

Integrating Indigenous perspectives in the drama class: Pre-service teachers' perceptions and attitudes

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Currently, educational bodies are recognising the importance of integrating Australian Indigenous cultures in education to promote intercultural understanding and improve outcomes for Indigenous students. In drama, learning about Indigenous perspectives can be integrated through sharing cultural stories, with this integration mandated by the Australian Curriculum. However, teachers are struggling to achieve this directive due to a lack of knowledge in Indigenous content and concerns surrounding permission and cultural appropriation. This qualitative study used a focus group interview to determine non-Indigenous pre-service drama teachers' perceptions about integrating Indigenous perspectives in their praxis. Inductive analysis of the data revealed participants strongly believed in the importance of embedding Indigenous perspectives, yet felt apprehensive due to a range of challenges, including a lack of adequate training. These challenges and the participants' recommendations provide compelling evidence for initial teacher education to specifically embed learning experiences in Indigenous theatre and to provide opportunities for pre-service drama teachers to collaborate with Indigenous communities. The significance of this research points to the importance for pre-service drama teachers to be given tools to ensure that their praxis breaks the generational cycle of insufficient teaching of Indigenous perspectives in Australian schools, a cycle that has disadvantaged Indigenous children since colonisation.

Keywords: Indigenous perspectives, pre-service teachers, drama

Introduction

The inclusion of Indigenous perspectives in curricula has long been identified as a critical area for reform in Australian education policy. This is no doubt in recognition of the legacy of intergenerational educational disadvantage affecting Australian Aboriginal communities (Baynes, 2016; Beresford et al., 2012). However, the past thirty years have seen some radical improvements in Aboriginal education and, currently, there is a greater degree of bipartisanship in Indigenous affairs policy than at any other recent time (Beresford et al., 2012; Wyatt, 2020). As a result, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander histories and cultures have been recognised in the Australian Curriculum as a cross-curricular priority (CCP) since 2014, meaning they must be embedded in every learning area across the curriculum.

In addition, the Australian Curriculum: Drama (ACARA, 2014) puts a strong emphasis on the teaching of Indigenous histories and cultures in secondary education, with two content descriptors out of a possible seven devoted to teaching Indigenous content. Throughout the Years 7 to 10 curriculum, drama teachers are required to provide learning experiences for students to explore Indigenous drama; in

particular, investigating its “expressive capacity” (ACARA, 2014 – ACADRM049) in one content descriptor and the “differing viewpoints” (ACARA, 2014 – ACADRR053) which it represents in another.

Despite this directive from the curriculum, teachers in Australian schools are struggling to deliver effective learning in Indigenous content (Harrison & Greenfield, 2011). Often teachers feel they do not have an adequate understanding of Indigenous cultures and histories themselves and, even if they have, they are wary of cultural appropriation and inadvertently perpetuating stereotypes (Harrison & Greenfield, 2011; Kanu, 2005). As a result, students are often denied the opportunity for rich experiential learning and an understanding of the critical contribution Australian Indigenous peoples have made to the fabric of our national culture (Nakata, 2011).

Given the specific mandate to include Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander perspectives in drama as a subject, greater investigation into the application and integration of Indigenous content in drama is required. Therefore, this research study was undertaken to provide an outline of pre-service teachers’ readiness to deliver this important content as they enter the teaching profession. The study was conducted with fourth-year pre-service drama teachers in their final semester of study, and aimed to answer the following research questions:

- How do pre-service drama teachers feel about embedding Indigenous perspectives into their praxis?
- How do pre-service drama teachers anticipate they will embed learning about Indigenous histories and cultures into their future drama classes?

Integrating Indigenous content at the cultural interface

The concept of integrating Indigenous content into the curriculum has been explored in both national and international educational literature. Relevant to this field is the work of prominent Torres Strait Islander researcher Martin Nakata, who articulates the learning opportunities that can be found at the intersection of Western and Indigenous epistemologies (Nakata, 2011). For more than a decade, Nakata has contributed literature to encourage a discussion on how to deliver authentic Indigenous curricula within a dominant Western context (Carey & Prince, 2015). Nakata (2011) describes a “cultural interface” (p. 2) as the space where the difference between Indigenous and non-Indigenous ways of knowing, being and doing can connect and overlap – a non-oppositional space of dialogue and mutual respect. Although optimistic that the Australian Curriculum initiative can operate within this space, Nakata brings to light important issues that teachers have raised towards delivering Indigenous knowledges. These include questions such as “What does the inclusion of Indigenous perspectives look like and how can teachers embed these meaningfully in a non-tokenistic way?” and “How can non-Indigenous teachers do this when they have their biases and may already be challenged in this area?” (Nakata, 2011, p. 2). These, he points out, are not new concerns; rather they are old unanswered questions left over from past curriculum approaches (Nakata, 2011).

Recent Australian research suggests that the benefits to education of a curriculum embedded with Indigenous knowledges are numerous and multi-layered (Lowe, 2017; Lowe & Yunkaporta, 2018; Nakata, 2011). Prominent Indigenous researcher Sefa Dei (2008) suggests that issues such as whole child education, creative problem solving, collaborative learning and multicultural understanding can all be assisted when Indigenous perspectives are considered in the classroom. As identified in seminal writing by leading Aboriginal researcher Noel Pearson (2011), for Indigenous children to prosper in education,

there must first be systemic recognition of their cultures, and a space must be made for them within the dominant Western education system. This concept is verified by other Indigenous education researchers (Nakata, 2011; Yunkaporta, 2009), who validate the connection between a curriculum populated with Indigenous content and the increase in Indigenous educational outcomes.

