

PARRHESIA FROM THE HEART: DECOLONIAL DISRUPTION IN P-12 SCHOOLS

TROY MESTON¹, CHESLEY CUTLER², TASHA RILEY³ and HARRY VAN ISSUM⁴

ABSTRACT. On October 14, 2023, over 70% of Australians rejected the government's referendum to include Indigenous peoples in the constitution and establish an Indigenous voice to parliament. We locate the latest Australian rejection as another episode in a continuing global project of Indigenous dispossession and a flash point in escalating critical Indigenous activism in P-12 schools. This paper centres on learning through suppressed Indigenous histories and voices by positioning Foucault's notion of parrhesia (truth-telling) as decolonial defiance. We present three qualitative themes to guide teachers to perform this activist-centred work—founding respect, humble leadership, and Indigenous representation—drawn from the Weaving Stories of Strength (WSS) project. WSS conducted sessions of yarning, an Indigenous dialogic method, with 16 Indigenous educational experts from the United States, Canada, Aotearoa (New Zealand), and Australia. Synthesizing their voices, we outline the conditions necessary to mobilize parrhesia in decolonial strategies.

Keywords. Decoloniality, Indigenous, Truth-telling, Parrhesia, P-12 Schooling, Michel Foucault

1. POSITIONALITY STATEMENTS

Professor Troy Meston is a Yuwaalaraay/Gamilaroi scholar, whose work is grounded in Critical Indigenous Studies, decolonial theory, and Indigenous-led systems reform. A systems thinker and futurist, Professor Meston integrates Indigenous knowledge systems with foresight methodologies to anticipate and respond to complex cultural, ecological, and technological challenges. Over two decades, he has driven structural reform in higher education, embedding Indigenous self-determination through governance, curriculum, and institutional policy. Professor Meston currently holds executive First Nations research leadership roles across the One Basin Cooperative Research Centre and the Gulbali Institute at Charles Sturt University. His work leads sector-wide transformation across water,

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agriculture, and environmental systems, with a core commitment to embedding Indigenous leadership, ethical research practice, and decolonial futures.

Mr Chesley Cutler (BA Hons) is an early-career academic and research proxy working at the Griffith Centre for Social and Cultural Research, Griffith University. Of Irish and Lebanese descent and a settler in Australia, Chesley works within an Indigenous-led, multicultural research team on projects advancing Indigenous education, student voice, and cultural resurgence. His praxis is informed by a long-standing commitment to anti-establishment movements, including labour activism, student advocacy, Indigenous rights, gender equity, and LGBTI+ justice. Drawing on lived experience and community organising, Chesley adopts a decolonial allyship and solidarity framework that foregrounds relational accountability and structural critique. His work seeks to amplify marginalised voices and challenge settler-colonial logics in education through critical engagement, collaborative practice, and solidarity-based scholarship.

Dr Tasha Riley is a Canadian–Australian settler scholar, currently based in Queensland. Dr Riley is a Senior Lecturer in Educational and Professional Studies and the Griffith Institute of Educational Research (GIER) where she teaches courses and researches in areas related to diversity, social justice, and Indigenous education. Her research, teaching, and professional interests strongly align with her commitment to ensuring teachers are engaged leaders when it comes to creating educational settings that validate students’ diverse knowledge base and political and community consciousness. Dr Riley has extensive experience researching and collaborating with community partners on education curriculum, programmes, and policy development relating to social justice issues in education. She has had experience teaching both nationally and internationally in countries including Australia, Canada, Botswana, South Africa, South Korea, and Andorra where she has taught and developed curricula for a wide range of learners in various contexts including primary and secondary schools, community organisations, recovery centres, and correctional institutions. She has published in the fields of Indigenous and anti-racist education, teacher leadership and development, community-based partnerships, and arts and health education. Her current research explores how arts-based pedagogies may be used as a means to increase teachers’ ability and confidence to engage learners in critical and sensitive discussions in schools, universities, and communities.

Dr Harry Van Issum is a Woppaburra man from the Darambal Language Group of Central Queensland, an experienced educator and historian of Queensland Aboriginal history. His involvement in many grassroots organisations includes working with the Woppaburra Traditional Use of Marine Resources Committee (constituted through the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority). Dr Van Issum is currently a board member of the Queensland Museum and a committee member of the Great Barrier Reef Foundation, Reef Restoration and Adaption Program Steering Committee and has successfully delivered projects for the Queensland Department of Education, Australia, and the Brisbane Indigenous Media Association. He is an experienced researcher and project manager.

Harry was the recipient of the inaugural John Mulvaney Fellowship, awarded to an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander to undertake historical research. Harry proposed to travel to the UK to assist in the repatriation of Woppaburra skeletal remains housed in the Museum of London.

2. INTRODUCTION

In the wake of the Labor electoral victory in May 2022, the newly appointed Australian Prime Minister Anthony Albanese pledged to fully implement the Uluru Statement from the Heart. Issued in 2017, the statement has been controversial in Australian politics and was previously rejected by the previous Coalition government of Scott Morrison. The emotive language of the statement reflects the collective voice of Indigenous peoples to be included in decisions that affect their communities and outlines the principles of constitutional change and structural reform as the most pressing actions necessary to enhance Indigenous social justice (The Uluru Statement, 2017). At the center of the Uluru Statement are the pillars of ancient sovereignty, truth telling, and the symbolic peace of reunification from the Yolgnu¹ word *Makarrata*.² The statement emphasizes how Makarrata is connected to truth-telling and sovereignty and is sought due to the “torment of Indigenous powerlessness” (The Uluru Statement, 2017). Indigenous torment is defined through high rates of incarceration, yet the statement affirms that Indigenous peoples are not inherently criminal. Moreover, it foregrounds the policy-sanctioned separation of Indigenous children from their families, which is not due to those families’ lack of love. The Uluru statement also provides a voice to the Indigenous youth who are currently detained and who should be our hope for the future. The statement sheds light on the structural nature of Indigenous issues³ and outlines a path toward a more just Australia.

