

## Research Article

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# Imagining the possibilities of a cross-cultural oral narrative portraiture method: stepping beyond binary discourses

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## Abstract

Contemporary scholarly critique in Indigenous research spaces has tended to focus on binary dualities, including the purpose of Indigenous-focused research, and the legitimacy of researcher identity, research knowledge and truth. Yet, perhaps unintentionally, such interrogation has led to the continued (re)construction and maintenance of false race-based dichotomies. In this paper, one way in which we seek to step beyond binary race-based discourses is by advocating for the advancement of cross-cultural research practices that interweave traditional and contemporary communication practices. We put forward the case that by knitting together Eurocentric and Indigenous research methodologies, Lawrence-Lightfoot's (2005, *Qualitative Inquiry* 11, 3–15) portraiture method, and Aboriginal practices of storytelling/yarning, the cross-cultural oral narrative portraiture method enables co-construction of more holistic, culturally nuanced and responsive stories, where meaning, context and reason resonate. In the 21st century research space, we open dialogue for thinking about data as stories, and advocate for contemporary intercultural research processes that are inclusive, engaging and promote co-construction of narratives for storytelling.

## Introduction

The role of non-Indigenous researchers in Australian Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander research spaces has become an area of increasing critical scholarly examination. In particular, contemporary scholarship has focused on the concern for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander control in research projects involving them as a means of speaking back to constructed knowledge of Indigeneity in discourses (Nakata, 1997, 2003, 2006, 2007a, 2007b; Minniecon *et al.*, 2007; Gower, 2012; Shay, 2017; Hogarth, 2018). This raises questions however about the 'purity of research outcomes [being] enhanced if the indigenous is researched [only] by the indigenous' (Foley, 2003, p. 46). In an attempt to address such concerns, Minniecon *et al.* (2007) states that while:

Indigenous control over research allows for questions to be framed differently; priorities to be ranked differently; problems to be defined differently; and people to participate on different terms (p. 25) ... [the] non-Indigenous researcher[s] can come to the research relationship with a practice guided by an understanding of the need to find new, culturally appropriate research 'spaces' ... [where] the focus changes from empathetic understanding to the flexible engagement in an interface that attempts to challenge dominant discourses (Minniecon *et al.*, 2007, p. 28).

Zubzycki *et al.* (2017) argue, however, that in order for non-Indigenous peoples to understand inherently how their own positioning and social histories may influence development of culturally responsive research processes, they ought to be cognisant of the time required to 'engage in different knowledge systems and trust building processes' (p. 1324). For Nakata (2006), concerns for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander control in non-Indigenous led research projects involving them are central to:

A whole range of issues ... whose knowledge, which parts of knowledge systems, whose language, who is in charge of them, what can be written about them, who owns the intellectual property, for what purposes can they be taught, who decides, and what survives in the translation (p. 271).

These statements couched within power/knowledge relations raise questions for non-Indigenous researchers working and researching with Aboriginal peoples and Torres Strait Islanders. What roles do the non-Indigenous researcher, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander participants take where both privileged and non-privileged subjects are engaged and examined? How may knowledge be co-constructed and shared in ways that move beyond race-based constructs permeating binary dichotomies? How does intercultural research take

into consideration the entirety of elements contributing to a complex situation? How may intercultural research be presented so that communication methods of the oldest living culture on earth is honoured and embraced with the 21st century of digital technology?

Such questions bring forth discourses of privilege that circulate in and around the Australian academy. Foley *et al.* (2008) argue, for example, that Eurocentric research practices position the researcher as an expert who professes knowledge and the participant/research subject as the data-presenting object. Researchers drawing on Eurocentric theoretical perspectives and methodological constructs then position their research within imperialistic/colonialist codes where ethical processes and methods of knowledge transfer are couched securely within notions of Eurocentrism (Smith, 1999). Historically, this has led to 'inappropriate and invasive research methodologies [that] often ignore the rights of Indigenous Australians' (Gower, 2012, p. 2). To step beyond such practices, Sefa Dei's (1999) argues that the privileged non-Indigenous researcher has:

An obligation to speak about these issues [minoritising, deprivileging, oppression] because we are all in the same boat. We live in an interdependent world. We need to deal with the sense of complacency that since things are working for me, everything is fine ... We cannot continue to read our world in terms of those who have and those who have not (np).

Instead of adding to a 'unitary system of knowledge' (Smith, 1999, p. 45), non-Indigenous researchers ought to be concerned with conceiving a 'cultural archive [that] contains multiple traditions of knowledge and ways of knowing' (Smith, 1999, p. 45). Given this, we build upon Lawrence-Lightfoot's (1986, 2005) formative studies to develop the cross-cultural oral narrative portraiture method (C-CONPM) in the Aboriginal/Torres Strait Islander/non-Indigenous research space. In the remainder of this paper, we speak about the possibilities of C-CONPM honouring Aboriginal/Torres Strait Islander oral histories processes, rejecting Eurocentric research practices of appropriation and harm and continuing dialogue for interculturally valuable research methodologies.

### Portraiture genealogy

The concept of portraiture originated with Lawrence-Lightfoot (1986) as a narrative method to capture the complexity, dynamics and subtleties of the human experience. The purpose of portraiture is to create narratives that provide contextual stories of participants' experiences by bridging the gap between scientific and interpretive paradigms (Lawrence-Lightfoot, 2005). The methodological legitimacy of narrative portraiture lies in the shifting nature of research away from 'a single disciplinary lens of inquiry' (Lawrence-Lightfoot, 2005, p. 8), to a focus on context and voice. The relationships between researchers and participants in this method are central to ensure 'more participatory, collaborative, symmetric, and dialectic research' (Lawrence-Lightfoot, 2005, p. 9) that produces 'multiple opportunities for voice in privileged settings without further marginalising groups or individuals' (Chapman, 2005, p. 27).

