CRITICAL STUDIES IN EDUCATION
2022, VOL. 63, NO. 1, 131–146
https://doi.org/10.1080/17508487.2020.1848895

Routledge
Taylor & Francis Group

Indigenous education sovereignty: another way of 'doing' education

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ABSTRACT

With schools known to be sites of harm for many Indigenous peoples, both historically and currently, this paper re-considers 'doing' education another way. As a Gamilaroi woman, educator and researcher, I contemplate the ways Indigenous sovereignty is conceptualised and enacted by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in the country now known as Australia. This provides the foundations to apply broader understandings of sovereignty to the notion of education sovereignty. Using narrative and storytelling, I aim to *show* education sovereignty before considering potential elements involved in *doing* education sovereignty. I identify six interconnected elements that underpin education sovereignty, including: Pattern Thinking; Country; Time; Relationality; Intergenerational Reciprocity; and Agency. These elements provide a deeper understanding of what education sovereignty could look like, and therefore another way of 'doing' education for all students, grounded in Indigenous axiologies, ontologies and epistemologies.

ARTICLE HISTORY
Received 27 May 2020
Accepted 5 November 2020

KEYWORDS
Indigenous sovereignty; pattern thinking; country; time; relationality; intergenerational reciprocity; agency; Aboriginal education

Introduction

Sovereignty has been conceptualised and enacted by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples in Australia for tens of thousands of years. In this paper my focus is on how Indigenous sovereignty can operate in educative terms today. There are numerous examples of Indigenous education sovereignty being theorised and exercised around the world (cf. USA – Brayboy et al., 2015; Hawaii – Goodyear-Ka'ōpua, 2013; USA – McCarty & Lee, 2014; Canada – Pidgeon et al., 2013; Aotearoa/New Zealand – Smith, 2000). However, with much literature focused on the content that is being taught – for example: Indigenous languages; teaching about/through culture; Indigenous histories; dance; art; music; Indigenous values and beliefs – my intention is to turn the gaze onto the processes involved. There are many instances where the institution of schooling is attempting to adopt fragments of Indigenous content to include in classroom teaching and learning, sometimes in meaningful and enriching ways, but often in tokenistic and problematic ways (Bishop et al., 2019; Blair, 2015). For example, in Australia, there is a plethora of policy mandating teachers embed Indigenous perspectives in the classroom, with a core component of the Australian

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Curriculum stating that teachers across all year levels and subject areas are to incorporate the *Cross-Curriculum Priorities: Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Histories and Cultures* (Australian Curriculum Assessment and Reporting Authority (ACARA), 2011). With such a professional requirement befalling on teachers, one would expect there is adequate teacher development to fulfil such a responsibility. However, surprisingly few teachers have had meaningful interactions with Torres Strait Islander and Aboriginal peoples and there is a distinct lack of professional development to equip teachers to meet these obligations thoughtfully and respectfully (Moreton-Robinson et al., 2012).

In considering education sovereignty based on my experiences in education, and from stories and knowledge I hold from my Old People, it is helpful to clearly distinguish between the institution of schooling and the education systems that have been occurring here forever (cf. Bishop, 2020). As Narungga, Kaurna and Ngarrindjeri scholar Lester-Irabinna Rigney (2015) asserts, 'curriculum didn't arrive on a boat, pedagogy didn't arrive on a boat, it was always here.' This paper will focus on these ancient Indigenous education systems, looking to the *processes* (or elements) involved in enacting education sovereignty. Indigenous processes are sometimes overlooked in favour of content; however, Indigenous processes sit at the heart of an intellectual genius that continues to sustain people, communities and Country[1] (Yunkaporta, 2019). In addition, Indigenous processes are much harder to extract and exploit; they cannot be uplifted as easily as content and simply plonked into the classroom to appease policy requirements. Adopting the processes of education sovereignty requires systemic change. As a Gamilaroi woman, an educator, student and researcher, a granddaughter, daughter and mother, grown up on Dharawal Country, I hold stories, knowledge and relationships that affirm the genius of Indigenous knowledges. I wish to share these with you. I have no doubt that Indigenous ways of Knowing, Being and Doing (Martin, 2008) hold the potential to revolutionise the way we see and do 'education', for the benefit of all peoples, Country and more-than-human entities.