Since election night, the Albanese government has made significant commitments to the Uluru Statement, guaranteeing a constitutional referendum on an Indigenous voice to parliament (at a cost of AUS\$50.2 million) and proposing to establish an agreement-making and truth-telling commission (at a cost of AUS\$5.8 million). Despite significant financial investments and a year-long lobbying effort, over 70% of Australians voted on October 14, 2023, against the government’s proposal to change the constitution and establish an Indigenous voice with the right to make representations to the federal parliament and the executive. This rejection was a significant setback for Indigenous-settler relations,

¹The people who live in the Miwatj or north-east Arnhem Land region (i.e., Northern Territory) are known generally as *Yolngu*, which simply means “people”: <https://www.nma.gov.au/exhibitions/yalangbara/yolngu>

²Makarrata voiced through the statement is understood to constitute a motive to “come together after a struggle”, and “facing the facts of wrong [e.g., truth-telling] and living again in peace”: <https://ulurustatement.org/our-story/makarrata/>.

³In Australia, structural oppression of Indigenous peoples is maintained through systems of land dispossession, legal inequality, cultural suppression, economic disparity, and political exclusion. These mechanisms perpetuate systemic marginalization, denying Indigenous peoples control over lands, cultures, and resources and reinforcing cycles of socio-economic disadvantage (cf. Meston et al., 2024).

reinscribing long histories of injustice and marked power imbalances between settler-migrant and Indigenous communities. We argue that educators must now intensify truth-telling through their classroom praxis: that is, the cyclical process of thinking-doing/doing-thinking (Mignolo & Walsh, 2018).

Writing from Meanjin (Brisbane) on the unceded lands of the Yuggera and Turrbal peoples, we are a multicultural research team guided by Indigenous researchers. We draw expertise from roles in the community, initial teacher education (cf. Dreise et al., 2016; Riley et al., 2025), and the social sciences. We synthesize findings from the Weaving Stories of Strength (WSS) project (Riley et al., 2024), which conducted sessions of yarning, an Indigenous dialogic method (Bessarab & Ng'andu, 2010), with 16 Indigenous educational experts from the United States, Canada, Aotearoa (New Zealand), and Australia to explore how teachers might better service the needs of Indigenous learners in P-12 schools. We present three emergent themes—founding respect, humble leadership, and Indigenous representation—curated from selective yarns to establish truth-telling as a decolonial strategy in P-12 schools.

First, we engage the coloniality of power and knowledge through the histories of colonization across our research sites. Second, we locate the need to escalate P-12 truth-telling through key decolonial theorization and Foucauldian *parrhesia*. Third, we outline our synergetic conceptual framework, mobilizing the decolonial pluriverse (Mignolo, 2018) with Narungga, Kurna, and Ngarrindjeri scholar Lester Irabina Rigney's (1999) Indigenist research principles. Fourth, we present our thematic discussions, drawn from the voices of Indigenous education experts. We conclude by offering final thoughts on the role of decolonial truth-telling in P-12 systems.

3. COLONIALITY OF POWER AND KNOWLEDGE

The Australian government's approach toward the Uluru Statement from the Heart (2017) and its structural pillars of ancient sovereignty and truth-telling must now become requisite components of an activist-oriented educational praxis (cf. Cutler et al., 2025; Meston et al., 2024). By prioritizing ancient sovereignty, we mean that the unceded sovereignty of Indigenous peoples must become the guiding mechanism from which educational action emerges. In practice, this would entail the wilful deconstruction of original power dynamics created through the dispossession of Indigenous peoples and the coloniality of knowledge, deferring to Indigenous leadership, listening through the pain of Indigenous voice, and learning through Indigenous wisdom. However, Australia, like the United States, Canada, and Aotearoa, are settler-colonial states where Indigenous peoples writ large continue to be dispossessed to maintain democratic nation states. At this juncture, truth-telling has a fundamental role in disrupting the "common sense" politics of enduring Indigenous dispossession, trauma, and racialized oppression.

Truth-telling as a disruptive act is necessary, as the structures of colonialism did not suddenly end with the close of the twentieth century. Annibal Quijano, a Peruvian decolonial expert, introduced the concept of coloniality to describe

how modern global capitalist power relations are rooted in the social hierarchies, wealth accumulation, and dehumanization established during the colonial period (i.e., the colonial power matrix, the colonality of power, and modernity/coloniality (Carroll, 2024; Mignolo, 2023). In articulating coloniality, Quijano (2000) locates the influx of the Spanish and Portuguese into Abya Yala (the Americas) during the sixteenth century as the staging point for global colonial expansionism and the generative roots of the modern world. The colonality of power, which traverses the power networks of the Anglosphere, extends traditional territorial colonization and disrupts sanitized peaceful settlement histories and utopian democratic progress.

Quijano's (2000) analysis reveals the modern circulations of power relations, as reproduced through shifting systems of racial classification,⁴ knowledge production,⁵ and control of labor and resources,⁶ are reconstitutions of colonial techniques of dehumanization and wealth accumulation. Wolfe (2006), whose work also extends traditional colonialism, argues that settler colonialism, a specific mode of colonial endeavor, aims to eliminate rather than exploit Indigenous peoples, or as Kēhaulani Kauanui (2016) states, "eliminate the native as native" (p. 1). Like Quijano's diagnosis of the enduring character of the colonial project, Wolfe (2006) and Tuck and Gaztambide-Fernandez (2013) emphasize that settler colonialism is an ongoing structure rather than a temporal event. These layering dimensions of an enduring colonial power matrix are fundamental components in Australia's rejection of Indigenous constitutional change. More broadly still, these intersections aptly configure the distinguishing "domains and levels" of a connected but localized global project of continuing Indigenous dispossession that is always evolving through techniques of "domination, exploitation and conflict" (Quijano, 2000, p. 535).