Teachers' attitudes and perceptions on delivering Indigenous content

Despite the benefits, teachers are concerned that they lack the skills, knowledge and confidence necessary to implement this vital content and often their attitude to integrating Indigenous content is not reflected in their practice. For example, Yatta Kanu's (2005) ethnographic study found that, while Canadian secondary teachers believed integrating Aboriginal content to their classroom teaching was "absolutely crucial" (p. 54), only one out of the 10 teachers involved in her study was found to be integrating Aboriginal perspectives into her praxis. This teacher, who identified as Indigenous, was found to have adopted a "transformational approach" to delivering Indigenous content (Kanu, 2005, p. 56) because she provided opportunities for her students to experience Indigenous ways of being, doing and knowing and embedded a range of multicultural views and perspectives into her classes. The other nine teachers were found to have adopted a more tokenistic approach to integration, only adding Indigenous content where either necessary or convenient to a mostly Western-dominated curriculum (Kanu, 2005). Teachers' concerns about embedding more Indigenous content range from a lack of quality Indigenous resources to a perceived lack of time to fit Indigenous content into an already loaded curriculum and, most importantly, to teachers' perceived lack of the Indigenous cultural knowledge required for meaningful integration. In Kanu's (2005) study and those carried out in Australia, this has been reported as being one of the most significant impediments to quality delivery of Indigenous content (Harrison & Greenfield, 2011; Lowe & Yunkaporta, 2018).

Australian research has found similar results. Harrison and Greenfield (2011) discovered that many teachers lacked an understanding of the difference between Aboriginal knowledges and perspectives. They noted the primary school teachers in their study used broad generalisation and stereotyping, and often talked of Aboriginal people in the past tense, implying a race that used to exist. This metalanguage, which they define as "objectified and dehumanizing" (Harrison & Greenfield, 2011, p. 70), contributes to a significant problem: the Aboriginal perspectives they observed being taught in Australian schools were not actually authentic Aboriginal views or perspectives, instead, they were the non-Aboriginal teachers' perspectives on Aboriginal Australia (Harrison & Greenfield, 2011).

Research carried out by Phillips and Luke (2017) found similar themes of dehumanisation. Their study, carried out in four schools in NSW and Queensland, revealed a strong disparity between the perspectives of the Indigenous communities at these schools and their non-Indigenous teachers. The study revealed that this disconnect represented a critical concern which was that in those schools Indigenous peoples continue to be "viewed and treated through the lens and language of cultural, intellectual and moral 'deficit'" (Phillips & Luke, 2017, p. 960). To counteract this, the authors recommend populating schools and curricula with many diverse Indigenous perspectives, and they urge non-Indigenous teachers and school leaders to engage with these perspectives with "respect... patience and humility" (Phillips & Luke, 2017, p. 994).

Nakata (2011) contends it is vital that Aboriginal perspectives are represented when delivering Aboriginal content, a value shared by national and state government curricula. According to the

Queensland Curriculum and Assessment Authority's (2018) *Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Perspectives Statement*, Indigenous perspectives reflect individual and community experiences, cultural beliefs and values. They acknowledge and connect Aboriginal peoples' and Torres Strait Islander peoples' "ways of knowing, viewing and relating to the world" (QCAA, 2018, para. 3). Despite the importance of these perspectives being integrated into curricula, Nakata (2011) acknowledges that this can be difficult for non-Indigenous teachers, as it presumes they can fully understand and effectively translate these perspectives.

These perceptions are also shared by pre-service teachers. Canadian researcher Frank Deer (2013) interviewed pre-service teachers in their second year of training and found that pre-service teachers experience an overwhelming sense of apprehension towards embedding Indigenous perspectives into their practicum. They communicated a variety of issues, such as fear of failing to teach these perspectives adequately, discomfort with the subject matter due to political reasons and lack of pre-service training in the delivery of Indigenous content (Deer, 2013). Some pre-service teachers felt so far removed "culturally, ethically and linguistically" (Deer, 2013, p. 205) from the experience of Indigenous cultures, that they regarded the teaching of Indigenous content to be the sole responsibility of Indigenous teachers.

Australian teachers express hesitancy to integrate Aboriginal content when they perceive they do not possess either the level of expertise or the cultural permission to do so authentically (Baynes, 2016; Burridge et al., 2012). However, as Harrison and Greenfield (2011) report, with adequate training in Aboriginal histories and cultures, and by building teaching partnerships with local Aboriginal elders, they can develop the confidence to incorporate Indigenous knowledges into their practice.

Integrating Indigenous perspectives through the arts

Deer (2013) identified several instances when pre-service teachers communicated a strong sense of comfort at the prospect of embedding Aboriginal perspectives into their teaching, with these coming predominantly from pre-service teachers who were training in the arts. He found that the pre-service teachers whose subjects were deemed as more "commensurate with Aboriginal culture and traditions" (Deer, 2013, p. 193) tended to experience a stronger sense of comfort. This may be a result of the arts offering a "rich territory" for the exploration of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures, as arts subjects provide opportunities to explore a multiplicity of worldviews (Dinham, 2020, p. 40).

