

# ‘No Shame at AIME’: Listening to Aboriginal Philosophy and Methodologies to Theorise Shame in Educational Contexts

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Shame is a ‘slippery’ concept in educational contexts but by listening to Aboriginal philosophy and Country, we can rethink its slipperiness. This article contemplates how multiple understandings of shame are derived from and coexist within colonised educational contexts. We focus on one positive example of Indigenous education to consider how these understandings can be challenged and transformed for the benefit of Indigenous learners. We discuss a mentoring program run by and for Indigenous young people that is successfully impacting school retention and completion rates: The Australian Indigenous Mentoring Experience (AIME). AIME has a rule, ‘No Shame at AIME’, with the view to minimising shame as a barrier to engaging with Western education. But is this as beneficial as might first appear? Might this erode important cultural understandings of shame necessary in Indigenous education? Instead, could shame be repositioned to better align with original cultural meanings and purposes? We philosophise about the AIME rule with Yuin Country and stories from Country along with our observational and interview data. We argue AIME does not so much ‘remove’ shame as reposition it to better align with Aboriginal cultural educational practice, which positively impacts mentees.

■ **Keywords:** Shame, colonisation, decolonisation, Indigenous education, Australian Indigenous Mentoring Experience (AIME)

This article is written by Aboriginal and nonAboriginal people, with guidance from a Yuin Elder, Uncle Max Dulamunmun Harrison. We start with a story. Through this story, we share our observations and interpretations of our research data from/of Country. The discussions in this article are based around themes in this story. We acknowledge the focus of this story is uniquely Australian; the theoretical approach of engaging scholarship in relationship with Country (McKnight, 2017) necessitates this localised focus. However, elsewhere (McMahon et al., 2017) we have articulated the international experience of the devaluing and subjugation of Indigenous knowledges in colonised, Western schooling. We hope that our local philosophising will resonate with global efforts to reculturalise shame for the benefit of Indigenous school students. We invite the reader to understand the story as shared but not directed by us as the writers and to form their own relationship with this article. We make this invitation because we can never accurately or completely represent the whole story.

## Opening Story

A particular place on Yuin Country is surrounded by water. The landscape is moulded by the water and the wind that consistently visits and is a part of this place. The clouds hovering above are of Country; they travel across the skies of many Countries. A spider weaves its web and is seen everywhere as the clouds control the light from Grandfather Sun, who is shifting and shaping what was to be seen by these visitors. The visitors (researchers) are at this place for a purpose and cannot ignore what is happening around them. Visitors can be skilled with vision to see connections to let go of what has been created by a foreign, obscuring story that has taken a hold of many

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a mind. Growth can occur with light and when the wind brings the clouds that hold water we can see the gifts that come from seeds to sustain life. These visitors were asked to take notice of the gifts provided by Mother Earth, Father Sky, Grandmother Moon and Grandfather Sun and did so with an open mind and heart. As with all things, learning takes place in its own time as knowing, learning and behaving occurs within the individual at its own pace. Importantly, every human and nonhuman account that was seen contributed to the story being woven by the spider that followed everyone.

Wind, water and clouds do not stop at borders, as they know their connections in supporting the networks that maintain the stories of many Countries in oneness. Respect and permission is sought at each junction as the protocols in the web of networks are seen across all landscapes to catch the essence. The sharing of wind, water and clouds is important to the caring and holding of stories from Country. Water, wind and clouds demonstrate how Country can go beyond the physical and has informed relatedness to Country. Taking notice of Country while creating and implementing Indigenous strategies within mainstream institutions is essential. In particular, the researching of such strategies can no longer ignore the role of diverse Countries.

### **‘Moulded by Water’—Shaping the Conceptual Landscape for Our Discussion**

A particular place on Yuin Country is surrounded by water. The landscape is moulded by the water and the wind that consistently visits and is a part of this place ... (Opening Story)

Not knowing a word is just as important as knowing because culture is a lot more than a spoken or written language. Not knowing a word does not mean you do not know the experience, feeling or sense. The word ‘shame’ is both an English and Aboriginal English (AE) term. The English term shame did not exist in Australia prior to colonisation. However, we propose that some senses of its meaning did exist and was understood through language. Language in this cultural context (Yuin)<sup>1</sup> means not only verbal expression (tongue) but also body language, inscriptions, cultural practices, dance, and Country. It was demonstrated, spoken and felt when the community witnessed a person removed from being *in oneness*. ‘In oneness’ is being connected to all things of the world and is the community, group and individual. In oneness is theorised elsewhere as relationality (Wilson, 2008) and relatedness (Martin, 2008).

