



*Conversations that matter: Teaching and Teacher Educator*

*Transforming InDigenous Education in practice.  
On, From, With and In Country, flowing with the TIDE.*

**Griffith University Creating Futures Summit Series, 13 June 2023**

The School of Education and Professional Studies at Griffith University is proud to host the 8th annual Initial Teacher Education (ITE) Creating Futures Summit Series with a spotlight on issues related to the teaching profession. The Summit Series provides professional learning that is relevant, engaging, and proactive and enables Griffith University to deepen collaborations with our valued partners while setting agendas on key issues. The Series brings together a wide range of stakeholders with an interest in teaching futures.

The 2023 summit conversation begins on Country, with the understanding that *jagun* (Country) holds its own narrative and is an active participant in our conversation. *Jarara*, [Carrara] a place on *Yugambah jagun* where the ancient stone boundary once indicated the flooding high water line, continues its ancient narrative today whenever the flowing waters spill over the banks of the *Nerang* River filling the wide, flat, open fields with fresh and salt water.

*The tidal current ebbs and flows with the regular rise and fall of the ocean,  
dependent upon the phases of the sun and the moon.*

When I hear the phrase 'Indigenous Education', I instantly feel that I am in the 'brackish water', that meeting place on *Yugambah jagun* that naturally occurs in our river systems. It is no longer completely saltwater or freshwater, but like *Jarara*, a murky combination of both, and is sometimes a place where the *woorajum* (bunyip) lives, so you really should tread with caution.

Indigenous knowledge holders and Indigenous educators understand that brackish water [Indigenous Education] should be carefully navigated. On one hand, it is an exciting place to enter on your *gundala* (boat) because brackish water is host to a unique ecosystem and is a fascinating and inspiring place to explore and learn. On the other hand, it can be concomitantly difficult to navigate due to merging currents, floating debris, and the unknown. Therefore, two hands are always required to keep afloat.

While safely seated in the *gundala* together, we can ride the TIDE to explore and learn through the lens of *Jarara*, a pedagogy of Country, as a practice for teaching and teacher education. The coming together of fresh and salt water has long been connected with the possibilities for transformative change in teaching and learning<sup>1</sup>, the *Yolnu* described this as *Ganma*<sup>2</sup>. And in this spirit, together we can explore and learn from, with and on Country<sup>3</sup>, two-way learning<sup>4</sup>, stronger smarter<sup>5</sup>, culturally responsive practices<sup>6</sup>, nourishing schooling<sup>7</sup>, and so much more. *Jarara* encourages us to be aware of the low TIDE line (such as low expectations and deficit perspectives), to reach out with the swirling

waters of the high TIDE line (by fostering strength-based approaches that are locally grounded), and from this to transform teaching and learning into ecosystems that better harness and reflect the promise of Indigenous Education.

In 2007, the *United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples* was adopted, with Article 14 speaking directly to the rights of Indigenous people to establish and control educational systems and practices for their people<sup>8</sup>. The Declaration was endorsed by the Australian government in 2009 and can now be seen enshrined in policies such as the 2019 *Mparntwe Education Declaration*<sup>9</sup>. However, as illustrated by the efforts of education advocate and trailblazer Pearl Duncan (*Kamilaroi*) for example, Australian Indigenous peoples have been transforming mainstream education for well over 70 years<sup>10</sup>. So too were the efforts and contributions of the *National Aboriginal Education Committee* formed in the mid 1970s significant with drawing attention to the urgent need for change, and with suggestions to transform teaching and learning<sup>11</sup>. However, we must now also ask questions about why educational 'gaps' seem to be far from closing?