Drama is an experiential subject that provides many opportunities to experience a worldview as perceived by another person (O'Toole, 2006). Leading Indigenous theatre researcher Maryrose Casey (2005) believes the subject of drama is uniquely positioned to encourage intercultural understanding between Indigenous and non-Indigenous students through the study of Indigenous theatre texts. With the Australian Curriculum devoting two content descriptors to teaching Indigenous content in drama, it seems that now, more than ever, there is the opportunity for drama teachers to promote long-awaited cultural acknowledgement and cultural safety for Indigenous students (Fricker, 2017). As Aboriginal author Liza-Mare Syron (2008) points out, "At one point the words 'Indigenous' and 'Aboriginal' disappeared altogether from the NSW drama curriculum and were re-positioned as 'post-colonial drama' in Australia" (p. 75). However, studies into how drama can be used effectively at the cultural interface have not been conducted in an Australian context. It is this gap in the literature that inspired this study to determine how ready pre-service drama teachers are to embed vital learning about Indigenous histories and cultures into their teaching practices as they complete their pre-service training and embark on their careers.

Methodology

This research is influenced by Aboriginal ontology, which is the continuous interconnection of people, land and spirit – a metaphysics that both informs and supports Australian Indigenous peoples' ways of knowing, being and doing (Martin, 2008). Leading Indigenous researchers Martin and Mirraboopa (2003) clarify that research involving Indigenous perspectives "must centralise the core structures of Aboriginal ontology as a framework for research if it is to serve us well" (p. 209). Thus, the study was set within a relativistic paradigm and used a constructivist method of inquiry (Lincoln & Guba, 2013). The methodological premise for this study conformed to the constructivist belief that reality is a shared and subjective construct because the researcher and the participants work together to construct knowledge "and create a new, shared reality" (Lincoln & Guba, 2013, p. 41).

The study aimed to gain insight into pre-service drama teachers' attitudes and perceptions towards the prospect of integrating Indigenous perspectives in their praxis. The pre-service teachers' experiences of Indigenous education in their early schooling, as well as in their tertiary training, was examined, as was their recommendations for mentorship and support in this area. As the lived experiences of these pre-service teachers was the focus of the study, it was important to utilise a phenomenological method of inquiry. Drawing on the premise of Husserlian phenomenology, which contends that only the people who are experiencing the phenomenon being studied are qualified to communicate these experiences back to the rest of the world (Moran, 2000), a focus group interview was used as the key method of inquiry.

Method

Leading drama researcher John O'Toole (2006) notes that focus group interviews lend a valuable dynamic to data collection in drama research due to the rich data and profound insights that can be gained through group interaction. Liamputtong (2013) clarifies that focus group interviews are useful when a researcher wishes to examine participants' knowledge and experience, especially when exploring sensitive issues, as participants may feel more confident sharing their views within a group of people with similar experiences. During the focus group interview, a questioning route as identified by Krueger and Casey (2015) was used. Questions were sequenced from the guiding question "Can you describe what your interpretation of cultural learning is?", which was easy for participants to answer, before moving towards more specific questions, such as "Can you describe how confident you would feel if you had to integrate learning about Aboriginal histories and culture into your drama teaching?" and "Can you describe the ways you might embed learning about Aboriginal histories and culture into your drama teaching?".

The focus group interview was recorded and transcribed before an inductive thematic analysis of the transcription, as prescribed by Miles and Huberman (1994), was conducted. In keeping with key principles of inductive analysis, key areas of thematic commonality emerged from the raw data without any theoretical preconceptions being applied (Miles & Huberman, 1994). The analysis involved a thorough examination of the interview data in order to detect central themes and ideas that were coded to form categories of generalised information presented in a data matrix using Nvivo software. Key themes were then determined using the data matrix. Member checks were conducted to ensure the trustworthiness of data, and participants had the opportunity to view interview transcripts to check for inconsistencies and resonance with their experiences. They were also offered the opportunity to change or add to the transcript.

The participants

The focus group interview included eight pre-service drama teachers who were currently in their fourth and final year of their Bachelor of Education (Secondary) degree. The participants came from predominately Anglo-Celtic backgrounds, with English being their first language. One participant identified as coming from an Arabic background. The cultures of these participants closely mirror that of Australian teachers, with an estimated 87 per cent of teachers identifying as Anglo-Celtic and only one per cent of all Australian teachers identifying as Indigenous (Santoro, 2014). At the time of the study, the gender demographic of the fourth-year cohort was predominantly female, and all interview participants were female students. The participants were all living in an urban setting whilst completing their training; however, two participants had spent their primary and secondary years living in rural settings.

These participants were desirable for this study as they had already achieved a total of 90 days' practicum teaching during their studies. This level of experience meant they had more on-the-job training than students in other years. Further, this number of participants is both appropriate and manageable for focus group interviews (Liamputtong, 2013).

Ethical considerations

At the time of the study, there were no students enrolled in the fourth-year drama studies course who identified as Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander, so participants responded to the questions from their point of view as non-Indigenous pre-service drama teachers. Participants were informed at the start of the process that their confidentiality was assured. Consequently, no identifying information was kept, and pseudonyms were used when analysing and presenting the data.