The AE term *shame* has a history, like its speakers, in which its meaning has been disrupted (colonisation) as well as remaining within a continuum of connection to its original cultural context. Uncle Max Harrison, Yuin Elder and Lawman, does not use tongue liberally. However, he has shared two Yuin words for shame. With per-

mission from Uncle Max, the first word for shame in lore is *baambi* (strength in holding lore), while the second word (everyday use) is *baambi mumm* (scared, frightened). The AE term of shame today is more aligned towards *baambi mumm*, with colonisation disrupting but not removing *baambi*. This article explores the need to strengthen this continuum of connection in current usage of shame by Aboriginal and Torres Islander high school students.

Country continues to demonstrate the two Yuin language words of *baambi* and *baambi mumm*. There is no shame in not knowing how to observe the teachings and input Country has on everyday life (for example, not knowing the language/tongue word for shame). There is no shame in colonisation disrupting connection to Country. Country exists today, even in a time when colonisation has influence (residue) and Western<sup>2</sup> education is dominant. Rose (1996, p. 8) describes the term Country as,

multi-dimensional—it consists of people, animals, plants, Dreamings, underground, earth, soils, minerals, surface water, and air. There is sea country and land country; in some areas people talk about sky country. Country has origins and a future; it exists both in and through time ...

We suggest that for many Aboriginal people, whether in resistance, contentiously, conformingly and or conciliatory, Western education has become an aspect of life, culture/Country. Achieving a Western education is a necessary part of today’s gathering and hunting (Uncle Max Harrison, Personal communication, 2014); gathering and hunting when in connection with Country nourishes the body, mind and spirit (Presland, 2002). How young Aboriginal people hold and feel about this knowledge relationship (Aboriginal and Western) to survive within and outside themselves is a question, in part, shaped by the varying notions and experiences of the AE term called shame.

Through a reconfiguration of the English language within Aboriginal language(s) structures, Aboriginal peoples across Australia have produced varying forms of AE. Munro and Mushin (2016, pp. 109–110) describe AE as ‘language varieties that may appear mutually intelligible with Standard Australian English, but are nonetheless distinct in that they reflect the history, contemporary culture and world view of Australia’s Indigenous peoples’. The AE usage of shame, then, will be a composite of traditional (e.g., *baambi* and *baambi mumm*, in Yuin language) and colonised understandings of the term. Throughout this article, we explore how traditional and colonised understandings are varied, complex and interfacing in AE and AIME’s usage of the term. Such explorations underscore our theorisation of a reculturalisation of shame within AIME contexts.

We include Yuin Country and stories from Country along with interview and observational data from a national research project to explore the AIME rule, ‘No Shame at AIME’, in connection~separation<sup>3</sup>. That is, we

explore if the rule is successful, or not, in maintaining cultural understandings of shame and, concurrently, reducing barriers to Western education. To begin, we describe varied and often conflicting understandings of shame to show the concept at the centre of 'No Shame at AIME' as both critical~complimentary and contested~accepted. We then provide a rationale for understanding No Shame in the AIME context and outline our Aboriginal methodology of relationship (McKnight, 2017). Together, this builds a case for development of the opening story, which also informs the ensuing analysis; showing how clouds, wind, water and spider webs are knowledge and demonstrate a way people can work with Country to understand the meaning of shame.

### **Moulded by Water Within and Without: What is Shame?**

... take notice of the gifts provided by Mother Earth, Father Sky, Grandmother Moon and Grandfather Sun. (Opening Story)

Grandmother moon moves the water on earth through her effects/affects on the tides. She also has an effect/affect on us as people because we too are mainly water; she moves and moulds our feelings, thoughts and actions. Grandmother moon working externally and internally with water guides our thematic discussion of the literature. First, attention to feelings and thoughts are explicated through psychological construals of shame, then our attention turns to literature that depicts shame as cultural, shared and suprapersonal.

#### **Psychological Construals of Shame**

AIME's use of the word, shame, we suggest, is relatively straightforward and consistent. Shame is seen as a barrier to success in Western schooling. The 'No Shame at AIME' rule is used to communicate 'there's no shame in being Indigenous *and* doing well at school'. However, shame is a 'slippery' concept (Scheff, 2000) and has multiple meanings and usages linguistically, culturally and academically. Colloquially, shame is often conflated with guilt, humiliation, embarrassment, feelings of inadequacy, unworthiness, being unliked, awkwardness, fear of leaving the group/individual perceived expectations and shyness. All of these colloquial meanings infer internal, psychological manifestations of shame.

