

Holistic Approach to Embedding First Nations Perspectives

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Background

SharingStories Foundation (SharingStories) supports First Nations communities to maintain and share cultures, languages and knowledges. The organisation listens to and works with First Nations community partners across Australia, building long term and trusted relationships. Together they invent, adapt and adopt new ways to record and creatively interpret cultural knowledge using a range of media, art forms and platforms.

SharingStories programs are co-designed with, and led by, senior Cultural Custodians, and include digital storytelling and cultural mapping programs, films, production of interactive books, immersive exhibitions, interactive display panels, and education resources that embed Aboriginal and Torres Strait Island perspectives across the curriculum.

Programs often support knowledge transfer between generations on Country, skill building with community artists and language workers and strengthening local capacity for ongoing cultural expression and practices.

Education has become a strong focus for SharingStories in recent years. Authentic representation of First Nations peoples, cultures and stories has historically been excluded from student learning in the classroom resulting in a lack of knowledge and minimal understanding of the diversity of First Nations perspectives.

In Australian schools from Prep to Year 12, ‘Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Histories and Cultures’ is a cross-curriculum priority (Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Content Authority, 2022). While the importance of providing young people with relevant learning opportunities to engage with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander histories is explicitly stated in the syllabus, many non-Indigenous educators lack the confidence to meaningfully engage students in this content (Baynes, 2015; Harrison & Greenfield, 2011; Kanu, 2011) resulting in potentially fewer, and

¹ Throughout this paper Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples will be referred to as First Nations people.

less substantive, learning opportunities. Consequently, it appears that “there is a strong need for authentic and high-quality Indigenous education materials for use in schools,” (Deloitte, 2020) both in terms of what students learn in this domain as well as how to boost teachers’ cultural safety and confidence working in this space.

Within this context, SharingStories developed *Jajoo Warrngara—The Culture Classroom*. *Jajoo Warrngara* is a Nyikina word gifted to SharingStories by Nyikina Custodian and Elder Annie Nayina Milgin. It means ‘gather around and learn from Elders.’ As an online educational platform, *Jajoo Warrngara* aims to support educators to embed Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Histories and Cultures as part of the Australian Curriculum. Created with and approved by First Nations Custodians and communities, their resources seek to equip educators with cultural understanding to deliver lessons drawing directly on the cultural and historical knowledges which are shared and approved by First Nations peoples. More specifically, *Jajoo Warrngara* has designed a range of lesson series for different year levels. Each series is clearly labelled regarding how it relates to the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Histories and Cultures cross-curriculum priority and how it links to Australian curriculum v 9 core subjects including Maths, Science, English, Humanities, Arts and Social Sciences, Media Arts, Design and Technology, and Health and Physical Education. At the start of each series, educators are provided with an overview, key guiding questions, and relevant cultural protocol guides specific to each community. Within each lesson, students are provided with a range of activities and tasks to complete that draw on a diversity of resources—many of which are interactive and have been produced in house by SharingStories in partnership with Traditional Custodians and student communities. Each lesson concludes with student reflections.

Through these complex and engaging units of work, SharingStories via *Jajoo Warrngara* seeks to enable schools to fulfil their “responsibility to include Indigenous knowledges in the dynamic process of knowledge generation and dialogue” (Dei, 2002, p.5). This is particularly helpful, given that “introducing differing ways of knowing into a classroom may present epistemological challenges for teachers” (Baynes, 2015, p.81) and serves as a potential counternarrative to “educational journey[s] replete with experiences of colonial and colonized encounters that left unproblematized what has conventionally been accepted in schools as ‘in/valid knowledge’” (Dei, 2002, p.4).

In addition to the collection of anecdotal educator feedback from the initial trial of *Jajoo Warrngara*, SharingStories has commissioned researchers from the University of Queensland to conduct an independent evaluation of its utility as an educational platform to support teacher instruction on sharing Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples’ cultural content and knowledges². With this aim, the project employed a case-study design to collect data on how educators experience and utilise the site. Following data analysis involving the organic generation of themes by two independent researchers, one who identifies as an Aboriginal person, drawing from survey and interview data, this report provides an in-depth discussion of key findings. Overall, the data indicates that teachers appreciate the reliability of *Jajoo Warrngara* as a source for credible knowledge from and about First Nations peoples, histories and cultures. In addition, the participating educators found the resources to be highly engaging for students and to provide ample opportunity for teachers to adapt the materials to suit their individual classroom needs. Furthermore, the educators appreciated the high quality of the audio-visual resources and accompanying activity sets. While the participants identified a few minor technical challenges regarding the platform, their

² Ethics approval for this project was obtained from the UQHREC: Project ID 2023/HE000801.

assessment of *Jajoo Warrngara* as a resource to support classroom enactment of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Histories and Cultures cross-curriculum priority is exceedingly positive.

Methodology

This project employs a case study design involving survey and interview data collected from three different school sites. The justification for this design lies with the intent to develop both a breadth and depth of understanding regarding how teachers perceive, use and experience the *Jajoo Warrngara* resources in the particular contexts within which they operate.

For ease of reading, the included interview excerpts have been cleaned to remove repeated words and place holders such as ‘like,’ ‘hmmm,’ ‘I guess,’ and ‘you know.’