Lawrence-Lightfoot (2005) argues that the act of crafting narrative portraits 'is a discerning, deliberative processes and a highly creative one' (p. 10) that requires a deep sense of perspective and reflexivity. This is because:

There is a crucial dynamic between documenting and creating the narrative, between receiving *and* shaping, reflecting *and* imposing, mirroring *and* improvising ... a string of paradoxes. The effort to reach coherence must both flow organically from the data and from the interpretive witness of the portraitist (p. 10).

The key tenants upon which researchers drawing on portraiture to present narratives are via notions of context and voice. Context is the reference point at which audiences may start to develop situational understanding of participants' stories within a time and place, with voice being the chronological presence of dialogue between researcher and participant (Hill, 2005). In this manner, portraiture becomes an interactive process where meanings, context and experience intersect (Bloom and Erlandson, 2003).

While Lawrence-Lightfoot's (1986, 2005) studies focus primarily on artistic expression, Smyth and McInerney (2011) build upon the method to develop a guiding text that explains how portraits may be crafted from audio-recorded interview transcripts. They propose three avenues by which this occurs; from interviews, from field notes including observations, and from documents collected as data in a research project. They argue that narrative portraiture is a particularly pertinent methodology because it asserts a:

Counterhegemonic view [where] researchers have a moral and ethical responsibility beyond the "thin" imposed views of university ethics committees – to work *with* and advance the lives of those who are institutionally and systematically the most excluded and silenced (p. 17).

The originality and legitimacy of Lawrence-Lightfoot's (1986, 2005) formative studies have been taken up by a range of other scholars, particularly those concerned with exploring power/knowledge relations where one group of people are privileged and others marginalised. Golding (2000) drew upon the narrative portraiture method to present the importance of wellbeing and social capital inherent to Koorie Elders as the surrounding urban environment increasingly becomes Westernised. Chapman (2005) employed the portraiture method through the lens of critical race theory to demonstrate the complex relational dynamics operating within a racially diverse and contextually layered urban classroom in the United States. Hill (2005) used portraiture to develop poems that captures the experiences and practices of three Black women teacher educators. Each of these scholars' studies point to the power of the portraiture method as the humanistic impulse of storytelling that has the potential to influence public discourse by blending analytic rigour with community building (Featherstone, 1989). Featherstone (1989) describes it as 'a people's scholarship [in which] scientific facts are gathered in the field to give voice to a people's experience' (p. 375).

The use of portraiture method as a stand-alone approach however is not advocated by any scholars who draw upon it. Lawrence-Lightfoot (2005) even argues the need for multi-disciplinary research in spaces where *researcher* and *participant* are entangled relationally in interpersonal, social and ethical histories. Similarly, Smyth and McInerney (2013) argue for advancing the sterile and detached research practices espoused by university committees to 'reveal more socially just and democratic alternatives' (p. 16). Methodologically, studies presenting interviews as narratives view research subjects as active participants who researchers work *with* and *for* to offer insights into exclusionary processes. By 'listening [and responding] to the voices

of those who are traditionally most muted [and] treating them in a more robust and respectful way' (Smyth and McInerney, 2013, p. 4), agents of change orientated towards interrogating power/knowledge relations of exclusionary processes emerge.

### **Making a case for cross-cultural oral narrative portraiture method (C-CONPM)**

One of the most complex considerations non-Indigenous researchers' knowledgeable about Australia's socio-political-historical relations between European arrivals, Aboriginal peoples and Torres Strait Islanders is how their stories may be conveyed in ways that are respectful and culturally appropriate (Gower, 2012). Nakata's (1997) discussion of life worlds as the interface of two cultures serves as a useful model for theorising the non-Indigenous researcher position within an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander research space. Nakata (1997) says that 'there is an Islander [Indigenous] position and there is a non-Islander [Indigenous] position. But, there is another dimension where the trajectories of two different histories come together to produce conditions that circumscribe' (p. 14) how we make sense and enact our lives. In this manner, the fallacy of the excluded middle is rejected. Rather than continuing to portray 'the marginalisation and sterilization' (Chapman, 2005, p. 28) of Aboriginal peoples and Torres Strait Islanders' experiences from the privileged non-Indigenous position, Nakata (2007a) theorises that non-Indigenous researchers ought to afford agency to Indigenous peoples' as participants to actualise stories, experiences, histories and cultures, in culturally responsive ways.

Rather than simply doing no harm—the foundation upon which many research projects are approved ethically—researchers ought to do moral research that 'takes a stand with/for those most adversely affected by unfair practices and discriminatory policies' (Smyth and McInerney, 2013, p. 15). In Australia's cross-cultural research space, we have seen this made possible through research prioritising theorisation of the Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander position, such as Indigenous Standpoint Theory (Foley, 2003; Nakata, 2007b; Kinefuchi and Orbie, 2008; Nakata *et al.*, 2012; Hogarth, 2017), Indigenous Critical Discourse Analysis (Hogarth, 2017), Indigenist Research Principles (Rigney, 1999) and Indigenous Women's Standpoint Theory (Moreton-Robinson, 2013) to name a few. While touted as Indigenous research methodologies (IRMs) reserved for Indigenous researchers primarily, one of the authors (Weuffen, 2017) have put forward the argument previously that as a non-Indigenous researchers draw upon IRMs as a lens of inquiry, in conjunction with other non-Indigenous methodologies, the construction of narratives that step beyond binary dichotomies becomes imaginable. This is supported by Hogarth (2017) who argues:

Drawing on both Indigenous and Western methodologies, theorising and articulating Indigenous and non-Indigenous theories further develops understanding of how research itself can be used proactively to speak back to the deficit discourses [and] challenge the societal norms (p. 32).

