layered approach provides consideration and the opportunity to explore school leadership through these four relationally responsive ways of leading. It is an opportunity to combine ways of knowing (epistemology) and ways of being (ontology) with axiology (values and ethics) as the basis of social change. “Valuing” considers building knowledge and understanding that values Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander identity through purpose and intention, exploring positionality, bias and assumptions of school leaders. “Being” is building knowledge and understanding relational protocols (Yunkaporta & Shillingsworth, 2020) of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander identity through trust, deep listening and dialogue (Brearley, 2015; Netolicky & Golledge, 2021), and understanding context (Fullan, 2021). “Knowing” is building knowledge and understanding of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander identity through high expectations, and counter-narratives of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people (Sarra et al., 2020; Shay et al., 2021). “Doing” is the authentic approach to school leadership, with the inclusion of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander voices in co-design to address local and global context challenges.

A multi-layered approach works towards the praxis of Indigenous futurity, where ethical futures for possibilities are not yet there (Gutiérrez, 2022). This approach contributes to safe learning environments for young Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, and a lens to further map the development and opportunity to build school leadership capability across the four elements: ethically, relationally, intellectually and authentically. A transformative school leadership approach enacts the mechanisms of Indigenous futurity in the nurturing of critical Indigenous consciousness and the development of critical settler consciousness (Kulago, 2019). A multi-layered approach means that school leadership has the potential and opportunity to support Indigenous futurity towards a future where relational ways of valuing and ethics are centred on embracing “relational understandings of knowing, existing and healing” (Gutiérrez, 2022, p. 381). The Indigenous futurity scholarship of Gutiérrez (2022), aligns with both the framing of Shields’s (2017) transformative models of leadership and the relationally responsive ways of Yunkaporta and Shillingsworth (2020). The next section reimagines the synthesis of school leadership and suggests a conceptual transformative school leadership approach that enacts the mechanisms and tools of Indigenous futurity in the education context. It anchors Indigenous futurity through ways of valuing, being, knowing and doing to (re)centre axiologies, ontologies and epistemologies as foundational to a transformative school leadership approach discussed in this section.

Conceptual model: Indigenous futurity – a transformative school leadership approach

Critical consciousness, a concept first introduced by Freire in the 1970s, suggests that to understand socially embedded inequities, it is vital to be reflectively aware of the view of self, others and the world (Freire, 1996). Critical consciousness has the potential to shift perspectives in the way that school leaders view people from backgrounds that are different to their own, while also having the opportunity to reflect on their own privilege and how they are related and shaped by societal context (Herzog et al., 2021). This is conceptualised in Figure 3: Indigenous futurity – a transformative school leadership approach. This approach centres Indigenous ways of valuing, being, knowing and doing at the heart of a transformative leadership approach, outlined previously in Figure 2.

Figure 3: Conceptual model

The mechanisms to support Indigenous futurity represent how the ways of valuing, being, knowing and doing are nurtured and developed in an educational context, drawing on the tools of futurity to support the nurturing critical Indigenous consciousness and developing critical settler consciousness.

Mechanisms for Indigenous futurity – critical Indigenous consciousness and critical settler consciousness

Kulago (2019) argues the need for educators to explore critical Indigenous consciousness and critical settler consciousness as mechanisms to address settler-colonialism and build notions of Indigenous futurity. Critical Indigenous consciousness, as discussed earlier, enables educators to engage in critical dialogue about the positioning of Indigenous education to identify how settler ways have constructed, and continue to construct, knowledge about Indigeneity and its problematisation. Just as developing a critical Indigenous consciousness is required to address mechanisms of settler-colonialism, critical settler consciousness is essential to support critical Indigenous consciousness.

Critical settler consciousness assists to break the oppression to eliminate colonising methodologies and can be applied in the discipline of education (Watson, 2023). The commitment to Indigenous futurity requires the work of school leadership dedicated to interrupting settler futurity through building critical settler consciousness (Kulago, 2019). Developing critical settler consciousness is essential to build awareness of positionality, power and privilege within the social and political conditions of education (Kulago, 2019). This means there is opportunity to develop critical settler consciousness in educational leadership approaches that perpetuate the dominant structure in order to better understand the intervention required in development of pedagogical practices. The development of critical settler consciousness is essential to understand the legacy of racism and its historical impacts located in the current context of education, and the complexity of the Indigenous/settler relationship (Kulago, 2019). Using the tools of Indigenous futurity to support the mechanisms for futurity suggested by Harjo (2019), as discussed below, can be applied in the context of education.

Tools of Indigenous futurity

The outer rim in Figure 3 identifies the tools of Indigenous futurity (Harjo, 2019) that can be used to embed notions of futurity in school leadership approaches. These are radical sovereignty, knowledge production, collective power and emergence geographies. Radical sovereignty works towards self-determination, power and agency of Indigenous peoples. It supports lifting all with the rising tide through community building, and not just those in positions of power and privilege (Harjo, 2019). Knowledge production supports the criticality of gaining input from Indigenous voices—students, families and community—and understanding the relevance of experiences and narratives in education (Harjo, 2019). Collective power is a tool to shift the language from the current deficit discourse used in Australian education to strong identities, relationality, positive energy, and safe spaces, and change the ways we view Indigeneity in education (Harjo, 2019). Emergence geographies is a tool to build critical settler consciousness to understand that geography is not simply a prescribed geographical area of property and geographies that settler-colonialism has produced (Harjo, 2019). Rather, it is seeing community exists in various iterations and forms, where land is kin, has memory and builds a sense of place. Using the mechanisms of critical Indigenous consciousness and critical settler consciousness alongside the tools of Harjo's (2019) scholarship works to (re)centre Indigenous ways of valuing, being, knowing and doing, enacting social change in education through school leadership. One example of how school leaders enact this is through critical self-reflection.