In this paper, I adopt a future focus – looking towards the possibility and potentiality of education sovereignty. And why this is imperative and a matter of urgency. The usual conventions of academic writing are interspersed with narrative and reflections as marked in italics. Additionally, I refrain from extensive critique on mainstream schooling in Australia and how schools continue to be sites of harm for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students as this is well-established in the literature (cf. Bodkin-Andrews & Carlson, 2016; Brown, 2018; Lowe et al., 2014). First, I look to the broader literature on Indigenous sovereignty exclusively from the perspective of Indigenous scholars in Australia before presenting a vignette to show education sovereignty in action. In combination, the literature and reflections provide the foundations to think more deeply about the elements and processes of education sovereignty, which I interpret to be: Pattern Thinking; Country; Time; Relationality; Intergenerational Reciprocity; and Agency.

Representing knowledge – a note on methodology

This paper is committed to outlining educative processes, and, as such, it is important I outline some of the processes I have employed in writing this paper.

You will notice throughout this paper that I incorporate storytelling, observations and reflections within conventional academic writing. Storytelling and narrative work form a way of theorising and representing knowledge that has existed for millennia: 'story-telling as epistemology' (Sheehan & Walker, 2001, p. 15). It is appropriate then that storytelling exists amongst an academic text, especially when considering Indigenous education sovereignty. It is crucial I walk my talk and not just adopt Western processes and insert Indigenous content. It would be weird not to. I also talk to you, the reader, directly. I ask you questions, I prompt you to reflect and ponder. I am writing this to/for you.

I have deliberately cited mostly Indigenous authors and made introductions to their work using their full name and where they are from. I do this to show my respect for their exceptional work and the way it has greatly informed my thinking. I acknowledge this paper does not and cannot provide extensive understandings of Indigenous education sovereignty from the perspectives of all Indigenous Peoples, in Australia or around the world. It is not only scope and word limits that inhibit such an undertaking. Everyday Indigenous Peoples are practicing and theorising Indigenous education sovereignty in ways which may not be observed, written about, peer-reviewed, published/publishable or able to be cited. But it is happening.

'Indigenous sovereignty has never been ceded'

> Expressions of Indigenous sovereignty can redefine and reorient what we do and what we know so that positive transformation may result (Larkin, 2007, p. 177).

What is Indigenous sovereignty and how is it recognised and employed more broadly by Indigenous people in Australia? Sovereignty can be a slippery term, one that isn't widely understood or agreed upon. In 2007, the ground-breaking book *Sovereign Subjects* (Moreton-Robinson, 2007a), edited by Goenpul scholar Aileen Moreton-Robinson, was released, containing the first collection of insights into Indigenous sovereignty by Indigenous scholars in Australia. Although the concept of Indigenous sovereignty appeared in discourse during the 1960s, prior to the book's release the majority of writing on Indigenous sovereignty was told from the perspective of non-Indigenous scholars. Thus, the book was momentous, and whilst not claiming to provide an all-encompassing definition of Indigenous sovereignty, it offers revelations and conceptualisations of what sovereignty means/could mean for Indigenous people, specific to an Australian context.

The purpose of this section is not to simply rehash the ideas presented in *Sovereign Subjects* (Moreton-Robinson, 2007a), nor provide an extensive discussion or a literature review as such. It is also important to clarify that I have chosen to focus on the concept of 'sovereignty', rather than 'self-determination', although these terms are sometimes used interchangeably. I do not claim to cover or express all ideas or understandings on Indigenous sovereignty, but rather seek to give a brief overview of the ways sovereignty is discussed and enacted in the academic literature by Indigenous scholars in Australia to assist in a greater understanding of how the principles of Indigenous sovereignty may be applied to education. Whilst reading, I contemplated three questions, including:

(1) What is sovereignty from an Indigenous (Australian) perspective?

(2) Is this accepted by 'mainstream' Australia?
(3) Is it different from Western notions of sovereignty?

From an Indigenous perspective, sovereignty is multi-faceted, a concept that is actual, spiritual, psychological and political (Birch, 2007). Moreton-Robinson (2007b, p. 2) and Goenpul and Waka Waka scholar Tracey Bunda (2007, p. 75) both assert 'sovereignty is embodied.' In other words, our sovereignty is carried in our bodies and is enacted in our everyday lives, including our everyday struggles to retain autonomy (Birch, 2007; Bunda, 2007). Furthermore, sovereignty 'is ontological (our being) and epistemological (our way of knowing), and it is grounded within complex relations derived from the intersubstantiation of ancestral beings, humans and land' (Moreton-Robinson, 2007b, p. 2). In this way, Indigenous sovereignty is decentralised and operates at the grass-roots, 'providing the capacity to exercise autonomy at both the individual and collective levels' (Larkin, 2007, p. 168).