We argue that employment of a grey methodology—one that encompasses Indigenous and non-Indigenous methodologies—assists non-Indigenous researchers to develop a reflexive cautionary praxis where culturally appropriate methods of creating narratives avoid marginalising the voices and complexity of participant experiences (Chapman, 2005).

Yet, application of a grey methodology raises questions in relation to how non-Indigenous researchers new to working in the

space, and with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities, may step beyond the coding conditions of their own positionality in research; a position infused with social, historical, cultural and relational experiences. Perhaps as an avenue to understanding their positioning better, novice non-Indigenous researchers would benefit more from working with race-based methodologies initially such as whiteness theory, critical race theory and decoloniality to name a few. This is because race-based methodologies guide researchers to critique the theoretical and practical Western order of things. An interesting conundrum of these race-based methodologies however, is that while the intention is to disrupt privileged research processes, those same privileged research processes are employed to conduct the interrogation.

Researchers' reflective engagement of their own positionality, and ways in which participants are involved in research projects, is an important step to avoiding repetition of harmful research practices, particularly ones that create division. Critique of divisional practices in cross-cultural research spaces is important because the adversarial position is a:

Simplistic division that situates 'us' in relation to 'them'. That is, the cultural paradigm is but another way to articulate the same division ... the bind that is the power in knowledge, that serves to reify old relations and that conditions future possibilities (Nakata, 1997, p. 310).

As this occurs, the notion of othering permeates dominant ideologies in the Australian research/education space, identifying who *we* (and not they, or others) are as a society, *our* practices, and *our* knowledge systems, as a way of maintaining privilege (Foucault, 1970; Smith, 1999; Nakata, 2003).

Portraiture in the form of narratives then provides a platform from which non-Indigenous researchers may attempt to deviate away from their privileged researcher positions—invariably couched within colonial/imperialist discourses—in discussions of data. One way in which we argue this may be possible is to avoid massaging interviews so they align prescriptively with Eurocentric research practices. Because the researcher holds 'responsibility to demonstrate the complexities of people lives and the contexts influencing' (Chapman, 2005, p. 48) their experiences, stepping beyond assumed norms of data (re) presentation is important because:

Most cross-cultural research is guided by a set of ethical considerations that are irrelevant, unrealistic, and/or possibly inappropriate and insufficient to address the complexity of such encounters. We are better researchers when we push ourselves to confront those aspects of our work that cause us discomfort (Andrews, 2007, p. 498).

Challenging binary dichotomies in Eurocentric research discourses illuminates ways in which Aboriginal peoples and Torres Strait Islanders have been 'suspended and dislocated from their own historical context for academic scholars [to] transform people into objects to study' (Nakata, 1997, p. 237). There exists precedence in the use of narratives to convey the interrelated connectedness in the *Bringing them Home: The Stolen Children Report* (Australian Human Rights Commission, 1997). As Smyth and McInerney (2013) discuss, this report highlights 'just how powerful this form of representation can be ... because of the prominence given to voices and stories' (p. 5). Furthermore, Ulalka Tur *et al.* (2010) contend that foregrounding voice within Indigenous narrative portraiture 'confronts the silence to incorporate the multiple voices that make one who we are' (p. 64).

Privileging Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander voices and emphasising the richness of their experiences in what is arguably otherwise Eurocentric research projects, manifests within C-CONPM by drawing on the notion of storytelling, or, to use the cultural term, *yarning* (see e.g. Dean, 2010; Geia *et al.*, 2013). The presentation of stories, as they are spoken in real time and real language, articulates and justifies the cultural appropriateness and post-structuralist uniqueness of C-CONPM. It creates an opportunity for wider readership due to the nature of the research being presented in a manner that is 'understandable, not exclusive and esoteric' (Lawrence-Lightfoot, 2005, p. 9). The use of C-CONPM challenges the homogenisation of 'rich indigenous knowledges so [they can] fit a western view [and] recognises the value of indigenous knowledge and its connections to other forms of knowledge' (Benham, 2007, p. 513), which 'advances and highlights the sustaining features of cultures and communities that are rarely promoted' (Chapman, 2005, p. 31). It creates a space that 'gives voice to those who rarely get the chance to enter into public conversation' (Lawrence-Lightfoot, 1986, p. 26).

Rather than being seen as *good* practice, we argue that presenting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander stories as oral narrative portraits facilitates making sense of, and challenging, hegemonic research practices in Australia. The need for advocacy research practices is explored by Smyth and McInerney (2013) as a response to:

The highly politicised research climate ... to restore the political balance unashamedly with and for people and groups in society whose interests, voices, and perspectives are silenced, excluded, marginalised, expunged or totally denied (p. 2).

One way in which such politicisation manifests is by examining the constraints of a PhD thesis. Any thesis presenting content outside the written word is considered primarily an exegesis and/or a creative-based research piece. While a few pictures or tables may be considered normative practice to illuminate particular arguments, the use of C-CONPM in Weuffen's thesis (2017) was considered initially as unnecessary and/or a 'nice thing to do'; their integration was considered not essential. We make the case that C-CONPM is not a feel-good endeavour, rather it is a culturally responsive and appropriate practice more suitable than race-based theories in affording 'priority to language formation in its socio-historical context' (Nakata, 1997, p. 97) to reflect the manner in which stories have been transmitted in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities for over 40,000 years (Dean, 2010; Geia *et al.*, 2013).