Site of research and participants

The three sites of research vary in institutional type and student demographic and were chosen for this pilot study for this reason. Site A is a state primary school located in the outer suburbs of Adelaide, South Australia. Site B is a private primary school located in Southeast Queensland and Site C is comprised of two flexible learning centres, both part of a flexible school network in Southeast Queensland serving the educational needs of students who have difficulty accessing mainstream schools for a variety of reasons.

From these schools, a total of sixty-one teachers completed a pre-survey describing the way educators typically engage with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander perspectives in the classroom, prior to the introduction of *Jajoo Warrngara* resources. This sample provides a window into the extent to which Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander perspectives are currently being shared in schools and how teachers feel about their pedagogical practice in this domain (see appendix A for the full survey). Fifty-five out of sixty-one educators identified as non-Indigenous, and five as being of Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander descent. The educators who completed the survey primarily teach in one of the five main curricular areas—Maths, English, Science, Humanities, the Arts—and work with students ranging from ages five to nineteen. Upon completion of the survey, the educators were invited to engage with the resources of *Jajoo Warrngara* and to select at least one lesson from the platform to use with their students in either term 3 or 4 of 2023. While efforts were made to collect post-survey data from the pre-survey participants, due to changes in leadership at one of the sites, coupled with a low response rate from the educators, the post-test survey response is limited to five. SharingStories is aware that many more teachers engaged with the site and utilised their lessons than is evident in the number of post-survey responses, however, for the purposes of this report, due to the low response rate, the post-survey data is not included.

From the pool of educators who used the *Jajoo Warrngara* resources, six educators volunteered to engage in in-depth semi-structured interviews—one from site A, two from site B, and three from site C. These lasted approximately thirty minutes and were guided by the interview protocol detailed in Appendix B. All three educators from site C work in the junior secondary or senior secondary space. Site B’s educators are a mix of experienced and early career primary teachers working with middle to upper year primary students, while the teacher at site A is an early primary

years teacher. Prior to their implementation of *Jajoo Warrngara*, the six educators had varying experiences of embedding Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander perspectives in their classrooms.

Findings and discussion

Survey results

While the focus of the findings lies with the detailed experiences of the educators shared in the interviews, the presurvey data from the sixty-one participants helps to establish a baseline for understanding how teachers think about and enact Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander education in today's context.

According to the data, fifty-seven percent of the responses recorded that the time spent on embedding Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander perspectives is less than thirty minutes a week. When attention is given to embedding Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander perspectives, ninety percent of participants responded that it occurs primarily during special events such as National Aborigines' and Islanders' Day Observance Committee (NAIDOC) week. While there is no singular dominant challenge that the educators collectively identified, approximately sixty-seven percent of respondents expressed concerns regarding one of the following: *not pronouncing the language words correctly; saying something inappropriate and/or offensive; and/or a lack of adequate knowledge of First Nations histories and cultures*. Despite these concerns, educators feel as though they have sufficient time (with twenty-seven teachers agreeing and fifteen staying neutral) and support (with twenty-one agreeing and twenty-one remaining neutral) to effectively embed Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander perspectives into the curriculum, suggesting that the barriers to doing so are either social, psychological, or epistemological. From these findings, it can be extrapolated that teachers feel somewhat equipped to address the cross-curricular priority of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Histories and Cultures but face some angst and/or other kind of limitation in doing so. These findings provide a useful lens through which to view the feedback shared during the interviews.

Interview findings

Significance of Elders and Custodians

When asked how, if at all, the *Jajoo Warrngara* resources addressed students' understanding of, and respect for, Elders and Custodians, the educators had much to share. For example, 1E highlights the cultural knowledge that their students obtained from watching videos of the Elders. They reflect, as follows:

The Year 2 unit I did last year... there was the Welcome to Country. So, we could talk about why we needed it, or why we would be Welcome[d] to Country. We weren't leaving our classroom, but we talked about that being, we were sharing in story from another place. So that was that connection to Country, being the Murray Darling area... it just highlights, like I said, perspectives where you are starting with, recognising Country, connections to land, that sort of thing...Part of our discussion, there was a story shared by an Aboriginal man who has since passed. So, there was the warning that

came up on the screen that this person, they're about to show a photo of someone who's passed, so we could talk about what that meant and why that was important to have that as a warning for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and what culturally that meant... All the way along, there were just so many of those discussions because it had been structured in that way for me to realize and then [for] me to share that with children.

Although operating in a different state and school, 1F recounts a similar experience to 1E, which highlights how the resources assisted students to develop new knowledge regarding Elders and Custodians.

It's been a really great opportunity for all of us to develop that respect and understanding... It's demonstrated the importance; I do really like that. It has the information connecting to those Elders and who those storytellers were. And it's definitely something that we've talked about with the students as well, that the Elders, they are very well respected, and they are the ones that pass on that knowledge and pass on those stories and teach those skills to the younger generations... I think it's really good how it's covered all of that.

While the resources generally enabled students to recognise the importance of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples Elders and Custodians, 1A talks specifically about the impact of Custodians' audio-recordings on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students.