As the research was focused on Indigenous culture, the values and ethical guidelines as documented by the National Health and Medical Research Council (2018) were addressed. The research was undertaken under the guidance of an Aboriginal supervisor to ensure appropriate conduct. Ethical approval from the University Human Research Ethics Committee was granted prior to participant recruitment.

Findings

Four key themes emerged from the inductive analysis of the focus group: (1) The importance of teaching Indigenous histories and cultures through drama; (2) Lack of education in Indigenous content, concepts and perspectives; (3) Fears surrounding the delivery of Indigenous content; and (4) Recommendations for initial teacher education.

The importance of teaching Indigenous histories and cultures through drama

Pre-service teachers felt that it was important for students to have a strong education in Indigenous histories and cultures. The group discussed evidence of racism and insensitivity at their practicum schools, and they agreed this could have been the result of a lack of effective education in contemporary Indigenous histories. Participants communicated that post-colonial Indigenous histories were largely being avoided, which could potentially be preventing opportunities for intercultural understanding. As participant seven expressed: "Don't keep history a mystery. I think that needs to really be embraced in the school environment because it is such a mystery to so many people and ... it just keeps growing, that insensitivity."

The participants discussed their perceptions of exploring post-colonial Indigenous histories in drama, concluding that, while being a sensitive topic, it provided non-Indigenous students with an opportunity to gain an understanding of the trauma experienced by generations of Indigenous peoples. Participant six related her experience when she learned about the Stolen Generations during the compulsory Indigenous studies unit at her university, and how she realised the importance of educating her students about this:

Like, we're ignorant [about the histories of Australian Indigenous peoples]. Even with the Stolen Generations, I understood that people were taken from their families but I didn't realise people from Western Australia ... were sent all the way to Sydney... Like you didn't know the intensity of it ... it's kind of sugar-coated, that it almost creates the ignorance that we see ... And I think that really does need to change because that would probably help in having Indigenous students feel more comfortable in our school and more accepted.

As the group communicated, for reconciliation to happen, these truths need to be explored and reflected on as part of the secondary-school curriculum. They acknowledged that Indigenous theatre texts strongly highlight contemporary Indigenous histories, making them important tools for intercultural understanding. Participant two remembered that studying an Indigenous text as a secondary drama student made her aware for the first time of cultural sensitivities and respect. As she recalled, "It was really interesting because I had never experienced anything like that before, of doing an Indigenous play or even an Australian author."

Finally, the participants agreed that the experiential process of drama is an effective way for students to learn as it offers them an opportunity to explore a worldview different to their own. The pre-service teachers interviewed in this study identified drama as a tool for promoting cultural learning due to the way that it encourages students to develop empathy, as participant seven stated:

I think everybody learns things a bit differently and maybe some kids will learn through the act of ... experiencing that thing to understand the empathy. I think the lesson of empathy is such a big part of cultural learning and you really get that in drama.

The participant pre-service teachers believed strongly in the positive effects to both Indigenous and non-Indigenous students of teaching Indigenous histories and cultures in their drama classes. They also revealed that, unfortunately, several major challenges stood in their way to successfully achieving this.

Lack of education in Indigenous content, concepts and perspectives

One of the strongest themes to emerge from the focus group interview was the participants' perceptions of their lack of skills and knowledge in delivering Indigenous content. Several participants admitted that it was highly unlikely that they would explore Indigenous content in drama because they simply did not have enough knowledge to share. Most participants traced their lack of skills and knowledge back to their own education in primary and secondary school. Participant one communicated, "I was in private schooling all of my life and really had no Indigenous education." Other participants who went to public schools found that their experience was similar; very little Indigenous content was covered. Participant five, who grew up in a rural town with a high Indigenous population, reflected on her level of knowledge about Indigenous histories and cultures, recounting, "I would still consider it quite low... we just didn't learn anything". It seemed that all participants, whether from private or public schools and whether in an urban or rural environment, found their education in Indigenous histories and cultures was

inadequate. For most, it wasn't until they reached university that they received any specific teaching in this area.

Although highly anticipated, most participants expressed regret that the one compulsory Indigenous studies unit offered in their university course was not successful in improving their knowledge of Indigenous histories and cultures. They communicated their disappointment that the unit had been too short, as it had been condensed from a 13-week unit to an eight-week unit, to accommodate time for the students to go on practicum. They also felt that the unit was too general, being directed at students in a broad range of teaching courses with a broad range of pedagogies.

Participant seven's experience encapsulates this view: "It's just a general course for all the students, like, you have early childhood and primary and all the learning areas of secondary all mixed in together, no one's really getting a very specific understanding for their area." Other participants also expressed regret at the lack of subject-specific training in Indigenous content, with participant four summing up the group's experience: "I think we haven't had more than two hours of teaching Indigenous theatre, or Indigenous content specific to our subject area."

Additionally, four participants communicated what they described as "unfortunate" or "frustrating" situations when it came to the issue of embedding Indigenous content into their drama lessons whilst on practicum. The pre-service teachers received very little on-the-job training in delivering Indigenous histories and cultures in drama. They recounted times when they had tried to deliver Indigenous content but were blocked by their mentor teachers. Participant two's experience typifies this situation:

I tried to do an Indigenous theatre unit with the class that I had on [my final practicum] because my mentor said, "You just plan your program, do whatever you like and I'll look at it." And then when she looked at it, she was, like, "Oh no, we can't do Indigenous theatre with them because none of them are Indigenous!"... So, she was, like, "Sorry, but we can't. We just can't do Indigenous theatre – full stop – with them."