For many Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander participants where trust and relationships between them and the researcher are built, the interview process is not a stoic professional interaction solely; it is one of *yarning*. *Yarning* as a process of interacting and telling stories:

Illuminate[s] knowledge in such way[s] that it connects us to the roots of who we are as individuals and as a community. For indigenous [*sic*] people, narratives are evocative accounts of sovereignty and loss, as well as identity and home. They are detailed and contextual, recognising the importance of community and place (Benham, 2007, p. 512).

Being aware and sensitive to the historical power/knowledge relations between non-Indigenous peoples, Aboriginal peoples and Torres Strait Islanders through a grey methodology lens ensures caution to not 'overlook or oversimplify' (Nakata, 1997,

p. 29) the intricacies of stories. Rather than ignoring the historical race-based social and research practices that continue to reinforce deficit discourses, or creating false optimistic accounts, C-CONPM creates a powerfully paradoxical dialogue where 'the beautiful/ugly experiences that are so much a part of the texture of human development and social relationship' (Lawrence-Lightfoot, 2005, p. 9) are laid out in their humanistic rawness. This rawness opens space for connections of experiences between audience and participant, and conversations to advance/reject discussions of the fallacy of the excluded middle in Australian cross-cultural research practices.

### Crafting oral narrative portraits

Creating cross-cultural oral narrative portraits begins with the interview. As Smyth and McInerney (2013) say, 'portraits [as they are] developed from semi-structured individual interviews and conversations, rejects flat, stereotypical explanations [and rather focuses] on the capacity of to convey the emotions, depth of feelings and intellectual reasonings' (p. 6) of participants' stories. To capture the richness and complexity of the socially and culturally bound stories, 'the context becomes the reference point to place people and action in time and space and a resource for understanding what they say and do' (Hill, 2005, p. 96). In taking up the concept of portraiture, the researcher takes care to 'honour the voices of participants, not ride over them ... smashing up what they say into fragments' (Smyth and McInerney, 2013, p. 4). In this manner, C-CONPM (re)constructs an interview so that the audience is able to experience the 'timbre, resonance, cadence and tone of [the] voices, their messages and their meaning' (Lawrence-Lightfoot and Davis, 2002, p. 99). As they are developed, English's (2000) concern for a central tendency that overrides the truthfulness of the narrative are addressed. Rather than setting the audience up to feel a certain way, the autobiographical presence encapsulated by oral narrative portraits allows the audience to hear the personal histories, experiences, connections to family and community, and cultural practices as they were shared in interviews (Lawrence-Lightfoot and Davis, 2002).

To craft narrative portraits from interviews, we assumed a preservationist position where dedication to 'presenting the original speech in such a way as to reproduce the sounds as they appear on the tape as accurately as possible' (Smyth and McInerney, 2013, p. 11) is of primary interest. This included working with 'the respondent's hesitations and non-standard grammatical constructions' (Weiss, 1994, p. 192, cited in Smyth and McInerney, 2013, p. 11). The first stage of C-CONPM is to create a document in Microsoft Word and create a table, split into two columns and two rows. The top row contains a title that reflects content in each column. The second row contains the raw transcript from the semi-structured interviews in the left-hand column, and the first stage of C-CONPM development in the right-hand column.

In the first-stage, Lankshear and Knobel's (2004) categorical content analysis is extended upon to systematically organise voices within the text. Colour-coding is applied to identify clearly, and at a glance, the researcher's voice in questioning (blue) and the participant's voice as responses (black). The use of colour-coding as Pappaluca (2018) explains is a visual indicator to identify 'whose voice is being privileged over others within the text [which] allows the reader to 'see' who is talking clearly' (p. 96). During this stage of C-CONPM, responses from the Koorie participant are copy and



Transcribed Interview	Excerpts for narrative portraits
<b>Interviewer:</b> Do they ever ask how can we include Indigenous perspectives to make school more engaging? <b>Respondent:</b> They do sometimes but not a lot. Um, one school in particular took on a, um, Koorie, might say perspective for Grade Four and sourced some bit of funding and of, you know, keep continual running a program for the kid and, you know, kids in Grade Four <b>Interviewer:</b> All kids? <b>Respondent:</b> Yes all kids <b>Interviewer:</b> Yep, And do you know what they do, like it's whatever subject they do they ... <b>Respondent:</b> Well, the put, set aside, um, for the program, they set aside to, um, bring in, um, local Aboriginal people to talk in, in the classes, um, they go on excursions outside the school to gain more knowledge of the local area, um, they go to, out to sites that acts, there's an Elder there to explain what the site is about. They go visiting other sides and, um, they have people there to talk about it, They have workshops, they have Indigenous, um, workers come in and, um, and Elders come in and do some workshops with the, um, students, <b>Interviewer:</b> Okay, Um, and is that on a paid basis or it's a volunteer thing? <b>Respondent:</b> Some of the, some, the Elders get paid, um, the workers don't yeah. So the workers, it's voluntary <b>Interviewer:</b> Okay, Alright <b>Respondent:</b> Education workers <b>Interviewer:</b> Yeah, and have you had, do you know if there's any being, do you know if there's been any Koorie kids go through that program? <b>Respondent:</b> Yes, Yeah. <b>Interviewer:</b> And what's it been like for them that you know of?	<p>how can we include Indigenous perspectives to make school more engaging</p> <p>They do sometimes but not a lot. Um, one school in particular took on a, um, Koorie, might say perspective for Grade Four and sourced some bit of funding and of, you know, keep continual running a program for the kid and, you know, kids in Grade Four</p> <p>Yes all kids</p> <p>whatever subject they do</p> <p>Well, the put, set aside, um, for the program, they set aside to, um, bring in, um, local Aboriginal people to talk in, in the classes, um, they go on excursions outside the school to gain more knowledge of the local area, um, they go to, out to sites that acts, there's an Elder there to explain what the site is about. They go visiting other sides and, um, they have people there to talk about it, They have workshops, they have Indigenous, um, workers come in and, um, and Elders come in and do some workshops with the, um, students,</p> <p>paid basis or it's a volunteer thing?</p> <p>Some of the, some, the Elders get paid, um, the workers don't yeah. So the workers, it's voluntary</p> <p>Education workers</p> <p>Koorie kids go through that program</p> <p>Yes, Yeah.</p>