The psychological construal of shame most frequently deployed in educational contexts is not so much shame as related to guilt (e.g., Cohen, Wolf, Panter, & Insko, 2011; Sheikh & Janoff-Bulman, 2010) but, as McGregor and Elliot state below, shame as related to fear of failure,

For individuals high in fear of failure, achievement events are not simply opportunities to learn ... Instead, they are threatening, judgment-oriented experiences that put one's entire self on the line (for conceptual parallels see: Crocker & Wolfe, 2001; Kernis, 2003) and that put one's sense of rela-

tional security in jeopardy (Elliot & Reis, 2003). (McGregor & Elliot, 2005, p. 229)

Connection to ideas of fear in this Western conception of shame aligns with elements of traditional understandings of 'Baambi mumm' (scared, frightened), but the above quote focusses on fear of achievement events. School is arguably a string of achievement events, judgment oriented experiences and spotlighting. To borrow from Foucault (1995), schools are disciplinary institutions designed to assess and differentiate students through normalising judgments. Schools are institutions described as sites of shaming (Creed, Douglas, Hudson, Okhuyesen, & Smith-Crowe, 2014) and, for Aboriginal students, are often foreign yet localised institutions. This 'foreign-ness' is complex. For it is not the case schools are unknown. Educational disadvantage for Aboriginal school students (e.g., SCRGSP, 2015), demonstrate schools are very much known to Aboriginal communities. The foreign-ness arguably eventuates from schools not effectively collaborating with Aboriginal educational structures and knowledges (e.g., McMahon et al., 2017).

We contend psychological notions of shame as 'fear of failure' underscores much of the literature on Western education of Indigenous Australians (e.g., Harkins, 1990; Louth, 2012; Martin, 2006). This is the case in literature on teaching English to creole speakers (e.g., Sharifan, 2005; Wigglesworth & Billington, 2013) and job readiness training (Oliver, Grote, Rochecouste, & Exell, 2013). With reliance on normalising judgments, the Western school system has contributed to the production and slipperiness of the term shame within contemporary Aboriginal educational contexts.

Currently, Indigenous Australian people's experiences of shame are attributed to several factors. These include: being singled out from a group (Butcher, 2008; Sharifan, 2005; Ware, 2013); novelty of experience or not knowing rules and expectations (Butcher, 2008; Harkins, 1990; Sharifan, 2005); being forced to act in a way that does not conform to social and spiritual obligations (Maher, 1999); internalized racism (Kwok, 2012); and response to colonising power dynamics, including engaging with people who speak 'Standard' rather than AE (Kwok, 2012; Oliver et al., 2013; Wigglesworth & Billington, 2013). Regardless of nuances in how Indigenous people's experiences of shame may be understood, shame is popularly cast as a barrier for Indigenous people in accessing public education (e.g., Grace & Trudgett, 2012; Louth, 2012; Martin, 2006). One problem with this is that shame is placed back upon Australian-Indigenous students, hindering their relational contexts with schooling.

#### **Shame as Shared, Cultural and Suprapersonal**

Having so far described within-person, psychological understandings of shame, we turn to understandings of shame as shared, cultural and 'beyond' the individual. In

the discipline of sociology, shame is cast as an embodiment of social conditions, rather than an emotion particular to an individual's psychological state (e.g., Kwok, 2012; Probyn, 2004). Scheff (2000) offers a summary of sociological analyses of shame over time. Other work considers shame as interfacing with and responding to cultural contexts and differences (e.g., Boiger, De Deyne, & Mesquita, 2013; Fessler, 2004; Zembylas, 2008).

Indigenous literature also engages with these ideas. Yunkaporta (2009) describes shame as a cultural necessity for Indigenous Australians, a mechanism for 'balance and groundedness and protocol' (pp. 108–109). Traditionally, shame was connected to Country as a form of discipline: maintaining Country as self, self as Country (McKnight, 2015). Or, as Suchet-Pearson, Wright, Lloyd, Burarrwanga, & Bawaka Country (2013) explain using the Yolugu word *wetj*, '*wetj* is a matrix, a pattern of obligation, a multidimensional and ongoing cycle of reciprocity' (p. 190). This understanding of shame is closest to the Yuin word, *baambi* (strength in holding lore). Shame in this traditional sense safeguards all relationships, upholding kinship relations and egalitarianism (Harkins, 1990) and is a mechanism for staking political lines and 'defend[ing] a space for the survival of cultural autonomy and difference' (Kwok, 2012, p. 40).

For Indigenous Australians, shame is clearly a shared, cultural experience. Two examples are provided by Kwok (2012) and Harkins (1990). Kwok (2012) explains shame as: 'The insidious penetration of internalized racism in the construction of subjectivities and bodily disposition' (p. 41) that effectively works to 'electrify the racial divide' (p. 39). Racism, although internalized by individuals is a phenomenon directed at and experienced by a group or community. Harkin's (1990) linguistic analysis of Indigenous people's usage of the term points to shame as a shared experience. 'Big Shame' is described as being ashamed about what White people say about Black people (as a group). Big Shame is probably the closest to the usage of shame used at AIME.