The settlement history of Australia, like other settler-colonial nations, continues to dramatically undermine Indigenous wellbeing and sovereignty.⁷ In 1788, the British claimed possession of sovereign Indigenous lands under the legal fiction of *terra nullius* – land belonging to no one. The arrival of the British introduced diseases such as smallpox, measles, and influenza, and contact with settlers often led to atrocities and massacres of Indigenous people. In the early phases of British settlement, frontier lands were strategically cleared to establish key agricultural and pastoral industries (Wallis et al., 2023). Over time, colonial governments implemented protection and assimilation policies aimed at eradicating Indigenous cultures and indoctrinating Indigenous peoples into Christian values and British

⁴This concept denotes the categorization and privileging of people based on race and skin colour. On this scale, European (white) peoples were deemed superior to non-white others whose cultures and knowledge systems were regarded as inferior and suitable for marginalization and exploitation.

⁵Western knowledge systems are categorised as universally valid and normative, while non-Western knowledges are suppressed, decentred, or viewed as culturally relative or irrelevant.

⁶The exploitation of labour and natural resources from colonised or formerly colonised regions continues to benefit the dominant groups in the global power structure.

⁷For a complete account of this history, see Rane et al. (2024).

customs. During the phases of protection and assimilation, official policies of removing Indigenous children from their families, known as the stolen generations, were intended to tear children away from their cultural roots. The dispossession of land remains a central issue; despite continuing efforts to gain land rights, Indigenous peoples grapple with intergenerational trauma and large-scale social inequality.

Like Australia, the United States, Canada, and Aotearoa were colonized by the “crown or the cross” (Walsh, 2018, p. 12). The colonization of the United States unfolded over several centuries and involved numerous European nations (e.g., Spain, Sweden, the Netherlands, France, and England). As the frontier territories continued to expand and grow westwards, interactions between Native American nations and European colonists resulted in large-scale loss of lands, genocide, and cultural assimilation. Despite the U.S. government initiating treaties with sovereign Indian nations, Native Americans were confined to reservations and experienced severe inequality in social welfare (Howe, 2013).

Canada’s colonization took place over several centuries, with settlement efforts by both the French and the British and transfers of control after military engagements between those two powers, most notably France ceding a vast amount of territory in 1763 (Baugh, 2014). As the British colony consolidated and expanded westward, widespread loss of land and policies of forced removal of children to residential schools had powerfully negative effects on Indigenous communities (Matheson et al., 2022). Residential schools in Canada operated from the early 1800s until the final school closed in 1996. The Canadian government and Christian churches ran these schools with the aim of assimilating Indigenous children, often through harsh and even abusive methods, disrupting their cultures and languages. The Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada documented the history and impacts of these schools.

Aotearoa also experienced British colonization. With European whalers, traders, and missionaries arriving throughout the nineteenth century, coupled with British concerns over French interests in the territory, the British moved to formalize settlement and establish the Treaty of Waitangi (1840). While the treaty aimed to create a legal framework for coexistence and to recognize Māori land rights, it ultimately granted the United Kingdom sovereignty and control over lands and natural resources. Despite the Treaty of Waitangi’s significance, Māori experienced largescale loss of lands, territorial dislocation, and cultural suppression (Ka’ai-Mahuta, 2011).

Although the various territories have their own accounts of colonial atrocities and dehumanization, the legacies of each invasion, settlement, and construction of the modern nation-state demonstrate a shared project of dispossession on the global level. The shared consequences of these histories continue to shape the social, cultural, and political lives of all Indigenous nations. The loss of traditional land, frontier wars, and the violence and impact of assimilationist policies continue to undermine Indigenous sovereignty and collective Indigenous wellbeing.

Breny Mendoza (2020), a Mestiza scholar, argues that “true” decolonization is not entirely possible because the control of Indigenous lands endures; she notes that the acquisition of land and wealth accumulation are fundamental features of settler colonialism. For Mendoza, decolonization, in the absence of manifest control over stolen lands, pragmatically translates into epistemic acts designed to disrupt and dismantle the legacies of the colonality of knowledge. That concept highlights the intertwined relationship between knowledge creation and the colonial power matrix (Mignolo, 2013) and extends beyond the geopolitical dimensions of colonialism to include the management, authentication, and shape of knowledge through English and other European languages, academic institutions, and cultural representations. This reinforces a Eurocentric-settler worldview and value system. As Mendoza (2020) explains, prioritizing epistemic disruption is essential because colonialism:

not only colonizes lands and bodies, but colonizes how we understand the world, our sense of being. Eurocentrism colonized time and space; it denied the multiple ontologies of human diversity and destroyed the ancestral knowledges of the Indigenous people.
(p. 53)

In privileging the role of knowledge and knowledge production, “the decolonization of society cannot precede the decolonization of knowledge. Knowledge will set us free. It will decolonize us” Mendoza (2020, p. 57). Therefore, knowledge drawn from the bodies “of those who live the colonial difference” Walsh (2018, p. 3), is a crucial aspect of a decolonial project. Epistemic disruptions taken from diverse forms of knowledge are imbued with the power to promote a reassessment of prevailing knowledge systems that perpetuate settler-colonial control over Indigenous lands and bodies. Indigenous and decolonial scholars highlight the significance of centring Indigenous voices and knowledge systems in parallel with the need to foster solidarity and alliances with settler communities (Rigney, 1999; Tuck & Yang, 2012; Walsh, 2012, 2020). The processes implicit in solidarity and alliance building are innately intertwined with knowledge and truth-telling.