Especially, on our site, we have a lot of First Nations young people who don't know where they come from, so these things have been really nice for them to connect to the lessons that have been delivered because they get a bit of knowledge from places where they might not be able to go in their whole lives. I think that's one of the comments that came up from one of my young people is that, you know, they think they don't ever, they're not going to get the chance to go to South Australia. So, the fact that they can listen to an Elder tell them a story through a lesson in their classroom, I think that was really impactful.

1C builds on this sentiment, applauding the long-term educational benefits of recording Elders, Custodians and their stories to share with student communities. 1C especially valued storytelling as a medium for preserving and sharing traditional knowledge, and how the resources thereby build respect for Elders and Custodians.

I think what it does is...create a respect for wisdom that's really important and a respect for, amongst younger generations, of the importance of storytelling. And we've got a long history here at the [school] with a whole heap of local First Nations Elders whose stories have really been passed down ... I think what this does is gives us an opportunity to continue to engage in those stories in a really, a really respectful and enjoyable and story focused way which all of our young people love so much. Story is such a big part of everything that we do here, and having the resources to share those stories means that they won't get lost... I think that's so important... really important for that respect of Elders, respect of the amount of story that is held by individuals.

With this commentary, non-Indigenous educators underscore the extent to which the *Jajoo Warrngara* materials provide a powerful pathway to building student understanding and appreciation for the knowledge and practices of Aboriginal Elders and Custodians of the land. This is significant given that historically non-Indigenous teachers' discomfort has been shown to act as a barrier to engaging students with culturally relevant material (Yunkaporta and McGinty, 2009).

A note on confidence

One of the most prominent themes that came out of the interviews was an increase in non-Indigenous teacher confidence when engaging with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples' knowledges when using *Jajoo Warrngara* resources. This theme was so pervasive that separate subheadings have been created to discuss the various ways that the resources boosted educators' confidence.

Understanding and confidence

First, respondents felt empowered by the well-researched and thorough information provided in the teacher resources. Access to these materials translated into a feeling of understanding, and ultimately, confidence for the educators. 1C captures this sentiment in the following comment:

The learning that I got to do was also really great. I didn't have to go searching for my own understanding of something prior to then delivering that to young people. The education information for educators, for teachers, was actually all there. So, for my own learning, that was really excellent and then it made me feel a lot more confident to be able to deliver that.

Given how time poor teachers are, it is unsurprising that easy access to reliable, high quality First Nations led and approved content is an appreciated feature of the platform. 1E echoes this sentiment as follows:

It gave me confidence to do a unit that I may not have done in the way that I did it... I think it was deeply embedding Indigenous perspectives, so it definitely gave me confidence ... I think it's always the first place I go to for ideas...I love the teaching notes ... It's a lot to read through and get your head around at the start of a unit, but I think it meant that it just came through ... You felt like you were on the right foot from the start.

These comments demonstrate the importance of teacher understanding when sharing First Nations people's cultural knowledges and perspectives with students. Providing educators with detailed and contextual knowledge on specific First Nations perspectives appears to have flow-on effects to the decisions that they make as pedagogues in terms of what, how, and how much to include. This is significant because "in order for non-Indigenous people to work effectively with multiple ways of knowing, there needs to be a preparedness to engage in knowledge from multiple perspectives" (Baynes, 2015, p. 81-82), something which *Jajoo Warrngara* appears to provide. 1F expands upon this point by referring to the utility of the resources as a foundation from which to conduct further research.

I use[d] the Dunggula story, the interactive story, for a whole term...We built a lot of knowledge around Indigenous practices and building vocabulary as well and connecting to the Country and land. I found it really enriching and it's made me feel a bit more confident in including those Indigenous perspectives in my teaching every day. So, absolutely, [it] reduced anxiety! ... Our professional development...was amazing, and really inspired me to run with the story ... So I used that as a basis to then do my own research and pull on different aspects from the story and from the information that was also connected to the story that you know in the interactive part of the map you could click on to, and they'd be talking about the Middens along the Murray, or about the digging stick and the different tools and how they were made. So, I felt really confident and comfortable in the end with how I could deliver and explore these aspects with the kids and actually doing a lot more research for myself as well to help me feel confident. It definitely helped with that.

1F's experience suggests that the *Jajoo Warrngara* resources not only generate deeper educator understanding and confidence, but also stimulate the pursuit of further knowledge—a benefit to both the teachers and students. The experiences of the participants generating further knowledge through these resources thus serve as a counterpoint to the broader experience of non-Indigenous teachers who “lament that they do not possess the knowledge to teach about Aboriginal Australia” (Harrison & Greenfield, 2011, p. 74 as cited in Baynes, 2015, p.82).

Credibility and confidence

The confidence that the teachers gained as their understanding of First Nations knowledges deepened was underpinned by their trust in the reliability of the *Jajoo Warrngara* resources to accurately reflect the knowledges and beliefs held by the Elders and Custodians who shared their cultural knowledges. 1D highlights this point in the following comment:

I'm an early career teacher... teaching about First Nations perspectives, it's something that I'm really passionate about, but it's also something that scares me a little bit because I'm not a First Nations' person, like I'm not Indigenous to Australia. So, I think, for me, you don't want to get it wrong... my father is First Nations where he's from.... So, it is something I'm really passionate about here because it just feels like we don't have that education around it. So, I think it's just that confidence of like being able to present something and know that you're giving the right information, or you're not passing on information from people that might not have the right information. It definitely made it easier, because it can be really hard to find the right information.