Other participants recounted similar situations, and it seemed that many of their mentor teachers believed that teaching Indigenous content was only appropriate if the class had an Indigenous majority. Participant four found this a recurring issue at her practicum schools, she explained: "But even in both schools, there was a lot of the stigma, you know, which is 'We don't talk about it because it's not our thing to talk about'". Very few of the participants interviewed were able to recount times that they had integrated Indigenous content in their practicums, and for some this was a disturbing realisation, as they wondered if these experiences were microcosms of how wider schools and educational institutions operated as well.

Fears surrounding the delivery of Indigenous content

Whilst the first two key themes to emerge were related to the pre-service teachers' external world, their educational environment and practicum schools, the next major theme to emerge was related to their internal world and their perceptions and concerns about delivering Indigenous content. Firstly, during the discussion, many participants communicated that, due to their lack of knowledge about Indigenous cultures, they were concerned that they might inadvertently cause offense to Indigenous students in their lesson delivery. Participant eight stated:

You don't want to say the wrong thing and you don't want to get in trouble for it because you know you haven't said it in a malicious way or on purpose, but sometimes it might come across and then people take it the wrong way and I really don't like feeling those feelings.

This was a very common cause of apprehension amongst the focus group, and they were concerned that, as they haven't been trained or mentored in how to explore Indigenous theatre in drama in culturally safe and respectful ways, this ignorance could result in them causing cultural harm to Indigenous students. While they were united in their admiration for Australian Indigenous theatre and were able to speak at length about the critical role these texts play in the fabric of Australian culture, they had no experience in how to sensitively navigate the themes reflected in these texts in a classroom environment. Exploring themes such as the Stolen Generations, the impact of racism, and Indigenous peoples' struggle for equality involved facing uncomfortable truths, and participant four questioned the traumatic impact studying these themes might have on Indigenous students:

I mean, especially in some ways, you really see the effect of the Stolen Generations from that because some kids have just completely lost their culture; it [has] literally been stolen from them and they don't know how to reconnect with that. And how do you deal with that in the classroom?

The participants' inexperience at supporting students to move through difficult feelings in the drama class was causing them much apprehension, with several admitting it was easier for them to avoid exploring Indigenous texts altogether.

Additionally, even if they were open to working with these texts, they revealed their anxieties in how to cast them, even for the purpose of analysis and discussion. In typical drama classes, most play texts are read aloud before being analysed, so the issue of non-Indigenous students reading or playing Indigenous parts was an area of confusion and apprehension. Participant one summarised this issue: "I wouldn't feel comfortable making a non-Indigenous student play an Indigenous character because that's just what I've been told throughout from my mentor teachers and from my lecturers, that right now, that's not where we're sitting." Participant three agreed, and added: "But then, that cuts out what plays you can explore in a classroom." This was a common concern amongst the group, and they worried that, due to the low numbers of Indigenous students in most Australian schools, this would limit their ability to explore the Indigenous texts recommended in the secondary drama curriculum. Participant eight asked:

How are we going to give those Australian Indigenous playwrights recognition when we can't even use their texts in our classroom because the kids can't play – 'cause you want them to – because the best plays often come when people write about what they can see, and if the students can't act it out ... because even say if there's one Indigenous student in the classroom, they can't carry the class for everyone. They can't come up and do everything for everyone.

The pre-service teachers appeared conflicted because, while they believed in the value of exploring Indigenous texts in terms of the important opportunities for intercultural understanding, they appeared very uncertain as to how to approach them and how the texts would be dealt with by students in their class. Many participants were concerned that some students would exhibit immature and insensitive behaviour when exploring these texts, which was a fear that seemed to paralyse some participants, especially as several recounted times they had seen this behaviour when they were high school students themselves.

Recommendations for initial teacher education

Just as the focus group participants were open and honest about the challenges they faced on their journey toward successful delivery of Indigenous content in drama, they were also very specific and clear about their recommendations for support and assistance. Their key recommendations were around their initial teacher education and the need for a comprehensive education in the delivery of Indigenous content in drama, as well as the support to build connections with local Indigenous artists or elders with whom they could collaborate in their future practice.

The participants believed that teaching Australian Indigenous theatre should be a separate and compulsory unit for pre-service drama teachers. As mentioned previously, the participants' concerns around approaching Indigenous texts in drama was one of the major challenges to the successful delivery of Indigenous content in their practice. Participant two noted of their university tutors: "If they hold back, well, of course, the knowledge we're going to get will be less than that, so we're going to hold back and so we're going to have less for our students." To overcome this, the participants believed they would benefit from having a specific Indigenous theatre unit as part of their training program, with participant two summarising the group's recommendation:

There needs to be an Indigenous unit for drama because I just feel very unequipped in delivering the content ... And then in that sense, you can get contacts because then, in that unit, you could bring elders in, you could bring in community members to give you a different perspective. Even in the drama community, they could come in and do some professional development for you.