We contend that there should be a teacher-led investment in truth-telling. In theory, P-12 schools are best suited to carry out this task; however, schools remain intrinsic to the colonality of power. As evinced by the overwhelming rejection of Indigenous constitutional change in Australia, not all teachers or schools are willing or able to adopt critical attributes. Nor are such approaches to classroom practice always feasible in neoliberal school settings. Historically, Indigenous learners were forcibly removed from families and confined in institutions run either by government officials or Christian missionaries. Western education played a pivotal role in the colonial agenda by strategically dismantling shared Indigenous cultural foundations to quell coordinated resistance to land confiscations (Pihama & Lee-Morgan, 2019).

Today, P-12 schools continue the work of those earlier “civilizing” colonial models. Their primary focus is on capitalist social relations, where Eurocentric approaches are saturated with neoliberal market orientations (Corson, 1999). Castagno et al. (2016, p. 241) and Kerr and Yoon (2023) observe that the school systems in North America encourage individualistic behaviours as a strategy to erode community-centric relationships rather than embracing Indigenous positions of holism and collectivism. Similarly, Linda Tuhiwai Smith has criticized the P-12 system in Aotearoa, referring to schools as “Trojan horses” of cultural assimilation designed to civilize Māori from within while reinforcing colonial ideologies (Pihama et al., 2019, p. 52). In Australia, Gamilaroi educator Michele Bishop (2020) also predicted “intergenerational consequences” for Indigenous communities if learners remain confined to Australian P-12 systems (p. 419).

4. CENTRING PARRHESIA IN P-12 SCHOOLS

Truth-telling in P-12 schools is a vital but daunting task. Critical thinking must be nurtured for teachers and students to undertake a bold departure from prevailing injustices and lay the groundwork for a more inclusive future. In writing on the critical tie between Indigenous sovereignty and education, Kulago (2019) explains that “the goals of Indigenous sovereignty and self-determination require teachers to dedicate proper attention to respectful and reciprocal relationships toward humans and nature, and to hold high regard for their relationships with families and communities from which they come and for whom they work” (p. 241). While it is imperative for this work to begin in schools, cultivating the elements required to create meaningful learning experiences in P-12 schools involves risk and takes courage (Wildcat et al., 2014).

Given the enduring disposition of settler colonialism as a phenomenal structure rather than an event now in the past (Wolfe, 2006), truth-telling functions as intentional epistemic acts (Mendoza, 2020) that reveal and speak hidden or suppressed knowledge in dominant discursive spaces. Integrating the experiences of the oppressed repositions narrow or sanitized accounts of historical and ongoing injustice. Opportunities for renewal may be found in epistemic repositioning. In writing on the prescriptive function of truth-telling as “re-positional renewal,” Kuntz and Pickup (2016) note that

if productive critique is to occur within the field of education, it must necessarily invoke a way of being other than we currently are; a provocative break with what was in the interest of calling forth new . . . engagements with the world. Critical inquirers must intervene by invoking a particular orientation to truth and notions of the good; orientations which postulate a meaningful future while uprooting the problematics of the past and present. (p. 2)

Truth, then, must be laden with truth, by which we mean an unsanitized truth that is untold, hidden, and cast into the shadows of power and that a facilitator of truth must carry forth. These acts of disobedience do not emerge from the total disavowal of Western thought. Instead, Mignolo and Walsh (2018) identify a need

for “re-existence”: that is, practices of “re/in-surgency” that “redefine and resignify . . . life and dignity” while also “undoing” and “transcending” the dehumanization of coloniality (p. 3). To do this work, we mobilize Foucauldian parrhesia as a decolonial pedagogy.

Foucault mobilized the term “parrhesia” to define the conditions of truth and the one who speaks it. He introduced the concept in a series of lectures at the Collège de France (Foucault, 2005) and later elaborated on it in a six-lecture series at the University of California, Berkeley (Foucault, 1983, 2001). The word “parrhesia” (Greek: *παρρησια*) comes from the Greek term *parrhesiazesthai*, which means “to say everything” and describes a form of “candid and unrestrained speech” (Foucault, 1983, p. 2). In his Berkley lectures,⁸ Foucault explains that “parrhesia” comes from the Greek words “pan” (everything) and “rhema” (that which is said) and was used in both the early and later periods of Greek tragedy (1983, p. 2).

According to Foucault, parrhesia extends beyond mere freedom of expression; it encompasses the responsibility to speak the truth for the collective benefit, even if it involves personal risk. Foucault has defined certain elements of the “speech activity to distinguish the parrhesiastic utterance,” including “the commitment involved in parrhesia is linked to a certain social situation, to a difference of status between the speaker and his audience” (1983, p. 2). Additionally, the speaker must say something that is potentially dangerous to themselves (p. 2). This kind of speech activity requires nuance and careful consideration:

The one who uses parrhesia, the parrhesiastes, is someone who says everything he has in mind: he does not hide anything, but opens his heart and mind completely to other people through his discourse. . . . The word “parrhesia” then, refers to a type of relationship between the speaker and what he says. For in parrhesia, the speaker makes it manifestly clear and obvious that what he says is his own opinion. And he does this by avoiding any kind of rhetorical form which would veil what he thinks. . . . In parrhesia, the parrhesiastes acts on other people’s minds by showing them as directly as possible what he actually believes. (p. 2)

Foucault argues that parrhesia mobilizes unconventional ways of knowing that require searching for and embracing truths often overlooked. Parrhesiastes depart from established norms to enable the envisioning of a yet-to-be realized future. Achieving this involves three interconnected dimensions: citizenship, responsibility, and risk.