**Fig. 1.** First-stage of oral narrative portraiture development: extracting statements from interview transcripts.

pasted directly from the left-hand column to the right-hand column, minus the proper noun signifier. To assist making sense as a stand-alone text, questions posed by the researcher are reviewed to identify appropriate statements that provide contextualisation of responses from Koorie participants, which are then copy and pasted into the right-hand column. The first-stage process of C-CONPM is represented visually in figure 1.

The second-stage of C-CONPM requires another blank document to be created using Microsoft Word, with one table, split into two columns and two rows. The top row contains a title that reflects content in each column, with the second row containing reflective textual content. The first column contains precise *excerpts for narrative portraits* developed during the first-stage of the method, copy and pasted from the first document. During this stage, the right-hand column is used to make editorial amendments to excerpts to create conventional paragraphs for sense making (Zeegers, 2013). Discussions held throughout interviews not aligning with the key research questions, or interrupting the narrative flow, are removed. The second-stage process of C-CONPM is represented visually in figure 2.

The third-stage process of C-CONPM requires the creation of another blank document in Microsoft Word, where content from the right-hand column of the second-stage process is copy and pasted. While listening to the raw audio recording of the

Excerpts for narrative portraits	Crafting Koorie Narrative Portraits
<p>how can we include Indigenous perspectives to make school more engaging</p> <p>They do sometimes but not a lot. Um, one school in particular took on a, um, Koorie, might say perspective for Grade Four and sourced some bit of funding and of, you know, keep continual running a program for the kid and, you know, kids in Grade Four</p> <p>Yes all kids</p> <p>whatever subject they do</p> <p>Well, the put, set aside, um, for the program, they set aside to, um, bring in, um, local Aboriginal people to talk in, in the classes, um, they go on excursions outside the school to gain more knowledge of the local area, um, they go to, out to sites that acts, there's an Elder there to explain what the site is about. They go visiting other sides and, um, they have people there to talk about it, They have workshops, they have Indigenous, um, workers come in and, um, and Elders come in and do some workshops with the, um, students,</p> <p>paid basis or it's a volunteer thing?</p> <p>Some of the, some, the Elders get paid, um, the workers don't yeah. So the workers, it's voluntary</p> <p>Education workers</p> <p>Koorie kids go through that program</p> <p>Yes, Yeah.</p>	<p>Schools can include more Indigenous perspectives to make school more engaging. <del>They do sometimes but not a lot. Um, One school in particular took on a, um, Koorie, might say perspective for Grade Four and sourced some bit of funding and of, you know, keep continual running a program for the kid and, you know, kids in Grade Four</del></p> <p>Yes all kids</p> <p>Whatever subject they do, Well, the put, set aside, um, for the program, they set aside to, um, bring in, um, local Aboriginal people to talk in, in the classes, um, they go on excursions outside the school to gain more knowledge of the local area, um, they go to, out to sites that acts, there's an Elder there to explain what the site is about. They go visiting other sides and, um, they have people there to talk about it, they have workshops, they have Indigenous, um, workers come in and, um, and Elders come in and do some workshops with the, um, students.</p> <p>paid basis or it's a volunteer thing?</p> <p>Some of the, some, the Elders get paid, um, the workers don't yeah. So the workers, it's voluntary</p> <p>Education workers</p> <p>Koorie kids go through that program</p> <p>Yes, Yeah.</p>

**Fig. 2.** Second-stage of oral narrative portraiture development: crafting Koorie narratives.

interview, the researcher applies further editorial amendments to the narrative portrait, namely the insertion of grammar and square brackets, all-the-while 'remain[ing] faithful to the words and meaning of the original transcript, but accept[ing] the need for editing [for] a more coherent and readable text' (Smyth and McInerney, 2011, p. 11). Because 'interview talk is by nature, interpretation work [that is reflexive, theoretical, contextual and textual] concerning the topic in question' (Talja, 1999, p. 6), to guide against the 'distorting effects of personal bias' (Lather, 1986, p. 86), the final narrative portrait as a clean document is sent back to the participant for review. The process known as member-checking has been argued to enhance rigour in qualitative research (Guba and Lincoln, 1994), yet Birt *et al.* (2016) argues the process 'raises ethical questions about the protection of participants during the research process, [in particular], whose voice is being bought to the fore' (p. 1805).