AIME's consistently uses 'No Shame' to mean: 'There's no shame in being Indigenous AND doing well in school'. We contend this challenges young Indigenous Australians' shame by negotiating tensions between acknowledging shame as/with a cultural necessity for 'balance, groundedness and protocol' (Yunkaporta, 2009, pp. 108–109) and dissipating shared shame about one's culture that arises from internalized racism and colonisation (e.g., Harkins, 1990; Kwok, 2012).

### **A New Song to Sing Up Water: What is AIME and Why Study 'No Shame' in this Context?**

AIME is making progress towards 'closing the gap' for Australian Indigenous students' school retention and completion rates (AIME, 2016, 2017; Harwood et al., 2013;

KPMG, 2013). Understanding AIME's success moves beyond describing the problem of an 'education gap' and focussing on identifying 'what works'. AIME is an Indigenous designed and led mentoring program that supports students to complete high school. The AIME program is delivered to high school students via excursions to university campuses. The students (mentees) work through curriculum modules with assistance from their volunteer university student mentors and AIME staff. Modules focus on cultural history and identity, promoting skills and values conducive to school engagement (e.g., resilience, respect, empathy for teachers, self-esteem, goal setting and time management). AIME also provides a school-based academic support program (scholastic years 9–12) and personalized transition support from Year 12 to postschool pathways (including further education, employment and university).

AIME places responsibility for stepping up and 'abandoning' shame on the entire group through setting whole group challenges in their curriculum; but each individual is responsible for joining this group challenge. The individual can become different from 'being shamed', but remain with the group (similar) if the group moves as a whole (not shamed). Fear of doing well, of identifying as un/successful, is lessened if things are done as a group. This shows how AIME connects both with aspects of traditional shame (e.g., *baambi mumm*, scared/frightened) and Western psychological notions of shame, (e.g., 'fear of failure' in McGregor & Elliot, 2005). The focus on the group ameliorates individual shame and creates egalitarian, nonjudgmental learning environments. The discipline of the group can move to self-discipline when you know who you are, or are learning who you are. Significantly, AIME contributes to this journey of understanding self (Aboriginality).

Based on AIME's practice, the dominant psychological fear of failure concept described in the literature review requires repositioning to shame as an Aboriginal cultural education position. Understandings of shame can be reconnected to Indigenous traditional concepts of discipline (*Baambi*, strength in maintaining lore/connections). We will illustrate AIME as an example of achieving reculturalisation of shame in current Western educational landscapes to foster learning 'in oneness'.

### **'Grandfather Sun Was Shifting and Shaping What Was to be Seen by the Visitors'—Observing Stories Not Constrained by Time**

The visitors were at this place for a purpose and in respect could not ignore what was happening around them. (Opening Story)

Stories from Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students (mentees) and the authors' observations through/with Country were the research methods. The research is part of a five-year partnership between AIME

and university researchers (University of Wollongong, the University of Sydney, University of Technology Sydney)<sup>3</sup>. The project was conducted in accordance with Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies (AIATSIS) (2011) research protocols. Human ethics approvals were secured from the University of Wollongong and relevant state departments of education. This article draws on field notes from observations of 150 AIME sessions during 56 AIME program days at 15 university campuses across Australia (QLD, NSW, VIC, SA, WA and ACT) and semistructured interviews with high-school student mentees ( $N = 143$ ) and university student mentors ( $N = 73$ ).

The interview and observational data was completed in Western research practice during programs days at universities. From our fieldwork, we recognised that the known~unknown cultural work AIME does around shame was important and needed to be given careful, sustained and culturally informed attention. We analysed this data in the context of a shared knowledge system of relationality (Wilson, 2008) and finding connections to Country (McKnight, 2015, 2016) through stories. This was achieved through a four-day retreat on Yuin Country.

On this retreat, Anthony McKnight (Awabakal, Gomaroi and Yuin man) led yarning (Bessarab & Ng'andu, 2010; Fletcher et al., 2011) that directed findings and the theory/story (McKnight, 2015). Anthony encouraged all the authors to look, listen and see (Harrison & McConchie, 2009) Yuin Country as the guiding source methodologically (McKnight, 2016). This included observing the birds, sky, animals, people, wind and land when analysing the stories from the interview data. We recorded our yarning in drawings, concept maps and shared stories: we related these to the data. We yarned for sharing and transforming our impressions of the data (Bessarab & Ng'andu, 2010), to understand what 'No Shame at AIME' is and how it functions.

Yuin concepts of respect and reciprocation informed the yarning and *knowledge shared with us on Country*. As Archibald (2008, p. 8) states:

In addition to knowing the cultural protocols and rules pertaining to the telling of stories, one must know how to make meaning with stories. It is important to appreciate the diversity among Indigenous cultures and to recognize that there are different story genres, purposes, protocols, and ways to make story meaning.