Wiradjuri scholar Wendy Brady (2007) explains that sovereignty impacts upon our relationships with each other, with land, and how we perceive our past and future, whilst Aboriginal activist Michael Mansell (2003, p. 5) defines sovereignty to be the 'right of authority in a people to control their territory, and those in it.' Furthermore, he asserts that sovereignty continues to exist 'even if a people are prevented from exercising it' (Mansell, 2003, p. 5). For Gumilaroi scholar Bob Morgan (2018, p. 7), sovereignty is a principle used to express 'the social and political rights, freedoms, and resources to make decisions for socio-political change and development within the context of cultural survival and celebration.'

However, whilst many Indigenous people declare that 'Indigenous sovereignty has never been ceded' (Moreton-Robinson, 2007c, p. 87), this is denied by Australian law (Moreton-Robinson, 2007b). Instead, there exists an assumption of patriarchal white sovereignty – tied to the theft of Indigenous lands and the death of Indigenous people – whereby 'Indigenous sovereignty is assumed to be foreclosed by this assumption' (Moreton-Robinson, 2007c, p. 87). This is not just the position of governments, many non-Indigenous Australians react defensively to the notion of Indigenous sovereignty. Eualeyai/Kamillaroi scholar Larissa Behrendt (2003, p. 115) claims this is due to a lack of understanding of the term and 'the substance of what it is that Indigenous people are asking for in their political agenda.' Yet, Tanganekald and Meintangk scholar Irene Watson (2007, p. 20) poses 'is Indigenous sovereignty to be feared by Australia in the same way as Aboriginal people fear white sovereignty and its patriarchal model of state – one which is backed by the power of force? Or is Aboriginal sovereignty different . . . ?'

These questions are important, yet rarely enter the debate. What is it that many non-Indigenous Australians fear? Mere hints of Indigenous sovereignty have resulted in vehement backlash in the recurring debate to 'Change the Date'.[2] The call to change the date is a timid step towards recognition of Indigenous sovereignty, invasion, dispossession and genocide, yet is largely met with hostility and defensiveness. At a federal level the position is clear with Prime Minister Scott Morrison insisting in 2018 that 'indulgent self-loathing doesn't make Australia stronger', and in 2019, Home Affairs Minister Peter Dutton warning local councils to remain apolitical after several councils shifted Australia Day celebrations away from 26 January (Baker, 2019). It seems, for now, the 'unfinished

business of Indigenous sovereignty continues to psychically disturb patriarchal white sovereignty' (Moreton-Robinson, 2007c, p. 93).

Indigenous sovereignty differs significantly from Western constructions of sovereignty which are 'predicated on the social contract model, the idea of a unified supreme authority, territorial integrity and individual rights' (Moreton-Robinson, 2007b, p. 2). On the other hand, Aboriginal sovereignty is maintained through pre-existing, pre-European models of governance (Birch, 2007) which focuses on inclusivity and embraces diversity (Watson, 2007). In addition, Indigenous sovereignty is/continues to be sustainable, both politically and culturally, regardless of legal recognition by state or federal governments (Birch, 2007). Indigenous peoples occupied the lands long before 'the formation of the nation states that invaded and dispossessed them' (Moreton-Robinson (2007b, p. 3). In other words, 'sovereignty within Indigenous communities themselves is not reliant on either European law, or occasional state paternalism' (Birch, 2007, p. 107). Sovereignty is not lost through the process of invasion, we retain sovereign rights and responsibilities as custodial peoples who have always belonged here. In a recent interview (Grant, 2017), Mansell asserts 'the people of invaded countries do not lose their sovereign rights; at best they temporarily lose their ability to exercise their rights.' However, Indigenous sovereignty need not pose a threat to Australian sovereignty. From a legal perspective, Behrendt (2013, p. 175) argues this fear is a falsehood as 'every day the law finds ways to balance sovereignty of local, state and federal governments.' Indeed, Aboriginal sovereignty may pose a 'solution to white supremacy in its deflation of power' (Watson, 2007, p. 20).

Sovereignty is enacted in our everyday lives, through our relationships with each other and Country, and in the ways we think about and relate to the world around us. This extends to critiquing, reforming or resisting the pervasive mechanisms of colonialism that have sought to annihilate and assimilate us. It is useful to have a broad understanding of the underlying principles of Indigenous sovereignty specific to the Australian context, including the strengths and the struggles, before applying these to education sovereignty.

A current consideration

It would be neglectful if I didn't mention that, as I put the finishing touches on this paper in the year 2020, a pandemic spreads anxiety and fear across the globe. Country after country has locked down its borders and put laws in place to restrict the movement of people. At the time of writing in Australia, pubs and clubs are closed, as are most shops, restaurants and cafes. Streets are empty. Gathering in groups of more than two people is now unlawful (except if you live in the same household) and even then 'social distancing' must be adhered to. In the state of New South Wales (NSW), the Premier has appointed the NSW Police Commissioner to control the COVID-19 response with police order and riot squads cruising neighbourhoods, targeting parks and beaches to issue on-the-spot fines to loiterers void of a 'reasonable excuse'.

In NSW, schools remain officially open, though parents are being urged to keep their child/ren at home if possible, and many schools have migrated to an online learning platform. This has prompted me to think deeply about my research, about education sovereignty, and, in particular, education futurities outside of colonial-controlled

schooling. With few options and little warning, schooling has been forced to shift in substantial ways. This response shows that whole-scale systemic change *is* possible, and is capable of happening swiftly. Learning and teaching continue to happen during the pandemic, albeit in different ways, on different terms. Often this occurs in a calmer home learning environment; an 'informal way of learning that advocates student-chosen activities rather than teacher-directed lessons' (English & Gribble, 2020, n.p). (How) can these events inform and enrich the way schooling, education, parents/carers and educators are able to adapt and transform in innovative, future-focused ways?

Education – another way

> Can we, as Indigenous people, reclaim our way to be, to see, to think and to know, to speak from our sovereignty to offer a different way of being human that does not require us to mimic the cannibalism of the coloniser? (Moreton-Robinson, 2007a, p. 7).

Education is a term often used synonymously with schooling, though I don't see them as one and the same. For the most part, schooling is institutional; offering a mandated curriculum as decided and approved by federal and state governments, delivered by people who have the qualifications deemed to be legitimate (Bishop, 2020). Think about it, every day we send our young people to school. In Australia, we have to, it is compulsory. Six hours a day, five days a week, 40 weeks a year, 13 consecutive years. For Indigenous people, this is a long time to be sending our babies away to an institution we know to have caused great harm to many of our communities.

Education, on the other hand, has been happening here for tens of thousands of years, very successfully (Rigney, 2015). Knowledge has been exchanged for thousands of generations, ensuring continued sustenance and abundance for people, Country and the more-than-human. *Living, thriving, creating, nurturing*. So, what if we decided to look to our old ways and started to 'do' education on our own terms? For all students, grounded in Indigenous ways. What would that look and feel like? These questions get me excited. They're a bit cheeky too, and often when I pose them the conversation turns to a whisper, with a quick glance over shoulders to check who might be listening. Dare we imagine education another way? Dare we concoct our own future outside of colonial control?

Allow me to indulge in an extended vignette to *show* what education sovereignty might look like:

> Thousands of droplets smother the morning grass, the wood pile dark with dew. An assorted collection of camping chairs are perched upright against the tree, our attempt to keep them dry overnight unsuccessful. We unfurl them, giving a gentle shake at arm's length, careful not to spray ourselves. It's chilly. Each breath visible as we try to get the fire started. There's a noisy silence, where, at first, the absence of people and traffic tricks your brain into thinking it's quiet, and then you register the squawks and chirps of the birds. Persistent and loud as their chatter carries across the campground.
>
> Today is the fourth and final day of the National Indigenous Fire Workshop[3] on Yorta Yorta Country. It's early June where the warm winter sun welcomes us throughout the day, while the rest of Australia experiences 'wild weather'. More than 400 people have converged from all over Australia to share and celebrate cultural fire knowledges and practices. Young and

> old, Indigenous and non-Indigenous, fire practitioners and government agencies. It's exciting to see how many 'school-aged' young people are here. It's not school holidays and, as a former primary school teacher, I wonder how the conversation might have gone between parents/carers and teachers. Would the kids have to 'make up' the time they are away or do homework whilst they are here?
>
> I'm fortunate to meet and share camp with two exceptional young blackfullas, Emily and Tim.[4] Their tent is next door and the sound of their morning giggles brings smiles to my slumber. We sit around the fire each evening, sharing chocolate and marshmallows, talking about our day. They propose scenarios like 'What if the campfire has been going for 4 hours and a storm came. Would it put the fire out?' And we ask questions back at them 'What time of year is it? What time of day? Are you close to the ocean or inland? What type of wood are you using on the fire? How much rain falls?' Each scenario gets more and more elaborate, detailed and inquisitive. They love building this 'riddle' for us to contemplate, and we love the deep thinking that goes into their response, the care taken to avoid contradiction.
>
> During the day, Emily and Tim go to the cultural fire masterclass sessions with their Mum. Sometimes they run off with the other kids, creating their own world together. Other times they are mesmerised learning about the right fire and how to listen to and care for/with/as Country. They come back to the campfire each afternoon bursting to share and discuss. Their understanding of Indigenous knowledges and practices deepens, as does their recognition of the environmental crisis they will be tasked with solving. They are taught to carve with care and weave with love, and they dance up on the final night; limbs abound with ancestral memory.
>
> Emily is 9 and Tim is 7 years old. Their ability to process and synthesise complex information is astounding. They are thoughtful and respectful, as they grapple with the enormity of these teachings. They are also joyful and a joy to be around. Months later, I'm told by their Mum that they are still talking about their time at the National Indigenous Fire Workshop.

The purpose of this vignette is to show what education sovereignty looks and feels like, and to emphasise the enjoyment of deep learning and critical thinking that took place that week. For Emily and Tim, they weren't being assessed on their learning, there were no multiple-choice quizzes at the end of each day. They didn't write anything down. Yet, undoubtedly the learning that occurred was profound, enjoyable and long-lasting. I saw first-hand another way of 'doing' education. It involved intergenerational relationality; knowledge sharing through Indigenous pedagogies and processes; a different sense of time; a reverence for Country; and respect, for real, not just compliance and obedience – the 'sit still' or 'put your hand up to talk' kind of 'respect' demanded in schools. But let's not get lost in making comparisons. I know the current imposition of mass, compulsory schooling is a relatively recent phenomenon in Australia, an institution that has attempted to eradicate the existence of a very successful education system that has been occurring on/with Country forever. And I *saw* it, I *felt* it, that week, at the National Indigenous Fire Workshop.

Show, now tell: six elements of Indigenous education sovereignty

> Only a model of sovereignty, defined as the social and political freedoms and resources to make decisions for socio-political change and development within the context of cultural survival and celebration, can provide a fully adequate basis for success in Aboriginal education (Morgan, 2018, pp. 11–12).

From here, I want to highlight six core elements, the processes, that work to describe Indigenous education sovereignty in more detail. These elements are happening all around us, all the time, in Indigenous communities and I interpret them to be: Pattern Thinking; Country; Time; Relationality; Intergenerational Reciprocity; and Agency. However, it is important to note that this is neither an exhaustive list, nor a checklist. The naming of elements is not intended to be used as a finite definition of Indigenous education sovereignty. There is no universal version of Indigenous education sovereignty, nor should there be. Indigenous peoples across Australia (and the world) may (or may not) have their own interpretations of education sovereignty. In addition, the elements I'm presenting here are not 'new', these concepts have long been named and theorised by Indigenous (and non-Indigenous) scholars and thinkers around the world in varied contexts (cf. Bawaka Country et al., 2015; Moodie, 2018; Moreton-Robinson, 2017; Pidgeon et al., 2013; Tuck & McKenzie, 2015; Yunkaporta & Shillingsworth, 2020). My intention in bringing these elements together is to provide one way (of many) to answer the question – what *is* Indigenous education sovereignty?

The elements will vary according to Place, Peoples and Knowledges. You'll see them at play on weekends, family gatherings, at protests and rallies. Around the campfire, lounge room, backyard, or parking lot. The elements are interconnected and may differ in importance depending on who you are, where you are, what knowledge you are sharing or being shared, and with whom.

It feels strange to single these elements out, extract them from their relationships and write about each separately. This is counter-intuitive to the message I'm trying to convey. However, my purpose for doing so is to offer an in-depth discussion of each element and how it might operate, provide examples to demonstrate this, before bringing them back together where they belong.

Pattern thinking

Pattern thinking is the ability to 'think critically and holistically – and look to other perspectives that span time, place and the more-than-human' (Bishop & Tynan, forthcoming). It's about being attentive to the connections between things, rather than just focusing on individual components. In this way, it enables complex thinking, to see all things all at once. Thinking in this way, we can see themes and trends emerge from which we can make predictions or find solutions to complex problems (Yunkaporta, 2019). Pattern thinking shows how the patterns of the past can shape the future by embracing a holistic picture of the world we live in, across time and space, regardless of whether we are looking at numbers or physics or grammar or lifecycles. This is a way of thinking we should be striving for all young people to remember/develop in the face of potential human extinction (Tuck & McKenzie, 2015). It also enhances our brain capacity, increasing complexity and resisting the urge to default into conditioning that tells us to fragment time, schedule our days, separate and classify topics, subjects, ideas.

For example, pattern thinking does not separate information into subjects and disciplines to be studied in isolation – history, maths, geography. Rather than isolate the variables, pattern thinking considers entire systems and the connections between and across systems. In the vignette above, Emily and Tim used pattern thinking to make

enquiries and predictions about weather, climate, people and power, and the role of cultural fire in healing the dire state of Country. Try to use pattern thinking as you read the rest of this section, connecting up the other elements as we go.

Country

Country is central to learning, to education. At least, it should be. From my Old People, I know Country is/as Mother, giving us everything we need to survive. Country is also teacher, with Hawaiian scholar Manulani Aluli-Meyer (2008, p. 219) stating 'one does not simply learn about land, we learn best *from* land.' To truly listen, contemplate and learn from/with Country takes humility, and a degree of comfort in not knowing. It also requires knowledge, to spot the signs and patterns of Country and know how to read and share these. Or to build genuine relationships with people who hold that knowledge. Country teaches us to be patient, to go slowly, to give.

Unangaxˆ scholar Eve Tuck and colleagues Marcia McKenzie, and Kate McCoy (2014, p. 9) insist that Country is integral to storing knowledge, arguing 'land can be considered as a teacher and conduit of memory.' Through our relationships with Country (as well as people and other entities) we engage in knowledge transmission where we can store (and access) shared memory (Yunkaporta, 2019). This is foundational to building sustainable knowledge systems.

Caring for/as Country continues to be part of our custodial responsibilities as Indigenous people. Arguably, this should be true for all non-Indigenous people too. For example, in a sterile classroom environment, we put trust in books and computers to tell us all we need to know about Country, it is mediated. For Emily and Tim, they used observation, listening and *doing* to learn about Country and fire, *from* Country and fire. It is only recently in human history that people have been severed from the land, yet for Indigenous people there remains a living memory of our connection to Country and the abundance and wellness this brings. Country can help all people to remember. Take a moment to be outside, what can you see, hear, smell, feel, learn?

Time

> Past, present and future as one time (Yunkaporta, 2019, p. 88).

There is a calmness to thinking and learning when we dismantle contemporary notions of time; a freedom and sense of agency to stick with something, or move on. As Bawaka Country et al. (2017, p. 2) note, time has been altered by Western societies, now seen as a numerical measurement rather than an entity that is from/of place. It is no longer commonplace to observe Country and the material environment as a way to tell and experience time (Bawaka Country et al., 2017). From an Indigenous perspective, time cannot be reduced to a number, it cannot exist in a linear form divided neatly into past, present and future, or hours, minutes, seconds. In other words, it cannot (and should not) exist as a universal truth (Matamua, 2020). As Bawaka Country et al. (2017, p. 86) state 'time is not abstract, it is not empty, it does not exist separately from human and more-than-human worlds.'

Without strict timetables and time-moving schedules, learning can be timeless. This is especially the case when knowledge is shared through cultural activities such as dancing, carving, weaving (Yunkaporta, 2019). Through non-linear notions of time, thinking can be enabled and enhanced. In this way, learning is cyclical, emerging at different times, when needed. Ruminating through time. This level of complexity has the potential to increase knowledge retention and recall because it is bound in what is to be known.

For example, mass compulsory schooling in Australia mandates that learning is universal – all students in each year/stage level must meet certain outcomes to progress. Shifting perceptions of time changes this assumption of progression to one where different knowledges are held and learnt by different people, based on their awareness, understanding, interest. In the vignette above, young people made decisions about their own learning, knowing when they needed 'time out' to process, and having the flexibility to do this without reprimand.

Relationality

> Our sovereignty is strongest when we are strongest in ourselves. We are strongest in ourselves when we are together (Behrendt, 2019, p. 175).