To achieve parrhesia, Foucault notes that enunciation functions as a democratic pact between citizens as free individuals in a designated community. Yet,

⁸The online text was compiled from audio recordings of six lectures delivered in English by Michel Foucault at the University of California, Berkeley in fall 1983. The lectures were given as part of Foucault’s seminar “Discourse and Truth.” We draw primarily from the 1983 version.

one can only genuinely assert that one is a parrhesiastes if one has a clear commitment to truth. Parrhesia, therefore, accompanies a genuine responsibility to truth stemming from a distinct political obligation to social justice (Peters, 2003). Parrhesia leaves no room for ambiguity or the comfort of silence. Instead, parrhesiastes are duty-bound to articulate truths that challenge enduring power systems that shape institutions and everyday behaviors (Folkers, 2016). Pursuing parrhesia is dangerous work, as it is wilful in disrupting existing knowledge structures, vehemently challenging established patterns of common sense (Ross, 2008). As parrhesia is intent on re-positional renewal, speech activity resists mimicry of state-sanctioned histories and rhetoric. In doing so, the parrhesiastes knowingly jeopardize their status and position in established institutions.

Parrhesia for teachers in P-12 settler colonial systems engages citizenship from two positions. The first is via citizenship conferred by the original act of Indigenous dispossession and the drawing up of borders on stolen territories. The second is a more specific notion of citizenship that denotes citizenry access to a field of privilege garnered from earning status as teachers. Education functions as white property (Harris, 1993), embedded within the dominant episteme of whiteness, Eurocentrism, Englishness, and capitalism. With this privileged status, parrhesiastes wield their standing to extend discussions beyond institutional normativity and truth-telling to and through the institutions that grant insider citizenship. Connecting historical injustices to contemporary issues such as structural and individual racism and the large-scale Australian rejection of Indigenous constitutional change are urgent features of parrhesia in the context of ongoing Indigenous dispossession.

To practice true parrhesia, teachers must shift beyond superficial and sanitized state-based curricular mandates where perspectives on the Indigenous are myopic at best. Instead, they should include Indigenous perspectives in a way that disrupts the norm, promotes activism, and grows critical consciousness. It is also essential that teachers orient learners through an ongoing deconstruction of the institutional state-based mechanisms that structure society and social discourse to create a continuing “common-sense” politics that normalizes Indigenous dispossession. In action, parrhesiastes would revise sanctioned curricular materials to include diverse and subversive perspectives that foster a genuine understanding of and empathy for lived Indigenous experiences. Parrhesiatic curricular revisions are strategically designed to function as epistemic disruptions to mobilize learners to speak out against enduring historical and contemporary injustices.

In our thematic discussion, we engage the wisdom of Indigenous education experts as guidance for teachers in P-12 schools. These strategies reposition Indigenous voices as central features of epistemic acts designed to defy the coloniality of knowledge. Engaging with Indigenous voices and deferring to Indigenous educational leadership primes professional practice for the shift from dominant teacher to decolonial parrhesiastes.

5. METHODOLOGY

This paper emerges from WSS, a broader research project that sought the wisdom of 16 Indigenous education experts from the United States, Canada, Aotearoa, and Australia. We chose to examine those settler-colonial states in addition to the Australian context due to their comparable histories of colonization, dispossession, and Indigenous resistance, which provide critical insights into both shared and diverging pathways of addressing Indigenous sovereignty and rights. These contexts were selected based on their established and ongoing policies, debates, and frameworks for Indigenous recognition, self-determination, and reconciliation, making them particularly relevant in analysing the implications of Australia's 2023 referendum. Other settler-colonial states were excluded to maintain a focused comparative analysis that prioritizes regions with robust existing literature and direct resonance with the Australian experience.

To engage our experts as situated knowers (Collins, 2022), we employed the Indigenous dialogic method of yarning (Bessarab & Ng'andu, 2010). Fredericks et al. (2011) describe yarning as a "discussion technique that centres on converging towards a consensus position on issues and includes elements of respect, protocol and engagement in individuals' relationships with each other" (p. 13). Two research questions drove WSS:

- (1) What strategies effectively increase teachers' capacity to embed Indigenous Knowledge in classrooms?
- (2) What factors impede or enhance teachers' ability to teach issues related to race or Indigeneity?

While WSS focused primarily on understanding the challenges of including Indigenous perspectives at the classroom level (RQ1), this emergent discussion broadly engages the issues of race and the role that Indigenous education can play in furthering self-determination (RQ2). The focus of the present study is a distillation of data extracted from the broader WSS project and is organized under three core themes: founding respect, humble leadership, and Indigenous representation. While sharing collective experiences of continuing settler colonialism across these jurisdictions, Indigenous educational experts also brought deep ancestral knowledge and connections to the lands where the yarns emerged. In the spirit of coming together after a struggle and aligning with a renewed governmental interest in makarrata, yarning across jurisdictions shared connective tissue with other, more culturally adjacent Indigenous acts of meeting, such as those enacted through ceremony and inter-nation diplomacy. In such instances, coming together strengthens bonds, extends knowledge and experience, and offers opportunities to form alliances.

To locate the diverse experiences of our Indigenous educators, we employed a synergetic conceptual framework drawn from critical Indigenous studies and decoloniality. The value of synergistic theoretical framing is articulated through the careful outline of by Kamilaroi and Wonnarua race scholar Debbie Bargallie and

Australian Jewish race scholar Alana Lentin (2022) of the strength of drawing together international theoretical frameworks with local theorization to understand the shifting character of racialized oppression in the local, which they refer to as a “both/and” approach. Critical Indigenous studies, in alignment with decolonial thought, offers historical and contemporary viewpoints on coloniality as a continuing technique of power. By bringing together these domains, we can bridge the global-local nexus, which is necessary to position this discussion. Guided by Bargallie and Lentin’s both/and approach, we synergize the Zapatistas’ notion of the pluriverse (Mignolo, 2018) with Rigney’s (1999) Indigenist principles of research.

In *The Darker Side of the Renaissance*, Walter Mignolo (1995) introduced the Zapatistas’ concept of the pluriverse to denote an idea of “pluritopic hermeneutics” central to his thesis. Mignolo (2018) reflects that “it was the Zapatistas’ own decolonial political vision of a world in which many worlds would coexist that announced the pluriverse. The ontology of the pluriverse could not be obtained without the epistemology of pluriversity” (p. 9). Since the mid-1990s, the pluriverse concept has been deployed by decolonial scholars to challenge the single, universal worldview of Eurocentrism, to confront the centrality of modernity, and to emphasize the coexistence of multiple diverse worlds and ways of knowing. In their work advocating for a post-capitalism shift via a pluriverse, Acosta and Cajas-Guijarro (2020) define it as “a world where many worlds fit as the Zapatistas of Chiapas clearly propose; a transition toward plural ways of making the world in a complete relational harmony among human beings and between them and Nature” (p. 292). Further explaining the role of pluriversity as a theoretical framework and drawing on his Andean worldview, Querejazu (2016) states that

theories are processes through which we make sense of our environment and our reality. This suggests that there can be as many theories as necessary to our comprehension of our cosmos. . . . Drawing from other worldviews – mainly indigenous relational worldviews – the pluriverse implies the existence of many worlds somehow interconnected, in other words the human world is connected to the natural world and also to the spiritual world. This means these three kinds of worlds coexist in time and space. It entails a vision where the earth is a whole living being always emerging, encouraging the discovery and the imagination of different forms of planetarization in which human beings, along with other beings can coexist enriching each other. (p. 1)

Pluriversity, therefore, connotes an ontology with multiple and equally legitimate ways of understanding and organizing societies, each rooted in its own historical and cultural context. In the pluriverse, diverse worldviews, epistemologies, and ontologies coexist without one dominating the others (Escobar, 2018). This theoretical housing is critical for our work, given the geographical and cultural expanse of worldviews, diverse knowledge systems, and varied professional experiences, which come in the border spaces of WSS. Pluriversity draws down

from the global and enables engaging the diversity of our Indigenous educators, allowing their situated knowingness to exist in its universe of time, logic, and space, while at the same time co-existing in a multiverse rich in cultural pluralism (Sundberg, 2014).

Parallel with the global framing of the pluriverse, we also employed Rigney's principles of Indigenist research (1999), which were designed to counter the function of orthodox research methodologies that reinscribe via the coloniality of knowledge colonial biases and a deep ethnocentrism. For Rigney (1999), writing at the peak of the "Indigenous Renaissance," alternative Indigenous research methods were required to enable Indigenous peoples in Australia to reinscribe sovereignty and advance self-determination through research practice. In this foundational work, Rigney's (1999) anti-colonial critique of research methodologies articulated the need for Indigenous research to centre three core tenets: resistance as the emancipatory imperative, political integrity, and privileging Indigenous voices (p. 116).

In establishing these tenets, Rigney (1999) announces the emergence of an Indigenist research practice designed to empower Indigenous communities and ensure that scholarship benefits those being studied. Indigenist research challenges the dominance and seeks to disrupt the centrality of Western knowledge systems. This approach is comprised of an ethical framework designed to centre silenced Indigenous voices, histories, and knowledge systems. It aims to reposition the negative histories and experiences of Indigenous peoples caused by continuing colonization. This theoretical housing was crucial as it enabled a local, activist-oriented, and ethical research agenda to guide the composition and conduct of this research project. Given that the project was guided by Indigenous Australian researchers, Indigenist research principles were relevant and indeed specific to the tensions we face in this country, but they also provided a nuanced insight into the educational dimensions of the coloniality of power in Australia.

The data analysis process involved a careful selection of participant statements based on relevance to the key themes of the research and alignment with the theoretical frameworks underpinning the study. Statements were included if they offered rich, insightful perspectives directly related to the research questions and contributed to the development of emergent themes. Exclusion criteria were based on relevance, clarity, and depth of content, ensuring that only statements that meaningfully enhanced the thematic analysis were included. Themes were generated through a rigorous process of coding, where patterns in the participants' experiences and insights were identified and categorized, guided by both the theoretical framing and the research objectives.

This work aims to guide teachers toward decolonial parrhesia. In the following section, we outline our thematic discussion, in which Indigenous voices discuss practical engagement strategies in P-12 schools. These themes offer concrete examples of praxis to disobey and rupture the epistemic centrality of the coloniality of power/knowledge and guide teachers in advancing the difficult work of decolonial parrhesia.

6. DISCUSSION

6.1. Founding Respect. Founding respect is our first condition in the shift of settler teaching toward decolonial parrhesia. Repositioning power dynamics is vital to ensuring that suppressed histories have the space to be spoken and heard. Ethical foundations are necessary to facilitate communication and understanding through learning encounters, as one Indigenous expert (IE) commented:

Building a foundation of respect cannot be achieved by one approach or on one occasion and saying, “That’s it, that’s done. I’ve accomplished my goal”. No! Multiple strands of respect need to be enacted for this to happen. [IE4]

Respect and authenticity are intertwined in acts of epistemic repositioning. Without direct consultation with the local Indigenous community, authentic knowledges and experiences are either suppressed or diluted, as they may become muddled by the unchecked assumptions and biases of non-Indigenous teacher-assumptions and the “common-sense” politics of settler-colonial framing, as these experts explain:

Bluntly, we’re talking nothing about us without us. This translates as sitting together and the mapping out of intentional programming, services and supports. [IE4]

Teaching spirituality, any kind of creation story, or any kind of story of the cosmos requires the support and privileged voice of an Elder or community member from the local area. Educators must ask themselves, “Have the Elders and [Indigenous] community been consulted about how they would like to proceed and how they might work together?” [IE7]