The team looked for stories from the data and Country by implementing both Western and Aboriginal protocols—sharing a story in an academic context. Here, 'No Shame at AIME' is analysed from a Yuin Country centred approach that observes Country as self and self as Country (McKnight, 2015). From a Yuin philosophical position, McKnight (2015) explains that you are the Country you are born from, Country as self and self as Country. The non-Aboriginal researchers were seen as connected to the Abo-

iginal Country they were on, but they *are* the Country of their Ancestors (e.g., England, Scotland, Wales, Germany and Ireland). The yarning and written analysis lead by McKnight places Yuin Country's umbilical cord in Tripartation (McKnight, 2015) to unpack the unknown~known cultural elements in AIME's program. This is shown as the following analysis speaks back to the opening story, which was written when the authors met on Country, with each subheading speaking to a story theme.

### **'Wind, Water and Clouds do Not Stop at Borders': Weaving Data and Country for Shared Understandings of the Spiders Web**

Water, wind and clouds demonstrate how Country can go beyond the physical and has informed relatedness to Country. Taking notice of Country while creating, implementing Indigenous strategies within mainstream institutions is essential (Opening Story)

Wind can place pressure on structures (spiderwebs) that are put in place whether physically, mentally and or spiritually. This living entity can range from a gentle breeze to a hurricane that can reveal, remove and replace. Wind is something that we do not often connect to our everyday life, identity and way of learning. Students, if allowed, can voice what they see and feel: breathing out (wind) on what is held within. Students hold knowledge and their own identity that may be known, or not. When a constraint (baambi mumm) or pressure is breathed out damage can be removed or revealed for new growth to occur (baambi).

Including Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students in Western schooling is a discourse that is very slowly changing educational thinking, philosophy and practice. Donovan's (2015) work on including Aboriginal students' voices identifies, 'the importance of the relationship between the students and staff' (p. 615). AIME places relationships and student voice central to engaging the students in the learning process. As Mara, a Year 11 female student from Western Australia who participated within the AIME program commented, 'I think at school with some things it's yes or no but *here* [at AIME] it's always *yes*, like everyone has their own voice' (Mara, Year 11, Western Australia). From what we have observed, 'No Shame at AIME' is a rule that enhances student voice in the teaching and learning process; it instills self-belief within the students, which they are encouraged to transfer to school contexts.

A low-pressure system (spiral) creates a wind that moves towards its middle, which rises (atmospheric lift) to form emotions conducive to learning. The following quotes demonstrate how the high-pressure rule 'No Shame at AIME' interacts with the low-pressure system to produce learning conducive environments:

Because then you can't say no, you can't say shame. I like shame because that's like another way of saying no. You turn around and go "No that's shame we're not going up there". (Jared, Year 10, WA)

I think it's a really good rule because sometimes you don't want to fully go out there but . . . if everyone's just out there you don't feel ashamed of doing something because everyone else is doing the same thing. (Mara, Year 11, WA)

It's actually pretty good because if there's shame, then you won't – you'll never try it. So if you just try it and see how it goes you might like it. (Matt, Year 10, WA)

There's 'No Shame at AIME' like they always say, that's the big motto you hear. No one should be ashamed of anything they have or say . . . the environment of AIME [is] just kick back . . . no one's judging you, no one's thinking about you badly everyone just accepts you for who you are. (Byron, Year 10, NSW)

This low-pressure learning system in relationship with the high-pressure 'No Shame at AIME' is represented by the formation of clouds and precipitation (learning will grow from the rain). By contrast, as the AIME mentees point out, when Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students are 'being' shame in relationship with Western schooling, the 'No' (baambi mumm) is often said in response to school/teacher-created high-pressure situations or systems. Imported high-pressure systems, like schools, are 'hot and dry' creating a troubling downward pressure directly on the planet~self. Both high and low pressure systems are important to living and learning. However, dominance of one system, and especially a colonising system like Western schooling, can be seen to be counterproductive; putting things out of balance. Western knowledge systems now dominate the knowledge (high and low pressure) system in Australia, with an over emphasis of high-pressure systems in schools. To counterbalance this negative effect, AIME has identified one way to reduce the high and foreign pressure placed on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander learners.

Importantly, Jared demonstrates the link between 'no' and 'shame' as a way to distance himself from the responsibility of learning; 'Shame is another way of saying no'. Therefore, instead of contributing to forming a cloud (stepping up), Jared, through shame, can resist learning to remain stationary on the 'earth's surface' (the outcome and/or response to a foreign high-pressure force), staying connected to his Aboriginal peers. This type of high-pressure assists students to choose to 'stay put' for long periods, which is not how high and low pressure systems work in conjunction.