The trustworthiness of the resources can be linked to the approval and contribution of the stories by Elders and Custodians of the relevant communities. This makes the veracity of the resources more reliable than other available resources. 1D speaks to the challenges that teachers face, even well-intended educators, when trying to quality assure the accuracy and origin of First Nations educational materials.

So even just with language groups ...who belongs to where? ... Not having to ...make sure that that's accurate because I know that there's definitely certain places where there are certain groups who say, 'this is our land,' but that can be a little bit conflicting. So, I guess you don't want to teach kids the wrong thing. I just found it really good to have that information and know that it's coming from a reputable source. That definitely helped in presenting certain lessons and things like that ...I think it's a really good resource ... even as someone who tries to find the right information.

1D's comment demonstrates the importance of having easily accessible, credible resources available to educators, something which *Jajoo Warrngara* explicitly endeavours to provide. As 1C asserts:

In the past, the only time I would ever feel anxious is if I didn't know that what I was delivering was considered to be culturally appropriate, culturally sensitive, well-researched and was actually considered appropriate by our First Nations people in our area. So that's when, in the past, I probably [would] have been a bit worried about more, you know, when someone shared a resource... 'This looks quite cool, but I'm not sure who's actually behind the formation of this particular resource.' And so, then you have to go doing a bit of digging to make sure that you know ... And it's not someone who doesn't have the qualifications or the experience putting together those resources in a culturally appropriate manner. So, for me, it was really great to know... I felt I didn't feel anxious at all. I felt really confident because I knew that it was coming from a place that was

well researched, absolutely, culturally appropriate and authentic. For me, that was really important, that the resources were authentic.

Effective teachers think carefully about which resources they select for students to engage with. This is particularly the case when addressing content that is sensitive, contentious or has a history of misrepresentation, three categories which First Nations peoples and cultures historically falls under, particularly in the classroom. Indeed, having sufficient professional development and access to reliable resources in this domain is a point of educator concern (Michie, 2002). 1D takes it one step further, highlighting the ways in which the very existence of *Jajoo Warrngara* advances educators' understanding of, and appreciation for, the acquisition and implementation of credibly authored First Nations learning materials.

I think, for some of the others in my teaching team, particularly some of the other teachers who probably haven't had to do this before... I think there was a bit of, prior to us using this resource, there was a bit of like, 'Oh, if I just Google something and it comes up, we can kind of use that.' And they were like, 'Okay, so some of that information out there is really not what we want.' And so, I think that that was really good. It was like, 'Okay, we really should be getting the information from the right people, and that that is the people who are the Custodians of the lands, especially when we're looking at a specific place.'

1D then discusses the positive impacts of modelling the use of credible materials with students.

When we were talking about, where has this information come from ... they were like, 'oh, so it's important that the information comes from the right place.' ... They had that realization, too, that 'if I just see something on the Internet that's not good enough. I need to know where I'm getting my information.' And I think just them seeing their teacher be able to do that, that was a big learning moment from them... It just gave them a bit more of a culturally sensitive lens of, 'sometimes I'm going to see things and that may not be the first thing that I should believe.' I think, us being like 'we are using this because it has come from somewhere. And it's important that it's come from the right people,' they started thinking about, 'well, when I interact with information, I need to be understanding that that comes from the right place.' And I think, for little people say, like Year 4, that was a big realization.

1Ds comments suggest that when educators explicitly model their use of *Jajoo Warrngara* with students, it can have positive effects on students' academic integrity and critical literacy because they learn about the importance of working with trustworthy material.

Cultural safety and confidence

Educators also reported increased feelings of confidence due to the cultural safety provided by the *Jajoo Warrngara* resources. In the following statement, 1D makes a direct link between feeling culturally safe and having guaranteed access to credible sources and ready-to-implement protocols for engagement.

It wasn't even just the lessons as well, so obviously the information, but just the protocols that were involved. So, the fact that the lessons have the protocols, and they have where the information has come from, and I found sharing that with the children as well... It led to rich conversation about... what is a Welcome to Country and what is an Acknowledgement of Country. And we kind of talked about the protocols and that and I feel like that's a space where you do get worried about saying the wrong thing. Some kids going to go home and say, 'you know this,' but having that information there, knowing it's come from a source that is reputable, it does reduce that anxiety of saying the wrong thing.... So, just having that resource to back you up and sort of say, 'well, no, we really do know,' because this has come from the right people and the right places.

1B echoes these feelings of cultural safety, confidence, and credibility as follows:

Well, I think it's definitely helped my confidence personally in that I know now that there is a place that it's safe to go to for resources that are culturally appropriate for our young people, as well as good structure around ... how to deliver it as well. But obviously, I think it's any educators' responsibility to kind of tailor that to their own young people... But it definitely does give me confidence that...for any topic that I've wanted so far, I could come on, have a look and then they start with all the right information from a good perspective and then be able to adapt that where necessary. So, it definitely helps confidence in embedding Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander perspective[s].