Often, non-Indigenous teachers absolve themselves from contact with the local community and rationalize that teaching Indigenous content is too tricky due to personal knowledge deficits or the fear of getting the “culture” wrong. In detailing their experience in P-12 schools, one expert explained the efficacy of developing respect through Indigenous consultation:

Employing more local people in the school to work as teacher aides, as cultural consultants is necessary. But also making the time. When we developed an Aboriginal studies program, we sat down with local Elders, and we said, “What do you want kids to learn here?” We talked about the traditional history of the place and the contemporary history, and then we talked and had some feature focus around that. But it was very much about having local people involved in deciding on the content that went into the program. And in part, it was also about reaching out to community and nurturing that relationship. So, I think about how that would play out in a big high school, for instance, and it doesn’t have

to be problematic, but it always comes back to building good, respectful relationships. [IE15]

As settler teachers grow to embrace their role as educational citizens, they must shift beyond the colonial modalities of epistemological confinement and extraction. Instead, they come to recognize the human responsibility associated with the obligations to both hold knowledge and convey it, as knowledge itself is powerful, imbued with the disruptive qualities of renewal. Teaching must be repositioned in the psychology of the settler teacher, transitioning pedagogics beyond simple knowledge transactions toward activist-oriented praxis. Respect must be founded as a central mobilizing ethic of parrhesiastes. This entails thinking through the situated politics of Indigenous knowledge and knowledge holders. While not without risk, respect and knowledge have the potential to seed futures marked by renewal. On the urgency of these actions, another expert stated that

this is non-negotiable. You gotta step up, you gotta take your turn, it's your time! If educators come to learning with humility, there is no need to push strategy, as beautiful and amazing things develop freely through equitable practice. [IE5]

6.2. Humble leadership. Building on the foundation of respect and the foregrounding of “the approach to learning through humility” offered by one expert, the next emergent theme is humble leadership, the second condition in a shift toward decolonial parrhesia. Indigenous experts were unanimous on the need for humility and collaboration to guide the practice of settler teachers in P-12 schools, as these four experts affirmed:

The most important quality is humility. Humility just in general. [IE7]

Leadership is huge, but this practice is nothing without humility. [IE13]

To bring other people in, teachers must learn to share power. [IE10]

It's essential to hear different voices and to understand each other's story. These are opportunities for facilitative leadership rather than dogmatic teaching. [IE5]

Without humility and deference to others, teacher stewardship reproduces the entrenched colonial machinery of power and suppression. Decolonial leadership in P-12 schools is actioned through the deliberate dismantling of the original power structures established through the dispossession of Indigenous peoples and the coloniality of knowledge. Some of this work is already occurring in schools, as one expert explained:

We have some teachers out there, Indigenous and non-Indigenous teachers, who are really trying hard to make a difference in the spaces that they're in. It's more present within their minds now

to listen and do things differently. Teachers are becoming more aware of outcomes for Indigenous kids and the need to be culturally responsive and to embed perspectives. [IE9]

Another expert relayed an example of horizontal partnerships occurring in practice in Aotearoa:

We have a Board of Governors for the school. The Board of Governors is kind of a co-partner with the principal. In fact, they've kind of signed an MOU [memorandum of understanding]. Locally, they can determine beyond the national framework what you must teach. They can locally determine curricula and pedagogy for predominantly Māori areas, which tend to be the lower socioeconomic schools. Nonetheless, Māori are getting in there, on the boards, and having a say about what their kids are being taught and the input of language and culture into the curriculum. I do think it starts there. Community orientated, community governance. [IE11]

While this example details an approach to a school-wide method of sharing power, other classroom-level strategies are shown by our experts in the following examples:

The first thing for me was to ensure that I built the relationships and the trust among all the faculties so we could all work together. That was my first goal. I also ensure all students get to share what they know. In this, there is no shame, blame, or right or wrong. My pedagogy is to grow the acceptance of difference [IE13].

A practical method is sitting in a circle. Even though the teacher's title represents a hierarchical structure, they are not the top of a circle. This knowledge-sharing model represents a meeting point between Indigenous and non-Indigenous teaching in school. Teacher and students are engaged in a model of Indigenous governance. [IE4].

By sitting down together, approaching gently and humbly asking, "What is this for me? And what is this for you?" Those in positions of power allow a conducive learning environment. [IE5]

In these examples, there is a connective tissue between knowledge/practice and leadership/humility. As one expert explained, "you can see where the change is happening if you have good leadership founded upon respect, displaying the critical elements of humility and courage" [IE9].

To approach their responsibility as educational citizens, the settler teacher must adopt a humble leadership style involving power sharing. Teachers can only achieve this goal after grappling with the ongoing conditions of coloniality and acknowledging the role of their schools and themselves in the power matrix. With

this mindset, teaching can become an opportunity to promote decolonial parrhesia.

6.3. Indigenous representation. Our approach to decolonial parrhesia also includes Indigenous representation, embedded in respect and humility. It is crucial to include Indigenous histories, knowledge, and ideas, along with representation of Indigenous peoples in schools and classrooms, in order to counter the monocultural centring of non-Indigenous human and epistemic resources. The absence of Indigenous presence aptly reflects modern and colonial techniques of dispersal and elimination of Indigenous peoples and knowledge. P-12 schools privilege the coloniality of knowledge, where learning spaces reify Indigenous dispossession, through the epistemic erasure and misrepresentation of Indigenous knowledges and histories. In explaining the “common-sense” erasure of Indigenous peoples, one expert recalled a conversation with a non-Indigenous student:

I remember showing a film to students about the Oka Crisis [Alanis Obomsawin’s 1993 film *Kanehsatake: 270 Years of Resistance*]. A student responded, “The documentary, it’s not very balanced. All we get is the Mohawk voice.” My response to the student was, “What do you get every day?” [IE16]