Mara's comment 'I don't want to go out there' (baambi mumm) also indicates that 'No Shame at AIME' is a form of positive discipline (baambi). It involves everyone remaining in a cultural context of connectedness: to go out there and participate together. We have interpreted these responses using Aboriginal understandings of the whole being more important than the individual (Hwang

& Matsumoto, 2013). Students 'step up' (formation of a cloud) to learn as both individual and group.

'No Shame at AIME' is a localised high-pressure system, a form of discipline that lessens the opportunity to not participate (Jared and Mara). It is important to mention that the option to 'not participate' remains; as refusing to participate can release both localised and imported high-pressure systems often placed in a school-learning environment. Students, like Jared, might have good reason to say 'No'. Respecting this facilitates strong relationships with students, which is a core objective of AIME (e.g., McMahon et al., 2017). Similarly, Matt's experience of 'No Shame at AIME' is that you will never try or see your potential if you hold shame from the colonial context. Jared echoes this idea with his comment of 'staying put', a self-group imposed learning restriction. Shame (baambi mumm) reduces an individual's opportunity to identify their gifts within a group context. This diminishes capacity to care for Country, society, family, community and self as an Aboriginal person engaging in two worlds.

Importantly, Byron alludes to judgmentalism as it relates to experiences of shame in educational contexts. This issue is highlighted in Fraser and Grootenboer's (2004) study of spiritual education practice in New Zealand schools:

The teachers . . . provided opportunities for their children to openly share their beliefs and values in a non-judgemental atmosphere. They provided opportunities for the deepest parts of children's lives to be touched (e.g., by powerful stories, by not interfering when boys comfort each other, by allowing the shyest girl in school to perform in public despite the risks) (p. 318).

There is limited judgmentalism and a strong relational dimension in AIME classrooms (Harwood et al., 2013; McMahon et al., 2017). This is achieved, in part, through 'No Shame at AIME'. This high-pressure rule creates a 'non-judgmental' atmosphere that values the individual *and group* within an Aboriginal context. In traditional Aboriginal learning settings normalising judgments are not directly made on the learning experience (Edwards & Buxton, 1997; McKnight, Hoban, & Nielsen, 2011). By contrast, the schooling high-pressure system prioritises these normalising practices; students' gifts are somewhat ignored (Bullen & Flavell, 2017). We argue that there is a tendency for judgmentalism to be based on prescribed learning outcomes that are valued in the Western knowledge site (Yunkaporta, 2009). At AIME, the responsibility for learning is with the 'teacher' and learner. However, the responsibility of relational discipline is with the 'teacher': an adult (AIME staff) helps the students (mentees) to unravel colonial impositions placed on them. This is done in order to assist the mentees to be able to learn in schools.

The expectation of this responsibility may at first appear harsh on schools and teachers. However, this type of knowledge sharing by Aboriginal people is

institutionally evident since the 1970's when Aboriginal education was recognised in Australian schooling (Hickling-Hudson & Ahlquist, 2003). The AIME program is not about 'showing up' teachers or schools. Rather, AIME is demonstrating and modelling their own approach to how Aboriginal education approaches can assist teachers in meeting educational needs of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students. AIME enhances Aboriginal students' capacity to participate in high-pressure learning environment such as schools.

### Clouds on the Move: What Does 'No Shame at AIME' do?

Clouds, like people, hold water and sometimes it is difficult to move with particular flows that are often seen as damaging. To be able to cross a border from a child to an adult, the border crossing is not always easy. Clouds move across borders and shed tears; this learning is emotional and supportive relationships are required. The following comments by AIME mentees demonstrate how 'No Shame at AIME' has impacted their attitude and feelings towards learning.

Int. What types of things have you learnt about at AIME, like about yourselves or about others?

Deon To be confident.

Greg Yeah be confident. And not be shame . . .

Deon There's 'No Shame at AIME'.

Greg Yeah but it is very shame but there's 'No Shame at AIME'.

(Deon and Greg, Year 10, WA)

No doubting yourself and no feeling that you are littler than everyone else just because of who you are and what your background is but to be proud of it. (Mara, Year 11, WA)

I [now] do a lot of things I wouldn't. (Seth, Year 9, WA)

Deon, Greg, Mara and Seth each signal 'No Shame at AIME' disallowed remaining in a learnt pattern of 'not having a go' (baambi mumm), and that this builds confidence. Interestingly, Greg comments it is still shameful but not in this AIME context. There is also recognition of colonial positioning of Aboriginal people in hierarchical relationships, such as when Mara talks about not feeling 'littler' (shame). We interpret this statement as not below or not marginalised and not lesser than nonAboriginal students. This term 'littler' is evidence of colonial residue in intergenerational shame where an Aboriginal person was placed as the lesser other, or nonhuman in the colonial period (e.g., Parbury, 2005).

Seth adds an interesting layer to this discussion: 'I [now] do a lot of things I wouldn't' (baambi). Confidence, not doubting themselves, and 'give[ing] something a go' demonstrate how the 'No Shame at AIME' rule assists students to cross a border within a Western school context to help themselves, with others, to learn. Clouds on the move (baambi). We now turn to discuss how the AIME mentors modelled this rule and behaviour through a relational approach.

### Drawing up Water Particles to Form Clouds

We identified that the 'No Shame at AIME' rule is utilized as an *articulated disciplinary pedagogy* to offset the disconnection many Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students have with Western schooling. From our observations, we contend that this only works if the mentors and AIME staff model, reinforce and engage with the rule. The following story shows how the 'No Shame at AIME' rule was demonstrated by AIME mentors and staff.

In an AIME session that encouraged mentees to perform in a talent show, two mentees, a mentor and schoolteacher practiced dancing along with a YouTube clip of a dancing gorilla. When it came time to perform to the whole group, one of the mentees 'refused' to get up and dance. The other mentee, the mentor and teacher started dancing and everyone 'cheered' to encourage the whole team to perform (Fieldnotes, 29 July 2014). This discussion between mentors at the end of that day recounts the event:

- I just loved watching that girl who got up in that dancing group . . . despite the fact that [her friend] didn't. Like she was so shame and she did it and afterwards she [was] just 'head down'.

- Did she cry?

- I think she might have been crying. That just took enormous courage and I was just really touched by that ...

- You could see her kind of thinking about it a little bit afterwards and eventually she just went back to normal. Which I think is like good for her now because she realizes like, you know, it only lasts like ten seconds.

(Mentors, 29 July 2014, VIC)

Before exploring this experience, we consider another modelling approach of AIME mentors and staff,

[The AIME staff member] asked everyone to put on a nametag. In anticipation of them not wanting to wear a nametag, he said: "honestly, if you put your nametags on I can use your actual name instead of just calling you all 'sister' and 'bro'" then "You won't be the only losers here, that's me. I'm the loser out the front". (Fieldnotes 18 June, 2014, NSW)

AIME mentors and staff model 'No Shame at AIME' at their own expense. The mentors in the first story provide a picture of the emotion, courage and discipline of the young woman that stepped out of shame but remained in shame. Interestingly, the student sustained the respect element of not putting herself above the other students (baambi), but accepted the challenge, as her teacher and mentor were also willing to 'be shame'. This is balanced pressure from shame: overcoming colonial shame to learn but knowing shame in not putting yourself outside of the group. The AIME staff member with the nametags, modelled that it is all right to put yourself out there in the spotlight but remain in a group context. The Aboriginal staff member identifies himself as the 'loser', implying 'if

I can, we all can be losers with me being the biggest'. In this way, the staff member placed himself as part of the group and not an authority figure.

### Looking at a Spider Weaving a Story: Is There Really 'No Shame at AIME'?

Visitors can be skilled with vision to see connections to let go of what has been created by a foreign, obscuring story that has taken a hold of many a mind. (Opening Story)

The title of this subsection makes a spiritual statement of connectedness: it is okay to allow yourself to get caught in the spiritual web of Aboriginal and nonAboriginal stories. We have looked at a spider weaving his/her web. The spider helped us to open our minds to see and reflect with Country, to make sense of our observations of how shame works at AIME. Spiders' webs are quite resilient to wind, rain and heat, and all of these have a role in the web's resilience. Forming your own web that can be resilient or built again if disrupted is something that we all need to learn. The intelligent spider holds such an amazing technology within themselves to weave a web that supports their subsistence.

The 'No Shame at AIME' rule informs AIME's philosophy of mentoring and is underpinned by the telling of stories by all involved. The story approach is reinforced across all aspects of the AIME program through many contemporary storytelling formats. AIME staff present stories through the curriculum, mentees and mentors are required to reciprocally share their stories (McMahon et al., 2017). In this teaching context, the current usage of AE shame would block the teaching and learning activity as this activity is not complete if it is not reciprocal. To achieve this reciprocal storytelling approach, 'No Shame at AIME' works to shift the mentees' *colonialised mindset of shame*. Significantly, this has the effect of reinforcing traditional concepts (baambi and bammbi mumm) of shame in a contemporary context, which matches or counterbalances the discomfort of being different. 'No Shame at AIME' is used to both reduce the effect of colonial, psychological notions of *shame* and to enhance a culturally appropriate teaching space. The form of shame that we observed at AIME is based from the traditional Aboriginal concepts (e.g., baambi and baambi mumm) as it brings the whole group together and engenders confidence to be Indigenous and 'different' while working in the Western system of education.