1B's comment that *Jajoo Warrngara* provides a useful starting point for classroom engagement with First Nations content was echoed throughout the interviews. This is a significant insight regarding the platform's utility given that a principal obstacle regarding instruction on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander histories and cultures for non-Indigenous educators' is knowing, with confidence, where to start. Indeed, as detailed in the literature, "teachers are also reportedly hesitant about incorporating Indigenous content when they feel that they do not have the expertise to do this in an authentic way" (Quince, 2012 as cited in Baynes, 2015, p.82). As 1A, an educator who identifies as Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander, explains:

But I think that more educators could use this research because again, I'm... very confident, I know Culture. I know who my people are. I know how to deliver this stuff and I've only ever worked in identified roles, so I know how to engage with this content. But I can see that some people would be really confronted, or they would feel like they don't want to get it wrong, and I think this resource will help people feel like they're getting it right. And it's a non-confrontational, non-intimidating way of engaging and getting people confident around First Nations culture, because I think that's the roadblock for a lot of people, where it's another language or it's, you know, they don't want to be culturally insensitive or get something wrong, but that actually stops them from trying altogether. So, I think that this resource will be great for more educators to access.

1B's experience epitomises 1A's supposition as detailed in the following comment:

I have faith that these resources have a good perspective and a good lens on...[the] quite complex issues that we are tackling, so, I feel that they give me a bit more confidence to facilitate in the lesson in the way that I would want, knowing that ... there's less likelihood that I'll be portraying things in the wrong way or ... using a perspective that's not that of people in this industry, with Indigenous backgrounds.

Here, 1B's use of the term 'wrong way' is telling and speaks to a general fear of not getting 'things right' as a non-Indigenous educator embedding Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander perspectives. As 1C further explains:

I would say that it's certainly made the teaching of First Nations perspectives in our classroom a much more enjoyable, comfortable, confident, and engaging way for me to be able to use those kinds of resources and feel confident that I was presenting stuff as someone who's not Indigenous. As a teacher to be able to do that in a way that's authentic, in a way that that feels appropriate... So, it was great to have so many resources that we could pick and choose from and use them in a way that met the needs of our young people.

Taken together, the data shared in these three sections on confidence underscore the positive impact that *Jajoo Warrngara* resources have on teacher understanding, efficacy, and cultural safety when

engaging students in lessons that embed Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples’ histories and cultures.

The utility of adaptability

Another common theme that came through in interviews was the adaptable quality of the *Jajoo Warrngara* materials. Whether the educators worked in upper or lower primary, or senior or junior secondary contexts, they highlighted the resources’ transferable capacity to meet their students’ particular needs. As 1C advises about how to flexibly adapt the resources:

I think, make it work for you. That, for me, was the best part of it—although there was lots of resources with options about the way that you could deliver... We really just pick[ed]... what was gonna work for our group and they were open ended enough for us to be able to do that, which was excellent.

In a similar vein, 1F recounts how they used the *Jajoo Warrngara* material:

I also did a PowerPoint that followed on from Dunggula and really took a deep dive into the vocab that was used. So, a part of it was around talking about the Creator and how the women weren't able to use the Creator's name. That was, I guess, a taboo for women to say his name, but the men could, so that took a branch off into talking about men's business and women's business. So, I had to then do a bit of research into that—finding different websites that could break back down and give examples. And I'd find little video clips to connect to different things and different artwork. And it just really built a great unit for the kids’ learning. And I would find that throughout our learning, not just in literacy, when we were focusing on that, they would be making connections to all sorts of different things that we'd covered in that story and in that unit of work.

1F’s experience demonstrates the ways in which the *Jajoo Warrngara* resources can be used to stimulate discussion and activities that move beyond the platform’s learning materials, opening up even more opportunity to learn about Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander histories and cultures.

1A addresses a different aspect of the materials’ adaptability to underscore the ways in which reflection can be tailored to meet the individual interests and needs of student cohorts. They discuss the following examples from the Frontier Wars unit:

And then we did some reflection, I adapted the reflection activity to better suit our young people. So, we did some audio tapes, and we did some typing and some writing and texting about how we felt about the Frontier Wars and... [did] some research about our specific state. They went deeper than I thought they were gonna go, which I thought was really interesting whereas when you deliver that class with a younger grade, they're just like, 'Oh, that's really sad.' It's the first time they've been introduced to this, so they don't really, they just kind of absorb it. Whereas the grade twelves they were grossed out by it, but they wanted to remain in the conversation. They wanted to research more and see what happened in our own community because in [city of QLD], out here, we had a lot of South Sea Islanders brought here to work on cane farms and things like that as well. So... it created a really deep conversation in our learning space, which was great.

By adapting the reflection activity in this way, 1A supports students’ ability to make connections between local First Nations histories and the material of the Frontier Wars, resulting in high quality student engagement and more meaningful place-based learning for the students. Although the resources were originally designed with a younger cohort in mind, the resultant conversations and insights that this material incited in adolescents is indicative of the transferable utility of the educational resources.

1D also recounts modifying resources ‘intended’ for one year level for use with a different one. They discuss their experience as follows:

So, I know that we actually in Year 4... we did use one of the Year 6 resources that was in the First Fleet, and we did that because at our school, we ... look at it a little bit in Year 6, but not as in depth as we do in Year 4. So, we looked at the First Fleet resources that were there and some were age appropriate, and some weren't quite age appropriate. There was a bit of picking and choosing with that, but just watching those videos and following through the steps, it just made it really, really easy... the videos as well. There was a lot of conflicting information if you looked for your own videos... So, it was kind of like starting, watching the video, following through with the discussion, doing the activities, and then we would follow through with some other activities that kind of was going back on what we've learned, like, ‘what did you take from that activity?’ Or ‘how could you apply it? How might you feel?’ Those sorts of activities.

While 1D would have liked more access to age-specific resources on this topic, they were still able to make use of the existent materials to enrich the learning of their Year 4s. As 1D summarises:

Just having lessons and units where I could go and find information, and it was all there... I just feel like it definitely meant that I could do it more often with other lessons where I might not have prioritised it.

This ease of access to resources is echoed by 1A, an educator, who identified as being of Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander decent.

I am a First Nations person, my dad's family is from the Wakka Wakka region... So, I always like to give a lesson where First Nations perspective in history is a focus. And it's just easier for me to use something like the Cultural Classroom or Sharing Stories because then I don't have to come up with the lesson myself, which is really nice.

Regardless of the specific school or student cohort, the participating educators found the *Jajoo Warrngara* materials easy to integrate and meaningfully adapt to suit their classrooms.

Application and lived experiences

Building on the notion of adaptability, interviewees discussed the different ways that they modified lessons to suit the particular interests and lived experiences of their students. For example, 1C drew explicit links with their students between the content of the *Jajoo Warrngara* resources and their annual retreat to Minjerribah.

So, our curriculum is often generated by young people interest and also things that we think will be most engaging for young people... And so, we do these really cool camps and things to areas that have significance for young people from our [school], but also significance going back in the history of [the school], and one of those places that we always go to is Minjerribah.... That's where our class really engaged in the resources...[By] using the map, which was really awesome, we were able to show that as an interactive thing in the class up on the big whiteboard with young people. We're able to look exactly where Minjerribah was on the map and say, ‘Okay, what are the, who are the people from? Ok, Quandamooka people’ And then we were able to go straight to the Quandamooka resources and then we used those extensively in class. So that was ... excellent.

According to 1C, throughout the camp, the *Jajoo Warrngara* resources provided a rich complement to their experiential learning.

In a similar vein, 1F draws connections between local First Nations knowledge and the interactive story of Dunggula. In this instance, the *Jajoo Warrngara* resources stimulated additional engagement with local Traditional Custodians via student families. As 1F recounts the experience:

I had a couple of Indigenous students in my class last year and their parents brought in some texts, some different books that I could share with the kids. Some were stories, so dreaming stories, but there were also other ones that were information texts but had beautiful artwork and would explain in simple terms that the kids could understand about...you know what their ceremonies are like, and what Indigenous traditions are and different vocab that they use as well, and explaining what those things mean and connection to Land, a connection to Country. So, finding text that I could use with the class, with the story.

1A also shines a light on how First Nations students connected to and built upon the *Jajoo Warrngara* resources in terms of their families' lived experiences. As 1A recalls:

We had some really deep conversations with some of the young people and ended up going on different tangents where other First Nations young people were able to share their own experience with their class, with their own interactions with the police, their history of their family and what had happened to their family during those times and ...conversations about the Native Police. So... it was one topic, but it branched out so many times because the resource allowed me to keep it so conversational.

Later in the interview, 1A emphasised the connections that students made with material, this time in relation to a shared experience at a recent Invasion Day rally.

When we were talking about the Frontier Wars with the Native Police [resources], they were reflecting on an experience we had ...We took them to the Invasion Day Rally at the beginning of the year and we had a really negative interaction with a police officer there. So, they were able to link the things that were being said to their experience that they had just had. And even our non-Indigenous young people, they were making connections about how they would feel if this would happen in X-Y-Z context.

In summary, the experiences shared by the educators suggest that *Jajoo Warrngara* resources provide an effective platform for continued engagement with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander histories and cultures and invite students to draw connections with lived experiences.

Dialogue and critical thinking

The capacity of the *Jajoo Warrngara* lessons to elicit positive dialogue among students and teachers emerges from the data as another prominent theme. As 1A explains:

The Frontier Wars is a lesson that I've done a couple of times with different groups of young people. I think I did it with a senior class maybe three weeks ago, four weeks ago, it was one of our introductory literacy lessons, and I used it to help us gauge where our young people were at especially because...I haven't been in a senior space before, I wasn't sure of their numeracy and literacy levels. So, it was very conversational...I really liked that about the resources ... As a 'non-teacher,' I feel like a lot of the time we get sent lesson plans to deliver and it's very 'here's the PowerPoint, here's exactly what you have to say, this is exactly what you need right on the board.' And I feel like the SharingStories [material] is so conversational, and it leans so well with my practice of how I deliver content to young people as well.

Unlike some other educational packages, SharingStories creates space and genuine opportunity for students to talk through First Nations historical and cultural knowledge. As 1B explains:

The resources that I was using around, I think it was the Native Police and the Frontier Wars, were very valuable in facilitating good conversations with young people and giving them a better foundational perspective on those events than other resources have in the past.

Indeed, many of the educators commented on the high quality of student conversations that took place during the *Jajoo Warrngara* lessons. As 1C states:

It also made that process of having rigorous discussions, and ours are much better at having discussions than they are at writing, [for] a lot of them literacy is difficult ... so discussion heavy is often what we have, you know, small group discussion, whole group discussion, pairs, think-pair-share, share, come back—that kind of stuff. So, in that way, it really helped develop that critical and creative thinking around some big topics.

With this comment, 1C highlights how the *Jajoo Warrngara* materials support students in meaningfully engaging beyond the traditional parameters of scholastic literacy. Extending on this, 1B considers how these resources help build critical reflection.

I think a big part of critical thinking for our students is reflection... So, thinking about what they're actually doing and how it's kind of making them feel and does this kind of change their worldview in any way. And then, the way that we ran it in terms of discussion-based learning... to help them develop their critical thinking because they're looking at each other's perspectives, and whatnot... just examining their own ideas, attitudes and beliefs and comparing those to others, and then thinking about how they could justify those...

The importance of dialogue is thus a staple and celebrated feature of *Jajoo Warrngara*.

Engaging and interactive resources

In addition, the educators spoke to the high quality and engaging character of the platform's audio-visual materials. For example, 1C makes the following observation about their students' experience:

There was a really good...range of activities ...The visual resources were excellent. That's what we really loved. And the imagery, ... the beautiful presentation of the way the things [are]. Our kids are really visual learners, so they really loved that component of the resources.

1C also acknowledged the fact that their students are already primed to appreciate Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander histories and cultures, so it is not difficult to engage them in deeper learning about First Nations peoples. However, as 1C notes:

In saying that, though, if you were just presenting something that wasn't necessarily interesting to them, and another worksheet, that might not necessarily have been so successful. So, I think the visual resources from that were great in terms of them getting an understanding of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander perspectives.

1A works with a similar population to 1C and also underscored the utility of these audio-visual materials for student learning.

We watched the videos. The videos were really cute...one of them was a creative one. It was probably made for a bit younger than our Grade 11s and 12s, but they loved it. The fact that it was something visual and the examples given in the resource were straight to the point, which is great for our young people because our attention spans aren't very long. So, the two-to-three-minute videos were really good and they [the students] knew exactly what we were talking about. They knew exactly how to communicate how they felt about the stuff that they had watched.

1F takes the importance of audio-visual materials one step further, describing the ways in which the *Jajoo Warrngara* material inspired the creation of students' own artwork.

But they loved it. And having the interactive aspect to the stories, we were able to talk about the different ways of storytelling. And then, when we did the artwork, they were able to retell how the story went, and then use the images and pictures that they'd seen in the videos they'd seen to make their own artwork for it as well... They very much enjoyed it.

In 1F's Prep class, the audio-visuals contributed to students' knowledge and understanding of First Nations peoples and cultures, while also inciting powerful expressions of this understanding through their own visual storytelling.

Limitations

While the interviewees spoke extensively about the classroom benefits of engaging with *Jajoo Warrngara*, they did identify some challenges, albeit minor. Taking stock of these limitations will help inform future improvements to the site.

First, the educators suggested removing recommended age labels from the student resources as this places unnecessary constraints on both teachers and students. This was particularly consequential for educators working with youth in flexible learning environments. As 1A explains:

My feedback from some of the other lessons that I've delivered from this resource is that it's very obvious what level or what age demographic that the resource is made for—that was something that I did struggle with. I had to download stuff and kind of hide the age bracket when I was delivering the content.

1B reiterates this point in asserting that *I do remember one of the worksheets having grade levels on it. I think which in our particular space is not great because we're often working below level.* While guiding age ranges for the teacher resources were deemed useful, it was recommended that this not extend to student-facing resources in the interests of inclusive teaching methods.

Another minor point of feedback concerned the presence of a broken or inaccurate link. For example, as 1F recounts:

I think at first trying to find the right link to get onto the interactive story, I think I had a bit of [an] issue with that. It was taking me instead to another page, it was just previewing the story. I think that's the only trouble I had. Once I got to the right page, it was all smooth sailing from there.

Although this experience was far from the norm, it suggests that the links would benefit from a fine-tuned review.

Another sentiment shared by a few of the teachers was the desire for the creation of more resources for different year levels. 1D encapsulates this point as follows:

Obviously, there's been so much work, and it's a start-up, and there's so much that goes into it, but I guess it was just sometimes you would be looking for something, and you're like, 'oh, it's not quite there.' I think that was the biggest challenge, because you'd be like, 'I really want something here' or 'I feel like this is really important for us to touch on at our year level,' and you're kind of looking for something and it just wasn't there.

Indeed, as 1E experienced, sometimes the focus of the resources did not align with the sought after focus of the individual teacher or school:

I mean, I could well have missed something, and it was a little while since I looked, but I was looking for more history content like a history unit that I could utilize rather than [what] I found at the Year 5 level. It was a lot of culture resources.

While this challenge will likely be mitigated as SharingStories expands, it will be difficult to meet either the individual desires of every single educator accessing the platform or every component of the curriculum.

