

**How can Aboriginal Teachers use culturally enhanced approaches when teaching foundational skills for reading and writing in the early years?**

**by Melissa Kirby**

Thesis submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for  
the degree of

**Master of Education (Research)**

under the supervision of Hilary Yerbury & Katherine Bates

University of Technology Sydney

Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences

July 2021

# Certificate of Original Authorship

## CERTIFICATE OF ORIGINAL AUTHORSHIP

I, Melissa Kirby declare that this thesis, is submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the award of *Master of Education (Research)* in the *Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences* at the University of Technology Sydney.

This thesis is wholly my own work unless otherwise referenced or acknowledged. In addition, I certify that all information sources and literature used are indicated in the thesis.

This document has not been submitted for qualifications at any other academic institution.

*\*If applicable, the above statement must be replaced with the collaborative doctoral degree statement (see below).*

*\*If applicable, the Indigenous Cultural and Intellectual Property (ICIP) statement must be added (see below).*

This research is supported by the Australian Government Research Training Program.

Production Note:

Signature: Signature removed prior to publication.

Date: 06.07.2021

# Contents

Abstract.....	4
Acknowledgements .....	5
Chapter 1 Introduction.....	7
Chapter 2: Review of the Literature .....	12
Literacy learning in a social context.....	12
Understanding pedagogies.....	13
Contemporary mandated literacy practices .....	24
Developing a repertoire for teaching literacy .....	28
Scaffolding and the importance of culture .....	31
Cultural strategies and approaches for learning literacy .....	33
Oral culture and its importance .....	38
Scaffolding with oral language skills .....	39
Scaffolding through place.....	40
The role of the teacher .....	41
Conclusion.....	42
Chapter 3 Methodology .....	44
Introduction .....	44
Inside/Outsider Research.....	46
Case Study Methods .....	50
Narrative Enquiry .....	52
Participant Selection.....	57
Data Collection.....	57
Kapati method .....	58
Data Analysis.....	60
Analysis in Narrative enquiry.....	62
Data analysis in this study .....	63
Ethical Implications and Risks .....	63
Writing up the Findings.....	65
Conclusion.....	65
Chapter 4 Findings .....	67
Introduction .....	67
Participants in this Study.....	68
Factors influencing and shaping literacy teaching strategies .....	72
The most important literacy outcomes for Aboriginal educators .....	75
The role of literacy in Aboriginal empowerment .....	79
Indigenised approaches strengthening western teaching and assessment methods.....	83
Culturally familiar oral ways of learning .....	86
The early year's literacy approach and foundational learning .....	90
Conclusion.....	93
Chapter 5 Discussion.....	94
The importance of culturally relevant pedagogies .....	94
Approaches to Pedagogy .....	95
The purpose of literacy .....	97
The Use of culturally enhanced approaches .....	98
Understanding culture .....	98
Oral Culture .....	102

Translanguaging .....	104
Scaffolding .....	106
Tensions.....	109
Needing to comply .....	109
Closing the gap .....	112
Reclaiming Indigenous languages .....	113
Conclusion .....	113
Chapter 6 Conclusion .....	115
Introduction .....	115
Review of the key findings .....	115
Implications for scholarship .....	117
Implications for the education system and for teachers .....	121
Conclusion .....	127
References .....	129

## **Abstract**

This study, conducted by an Aboriginal teacher of foundational literacy, addresses the question of how Aboriginal teachers use culturally enhanced approaches when teaching foundational literacy skills. It used the Kapatı method of data collection through yarning to gather descriptions of the pedagogical approaches and practices used in teaching literacy as well as insights into a range of related topics raised by the five Aboriginal teachers who agreed to take part in this study. The themes arising from the content analysis showed how they developed their own pedagogical approaches, complying with and subverting the mandated pedagogical approaches. It has also shown how they believe that while they may be valued for their cultural knowledge, it is more difficult to be recognised for their expertise in the teaching of literacy. The findings of the study hint at the challenges inherent in developing literacy in Standard English, in a context where this may be seen as the colonisers' language, the language which displaced traditional languages. This study could have far-reaching implications both for the practice of teaching foundational literacy and for scholarship and research. It has certainly been able to demonstrate how the use of a social pedagogy can be a subversive activity.

## Acknowledgements

There are many people whose help and support in so many ways have been essential to me in this big undertaking, studying for a research degree. First and foremost, to my daughter, Sanaa, thank you for being patient and kind waiting for your mother to finish her research journey. And next to my mother, Missy, father, Stan and my brother David, thanks to you all for looking after my daughter throughout the research process so that I could concentrate on the books and writing.

*Babaa, Gunii, ngaadhi gaga, ngindu yaadhumaadhuguuy, ngadhu gadharay ngindu gulibaa.*

Dad, mum and my brother, you are really amazing, I respect you three!

*Ngarragaa-ra giya=na ngurra-gu buwiy burraay research, ngilu gayaa gunii. Sanaa-ga dharrgi ngadhi, ngadhu gadharay ngadhi waruu madhanbu gadharay ngali barrima-li wandhalaa ngali yadama-li.* During the research period I felt sad for my child, but she was happy for her mother. Sanaa kept me grounded, I respect my baby, we respect each other, we will pick up where we left off.

I am grateful to the five Aboriginal teachers who were enthusiastic participants in this research and who were generous and open in yarning about their expertise and experiences. Their willingness to share their experiences has led to interesting insights into the ways that Aboriginal teachers use culturally enhanced ways to teach foundational literacy.

I have had support from different parts of the university: – Jumbunna Institute for Indigenous Education and Research gave me support as an Aboriginal student; Nick Hopwood gave me insights into research methods, an area that was completely new to me; my original supervisor, Wendy Holland, saw me through the early stages of my candidature, yarning with

me to help me get a sense of direction and Katherine Bates, who has been my co-supervisor throughout, has given advice on how to develop the skills of scholarship and feedback on my sections and chapters along the way. Hilary Yerbury, who was my principal supervisor for the last six months brought the best out of me, yarnning with me to show me things I knew but could not articulate, and helping me to develop the confidence to write as a scholarly Aboriginal teacher and as a strong Aboriginal woman.

It is easy to see carrying out a research study as something separated from everyday life. It has not been like that for me. My close uncle John Guy passed away at the beginning of my research and it took me a while to recentre and gather my thoughts about where I wanted to start with this research; I thank Dr Wendy Holland for helping me to work through that difficult time.

Melissa Kirby, July 2021