The pre-service teachers made it clear that they believed collaborating with Indigenous community in drama would lead to authentic learning for both their students and themselves, although they recommended this should start in initial teacher education. Participant seven discussed the Perth-based Indigenous theatre company Yirra Yaakin and how connecting with them would have been beneficial to her university training:

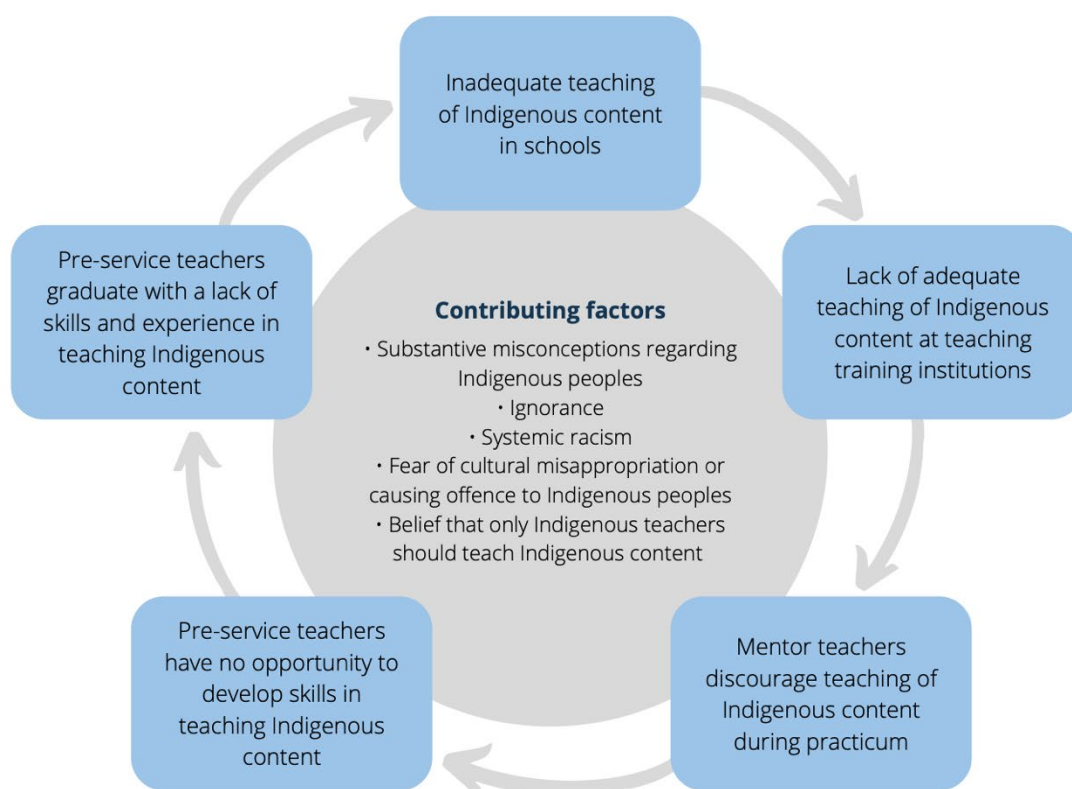
Just creating those community links when you're in university. So, I think, like, the link with the community would have to do with partnerships and that help for [Indigenous content] learning ... I don't think I've seen [professional development] over the past four years that's been about Australian Indigenous theatre. Even from Yirra Yaakin, or anyone else, I haven't... if you're not learning it at uni, you're not learning it in your professional development, you're just kind of having to read a website.

It was evident that pre-service drama teachers place a high value on delivering Indigenous content and that changes within their training environment could support achieving this. By helping them to build connections with the Indigenous community, perhaps through a specific Indigenous theatre unit, pre-service teachers could establish relationships that they could call on later in their teaching practice. These collaborations, built on trust, respect, and reciprocity, could perhaps help the pre-service teachers to find ways to work with Indigenous texts in the drama class so that students can benefit from respectful and authentic learning opportunities.

Summarising a cycle of inadequate teaching and learning: A model from the data

In addition to the inductive thematic analysis, the pre-service teachers' experiences (or lack thereof) with Indigenous content were chronologically mapped and analysed. This analysis was produced in response to pre-service teachers' articulation of how their own education shaped their attitudes towards Indigenous content and its place within educational systems. Analysis of the study's findings in this area identified a cycle of inadequate teaching and learning of Indigenous content in drama, shown in Figure 1.

Figure 1. Cycle of insufficient teaching and learning of Indigenous content in drama



At the beginning of the cycle, students attend primary and secondary school, receiving very little education in Indigenous content. Some then choose to train as drama teachers in university courses where the teaching of Indigenous content is also limited and ineffective. As pre-service teachers, they also complete school practicum placements where they receive minimal on-the-job training in the delivery of Indigenous content, which perpetuates their feelings of hesitancy and concern over embedding Indigenous perspectives and approaching Indigenous theatre texts. These concerns stay with them as they graduate and become drama teachers who do not have the skills or knowledge to approach Indigenous content in their practice. Their apprehension to embed Indigenous perspectives means they do not cover this content, thereby silencing Indigenous histories and perspectives in their teaching, which results in their students receiving little education in this area, perpetuating the cycle, which then begins

again with the next generation. A number of societal factors contribute to the cycle, shown in the centre of Figure 1. These issues pervade the cycle and hold it intact over time.

This cycle is concerning as it prevents the pre-service teachers from connecting students to authentic Indigenous perspectives, for which many Indigenous playwrights advocate (Syron, 2008). Maryrose Casey (2005) identifies Indigenous theatre as an important vehicle for students to hear voices that history has denied for so long. By teaching Indigenous theatre, students are exposed to Indigenous reality; she states:

The stories act to counter pre-existing narratives about Indigenous Australians. Images of Indigenous people sitting around a kitchen table, such as in Jack Davis's *The Dreamers* (1983), powerfully present the message that Indigenous Australians are alive and part of the present. (p. 7)

Discussion

The focus group elicited a detailed overview of the pre-service teachers' attitudes, perceptions and concerns towards the prospect of embedding Indigenous content into their practice. Despite the potential challenges, it was positive that all eight of the pre-service teachers interviewed strongly believed in the importance of embedding Indigenous content and perspectives into the drama class. The desire to privilege Indigenous perspectives is particularly important so that teachers (including pre-service teachers) do not perpetuate the idea of a missing history, a concept first addressed by Australian anthropologist W. E. H. Stanner in his 1968 Boyer lecture when he called the erasure of Indigenous history from Australian society the "great Australian silence" (Stanner, 2009, p. 182). He called the widespread lack of discourse on Indigenous peoples a "cult of forgetfulness practised on a national scale" (cited in Fricker, 2017, p. 4). To rectify this, Australian Indigenous writer Aleryk Fricker (2017) argues that it is the job of teachers to become "street-level bureaucrats" (p. 11) by adjusting the curriculum wherever possible to ensure that the invasions, massacres and forced removal of Australian Indigenous peoples are remembered in schools. This study showed that pre-service teachers have a desire to become such street-level bureaucrats, but require additional educational experiences to give them the confidence to undertake this role.

As Casey (2005) explains, Indigenous histories and cultures have a complex place both within the Australian society and the national identity, and this complexity makes them difficult to teach regardless of the cultural background of the teacher. Participants in this study believed that learning the truth about the traumatic history of Indigenous peoples would, in turn, lead to greater understanding amongst non-Indigenous students. This is a concept that is shared by Fricker (2017), who argues for "browning" (p. 1) the Australian Curriculum by highlighting Indigenous perspectives, peoples, places and ideologies wherever possible. This, Fricker (2017) believes, will aid intercultural understanding, which in turn can promote cultural safety for Indigenous students. Throughout the study, the pre-service teachers communicated their own lack of understanding could be traced to poor, if not non-existent, education in contemporary Indigenous histories. Other Australian studies focusing on graduate teachers found similar results, implying that a lack of sufficient Indigenous education in primary and secondary school can lead to a generation of teachers with little or no understanding of Indigenous histories (Baynes, 2016; Burridge et al., 2012; Kanu, 2005). However, the pre-service teachers believed drama was a subject in which browning could occur due to the opportunities it gives students to learn empathy. Sinclair et al. (2017) identify drama as an important conduit for intercultural and social dialogue, as it allows students

to access different points of view. They claim that by interpreting a story and embodying its characters and their situations, students can explore cultural reference points in a safe way.

Despite the pre-service teachers' beliefs about the importance of integrating Indigenous perspectives and the suitability of drama as a vehicle for this learning, they raised concerns about their understanding of how to respectfully teach this content. A dominant concern was unpreparedness due to the lack of support for embedding Indigenous perspectives they had encountered in initial teacher education. The pre-service teachers felt one compulsory unit in Indigenous content was not enough to prepare them for the responsibility of embedding Indigenous histories and cultures into their drama praxis and were concerned that the teaching of this content was generalised across learning areas. This is a common concern cited by teachers and pre-service teachers, and research has called for tertiary institutions to improve their teacher education programs in terms of subject-specific Indigenous teaching and learning (Deer, 2013; Harrison & Greenfield, 2011; Kanu, 2005). This needs to be addressed before any meaningful change can occur, and researchers such as Nakata (2011) have called for the creation of sequential programs of Indigenous content across all learning areas.

Importantly, the study also revealed that pre-service teachers were given very little support to approach Indigenous content whilst on practicum. This discouragement then prohibited the pre-service teachers from acquiring on-the-job training in this area. The participants' practicum experiences reflect the broader literature, including teachers' avoidance of integrating Indigenous content and providing either tokenistic or incidental delivery of Indigenous content and perspectives (Deer, 2013; Harrison & Greenfield, 2011). The lack of support for approaching Indigenous content on practicum diminished pre-service teachers' capability and confidence to present, explore or analyse Indigenous theatre in a drama education context. Due to a lack of mentorship in this area, the pre-service teachers still have unanswered questions around casting Indigenous roles in a class of non-Indigenous students. In fact, their concern over getting it wrong and breaking cultural protocols was so strong that they preferred to avoid this content altogether. Apprehensions of drama teachers towards the delivery of Indigenous content have emerged in other studies. Drama practitioner and researcher Danielle Hradsky (2017) encapsulates their views: "I, like most drama teachers in Australia, have had very little example of what good secondary-level teaching of Indigenous content looks like" (p. 106). This is a concern when the Australian Curriculum: Drama specifically mandates the inclusion of Indigenous texts and content (ACARA, 2014).