Target 4: 34.3% of Indigenous early childhood children are developmentally ready for school<sup>12</sup>

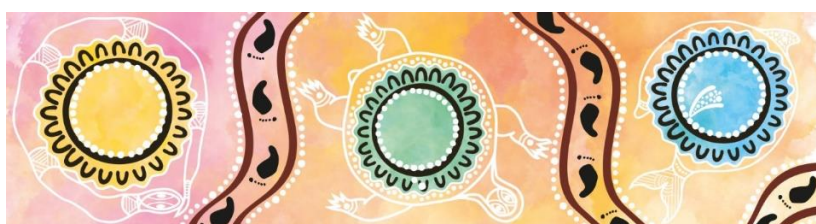
59% retention rate for Indigenous secondary school students Year 7-12<sup>13</sup>

NAPLAN year 3-9 inclusive - Indigenous students remain at a lower national minimum standard in Reading, Writing and Numeracy compared to non-Indigenous students<sup>14</sup>

In the midst of a year when we are moving toward the Voice referendum, it is timely to look back to move forward, to unpack and better critique the forces and factors that underpin challenges and opportunities when navigating *Jarara*. If the work of educators and schooling are to further improve on our efforts to embed Indigenous knowledges and work with Indigenous communities, this will require exploring uncomfortable conversations and reflecting on unconscious biases, with a view to achieving Indigenous student success both now and future.

Therefore, our next step is action, *garulbo* (partner together) in: co-design, co-research, and co-community partnership; to encourage, embrace, respect, and give time to understand the hyperlocal complexity of knowledges; and learn from schools where educators and communities are demonstrating co-practice of Indigenous Education. Consequently, and collectively, we will no longer fear the pan-Indigenising of curriculum content and the out of field teaching obligation, or unwittingly participate in the action of culturally taxing Indigenous co-workers with 'doing' the 'work' for us (knowledge and service). Rather, we will flow with the TIDE and participate in *Jarara mobobo*, a pedagogy of Country for today and tomorrow, to transform Indigenous education in practice.

**Yugambeh Elder, Songwoman and Educator - Dr Candace Kruger [Kombumerri/Ngugi].**



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**Endnotes:**

- <sup>1</sup> Worby, G., Rigney, L., & Tur, S. (2006). Where salt and fresh waters meet: reconciliation and change in education. In *Sharing Spaces: Indigenous and non-indigenous responses to story, country and rights* (pp. 418-447). API NETWORK.
- <sup>2</sup> Watson, H. (1988). The Ganma Project: research in mathematics education by the Yolngu community in the schools of the Laynhapuy (NE Arnhem Land). In G. Davis, & R. P. Hunting (Eds.), *Language issues in learning and teaching mathematics* (pp. 33-50). The Institute of Mathematics Education La Trobe University.
- <sup>3</sup> Yunkaporta, T. (2019). *Sand Talk. How Indigenous thinking can save the world*. Melbourne: The Text Publishing Company.
- <sup>4</sup> Wunungmurra, W. (1989, September). "Dhawurrpunaramirri": Finding the common ground for a new Aboriginal curriculum. *Ngoonjook*, 12-16.
- <sup>5</sup> Sarra, C. (2022). *Good morning, Mr Sarra: My life working for a stronger, smarter future for our children*. Univ. of Queensland Press.
- <sup>6</sup> Morrison, A., Rigney, L.-I., Hattam, R., & Diplock, A. (2019). *Toward an Australian culturally responsive pedagogy: A narrative review of the literature*. University of South Australia.
- <sup>7</sup> Lowe, K., Skrebneva, I., Burgess, C., Harrison, N., & Vass, G. (2021). Towards an Australian model of culturally nourishing schooling. *Journal of Curriculum Studies*, 53(4), 467-481.
- <sup>8</sup> Pritchard, S. (2009). *United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (Adapted version)*. Broadway (NSW): Amnesty International Australia.
- <sup>9</sup> Council of Australian Governments Education Council. (2019). *Alice Springs (Mparntwe) Education Declaration*. Carlton South: Education Services Australia.
- <sup>10</sup> DoE QLD. (2023). *Dr Pearl Duncan*. Retrieved from Indigenous Portal Department of Education, Queensland Government.
- <sup>11</sup> Holt, L. (2021). *Talking strong: The National Aboriginal and Education Committee and the development of Aboriginal education policy*. Acton (ACT): Aboriginal Studies Press.
- <sup>12</sup> Commonwealth of Australia. (2022). *Commonwealth Closing the Gap Annual Report 2022*. Canberra:
- <sup>13</sup> Australian Institute of Health and Welfare. (2023). *Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Performance Framework: summary report 2023*. Canberra: AIHW.
- <sup>14</sup> ACARA. (2022). *NAPLAN National Report for 2022*. Sydney: Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority.