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Thematic Dossier

Trauma-Informed Translingual Yarning Pedagogy

Pedagogia de "yarning" translíngue informada pelo trauma

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Abstract: Many Australian Aboriginal students are English as an additional language or dialect (EALD) learners because they grow up speaking Aboriginal English, creoles, and Indigenous languages as their first languages, with Standard Australian English being acquired later, often in formal schooling. This linguistic positioning has significant implications for ELT, particularly in trauma-informed contexts. This article presents findings from an ethnographic study conducted at an Aboriginal boarding school in Australia, examining how trauma-informed pedagogy can be strengthened through the integration of a novel concept we introduce – "translingual yarning pedagogy". By combining translingualism with yarning, this pedagogy aims to provide harmonious learning spaces that nurture Aboriginal students' linguistic, communicative, and identity repertoires. Drawing on classroom observations, yarning conversations, and art creations, we analyse how Aboriginal students engaged in yarning circles were able to express themselves through their full translingual repertories, including Aboriginal English, Standard Australian English, creoles, and traditional languages. Our findings demonstrate that trauma-informed pedagogy in Aboriginal classrooms can be strengthened through the integration of translingual yarning pedagogy. This approach fosters a more harmonious classroom environment, enabling Aboriginal students to confidently articulate their meaning-making practices while reclaiming their linguistic and cultural agency.

Keywords: trauma-informed pedagogy; translingualism; Australian Aboriginal students; boarding school; ethnography.

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Resumo: Muitos estudantes aborígenes australianos aprendem inglês como língua ou dialeto adicional porque crescem tendo inglês aborígene, crioulos e línguas indígenas como primeiras línguas, sendo o inglês australiano padrão adquirido depois, geralmente na educação formal. Esse posicionamento linguístico tem importantes implicações para o ensino da língua inglesa (ELI), principalmente em contextos informados pelo trauma. Este artigo apresenta os resultados de um estudo etnográfico conduzido em um internato aborígene na Austrália, examinando como a pedagogia informada pelo trauma pode ser fortalecida com a integração de um novo conceito que introduzimos – "pedagogia de *yarning* translíngue". Ao combinar o translinguismo com *yarning*, essa pedagogia visa proporcionar espaços de ensino harmoniosos que cultivem os repertórios linguísticos, comunicativos e identitários dos estudantes aborígenes. Recorrendo a observações de aulas, conversas de *yarning* e criações artísticas, analisamos como estudantes aborígenes engajados nos círculos de *yarning* foram capazes de se expressar usando a totalidade de seus repertórios translinguísticos, incluindo o inglês aborígene, o inglês australiano padrão, crioulos e línguas indígenas. Nossos resultados demonstram que a pedagogia informada pelo trauma em salas de aula aborígenes pode ser fortalecida com a integração da pedagogia de *yarning* translíngue. Essa abordagem fomenta um ambiente escolar mais harmonioso, possibilitando que estudantes aborígenes articulem com confiança suas práticas de construção de sentido e reivindiquem sua agência linguística e cultural.

Palavras-chave: pedagogia informada pelo trauma; translinguismo; estudantes aborígenes australianos; internato; etnografia.

Acknowledgement of Country

As is culturally appropriate, we begin by paying our respects to the Whadjak and to the Kepa Kurl Wudjari peoples of the Noongar nation on whose lands – their Boodjar – we live and work and where we wrote about this research. We use the terms Aboriginal and Indigenous interchangeably and do so respectfully and with recognition of the diversity of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples of Australia, knowing that such terms are not universally accepted.

1 Introduction: Australian Aboriginal Youths and Intergenerational Trauma

Intergenerational trauma refers to the transmission of historical and unresolved trauma across generations, often resulting in complex psychological, emotional, and social challenges (Alexander, 2014; Menzies, 2019). In the context of Aboriginal people in Australia, intergenerational trauma is rooted in colonisation that commenced in the late 18th century and continued through the subsequent centuries, including violent dispossession of land, suppression of language and culture, and the systemic removal of children from their families. The Stolen Generations – referring to the tens of thousands of Aboriginal children forcibly taken from their families between 1910 and 1970 – epitomises trauma inflicted by the colonisers. These children were often placed in institutions or foster homes where the abuse was not only physical and emotional, but also included the fact that they were forbidden from using their traditional languages and practising their cultural traditions (Chamberlain *et al*., 2025; Roy *et al*., 2015).

The legacy of these policies continues to manifest today across Aboriginal communities, with parents and grandparents passing on the trauma, pain, loss, and grief they endured. The transmission of trauma occurs both psychologically and socio-culturally. Parents and grandparents, shaped by their own grief and trauma, may struggle with parenting, emotional regulations and/or trust in others and in different agencies, especially those exerting some form of authority (e.g., schools, hospitals, and the police force). These struggles can influence how children articulate their identity and self-worth. Aboriginal young people often internalise the cumulative grief of family histories marked by trauma, even when such histories are not explicitly discussed (Atkinson, 2002; Chamberlain *et al*., 2025). The impact of intergenerational trauma, therefore, is apparent in the lives of many Aboriginal young people today, resulting in disproportionately high rates of mental health issues, educational disengagement and exclusions, substance abuse, and involvement with the police and juvenile justice system (Darwin *et al*., 2023). Sadly, Aboriginal youth also face elevated risks of depression, anxiety, suicide, and substance abuse compared to non-Indigenous youth. Compared to other youth populations, many more are in out-of-home care. In addition, Aboriginal young people often report experiences of systemic racism and macroaggressions in schools, workplaces, and public life, further decreasing their sense of safety and belonging (Chamberlain *et al*., 2025; Roy *et al*., 2015).

Yet, despite these challenges, not all Aboriginal young people are passive victims of trauma. Many resist and reimagine their future by seeking to reconnect with their culture through various activities such as language revival, storytelling, and connecting to Country and Elders (Smallwood *et al*., 2024). Aboriginal community-led programs and curriculums that prioritise healing and cultural reclaiming play critical roles in breaking the cycles of trauma for Aboriginal young people. This is particularly the case in educational settings such as schools, where teachers and other educators have begun introducing trauma-informed pedagogies to offer a safe space for healing, but also for reinforcing pride in identity and heritage (Miller; Berger, 2020; Petrone; Stanton, 2021).

In this article, we discuss our study with Aboriginal students in the Standard Australian English (SAE) medium classrooms, where we integrated "translingual yarning

pedagogy" – a novel linguistically and culturally responsive mode of classroom pedagogy we have developed. It provides safe learning spaces to nurture Aboriginal students' linguistic, communicative, cultural, and identity repertoires. We describe how translingual yarning pedagogy may create an environment where Aboriginal youths can freely engage in *yarning* in ways that allow them to confidently articulate their meaning-making practices, deeply connected to the Aboriginal ways of knowing, being, and doing (Martin; Mirraboopa, 2003). With students' increasing freedom to use their full linguistic repertoire through the power of the combination of translingualism and yarning in the trauma-informed classroom activities, our study was able to navigate the complex interplay between their cultural and linguistic backgrounds, emotions, and storytelling.

Our article, therefore, points to the significant role of translingual yarning pedagogy, particularly for Australian Aboriginal students, as it supports a safe and positive learning environment towards their healing processes. The primary objective of the study is to investigate how translingual yarning pedagogy can be implemented in Aboriginal classrooms to support trauma-informed, culturally and linguistically responsive teaching and learning. In so doing, we seek to explore how the integration of translanguaging and yarning fosters student agency, identity assertions, and wellbeing. We address two research questions: (1) How can translingual yarning pedagogy be conceptualised? and (2) How can it be applied in Aboriginal classrooms to support trauma-informed teaching, foster student agency and identity, and inform culturally responsive ELT practices?

2 Trauma-Informed Pedagogy

Trauma weakens learning practices, decreases literacy attainment, and leads to poor educational achievement and school absences. In fact, trauma is a key factor of academic failure (Harrison; Burke; Clarke, 2020). As Arnwine Jr. (2019, p. 77) stresses:

> Trauma serves as a detriment to a student's ability to learn by altering the physiology of a child's developing brain and creating a neurobiological response that impairs the performance of daily activities, especially educationally relevant skills like thinking, reading, concentrating, learning, and regulating emotions.

In recent years, in response to this, trauma-informed pedagogy has been introduced with positive results for vulnerable youths and children in the classroom (Bateson; Casley, 2025).

Trauma-informed pedagogy is an educational and teaching approach that seeks to ameliorate the impact of trauma on students' learning practices, classroom behaviours, and their overall wellbeing (Sheppard; MacLellan; Hawkes, 2025). It acknowledges students' trauma experiences and recognises that this can affect their ability to learn and thrive. In response to these issues, it aims to create a supportive learning environment where students feel safe, included, engaged, and empowered. Overall, its purpose is to foster students' academic success by tackling the barriers to learning that could be associated with trauma (Thompson; Marsh, 2022).

There are several principles embedded within trauma-informed pedagogy, especially in ELT classrooms – safety, inclusivity, transparency, trust, belonging, agency, choice, and

acknowledgement of student backgrounds. (Custodio; O'Loughlin, 2021). The creation of a safe space in the ELT classroom involves building trustworthy relationships with teachers and peers, as this can help students feel comfortable and, in turn, improve their ability to succeed (Custodio; O'Loughlin, 2021; Stromberg, 2023). A key part of this is achieved by creating trustworthiness and transparency, especially with respect to teachers and educators. This is particularly important as children who have experienced trauma may have developed a low sense of safety and trust in others, especially in adults. Building trust and support through the development of peer bonds within the classroom is another important strategy. This not only serves to improve their personal relationships, but also leads to better academic outcomes (Darragh; Pentón Herrera, 2026). Furthermore, collaborative and relationship-based strategies enhance the sense of belonging and community among students. In turn, this is enhanced when there is an inclusive environment where students feel supported (Darragh; Pentón Herrera, 2026). Restoring students' agency in the classroom is also important, as they are more likely to succeed if their learning is nurtured through their own voice, choice, autonomy, and agency. These processes serve to develop students' confidence and enhance their skill development (Palanac, 2022; Watson; Astor, 2025). Finally, acknowledging students' language and cultural backgrounds within the classroom is also pivotal for promoting equity and inclusion, while increasing students' critical thinking and social and cultural awareness (Palanac, 2022; Bateson; Casley, 2025).

Recent studies show that one of the most effective ways to develop constructive trauma-informed pedagogies is to foster classrooms where students can be immersed in their natural medium of self-expression to fully convey their meanings (Bateson; Casley, 2025; Biermann *et al*., 2025). If this natural medium is not prioritised, the classroom will minimise their potential for meaningful linguistic and creative expressions (Bateson; Casley, 2025; Biermann *et al*., 2025). However, another group of studies also reminds us that monolingual barriers are a prevailing obstacle for culturally and linguistically diverse children in the classroom (Oliver *et al*., 2025; Steele; Dovchin; Oliver, 2022). For example, in Australia, Aboriginal children whose first language (L1) is not English are largely disadvantaged in monolingual English classrooms, particularly when trauma-informed pedagogy occurs only in English. Nevertheless, this is not unexpected: classrooms are often led by monolingual English-speaking teachers who have no access to their students' home languages. Consequently, Aboriginal children who do not have English as their first language or dialect struggle to fully express themselves because they cannot find the appropriate expressions in that language, and the opportunity for self-expression, agency, and autonomy is lost. Even if they speak English well enough to function on an everyday level, they may not possess the language resources to communicate complex academic problems (Steele; Dovchin; Oliver, 2022; Tankosić *et al*., 2024; Tankosić; Dovchin; Oliver, 2025).

This monolingual approach, from our perspective, is not appropriate to provide trauma-informed pedagogy, hindering Aboriginal children's ability to express themselves in a natural manner. Researchers and educators still caution that there are limited resources available to address the basic linguistic needs of these Aboriginal children (Tankosić *et al*., 2024; Tankosić; Dovchin; Oliver, 2025), and none that focus specifically on linguistic strategies that can be implemented for trauma-informed pedagogy. Interdisciplinary, evidence-based research and practice are of critical importance to inform pedagogy to support Aboriginal young people's healing processes and academic success (Steele; Dovchin; Oliver, 2022). To fill this research and pedagogical gap, we propose the use of translingual yarning pedagogy, as

we believe it has the potential to create responsive classroom environments for Australian Aboriginal students, and that it may be useful beyond this context to other multilingual trauma-affected learners.

Our discussion also has direct implications for ELT. Despite sustained advances in multilingual and translanguaging research, ELT in many Indigenous and minority settings remains dominated by English-only, correction-oriented practices that overlook students' full linguistic repertoires. Such monolingual orientations conflict with trauma-informed principles, which emphasise safety, voice, and relational connection, conditions that cannot be fully realised when students are restricted from using the languages through which they naturally make meaning. Positioning Aboriginal learners solely as English language learners risks further marginalising their identities and exacerbating the linguistic aspects of intergenerational trauma. Integrating approaches such as translingual yarning pedagogy therefore expands the scope of ELT towards culturally sustaining, wellbeing-oriented practices that honour students' linguistic resources while supporting their academic and emotional recovery.

2.1 Translingual Yarning Pedagogy

Through this novel pedagogy, we seek to enable entirely new ways of thinking about language in relation to trauma and how best to support those individuals impacted by it. Translingual yarning pedagogy refers to a linguistically and culturally responsive trauma-informed pedagogy – one that provides safe learning spaces to nurture Aboriginal children's linguistic, communicative, and cultural repertoires. This pedagogy not only honours Aboriginal students' diverse way of speaking but also their ways of knowing, being, and doing. Through yarning, it provides them access to their full linguistic repertoire and Aboriginal praxis based on storytelling and knowledge sharing. Translingual yarning pedagogy, therefore, fosters trauma healing through meaningful dialogue and relational learning. To unpack more insights about translingual yarning pedagogy, we will first describe the two approaches – translingualism and yarning – separately and then revisit why they can be implemented together. By combining the fluid, identity-strengthening capacities of translanguaging with the relational, narrative-rich structure of yarning, the pedagogy supports both academic learning and trauma-informed healing, creating classrooms where language, culture, and wellbeing are mutually reinforced.

2.2 Translingualism

Translingual knowledge in applied linguistics has drawn growing attention. It has been discussed through numerous forms of trans-oriented terms such as translanguaging (Li, 2018), translingual practice (Canagarajah, 2018), transidioma (Jacquemet, 2013), transgrammaring (Barrett, 2019), transmediating (Darvin, 2020), polylanguaging (Jørgensen *et al*., 2011), languaging (Dovchin; Izadi, 2023), language assemblages (Pennycook, 2024), among others. The central idea of these trans-oriented terms – what we broadly refer to as translingualism in this article – is opening up to the fluidity of linguistic practices. Translingualism, thus,

recognises and supports simultaneous, balanced, and on-the-spot meaning-making through negotiation in more than one language. That is, it allows the (re)assemblages of linguistic, cultural, and semiotic resources to achieve one's communicative aims (Pennycook, 2024). Overall, from the perspective of translingualism, language users are supported to employ their full linguistic resources in their communicative repertoires. It allows speakers to flexibly transition between and across available languages (e.g., home, host or other available languages) through multiple semiotic modes, codes, genres, emotions, and other (non) linguistic resources (Dovchin *et al*., 2026b).

While translingualism is theoretical in orientation, seeing all language use as inherently fluid, it has actual real-life application, for example, in classroom contexts, which can be analysed through *translanguaging pedagogy* (Cenoz; Gorter, 2020). This is a framework that provides flexible instructional strategies in the classroom to enable students to actively engage with the given curricula and content by using *translanguaging* practices. That is, it gives opportunities for students in the classroom to integrate various linguistic repertoires, dialects, accents, varieties, and other multimodal resources to allow their voice, agency, and autonomy (Tian; Shepard-Carey, 2020). Introducing translanguaging pedagogy in the classroom aligns well with Aboriginal students' organic ways of learning because of its transformative potentials. Further, and as Kirsch (2020) notes, it can help enhance learners' literacy development, critical thinking, problem-solving, identity building, and emotional wellbeing. Translanguaging pedagogy is, therefore, often understood to have a transformative capacity to empower marginalised language users to realise their full linguistic potential in the classroom. Implementing translanguaging pedagogy markedly helpes students feel well, accepted, understood, and secure (Cenoz; Gorter, 2020).

Another transformative potential of translanguaging pedagogy is its flexibility to be implemented by monolingual instructors in the classroom when they do not speak or understand the learners' first languages (Dryden; Dovchin, 2024). Numerous studies show that instructors who are constrained by their monolingualism have been able to create translanguaging opportunities for their students in multiple ways: e.g., activating their creative voices by allowing their entire linguistic repertoires based on their additional languages in the classroom (Shi; Rolstad, 2023); facilitating various classroom-based activities that acknowledge the value of the home language (Kirsch, 2020); and designing multimodal resources and curricula that can stimulate students' attention and focus (Cenoz; Gorter, 2020).

Overall, translanguaging pedagogy has been theoretically and empirically shown to have transformative potential, empowering language users from linguistically and culturally diverse backgrounds to engage in meaning-making, storytelling, knowledge construction, and the development of linguistic, sociocultural, emotional, and identity resources (Pentón Herrera, 2020). In the context of ELT, translanguaging challenges monolingual norms by creating space for learners to draw on their full linguistic repertoires within the curricula, thereby fostering critical literacy, metalinguistic awareness, and deeper engagement with English as an additional language (Hopkyns; Dovchin, 2024). Given these benefits, particularly for emotional development and identity development, we posit that translingualism, and one of its classroom applications – translanguaging pedagogy –, can be strategically employed to implement trauma-informed approaches, enabling learners to express, process, and heal from experiences of intergenerational and individual trauma.

2.3 Yarning

In its simplest form, yarning refers to having a conversation, but in Indigenous contexts, it goes beyond that. It is a traditional way of storytelling, narrating, learning, sharing knowledge, and constructing meaning – a tradition that has been practised by Australian Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people for thousands of years (Balla *et al*., 2023; Hughes; Barlo, 2020). Yarning is integral to Australian Aboriginal ways of talking and deep listening for developing cultural understanding (Geia; Hayes; Usher, 2013; Rodríguez Louro; Collard, 2021, 2024) and passing on knowledge to the next generation (Hughes; Barlo, 2020). It is seldom an individual practice as it embodies joint dialogues and the mutual construction of knowledge for all involved in the process (Cumming-Potvin; Jackson-Barrett; Potvin, 2022; Walker *et al*., 2014). Yarns are a culturally shared discursive and oral construct of the lived experiences of the Australian Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, their ancestors, Elders, kinship, families, and communities, particularly communicating with Country (Ober; Dovchin; Oliver, 2024).

Yarning is often connected, but not restricted to being 'On Country' (ancestral land). Both yarning and being 'On Country' strengthen Aboriginal people's connection to their heritage and identity (Ober; Dovchin; Oliver, 2024). Their Country is not just a physical place, but instead it is a living entity intertwined with their land, beliefs, spirituality, identity, and history (Schiesari *et al*., 2019; Jackson-Barrett; Lee-Hammond, 2018). For Aboriginal people, their Country is a living, sentient, and synergistic environment, which is an entirely different type of relationship from those held within Western knowledge (Schiesari *et al*., 2019; Dovchin; Dovchin; Gower, 2024). Aboriginal people have always been On Country because they were on Country in the time before time began (Dovchin; Dovchin; Gower, 2024; Ober; Dovchin; Oliver, 2024). As Worimi Professor John Maynard (*apud* Taylor-Bragge; Whyman; Jobson, 2021, p. 429) notes, "[…] we came directly out of the Dreaming of the Creative Ancestors and our people lived and kept the earth as it was on the very first day". Country, thus, carries stories of Dreaming – a traditional Aboriginal concept that explains the origin of the world, the creation of landforms, animals, plants, oceans, rivers, and people, and the laws and values by which Aboriginal people live (Schiesari *et al*., 2019). Dreaming stories are spiritual, cultural, and educational, passed down orally from generation to generation, and form the foundation of Aboriginal knowledge systems, language, culture, and identity (Dovchin *et al*., *2026a, 2026b;* Taylor-Bragge; Whyman; Jobson, 2021).

When Aboriginal people gather to yarn, traditionally and continuing to current times, they often do so in a yarning circle. This is a circle where everyone sits in a culturally appropriate way, often but not necessarily 'On Country'. Sitting in a yarning circle creates equality – no one is positioned above or below another. In a yarning circle, they may share their Dreamtime stories, and they are not confined to speaking within the restrictions of Western linear time. This is because Dreamtime is not a distant past – it is ongoing, alive and interwoven with the present and future. It lives through story, land (Country), language, and relationships, continuing to guide and shape Aboriginal people's everyday life. Yarning, therefore, reflects what Country teaches. It also underpins the sharing of stories, reflecting how Country speaks to us, how we listen, and how we speak to Country (Hughes; Barlo, 2020). As Geia, Hayes, and Usher (2013, p. 15) note, "The stories remain in our conscious state like a thread hanging, waiting to be picked up again, to be continued, reconstructed, reinforced and once again embedded in our ontology".

By sharing yarns about Country, language, and culture, relationships and trust are built. Yarning embodies values of mutual respect, reciprocal dialogue, deep listening, and shared storytelling – all essential for establishing a harmonious space that is culturally, linguistically, and emotionally safe (Pentón Herrera, 2020). A common sentiment in yarns is: *before I tell you my story, I need to know you will listen, not just hear*. This means that yarning is also respectful, providing opportunities to demonstrate care and respect for each other, allowing individuals to speak freely and be heard and understood. It does not impose an authority's agenda. Instead, it offers the chance for self-determined expressions, where those involved in the yarn together guide the conversational flow (Ober, 2022; Ober; Dovchin; Oliver, 2024).

From this perspective, yarning can be understood as an indigenist praxis which disengages from dominant Western epistemologies that have historically oppressed, racialised, and dehumanised communities (Balla *et a*l., 2023; Hughes; Barlo, 2020). In contrast to Western narratives, yarning is as much (if not more so) the responsibility of the audience as listeners, as it is of the speaker. This value is particularly respectful of people who have historically been affected by trauma (Dovchin *et al*., 2026a, 2026b). We believe that yarning offers the opportunity to develop a deep understanding of our Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students, but also to provide access to multiple layers of profound cultural, linguistic, and historical knowledge that essentially make up the sociocultural identity of Aboriginal society (Rodaughan; Murrup-Stewart; Berger, 2024). Yarning will create a safe space for our Aboriginal students, whilst also allowing the educator's voice to form part of the jointly constructed narrative in the classroom. Yarning as decolonial praxis may encourage strong connections between people, place, and knowledge. Within ELT, such an approach directly challenges traditional teacher-centred, English-only models by foregrounding relational dialogue, co-construction of meaning, and culturally grounded storytelling. Incorporating yarning into ELT thus repositions Aboriginal learners not merely as English language recipients, but as knowledge-holders whose linguistic and cultural resources shape classroom discourse. In this way, yarning complements translanguaging principles in ELT, supporting both language development and culturally sustaining, trauma-informed learning (Dovchin *et al*., 2026a, 2026b).

3 Kutja School and Researchers' Positionality

Before we begin, as is culturally appropriate when working in the Australian First Nation space, we begin by describing who we are and where we are from, and then how we are connected to this current project.

Sender is a proud Mongolian woman. While Mongolia is not officially recognised as Indigenous by the UN, recent studies reveal that contemporary Mongolians share direct lineage with Native Americans (Brissenden *et al*., 2015). Sender believes that her Mongolian heritage, language, and culture share many similarities with Indigenous cultures, not only in Native America, but also with Indigenous communities worldwide. She began a research project two years ago at the Kutja School (see Tankosić; Dovchin; Oliver, 2025) and has visited the school a number of times since then. Some of Sender's interactions with the students are reflected in this chapter.

Rhonda is a non-Aboriginal woman whose lineage on her father's side goes back to at least the beginning of colonisation. She began her teaching career as an ESL teacher

before moving into research more than 30 years ago. Her accidental journey into Indigenous education (Oliver, 2025) began more than 15 years ago when she started undertaking research at Kutja School. She has been associated with a teacher at that school (Lissy) and her students for five years (see Shay *et al*., 2022, 2023).

Lissy began working as a teacher six years ago after many years spent in classrooms as an Education Assistant (EA). An EA is someone who helps the teacher and is qualified to take small groups, replicate teaching from the teacher, and assist in preparation and planning. During her time as an EA she started studying, mostly online, to gain a Bachelor of Education. When she was appointed to the Kutja School, she quickly thought "there must be a better way to teach – especially Indigenous students".

This article is informed by our collaborative work with Aboriginal students at Kutja School. With them, we have explored culturally and linguistically responsive trauma-informed approaches that support healing and the reclaiming of identity, language, and voice – approaches that address the deep-rooted challenges faced by these and other First Nations students. In particular, the data presented is drawn from our research site – Kutja School –, a boarding school for Aboriginal students, most of whom come from remote communities across Western Australia (note that Kutja was the pseudonym chosen by the now-retired elder at the school, meaning 'learning language' in the traditional language of the area). The school, originally established in the 1940s as a mission, was created with the goal of preparing young Aboriginal men for work in agriculture, aiming to enhance their employment opportunities. Initially focused on boys, it later transitioned to become a co-educational boarding school. In the 1990s, it became an independent institution.

Today, Kutja School is more than just an educational institution – it serves as a supportive environment for its students. As described elsewhere (see, for example, Tankosić; Dovchin; Oliver, 2025), the school fosters strong relationships not only among students, but also between students and staff, creating a community grounded in mutual respect and understanding. As the principal indicates, the school has a real intentionality to connect with, value, and respect students (Guenther *et al*., 2023). They come from diverse backgrounds, but the experience of living and boarding together strengthens their bonds, forming lasting connections that contribute to their personal and academic growth. Aboriginal students attending this school have diverse linguistic and cultural backgrounds. They communicate using traditional languages and/or Kriol, as well as Aboriginal English (AE) within and beyond their home community, with AE often functioning as a lingua franca. Given their background, the students are classified as second language/dialect learners, and English classes focus on Teaching English as a Second Language (TESOL).

Between 60 and 70 students are currently enrolled at Kutja School and they come from many different communities and different language nations across the state (e.g., Martu, Gija, Gooniyandi, Bardi). Interaction between these groups can be complex, especially those separated linguistically as an artefact of the geographical distances of their communities. However, by boarding together, they become part of a cultural, but also linguistic, milieu. In other words, these Aboriginal students are, often by necessity, "translanguagers", whose natural linguistic ability largely consists of a translingual instinct (Tankosić *et al*., 2024; Tankosić; Dovchin; Oliver, 2025). Traditionally, Aboriginal people were translingual; at the very least, most Aboriginal people spoke two or more languages and/or dialects, as their parents and grandparents before them came from different language groups. Today, they may speak

their own traditional languages and additional languages such as Kriol (a type of creole found throughout the north of Australia), Standard Australian English (SAE) and AE – with the latter having broader communicative reach.

When additional languages such as SAE are learned by Aboriginal children, this is only to the extent that access to learning opportunities allows. In some contexts, Aboriginal children will have extensive exposure to different languages from birth, while others will have access to fewer languages and to varying degrees. This variability will impact their proficiency trajectory. Even though SAE is the dominant, national, standardised language in Australia, it can be a foreign language in some Aboriginal language contexts where Aboriginal children may only have exposure to it when they come into the classroom. Given this dynamic and diverse linguistic milieu, translanguaging practice is normal in their daily life, but when it comes to classroom or other institutional contexts, their translingual instincts are largely restricted because of the imposition of SAE (Oliver *et al*., 2025). This dominance of SAE continues to disrupt the intergenerational transmission of Aboriginal languages and cultural knowledge embedded within them. Applied linguists in Australia, therefore, urge the acceptance of Aboriginal young people's natural translingual *instinct* as a mechanism to improve their learning, literacy, wellbeing, and communication in the classroom (Tankosić *et al*., 2024; Tankosić; Dovchin; Oliver, 2025). It is on this basis that the overarching goal of this project was to introduce and then examine the effectiveness of *translanguaging* as an interactive healing scaffold for building trauma-informed and inclusive, safe, and effective learning outcomes for Aboriginal students in the classroom.

4 Our Study

The participants in this ethnographic study were Lissy as the classroom teacher and her students. Her class consisted of 15 students aged between 16 and 18 years. As noted, Kutja students come from a variety of backgrounds, and generally from remote communities located in the Kimberley, Pilbara, and Goldfields regions of Western Australia: e.g., Bardi, Gooniyandi, and Gija communities are located across the Kimberley region, while Martu communities are situated in the Western Desert, spanning the Pilbara and northern Goldfields regions. All of these communities are a considerable distance from Perth, the capital city, and from Kutja School.

In this study, Sender and Rhonda assumed teacher–researcher roles. This was possible because Rhonda has been engaged with the school for the past 15 years, and Sender more recently. Over the last five years, they have collaborated with Lissy and her students in a range of learning and research activities (e.g., Dovchin, 2025). Because of this, an ethos of collaboration – building relationships and trust – has been established. We built upon this to further our close relationships with the staff and students at Kutja, noting that good relationships are essential when undertaking research in Australian First Nation contexts.

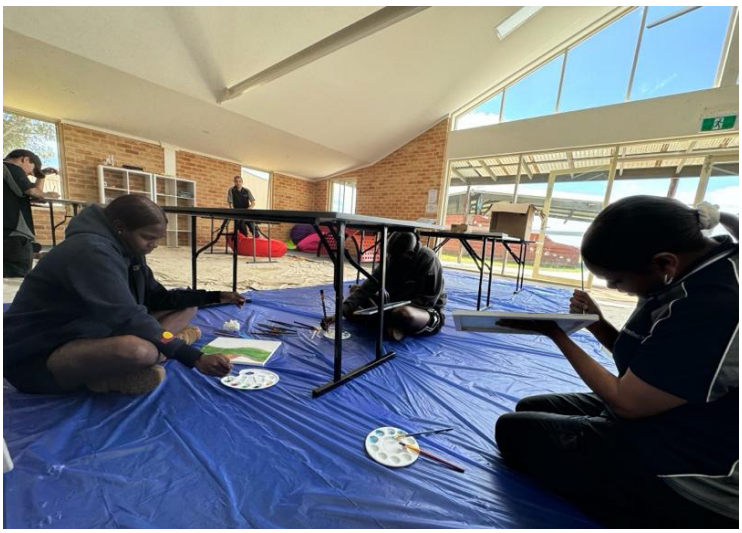
As a first step in this project and as appropriate for ecological validity before the data was collected, we liaised with Lissy, the class teacher, about how to undertake the art workshop as part of a trauma-pedagogy to foster safety, connection, trust, and empowerment, especially vital for these Aboriginal students who have been exposed to intergenerational trauma (Andrews; Swift, 2025). Art is a widespread approach in the healing of trauma, as it provides creative expressions so that the students have a safe outlet for expressing thoughts, feelings, and emotions to effectively facilitate recovery from psychological distress (Sheppard;

MacLellan; Hawkes, 2025). Art is also a traditional creative pursuit of many Aboriginal communities. Our role was to facilitate the creation of the art by providing appropriate tools (canvas and paintbrush) and encouragement. We further explored the implementation of translingual yarning pedagogy integrated within our trauma-informed art-based workshop. We approached it this way as we wanted to create a space that enabled the students to use their full linguistic and semiotic resources – that is, where *translanguaging* would flow, while anonymously exploring their emotions, creativity, and healing through yarning.

We began the art workshop with a whole-class yarn, reintroducing Sender and Rhonda, who each shared aspects of their backgrounds and heritages. Sender, for example, spoke about her Mongolian heritage, language, and culture, highlighting similarities with Aboriginal cultures. She also introduced several Mongolian expressions, which fascinated the students. Similarly, although very familiar to the students, Lissy described her background experiences, which, in turn, led to some of the students sharing personal stories about their families, their communities, and what they do when they are back on Country. Following this whole class discussion, the students were then divided into small yarning circles to further their conversation (see Figure 1) and begin developing their art pieces.

To make the activity meaningful and accessible, we provided explicit instructions and prompts. Students were told: "Create any form of artwork – drawing or painting – that represents a place, person, memory, or feeling that makes you feel safe". We also offered optional prompts such as: "What colours or symbols remind you of safety?", "What languages or words help you feel calm?", and "Can you show a story of safety through your art?" These prompts were intentionally open-ended to allow for culturally relevant and emotionally comfortable responses. In practice, instructors circulated between the yarning circles, joining the conversations as co-participants rather than evaluators. They asked gentle follow-up questions (e.g., "Would you like to tell me about this symbol?", "What language helps you describe this idea?") to support meaning-making without directing or limiting students' choices. This approach ensured that the activity remained student-led, relational, and grounded in both yarning principles and translanguaging practices.

Figure 1 – Yarning Circle



Source: The authors.

Breaking from rigid classroom structures such as desks and chairs, setting up a yarning circle in the classroom provided fluid and embodied ways of learning, storytelling, and creating artworks. The yarning circle allowed us to create a learning environment where safety and flexibility were prioritised – an approach essential for trauma-informed pedagogy. Choosing to sit on the floor while creating their artwork also reflects how Aboriginal art is essentially created – seated on the ground, in a posture that honours their deep connection to land, to Country, and to the practice of yarning. The ground becomes both canvas and Country – a space for healing, storytelling, and cultural continuity.

As the yarning progressed, they shared their stories about their artwork and the interpretation of these. As the storytelling unfolded, examples of translingualism started to emerge. Their interactions, with permission, were recorded, and their artworks were collected on completion. The language from these sources was analysed using discourse and text analysis with a particular focus on their use of translanguaging practices and yarning. All audio and video recordings were decoded by NVivo software, followed by the transtextual analysis framework – the most appropriate conversation analysis tool for understanding the effects of *translanguaging* through *transliteration*, *translation* and *transtextual* meanings (Dovchin *et al*., 2026b). Transliteration and translation into English were done with the assistance of Aboriginal educators and key stakeholders. *Transtextual* analysis was conducted to understand (a) systematic linguistic constructions, and (b) the socio-cultural, emotional and communicative effects of *translanguaging*. This means that questions about how and under what circumstances *translanguaging* was linguistically formulated, and how it relates to other practices, were answered. These analyses were the basis of our findings, which are presented next.

5 Translingual Yarning Pedagogy: "*Riba* Holes"

In this section, we seek to unpack translingual yarning pedagogy through close line-by-line analysis to understand how yarning and translanguaging may co-complement each other in the co-construction of shared meanings. When Sender was sitting in the yarning circle with a group of girls, she asked Student 1 about her artwork, which appeared to depict water, a river, or something similar, with connected green dots (see Figure 2). During the yarn, Student 2's voice also emerges, and the others from the group gathered together in the yarning circle can be heard in the background.

Figure 2 – "*Riba* Holes"



Source: The authors.

1) Sender: What are you painting, girls? It looks so *deadly!* [*deadly means cool*]
2) Group: [playful and friendly laughter]
3) Student 1: *Riba* holes
4) Sender: *Riba* holes? What is that?
5) Student 2: [friendly laugh] Sender, we're speaking Kriol now. Sorry!
6) Sender: Oh! Such a *shame* I don't understand.
7) Group: *No shame*!
8) Group: You're *deadly*!
9) Sender: Aww thank you girls! So, tell me what is "*riba holes*"?
10) Student 1: River, waterholes. It's important for Aboriginal art. It's a meeting place. Our *mob* go to *riba*. We come from the desert to meet and camp near the water. [*mob is an AE term for the people to whom you are related*]
11) Sender: That is so interesting! Thanks for sharing!
12) Student: You're welcome!
13) Sender: And who is your *mob*? [Sender asks the girl sitting next to Student 1]
14) Student 2: Me? *Mirriwoong mob* [*Mirrawoong is the name of a language nation in the Kimberley region*]

1) **Sender: "What are you painting, girls? It looks so *deadly*!"**

- **Yarning:** In this opening part of the interaction, Sender initiates an informal and relational dialogue, using the term "deadly", which is an Aboriginal English term meaning excellent, showing cultural alignment and relational respect within the yarning.
- **Translanguaging:** Sender's incorporation of "deadly" also marks her translingual movement into linguistic repertories of the Aboriginal students, facilitating trust, respect, and reciprocal mode of yarning.

2) **Group: [playful and friendly laughter]**

- **Yarning:** Shared laughter reflects relational bonding and a safe communicative space, one of the key principles of yarning.
- **Translanguaging:** Laughter is understood as a non-verbal and paralinguistic repertoire in translingualism that signifies group bonding that transcends language, a central expression of multimodal translingualism.

3) **Student 1: "*Riba* holes!"**

- **Yarning:** Student 1 brings cultural and linguistic knowledge into the yarning circle by integrating the East Kimberley Kriol expression *riba* [river].
- **Translanguaging:** "*Riba* holes" is a phonological transcendence influenced by Kriol, blending with the Aboriginal English word "holes" [referring to "waterholes"] – a translingual moment. Note, however, that Kriol is different from Aboriginal English – a type of English used by Aboriginal people in many parts of Australia. Kriol is a language of its own kind, distinct from either English or Aboriginal English. In places like the north-east Kimberley, many Aboriginal people speak English as an additional language, and therefore, their English is often influenced by Kriol (which is usually their first language). This might influence them to use lexical forms from Kriol when they speak Aboriginal English.

4) **Sender: "*Riba* holes? What is that?"**

- **Yarning:** Sender does not correct or question the Kriol language use. She actively listens to Student 1 and seeks to understand what she means. This is a relational and reciprocal dialogue – a part of engaging respectfully in yarning.
- **Translanguaging:** While Sender directly echoes Student 1's voice "*Riba* holes", she simultaneously captures Kriol in her repertoire, creating Bakhtinian multivocality. This question also prompts metalinguistic reflection by the Aboriginal students, who could become aware of their own translanguaging repertoire.

5) **Student 2: [friendly laugh]: "Sender, we're speaking Kriol now. Sorry!"**

- **Yarning:** Girls are playful but also friendly with Sender – laughing together, showing their close bond and group solidarity. While playful, the group is also respectful to Sender, sharing their knowledge about their language, something that is commonly practised within yarning.

- **Translanguaging:** Students are metalinguistically aware of their translanguaging repertoires as they explicitly acknowledge the use of their Kriol expression. The group navigates and labels their language resources consciously and metalinguistically – a key feature in translanguaging.

6) **Sender: "Oh! Such a *shame* I don't understand."**

- **Yarning:** Sender expresses humility and vulnerability, not authority. This maintains the safe and reciprocal yarning space.
- **Translanguaging:** Yarning also allows Sender to integrate the Aboriginal English term "*shame*", which is deeply connected to cultural values of humility, respect, and community belonging (Dovchin, 2025). Shame is a shared, cultural experience, which is historically connected with Australian Aboriginal people's experiences attributed to multiple colonising power hierarchies, such as being with people who speak standard English rather than AE (Oliver *et al*., 2025); experiencing internalised racism (Kwok, 2012; Wang; Dovchin, 2023) and barriers for Aboriginal people in accessing public education; and feeling ashamed about what White people might say about Black people (as a group).

7) **Group: "*No shame*!"**

- **Yarning:** Using "*No Shame*!" – an AE term meaning "don't worry!" "don't feel bad!" (see other multiple meanings of "*No Shame*!" from an Aboriginal perspective in McKnight *et al*., 2020) –, students are showing empathy towards Sender and, in the moment, resisting linguistic hierarchy, as they understand the limitation of Sender's linguistic resources and help create a safe, knowledge-sharing yarning space.
- **Translanguaging:** Students show strong affirmation of their cultural and linguistic identity through the integration of "*No Shame*!" – an AE term.

8) **Group: "You're *deadly*!"**

- **Yarning:** The group affirms Sender's presence and participation in yarning, reinforcing a reciprocal relationship through the culturally valued AE term – "*You're Deadly!*" (meaning "You're cool!" "You're excellent!").
- **Translanguaging:** The girls and Sender co-construct meaning through AE repertoire – *You're deadly*! –, marking their translingual movement through AE.

9) **Sender: "Aww thank you girls! So, tell me what is '*riba* holes'?"**

- **Yarning:** Sender encourages the group to elaborate more on the concept of "*riba* holes" and deepen story sharing, which is core to knowledge sharing within yarning circles.
- **Translanguaging:** Sender requests a culturally oriented story sharing about "*riba* holes" – not just a translation. This is a translingual moment where Sender seeks cultural knowledge from Aboriginal students to gain insights into their philosophy and their expressions.

10) **Student 1: "River, waterholes. It's important for Aboriginal art. It's a meeting place. Our *mob* go to *riba*. We come from the desert to meet and camp near the water."**

- **Yarning:** In this moment, Student 1 moves from being a cultural knowledge-holder to someone who can confidently share stories about her culture and Country. Through yarning, she explains the significance of "waterholes" in Aboriginal art as sacred meeting places deeply connected to Dreaming stories – ancestral narratives that explain creation, laws, and connections to the land and Country. Yarning provides Student 1 with agency and autonomy, allowing her to lead a culturally rich knowledge-sharing moment.
- **Translanguaging:** Student 1 fluidly moves between Kriol ("riba") and AE ("mob" – a term which refers to family, kin, and community) and SAE, conveying the cultural depth of the Dreaming Story. This is a powerful example of translanguaging – a dynamic practice that empowers Aboriginal students to use their entire linguistic and cultural repertoires, supporting voice, cultural expression, and identity.

11) **Sender: "That is so interesting! Thanks for sharing!"**

- **Yarning:** Sender's response signals active listening and cultural respect – key elements of yarning. The tone is relational and reciprocal, which supports trust and openness as part of culturally responsive yarning.
- **Translanguaging:** Although this line is expressed in SAE, it functions within a translingual setting where linguistic boundaries are fluid. Sender adopts the linguistic repertoire – SAE – that is available to her and uses the common communicative repertoire to include everyone in the conversation.

12) **Student 1: "You're welcome!"**

- **Yarning:** The student participates in the relational exchange typical of yarning. The response shows confidence and social reciprocity – central values embedded within yarning.
- **Translanguaging:** This response in SAE seems to reflect code-matching – mirroring the language of the interlocutor while preparing for a shift back into translanguaging.

13) **Sender: "And who is your *mob*?" [Sender asks the girl sitting next to Student 1]**

- **Yarning:** By asking this question, Sender aligns with AE communicative norms – "*mob*" is a culturally significant AE term that invites personal and cultural sharing. Sender also seeks to keep the yarning circle's non-hierarchical dynamic, respecting collective rhythm, where no one dominates, and each voice is part of the broader story.
- **Translanguaging:** The AE term "*mob*" means one's extended kin group, community, and language nation. The use of this by a non-Indigenous speaker demonstrates linguistic responsiveness, validating AE as legitimate repertoires in the educational discourse.

14) Student 2: "Me? *Mirriwoong mob*"

- **Yarning:** Student 2 shares her kinship connection with pride, referencing her mob and language group – *Mirriwoong* – from the north-east Kimberley region. This is a yarning moment where the student asserts her belonging and connection to her kinship.
- **Translanguaging:** The student draws on both SAE ("*Me?*") and her traditional language ("*Mirriwoong*"), reflecting her translingual Aboriginal identity expression.

6 Discussion

In this exchange, we can see how yarning and translingualism come together in ways that support the teaching–learning cycle. In particular, the data analysis shows that both translingualism (and its analytic framework, translanguaging) and yarning possess complementary characteristics that can be integrated as a coherent "translingual yarning pedagogy". Within ELT, this combined approach challenges the traditional monolingual, skills-focused orientation by highlighting relational dialogue, multimodal meaning-making, and culturally grounded storytelling. This dynamic pedagogy enables Aboriginal students not only to engage with English more confidently but also to view themselves and the world critically, to share knowledge with agency, and to think more independently and creatively.

Although translanguaging and yarning naturally co-occur in Australian Aboriginal contexts, promoting their co-existence within the classroom enables the type of interactions that underpin trauma-informed practices that foster inclusive, safe, and effective learning. Specifically, by combining these two complementary approaches, it is possible to address trauma because they create learner interactions that are relational, reconstructive, and respectful, as follows:

A) *Relational*: Both approaches foster and build upon reciprocal dialogue. They offer an opportunity for students and educators to actively listen, observe, reflect upon stories and activities, and develop *relational* dialogue that maximises engagement. In turn, this enables reciprocal bonds and relationships to be established and strengthened. At its core, *yarning* is about building relationships through informal and respectful story sharing. Within the classroom, by encouraging genuine dialogue, the breakdown of power hierarchies between students and educators is supported. When *yarning* is combined with *translanguaging*, the students can participate in these dialogues using all linguistic resources available to them, enhancing the discussions in ways that are not possible when parts of their language repertoires are excluded. This inclusion adds to the creation of a safe environment where communication is real and authentic and students feel heard, understood, and empowered. By using their full linguistic repertoire, students are able to reflect on their past, present, and future knowledge and concerns. They are supported in their discussions of what they bring socially and emotionally to the yarns, and through their interests and needs.

B) *Reconstructive*: Yarning invites Aboriginal students to share their stories that are deeply connected to their identity, Country, and Dreaming. These narratives are not merely personal anecdotes but are acts of reclamation of cultural expression. Yarning, in this sense, is reconstructive because it challenges dominant narratives, corrects historical erasure, and repairs voice and agency to those who have been marginalised and silenced. In so doing, it disrupts Western-centric knowledge by reconstructing Indigenous ways of knowing, being, and learning. When it is combined with *translanguaging*, it enables students to reconstruct their stories in the language(s) most meaningful to them, while also allowing them to address their concerns and needs. Together, they reconstruct Aboriginal students' voices towards revitalising their traditional languages and reclaiming their Aboriginal culture. Hence, translanguaging supports them and allows them to consolidate the legitimacy of their linguistic and cultural diversity (Dovchin *et al*., 2026a). When brought together through "*translingual yarning pedagogy*", *translanguaging* and *yarning* allow speakers to reclaim their language, culture and identity and to reconcile these against the traumatic difficulties or issues they may be facing.

C) *Respectful*: Both *yarning* and *translanguaging* are rooted in the principles of respecting students' agency, autonomy, and voice. *Yarning* places students in the role of knowledge-holders, allowing them to take the lead in conversations and share cultural knowledge. *Yarning* also honours Elders' knowledge and community-defined truths. Unlike extractive research or rigid academic interviews, it allows participants to speak on their own terms and in their own languages and styles. Rather than "taking knowledge", yarning is about exchanging stories and sharing knowledge. This two-way learning process embodies deep respect for one's lived experience. Translingualism builds upon this and respects such agency by giving students control over how they communicate, allowing them to move fluidly between linguistic and semiotic repertoires to best express their ideas. These common characteristics shift the classroom dynamic from one where students are passive recipients of knowledge to a position where they are active participants and co-constructors of meaning.

Therefore, when taken together, yarning and translingualism have the transformative potential to empower Aboriginal students by creating a fluid narrative space that welcomes their languages, stories, and knowledge in authentic and culturally safe ways. Within ELT, combining these two approaches disrupts conventional English-only norms and supports more relational, multilingual, and identity-affirming practices. Bringing yarning and translingualism together through the conceptual framework of "translingual yarning pedagogy" thus represents a powerful step towards transforming trauma-informed pedagogy for Indigenous students, while also broadening the horizons of ELT to better serve multilingual learners with complex histories and needs.

7 Conclusion

Translingual yarning pedagogy offers a powerful trauma-informed approach to culturally and linguistically responsive classrooms. It challenges traditional, hierarchical models of education by promoting relationality, reconstruction, and respectfulness – key elements that should be fully integrated into trauma-informed pedagogy. It reflects Indigenous epistemologies that centre storytelling, relationality, connection, and holistic understanding. By rejecting monolingual norms and embracing students' full linguistic, cultural, and emotional repertoires, it allows learners to express themselves and make sense of their worlds in linguistically and culturally meaningful ways. This pedagogy enables educators to co-create harmonious spaces that honour students' agency and autonomy, as students are encouraged to engage in deeper and more meaningful learning. Through storytelling and dialogue using the linguistic and semiotic repertoires they feel most comfortable with, learners can access rigorous yet responsive scaffolding that supports effective learning outcomes. In doing so, translingual yarning pedagogy has the potential to support Aboriginal students' healing processes, many of whom may carry the weight of intergenerational trauma. Because it prioritises deep listening, mutual respect, and relational storytelling, it provides a safe and non-judgemental space in which trauma-affected students can share their stories at their own pace. Healing begins when someone listens without rushing to fix or translate their pain.

Embedding translingual yarning pedagogy into the ELT classroom enables educators to move beyond tokenistic inclusion towards a decolonising practice – one that supports healing, belonging, reclaiming, and transformation. It has the potential to create educational spaces where Aboriginal students not only thrive academically, including in English learning, but are also seen, heard, and valued for all they bring. This means that English learning becomes embedded in identity-strengthening, story-driven interaction, where meaning-making – not grammatical accuracy – is prioritised.

Finally, this study has several limitations that should be acknowledged. First, the research is geographically and culturally specific, focusing exclusively on Aboriginal classrooms in Australia. While this focus provides deep, contextually grounded insights, it may limit the generalisability of the findings to other settings or populations. Future studies could explore the applicability and impact of translingual yarning pedagogy in diverse educational and cultural contexts beyond Australia, including other Indigenous or multilingual communities.

Ethics Committee Report

This project obtained ethical approval from Curtin University's Human Research Ethics Committee Number HRE2022-0559.

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Sender Dovchin contributed a theoretical framework, data analysis, and conclusion. Rhonda Oliver provided background about the Kutja School and revised the manuscript. Lissy Jackson provided the participants and revised the manuscript.

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Reviews

As part of the commitment made by the Brazilian Journal of Applied Linguistics to Open Science, the journal publishes the reviews issued regarding its published works, when authorized by all parties involved.

Review 1

This manuscript presents a thoughtful and culturally grounded ethnographic study conducted at an Aboriginal boarding school in Western Australia. It introduces the concept of Translingual Yarning Pedagogy (TYP) as a novel framework that integrates trauma-informed and translingual pedagogical principles within Indigenous contexts. The study makes a highly original contribution to applied linguistics, Indigenous education, and trauma-informed pedagogy. It is well situated in both linguistic and educational literature and provides meaningful theoretical and practical insights for trauma-informed English Language Teaching (ELT).

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