The cycle of inadequate teaching and learning (Figure 1) showed how a lack of education and confidence in teaching Indigenous content shaped the pre-service teachers' perceptions of how they would navigate teaching Indigenous content and perspectives in their future praxis. All of the pre-service teachers had a desire to break this cycle, but they explained how initial teacher education was essential to supporting them to do so. Initial teacher education was important because although the pre-service teachers felt deeply invested in their students receiving authentic, culturally sensitive teaching of Indigenous content, they felt inhibited to deliver the content on their own due to their lack of knowledge and confidence in this area. Forging collaborations with local Indigenous artists and elders to support the delivery of Indigenous content in their drama classes was one strategy offered by the pre-service teachers. The idea of collaboration with the Indigenous community in education is not limited to this study. Other research has demonstrated the importance of teachers connecting with their local Indigenous community (Beresford et al., 2012; Deer, 2013; Harrison & Greenfield, 2011; Kanu, 2005). Positive two-way relationships between schools and Indigenous communities allow for respectful teaching with Indigenous people rather than about them (Craven, 1998). In a drama context, this idea is reflected by the peak association for drama teachers, Drama Australia, within their *Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Guidelines for Drama/Theatre Education*; guideline writers Casey and Syron suggest (2007):

The processes of consultation and conversation between students and teachers and indigenous artists or members of Indigenous communities are shared learning experiences that require mutual respect and are an important part of the process of engaging with Indigenous texts. (p. 7)

However, the pre-service teachers did not have any connections with their local Indigenous community and had no idea how to cultivate these relationships. They believed that it was a failing of initial teacher education to not have offered a specific unit on Australian Indigenous theatre in which they could develop their understandings and application of Indigenous drama and form working relationships with local Indigenous artists. Since the Australian Curriculum places a strong emphasis on teaching Indigenous content in drama, it seems that more explicit training at a tertiary level is warranted (ACARA, 2014). Yet, the pre-service teachers also commented on the need for this learning to be embedded throughout their degree and not just taught as a stand-alone unit or subject. Their sentiments echoed the findings of Hart et al. (2012):

Our research-in-progress has revealed that Indigenous knowledge still occupies very little curriculum and pedagogic space within pre-service teacher education ... Our central standpoint that Indigenous knowledge should inform the professionalisation and pedagogic practice of future teachers, as they are expected to demonstrate on teaching practicum for registration, remains in constant tension and competition with Western knowledge, competing for the right to exist at all. (p. 719)

They strongly believed in Nakata's (2011) implications of Indigenous learning at the cultural interface, that embedding Indigenous learning is a crucial solution to the "endless separation of Indigenous and non-Indigenous knowledge" currently occurring in our education system (p. 5).

Conclusion

Both the Australian Curriculum and the Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership (AITSL) (Ma Rhea et al., 2012) mandate the quality teaching of Indigenous students and strongly highlight the teaching of Indigenous content through all areas of the curriculum. Prominent researcher Nakata (2011) believes that a key factor in achieving parity between Indigenous and non-Indigenous students is intercultural understanding, which could lead to cultural safety for Indigenous students and, in turn, provide an opportunity for reconciliation in the wider society. This study demonstrated that drama is an area of the curriculum commensurate with the integration of Indigenous content due to the experiential nature of drama pedagogy. Furthermore, it highlighted that drama provides an opportunity for students to learn empathy through content areas such as shared improvisation and the exploration of powerful, historically valuable, Indigenous theatre texts which reflect Indigenous perspectives (Casey, 2005).

The pre-service drama teachers in this study felt strongly invested in delivering to their students quality learning experiences in local Indigenous cultures and histories, yet they lacked the support from their training environment and practicum schools to do this authentically and with confidence. Their recommendations were logical and compelling: for universities to provide cultural competency and responsiveness training to help them foster relationships with Indigenous communities built on trust, respect and reciprocity. They proposed that this learning should be embedded across appropriate units rather than being covered in one unit. Furthermore, they welcomed the idea of local Indigenous elders or artists collaborating with university tutors in drama units to guide them on the most appropriate and respectful ways to explore Indigenous histories and cultures within their future praxis.

This study exposed a cycle of insufficient teaching of Indigenous content in Australian schools, and this finding has implications for further research. Leading on from this study, investigation into secondary drama teachers' attitudes and perceptions on teaching Indigenous content would be valuable, as would a similar study conducted with education policymakers in Australia. This investigation could possibly shed light on a key concern explored in this study; that is, the lack of national training available for graduate and pre-service secondary teachers in embedding Indigenous content in their subject areas, despite both the Australian Curriculum and AITSL mandating that they do so. Including the perceptions and attitudes of the Indigenous community in response to this concern would add a critical dimension to this research, and could provide compelling evidence for education policymakers to consider.

While the number of participants involved in this study was small and the results cannot be generalised beyond the sample of this study, the findings and recommendations provide new information within the field of knowledge surrounding the integration of Indigenous content into the curriculum. It offers conclusive insight that could aid tertiary institutions in their delivery of Aboriginal curricula content within drama education courses. As non-Indigenous arts educators ourselves, we believe it is time to move beyond the paralysing fear of cultural appropriation and become accountable for the decolonisation of our own praxis. While we need to learn to collaborate respectfully with Indigenous communities in the drama classroom, we should also not expect that it is the job of this community to be responsible for all the education about Indigenous content. The accountability for non-Indigenous teachers to deliver a diverse curriculum populated with Indigenous perspectives must begin in initial teacher education. It is time to graduate teachers with the skills, understanding and knowledge to effectively navigate the cultural interface in order to begin to break down the cycles of inadequate teaching of Indigenous content that has pervaded the Australian education system for centuries.

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