The fourth-stage and final-stage of C-CONPM is to develop an audio file that is a direct reflection of the portrait. Using Camtasia® (<https://www.techsmith.com/video-editor.html>) software, we uploaded the entire interview recording. With the final narrative portrait on hand, we cut out sections of the recording that contained either the interviewer's voice, or excerpts spoken by the participant not used in the final narrative portrait. We then proceeded to make a seamless audio file of the narrative portrait; a detailed explanation of the process is beyond the scope of this paper. The fourth-stage process of C-CONPM is represented visually in figure 3.

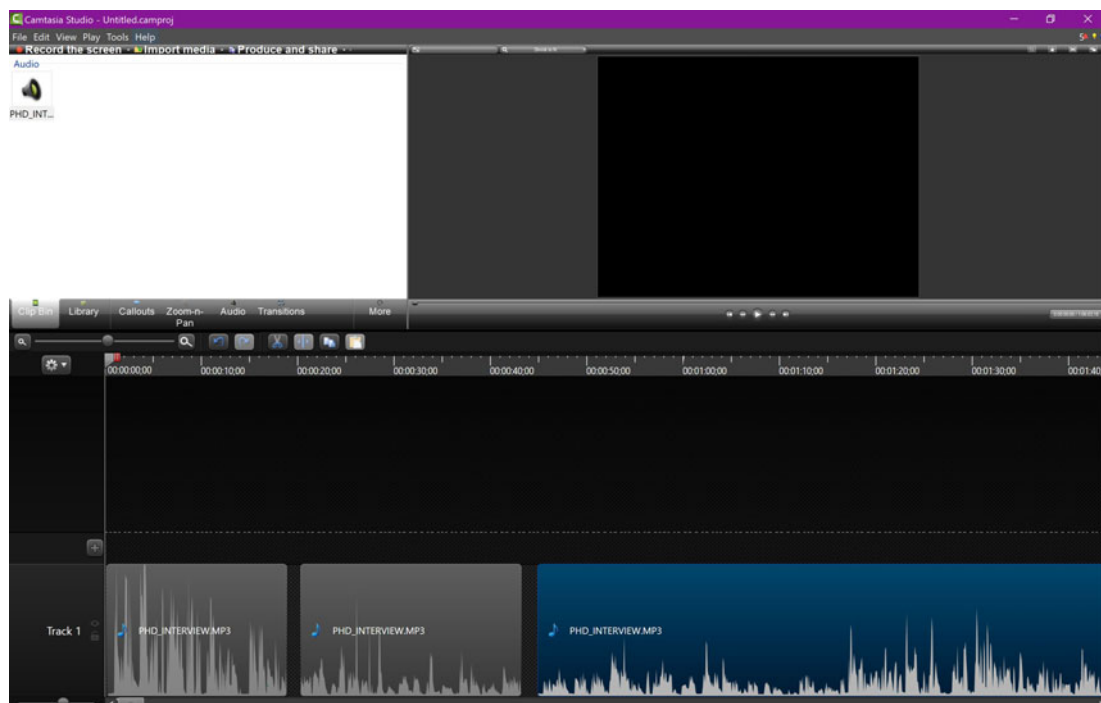


Fig. 3. Fourth-stage of oral narrative portraiture development: creating the audio file.

Provided below is an excerpt of one oral narrative portrait developed for a PhD thesis (Weuffen, 2017). For contextualisation, this portrait discusses the participant's experiences of the Australian education system, in particular, ways in which Aboriginal culture and support for Aboriginal students is understood in the Australian social landscape.

*Note: Due to the purpose of C-CONPM, the audio file should be listened to simultaneously while reading the narrative.*

A Koorie Engagement Support Officer (KESO) supports kindergartens and schools – primary and secondary – around enrolment of Koorie students in their schools, liaising with schools to make sure they've got school uniforms, books, advising parents how to around how to get money for uniforms and books for school. [KESO] liaise with the department [Department of Education and Training] and the different workers in there [such as] nurses, student welfare, early years prevention and net-working with different organisations.

The teachers come for advice, sometimes the teachers ring up and invite us, the KESOs, out to [their] schools to talk to us around what's appropriate, what's not appropriate with Koorie kids and Aboriginal areas [of the curriculum]. The schools taken on a responsibility and they've got to make sure that there's someone there that the parent and child can go to that has got some knowledge about Koorie families. So they gotta be there for them and be equipped to answer any questions or support those Koorie kids.

One school in particular took on a Koorie perspective for Grade Four and have sourced some funding for it, to keep continually running that program for the kids [students] in Grade Four. [This school] sets aside time to bring in local Aboriginal people to talk in the classes, they go on excursion outside the school, to gain more knowledge of the local area, they go out to sites where there's an Elder there to explain what the site is about. They go visiting other sites and have they people there to talk about it, they have workshops that have Indigenous workers come in, and Elders, to do workshops with the students. Some of the Elders get paid but the workers don't, it's voluntary. It's an experience having their grandfather who's an Elder come along and explain his knowledge of the area, do a smoking ceremony before they leave. They

feel empowered at the end of their program where they have a concert and they get into groups of emu, kangaroos and they perform those at the concert to the whole school. Students really enjoyed the program and their younger siblings are keen to get to Grade Four to do the program. They work in the class and they work with parents to make costumes and things like survival bags where the kids collect items on the way on their journey. [In the bag] they could have something to eat in it while they're walking, they can pick up some information, leaves, or something along the way. Being on Wadawurrung Country, they learn about the significance of the area they're going on excursion to.

It's about consulting with Aboriginal people, finding out as much information on the area, who the Aboriginal people were here, how many were here, where were the significant sites that they frequent, gain lots of information on the area, and that gives you more knowledge of understanding Aboriginal people.

If you're talking about Koorie, if it's in a class you gotta be aware that some students might be Torres Strait Islander so it's probably preferred to use Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander. You can use mobs, clans, tribes, but if there's aversion around the [word] tribe, they used to call them tribes back then, but tribes might have been wiped out and then it comes down to what clan you're associated with, and then it comes down to the mob which was your family. Mobs are your family connection and it could be a big family connection. Clans are clans where everybody sorta comes into there, and a tribe bigger like a community. [When schools or teachers contact us it's around] is this appropriate, [or] can we use this. [For example, they might say] 'We've got this resource from, for example, Queensland', and we would say 'well it's no, you need to look into the local area; we have a rich history and knowledge of the local area'. Sometimes it does [become tedious], but if you've got the finger on the pulse to know where to find it, [it's easy]. Being Aboriginal people, we have the knowledge and information to share, and if we don't, we source it.

If you don't build a relationship you're not going to get anywhere.

[Sometimes we might get] teaching saying 'well I don't have an Aboriginal child in my class', and that's when you say 'oh?, yes you do, this is their name', [then the teacher says], 'but' they don't look Aboriginal'. Well you just say 'well they are, even though [they have] blond hair, blue eyes'. You just say 'come along to our cultural awareness

information sessions’.

We had a Koorie education policy, but now [all] we’ve got is a Koorie education strategy [which is departmentally constructed], consulted with the Aboriginal education association (VAEA), Koorie workforce, communities. It gives us a direction in our work with those strategies, but there is a strategy and we’re still waiting; it was soft launched and we’re still waiting to see if the new government is going to use that strategy. I believe there was some hoo-haa about it, so we’ve been told to just hold off [and] don’t get it out there at the moment. Look, we’ve had strategies, we’ve had policies, but they send them out to schools [and] where do they end up?, on a bookshelf, not even looked at. And then you say, [during] a PD ‘have you got this book?’, [they say] ‘No, I haven’t see that one’, [we say] ‘Well perhaps you better go back to your school and have a look on the shelf somewhere’.

I haven’t had any consultation [from school about the curriculum]. When the national curriculum was [being developed] they were looking at it, they had lots of consultation with Aboriginal communities right across Australia and they had lots in Melbourne. They [curriculum developers] had to have consultation with Aboriginal communities because I remember going to a couple in Melbourne. There was an Aboriginal person that was on the committees that were working on it [the curriculum], because I was in a group and we were asking the questions back to these people that were on the committee working on the curriculum, say for example history, but because there was only one rep, it [questions] had to taken back to that committee to consult more.

### Critiquing C-CONPM

In adopting what is, arguably, a standardised approach to crafting narrative portraiture, it could be disputed, that the researcher’s voice can never be fully extracted from the narratives, since it is that voice which enables the stories to exist in the space. As Clandinin’s (2007) notes, ‘stories, as they are collected, are co-constructed by [the] researcher and research participant, but ... in interpreting and representing they become the stories of the researcher constructed for the research audience’ (p. 458). To this, English (2000) argues that the ‘inclusivity claimed by portraiture undermines itself. Inclusivity and omniscience are only possible to present [as] a singular, grand, encompassing truth’ (p. 23).

It could also be reasoned that because the creation of narratives are so tightly bound within the research process, the researcher’s voice/presence seeps through to potentially distort subject meanings, due to their position and the manner in which portraiture as art evolves (Lawrence-Lightfoot, 1986, 2005). However, Smyth and McInerney (2013) contend that while ‘it is ultimately the researcher’s perspective, experiences, and ideological beliefs that influence the construction of the portrait’ (p. 10), the rawness of crafted narrative portraits:

Helps to recreate the immediacy and spontaneity of the actual encounter [to a point where] humanity shines through, and we [the audience] are paired with the niceties of carefully measured words and detached judgements (p. 7).

In the case of cross-cultural research, non-Indigenous researchers engaging Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander participants may face possible objection to the use of C-CONPM. Namely, this may be via the argument that any co-creation and interpretation of stories told by Aboriginal peoples and Torres Strait Islanders can only be infused with views and interests held by the researcher’s privileged position within Eurocentric research practices. Foley *et al.* (2008) asserts that because of this, there is the potential for the individual researchers’ presuppositions to create and distort inferences and therefore alter and dilute the authenticity of

Indigenous peoples’ stories for the purposes of the research project.

As we will speak about in a forthcoming paper, the intention of C-CONPM is not to deconstruct the interview, extract themes and write to the commonalities and discontinuities uncovered between participant experiences of a phenomenon. Neither is the process a superficial application of methodology employed to sit within normative qualitative research practices. This is because:

The inclusion of mere snippets or fragments from lengthy transcripts can rob a report of important contextual information and separate out details of participant’s lives that add to the complexity and authenticity of the story (Smyth and McInerney, 2013, p. 4).

We maintain that construction of C-CONPM through a grey methodology lens, and emerging from trusting and respectful relationships between the researcher and interviewee, is a concerted and politically imbued attempt to dim the non-Indigenous researcher voice/presence in an Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander story. In saying this, we consider C-CONPM a method more suited to experienced researchers already committed to engaging ethical research that respects, validates, and foregrounds Indigenous voices; researchers who understand, and undertake concerted efforts to build meaningful, respectful, and productive relationships with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities (Wilson, 2008; Geia *et al.*, 2013).