Conclusion

This pilot study highlights the potential of *Jajoo Warrngara* to redefine how educators engage with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander histories and cultures in the classroom. As many teachers continue to struggle with what it means to embed Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander knowledges into the Australian curriculum (Nakata, 2011), these findings demonstrate that *Jajoo Warrngara* has much to offer educators operating in the Australian educational context. A consistent and ubiquitous finding from the participants was the increase in teacher security and cultural safety when delivering the *Jajoo Warrngara* materials. This largely stemmed from the educators' confidence in the reliability, accuracy, and authority of the content. That teacher-efficacy in embedding Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander histories and cultures depends on the authority of the resources and the deeper understanding thereby acquired is an important finding of this research.

The high production value of the resources is another salient finding of this research. Educators unanimously applauded the interactive and engaging quality of the audio-visuals and activities, were cognisant of how this promoted student inquiry, and how it manifested active engagement with and a further appreciation for the sharing of First Nations practices, protocols, and knowledges in the resources. While the participants experienced a few minor challenges using the platform, the results from this research underscore the overwhelmingly positive impact that *Jajoo Warrngara—The Culture Classroom* can play in how educators address the cross-curriculum priority of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Histories and Cultures.

In light of this study, it is recommended that SharingStories continue to collaborate with First Nations Elders and Custodians as a way of engaging educators with their platform and commission a larger, more comprehensive study of *Jajoo Warrngara*'s impact on the classroom in a diversity of schools examining both teacher and student data.

To conclude this pilot evaluation, it is only fitting to give an educator the last words—words which accurately reflect the views of all participants involved:

[Jajoo Warrngara] definitely helped me find ways to include cultural diversity and using Indigenous stories and perspectives in my day-to-day teaching. It's helped me to find ways, myself and my students, could connect to Indigenous perspectives as well, and their storytelling, and also language was very big...It is an amazing resource, and I thoroughly enjoyed using it.

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Appendix

Appendix A

A Holistic Approach to Embedding First Nations Perspectives

Pre-survey

- How do you identify?
 - Aboriginal
 - Torres Strait Islander
 - Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander
 - None of the above
 - Prefer not to say
- What year level range are you currently teaching?
 - Year 1-2
 - Year 3-4
 - Year 5-6
 - Year 7-8
 - Year 9-10
 - Year 11-12
 - Other
- Which learning areas are you teaching in this term?
 - English
 - Mathematics
 - Science (Biology, Chemistry, Earth and Environmental Science and Physics)
 - Humanities and Social Sciences (Geography, History, Civics and Citizenship, Economics and Business)
 - The Arts
 - Technologies
 - Health and Physical Education
 - Languages
 - Other (specify)
- Tell us about the group of students you will focus on for this project
- On average, how much classroom time do you spend embedding the Cross Curriculum Priority - Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Histories and Cultures?

- None
- Under 30 minutes per week
- From 30 min to 1 hour per week
- Between 1 hour to 1.5 hours per week
- Over 1.5 hours per week
- How do you partner or engage with local Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander peoples to embed Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Histories and Cultures?
 - Embedding Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Histories and Cultures in the school Curriculum
 - During specific Events (e.g. NAIDOC week)
 - Inviting Custodians to do welcome ceremonies
 - Inviting Custodians to share knowledge (e.g. bushtucker, Dreaming stories) in the classroom
 - We don't engage with local Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander peoples at the moment
- Evaluate the following statements and select the answer that best aligns with your view:
 - I have enough TIME to plan and embed the Cross Curriculum Priority - Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Histories and Cultures
 - I have enough SUPPORT to plan and embed the Cross Curriculum Priority - Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Histories and Cultures
 - I adjust my teaching practices to better understand the needs and backgrounds of my students
- Select the concerns, if any, that you have when embedding First Nations' perspectives
 - Not pronouncing the language words correctly
 - Saying something inappropriate and/or offensive
 - Lack of adequate knowledge of First Nations histories and cultures
 - Lack of support to embed First Nations perspectives into the curriculum
 - No concerns
 - Other
- Evaluate the following critical thinking statements and select the answer that aligns best with your view:
 - I know how to source and identify reputable sources that embed authentic First Nations perspectives.
 - I have reflected upon my own cultural biases and am able to modify my practice to provide an authentic learning experience for students when embedding First Nations perspectives.

- I use challenging questions to help students examine and rationalise their thought processes about the accuracy and importance of using reputable sources about First Nations peoples and cultures.
- Any final comments?

Appendix B

A Holistic Approach to Embedding First Nations Perspectives

Semi-structured Teacher Interview

Interviews will be conversational and semi-structured, and the following questions are indicative of the issues and topics that the interview will cover (without prescribing participant responses).

- How, if at all, has your involvement in the Sharing Stories project impacted your teaching practices?
- How, if at all, has your involvement in the Sharing Stories project reduced anxiety and supported you to feel culturally safe when delivering First Nations content?
- How, if at all, has the provision of Jajoo Warrngara enhanced your confidence to embed Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Histories and Cultures?
- How, if at all, have the Sharing Stories Resources provided you, and your students, with an opportunity to develop an understanding of and respect for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander histories and cultures?
- Can you explain, using examples, the extent to which the Sharing Stories resources helped you to embed Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Histories and Cultures into your class? Were there any particular highlights? What would you do differently next time?
- What, if any, challenges did you face utilising these materials? What suggestions might you have to address this?
- How, if at all, have these resources demonstrated the importance of recognising First Nations Elders and Custodians as traditional knowledge holders?
- How, if at all, did these experiences support you to develop the critical thinking of your students?



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