In discussing the absence of Indigenous presence in schools, another expert noted that “Indigenous representation is hardly even present, as the people making those decisions are predominantly non-Indigenous” [IE10]. Expanding on how minimal representation affects schools’ ability to fulfill state-mandated Indigenous-centric classroom content, the same expert contended that:

they say, “Oh, we’re developing blah blah blah blah,” and I’m like, “Who is?” Because ninety-something per cent of the department is non-Indigenous. I don’t think that they can talk about a measure without the experience. If they haven’t been out anywhere, even into a community, I’m pretty sure you can’t do that. And so, I have no confidence in that being developed appropriately. I’ve got no confidence in teachers. They’re all non-Indigenous! They don’t go out anywhere, and this is who’s measuring our kids. I just shake my head. [IE10]

To negate the lack of Indigenous representation in schools, non-Indigenous teachers should look to making alliances with local Indigenous communities. This sort of relationship disrupts the hierarchies of dominance indispensable to colonial power matrices. By creating alliances through learning, educational exchanges are repositioned as decolonial epistemic actions. As one expert proudly proclaimed, “Indigenous people have a gift to give!” [IE7]. Enabling communities to design and lead educational reform offers opportunities to represent Indigenous communities positively and activates possibilities for epistemic renewal. Two experts offered the following explanations:

creating safe spaces, working with Indigenous folks, and being able to see other Indigenous peoples, works! Having respectful and

holistic representation inside those spaces is entirely beneficial and a great buzz for those involved. [IE11]

By bringing in guest speakers or knowledge holders, the mandate to be more inclusive of Indigenous voices, both in terms of the curriculum scholarship and Indigenous perspectives, can be addressed. But Indigenous people must be fairly compensated for any work they do. [IE4]

It is crucial for teachers to actively involve Indigenous peoples and seek their advice on what stories to share and what resources to include in classrooms. By inviting local community or Elders to co-design or teach classes, teachers can demonstrate shared power representation, which can positively influence learners. For example, one of our experts defined her role as a “weaver” operating at the intersections of various disciplines to produce authentic experiences for learners:

I talk about fine arts, literacy, numeracy, Indigenous epistemology, ontology, axiology, methodology, philosophy, and theology. I weave this together in ways that reveal our time before colonization, from education and traditional practices to the orality and sacredness of stories and traditional medicines, as well as health and healing and the legacy of leadership. We may explore graphing, looking at stick charts that we connect to the constellation, the stories behind the constellations, doing water mapping, and measurements. That’s the job of the weaver. [IE13]

When spaces are created for Indigenous people to lead in P-12 schools, the seeds for generative change are planted. As one expert explained,

I saw the difference I could make in regional spaces working with educators and talking about embedding Indigenous perspectives and culturally responsive pedagogy. They weren’t terms back then, but doing that sort of stuff and talking about the importance of working in and engaging with community was powerful. [IE9]

Another expert explained the impact of this collaborative work to be like processes of intergenerational mentoring, akin to the Great Law of Peace, the seven-generations principle of Haudenosaunee democracy (Murphy, 2001). The expert explained that:

creating spaces for Indigenous representation in schools will, over time, seed appreciation and respect of Indigenous experience, resilience, and their voices of wisdom. In turn, this will stimulate opportunities to exchange dialogue, share resources, and foster better connections between community and institution. [IE4]

The representation of Indigenous peoples in P-12 schools can disrupt power relations naturally. Settler teachers should grow beyond the “common-sense” politics of erasing Indigenous erasure and instead use their privileged position to challenge

and disobey the power logics of coloniality. One expert strongly emphasized the urgency for this action to take place in schools:

The visible is always bad, and tired misrepresentations are played out over and over again. The prejudice against our people who are homeless, which is no fault of theirs, and the young kids out on the streets, at God knows what hour, doing whatever they feel like, because it's not safe at home. They need to learn to see how our people have been made. [IE10]

7. CONCLUSION

Guiding teachers toward decolonial parrhesia has been the purpose of this work. This paper has outlined coloniality and its enduring impact on Indigenous peoples across the Anglosphere. Decolonial theory exposed the crucial role of knowledge in the modern/colonial power matrix. Decolonial expertise, specifically Indigenous voices, can effectively disrupt P-12 schools. Teachers can reposition their role as educators by valuing Indigenous voices, knowledges, histories, and coalitions. In a repositioning, teachers have opportunities to transcend enduring power relations and prime their teaching to contain strategic acts of disobedience. As a framework to begin to think through this action, we mobilized Foucauldian parrhesia with decoloniality and applied them through our thematic discussion, where Indigenous voices talked through practical strategies of engagement in schools. We used these foundations as guidance for teachers to come closer to the situated knowingness of Indigenous positions, as peoples who live the colonial difference, in order to use these insights as activist platforms to advance the dangerous work of parrhesia through their responsibility as professional educational citizens.

The motivation to undertake the synergy of decolonial parrhesia and teaching responds to the overwhelming rejection of the national referendum to empower Indigenous peoples in Australia. By engaging the sitting Australian government's approach toward the Uluru Statement, we mobilized the national visibility of the rejection, arguing for the need to escalate truth-telling as a fundamental mechanism of *makarrata*. Given the shifting but enduring character of coloniality, decolonial strategies and engagement with Indigenous knowledges remain urgent. The material conditions of coloniality—with its escalating climate crisis, ever-increasing divisions between rich and poor, and the threat of large-scale warfare—continue to figure as a death knell for the most vulnerable. However, existential threats are not intractable and need not lead to the destruction of those most in need. As in Indigenous-decolonial synergies, there are real solutions for humanity. For the necessary changes to occur, educational leaders must plant seeds early in P-12 systems, and teachers must be simultaneously humble and courageous in leveraging their insider privilege for decolonial parrhesia.

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