We have shown how current Western psychological, sociological and linguistic explanations of shame can constrict rather than engender knowledge sharing and learning: pedagogy as self-discipline. This makes AIME's intent to remove shame via their rule understandable. However, *we are inclined to argue that shame is not removed; rather, a repositioning of shame occurs*. Shame remains but moves towards a decolonised form. The AIME rule creates a platform for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students to

share their stories from whatever context in which they hold, or do not hold, their culture. AIME triggers the students' intergenerational memory of shame. A traditional sense of shame, in being strong and finding connections (baambi), is important—especially in Western schooling.

The crucial move towards Aboriginality can be enhanced if Country has the opportunity to ground mentees' identity by maintaining shame's traditional purpose. AIME's rule reinforces that there is no shame in knowing or not knowing your culture/Country through story. As McMahon et al. (2017) point out, AIME 'draw[s] on Indigenous high school students' and AIME staff's personal stories and experiences of AIME to erode colonial misrepresentations and deficit approaches through a "re-storying" (Corntassel, Chaw-win-is, and T'lakwadzi, 2009) of Indigenous ways of knowing, teaching and learning' (p. 44). Consequently, the final point of exploration is whether this rule can trigger~halt the students' intergenerational memory of 'traditional shame'~'colonized shame' for use in today's contemporary context.

Intergenerational memory of shame works with cultural understandings of shame that existed before the English and AE usage in Australia. Intergenerational memory of shame draws from connections between shame and Country, where shame, as we outlined in the introduction, is a cultural form of discipline (baambi). Country is a living entity that holds Aboriginal knowledge and language. Notwithstanding the entrenchment of Western knowledge in Australia, from an Aboriginal epistemology/ontology/pedagogy position Country is our primary teacher (McKnight, 2015). AIME's program and the 'No Shame at AIME' rule are not informed by an anticolonial position. AIME's rule and its continued reinforcement deceptively reculturalises discipline of the whole group, instead of the individual shame of being 'colonized Blackness': an excuse not to learn.

### Conclusion: Challenging Colonial Shame

The term shame can be in/congruent with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students' engagement within Western education. Many disruptive effects of colonisation are evident in how Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students feel, think and behave through shame. The AE word shame demonstrates colonial residues that influence Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students' capacity to learn in Western education. This colonised practice/behaviour of shame can impact how students learn in Aboriginal education. AE shame creates a barrier to learning from a range of knowledge sites.

Whilst we can in no way presume to understand or represent each of AIME's mentees' nuanced negotiations of English, AE and or traditional shame that is particular to their individual intersectionalities and cultural identity, we can theorise our extensive observation the practice of



AIME's rule 'No Shame at AIME'. We contend that AIME embraces the concept of shame in both colonial (English and AE) and Aboriginal cultural forms to challenge students' capacities to learn in Western education. AIME repositions the colonial concept of shame to align with traditional conceptions (baambi and baambi mumm) by focussing on the behaviour and achievements of the group; not the individual. This provides a learning environment built on relationships and a rule intended to overcome a colonised understanding of shame. From our observations, AIME does not remove the aspects of baambi and baambi mumm that persist in this AE term.

AIME has implemented a rule (old-way) with a pedagogical approach for a two-way relationship with Western schooling. This rule works to bring the whole group up together to learn, simultaneously positioning individuals as successful learners. When you value your identity, ability to learn and Aboriginal culture then learning in a Western knowledge site may reinforce connections and similarities instead of an emphasis on assimilating or removing 'relationality' (Wilson, 2008). What we as researchers witnessed was a community (including Country's communities of clouds and spiders) of Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people guiding AIME's mentees to be who they are meant to be, keeping the spider's web strong.

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## Conflicts of Interest

The research is done in partnership with AIME, this relationship maintained an open communication around both positive and negative findings of the report. In no way was the research censored by AIME, the relationship was consultative and respectful of all involved.

## Disclosure Statement

The authors confirm their full knowledge of this article, its submission to AJIE and that the manuscript is their own original work. The authors confirm that this manuscript has not been published anywhere else and it is not under review by any other journal or publication. There are no potential conflicts of interest to report. AIME did not fund the research, funding was from the Australian Government. We are potentially identifiable as an authoring

team to reviewers due to our track record as researchers with AIME or being members of AIME staff e.g., <https://aimeresearchpartnership.wordpress.com>. University researchers work in partnership with AIME throughout the entire research cycle: in discerning research foci, data collection strategies, data analysis and reporting of research—this is to ensure research is conducted with cultural sensitivity and respect. Likewise, AIME are respectful of researcher critique, as evidenced in this article. Researchers do not alter research findings to suit AIME.

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