While we argue that any research has the potential to manipulate data, the purpose of C-CONPM is to enable critical examination and flexible engagement of intercultural ways in which non-Indigenous researchers may work *with*, rather than research *on* Aboriginal peoples and Torres Strait Islanders, their cultures, their ideologies, and IRMs. As De Lissovoy *et al.* (2013) may argue, the aims, process and outcomes of C-CONPM have the potential to ‘extend our thinking by acknowledging and challenging the power dynamics [that] explicitly decentre the authoritative voice of the researcher’ (p. 35). In other words, presenting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander stories as oral narratives is an example of the actualised engagement of ‘decolonial knowledge-making, that reasserts and draws in concepts and meanings from Indigenous knowledge and systems of thought and experiences’ (Nakata *et al.*, 2012, p. 124).

The question of how non-Indigenous researchers may best present stories told by Aboriginal peoples and Torres Strait Islanders, while also complying with Eurocentric research practices, raises power/knowledge relations issues that interweave and circulate throughout cross-cultural research. We acknowledge the everyday tensions existing between non-Indigenous researchers, Aboriginal, and Torres Strait Islander participants in the cross-cultural/racial research space, yet seek to imagine possibilities that exist beyond culturally/racially bound constructs. We question, how may cross-cultural stories be presented in ways consistent with the researcher’s Eurocentric position, while also resisting them by taking up IRMs consistent with the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander participant positioning? (Rigney, 1999; Smith, 1999; Wilson, 2008; Singh and Major, 2017). This crisis of representation, as Richardson (1997) argues ‘challenges the grounds of [one’s] own and other’s authority, and raises ethical questions about [one’s] own practices’ (p. 298).

While non-Indigenous research projects may not engage IRMs as formative guiding frameworks, we make the case that drawing on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander concepts of storytelling



intentionally as a means of developing oral narrative portraits, moves them towards a more intercultural space. The give and take of cultural knowledge, or reciprocity, in such intercultural spaces, enables 'a mutual recognition of meaning and power ... between researcher and researched and between data and theory' (Lather, 1986, p. 263). In taking up such practices, the researchers:

Recognises that reality is more than negotiated accounts – that we are both shaped by and shapers of our world. [Yet, they are] challenged [to consider] how to maximise the researcher's mediation between people's self-understandings and transformative social action without becoming impositional (Lather, 1986, p. 269).

This has been an important consideration in C-CONPM because as Nadasdy (2004) argues, only when non-Indigenous researchers 'take into account [Indigenous] peoples' approaches to interpersonal interactions with agents and processes of the state' (p. 28) are cross-cultural research approaches positioned to disrupt and challenge privileged discourses of Eurocentric research processes.

Given this, we acknowledge that there is a deep engagement of power/knowledge relationships in any attempt to extract the privileged voice from a text. The very reality and persistent preoccupation that the researcher's voice can never be completely extracted from the crafted narrative only continues to 'keep the spotlight firmly on power relations so as to expose the forces of hegemony and injustice' (Crotty, 1998, p. 157). While there exists undercurrents of privilege where the position of non-Indigenous researcher to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander participant is concerned, this only remains true while particular research practices are privileged over others. The possibility for such power/knowledge relations to be disrupted lies in the interrogation and possibilities for enhancing Australian research practices.

### Examining the possibilities

We acknowledge that the C-CONPM discussed in this paper is not immune from critique from the research community, because 'the issue of communicating across cultural boundaries is a major challenge to the very foundation of our dominant theoretical frameworks' (Apfelbaum, 2001, p. 32). In advocating for this approach, we argue that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander stories presented as oral narratives, honours and foregrounds 'the diversity of older traditions and historical experiences' (Nakata, 2006, p. 272) as they manifest in knowledge transfer/storytelling/yarning today. Shay (2017) argues that there is a growing need for 'theoretical frameworks that re-present multiple Indigenous knowledges and experiences' (p. 57). While the suite of IRMs offer lenses for (re)presentation of multiple knowledge and experiences, overwhelmingly they are couched within discourses of Indigeneity. We argue that C-CONPM may be seen as a more culturally accessible tool that non-Indigenous researchers may engage to step beyond Eurocentric research paradigms. Had Weuffen (2017) decided to conduct a discursive analysis of interviews held with Koorie participants in the same manner as teacher participants for example, the stories and voices of Koorie peoples would have been lost within the grand-narrative of researcher interpretation; picked apart, coded and decontextualised. Their stories and voices would once again have been subject to the Eurocentric 'scientific discourse that construct[s] knowledge about [them]' (Shay, 2017, p. 57).

We argue that a major objective in cross-cultural/racial research should be for the privileged researcher to acknowledge and work

with and through other knowledge systems as a means of disrupting hegemonic research agendas. We feel strongly that the non-Indigenous researcher has a responsibility to:

Acknowledge that [they] are telling a narrative of a community embedded in place and space ... [they] must become more skilled at both pivoting between and building bridges across native and non-native discourse systems ... this journey must start by honouring the sacredness of the process of telling (Benham, 2007, p. 529).

Through employment of C-CONPM 'the facades that protect us from the implications of social injustice' (Bloom & Erlandson, 2003, p. 892) are exposed, thus offering researchers (and by extension, the academic research community) opportunities to be empowered to challenge constructed privileged research processes. In doing so, 'the value of multiplicitous realities, where the role of the researcher, whether indigenous or non-indigenous, is as *kumu* (teacher)' (Benham, 2007, p. 519) becomes actualised. Rather than perpetuating Eurocentric practices of privilege, we put forward the case that bringing together Eurocentric and IRMs enables the creation of more culturally nuanced and responsive research practices. These practices, while constrained by the western order of things and privileged way of doing research—at least at the moment—offer up a view of the possible advancements awaiting post-structural research practices.

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