Critical self-reflection – a tool to cultivate critical Indigenous consciousness and develop critical settler consciousness

Critical self-reflection provides an opportunity to nurture critical Indigenous consciousness and develop critical settler consciousness, drawing on the tools to engage in critical dialogue with self and others. It is an opportunity for school leaders to be self-reflexive to better understand their positionality, privilege, power and bias within social and political positions that impact on their pedagogy (Kulago, 2019). Many scholars support the need to interrupt the current inequity, whereby educational leaders understand their own positionality, unconscious bias and assumptions through critical self-reflection, and to build moral and ethical approaches to improve outcomes (e.g., Alfadala et al., 2021; Hameed et al., 2021; Netolicky & Golledge, 2021; Proud & Morgan, 2021; Shay et al., 2021; Wynter-Hoyte et al., 2019). The next section provides a tool for school and system leaders to critically reflect and identify the next steps in their practice, and across their schooling context, to nurture critical Indigenous consciousness and develop critical settler consciousness.

The following questions could be used by leaders and their respective schooling contexts to engage in self-reflection. The term “school leader” refers to principals, assistant principals and those who assume the role of leader within a school. The term “system leaders” refers to roles administering system-level change, supporting schools within jurisdictions. The questions are adapted from the scholarship of Kulago (2019, p. 280):

As a school leader:

- How do I perpetuate settler-colonialism through my school community through the mechanisms of curriculum, pedagogy and everyday interactions with my students, teachers and community? How can I interrupt those mechanisms?

- How am I invested in settler futurity and how do I suppress Indigenous futurity? How can I interrupt that?
- How can I lead in support of critical Indigenous consciousness and encourage the critical settler consciousness of my students, teachers and community?

As system leaders:

- How do we perpetuate settler-colonialism through our school communities through the mechanisms of curriculum, pedagogy and everyday interactions with our students, teachers and communities we support? How can we interrupt those mechanisms?
- How are we invested in settler futurity and how do we suppress Indigenous futurity? How can we interrupt that?
- How can we lead in support of critical Indigenous consciousness and encourage the critical settler consciousness of our students, teachers and communities we support?

Engaging in critical self-reflection is an opportunity for school (and system) leaders to cultivate critical Indigenous consciousness, develop critical settler consciousness, and identify further opportunities for professional growth and development.

The literature provides clear evidence that current instructional models in educational leadership (Fullan, 2021; Sharratt, 2018) address the education of students as a homogeneous grouping (Shields, 2017). There is a sense of urgency in addressing educational success for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people that calls for a transformative leadership model for change and that privileges Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander voices in its approach. Through a transformative approach to school leadership, synthesised from the literature, the gap in educational leadership research and scholarship can be addressed, and this approach can be applied to school leadership practices in Australia. Supporting notions of Indigenous futurity, a transformative school leadership approach imagines “spaces and times we haven’t (yet) been” (Vowel, 2022, par. 4).

Conclusion

This paper analyses, synthesises and argues the criticality of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander voices, agency, scholarship and research in providing alternate approaches to school leadership. It argues the gap between the broader literature of school leadership and Indigenous scholarship in Australian education. The current pedagogical practices of educators continue to fail the needs of young Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and do not provide alternative narratives of positive identity, belonging or excellence (Hameed et al., 2021; Shay et al., 2021). These models erase notions of Indigenous futurity and the bodies of Indigenous knowledges, theory and practice, and rename them as settler-colonial property (Pewewardy et al., 2018).

Furthermore, current practices maintain notions of settler futurity and replicate systemic forms of oppression and inequity in educational experiences for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people. This impacts all young people and their understandings and representations of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander identities in Australian education. Harnessing the voices of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples in voice, agency, scholarship and research is critical to Indigenous futurity in the

field of educational leadership. It is not only critical, but timely to the success of young Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and the representations of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander identities in schools. Restoring Indigenous knowledges, theory and practice (re)centres Indigenous futurity and brings back what has been erased through acts of settler futurity (Gutiérrez, 2022, p. 383).

My contribution to research as an emerging scholar is harnessing the mechanisms of Indigenous futurity to build critical Indigenous consciousness and critical settler consciousness of educators. Through my positionality, praxis and agency I build critical Indigenous consciousness into my research to address settler futurity in educational research in Australia. This paper aims to reimagine school leadership approaches that work to support notions of Indigenous futurity. Indigenous scholarship proposes new practices in educational leadership in Australia that harness the tools of futurity to address the systemic forms of oppression and inequity that Indigenous peoples experience in education (Pewewardy et al., 2018). A transformative leadership approach reconceptualises leadership that has been mostly exclusive to Westernised approaches to an approach that privileges Indigenous worldviews, informed by voice, agency, scholarship and research.

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