Everything is connected. Stories and knowledges are shared through and in relationships. Not only amongst people, but between people and Country, and our more-than-human kin. Similar to Country being a 'conduit of memory' (Tuck et al., 2014, p. 9), Bama scholar Tyson Yunkaporta (2019) describes these interconnections as an external hard-drive, where knowledge shared between entities is stored in their relationships. On your own, you may not recall everything, but once you are in relationship, it's all there. You remember together. This is a very different approach to learning than is expected in schools where individuals are expected to recall vast amounts of information on their own, with standardised testing commonplace.

Through relationships, all involved are both teacher and learner, and caring becomes an ongoing commitment. Relationality is reciprocal you see, balancing care, warmth and understanding with responsibilities, obligations and respect. No one person or entity is better or more than the other. This form of connection is not based on positional authority, or a system of rewards and punishments, but rather a commitment to fulfilling your relational obligations: 'being accountable to your relations' (Wilson, 2008, p. 77).

Relationality is not about separation, instead the emphasis is on coming together to share knowledge from different places, communities, teachings. Relationality is also responsive to place/space/time, acknowledging that Country can be teacher too, whether it's Crow or Seedling or Wind. Relationships with our more-than-human kin are just as important. This was evident at the National Indigenous Fire Workshop in the way people, fire and Country taught and learnt in relationship. Emily and Tim didn't just learn from fire, they learned from the relationships between fire and dance, weaving and creating riddles, running on uneven ground and listening to Elders tell stories in non-linear ways. Learning is never singular, it is sparked by the relationships between the learner and the infinite entities to learn from.

Intergenerational reciprocity

Intergenerational reciprocity combines the idea of intergenerational learning with reciprocity. Intergenerational reciprocity is not about authority, or having the qualifications deemed necessary to 'teach', it's about acknowledging that everyone has something to share, and learn (Bishop et al., 2019). This is also bound in relationality, it is the strength of our relationships that enhance knowledge exchange and knowledge production. Learning from human and more-than-human entities who hold generations of stories and knowledge has the potential to drastically improve our futurities.

Intergenerational reciprocity recognises that knowledge is held communally, no one person holds (or should hold) all the knowledge. As Yunkaporta (2019, p. 14) explains, 'our knowledge endures because everybody carries a part of it, no matter how fragmentary.' Our Old People have much to share, but also acknowledge they have much to learn from the young ones. As written elsewhere, Grandmother and Granddaughter perspective (Bishop & Tynan, forthcoming) shows us humility and optimism when we are able to listen to and learn from others' perspectives. Intergenerational reciprocity also highlights that young people have much to offer, they are not sponges to be silenced and infused with information according to a government-mandated curriculum, they carry knowledges, stories, curiosity. This defies typical teacher-student power relationships that operate in schools (Bishop & Durksen, 2020).

Intergenerational reciprocity is a reminder of our deep obligations to one another, not simply to give back, but to listen, share, give forward. To ignore these obligations often results in various forms of extractivism, a process which annihilates Country, Peoples and more-than-humans (Simpson, 2017). With intergenerational reciprocity as a core principle of education, and living, we have a responsibility to do well by our Ancestors and Old People, and to become good Ancestors ourselves. In the vignette, Emily and Tim learn from Elders, fire and possum skins. They also draw on their extensive knowledges to teach those around them willing to listen, including me and others fortunate to share a campfire with them.

Agency

Agency is a concept that has been heavily theorised and can be somewhat ambiguous. In this context, agency implies autonomy in how education unfolds. This encompasses process, content, pedagogy and is self-determining, responsive and contextual. By this I mean, the learning is entirely dependent on relationships, knowledge, Country, and what is relevant at that moment, to the people involved. This might be difficult for some to understand as, for many of us, we have been conditioned into a schooling system that is 'universal' or 'one size fits all', where students have access to the same information depending on their year of birth. And whilst learning activities may vary depending on the initiative of the individual school or teacher, curriculum and outcomes are pre-set and repeated year after year, or until the curriculum is changed.

Agency also takes into account the local, paying attention to socio-cultural and socio-historical factors. It responds to where young people are at in their thinking, as well as the place they are learning, who they are learning from, and the importance/relevance to the

world around them – 'agency is not just the remit of humans' (Bawaka Country et al., 2013, p. 195). In this way, it is adaptive and can shift and change from moment to moment. For Emily and Tim, they exercised agency in their commitment to listening and learning in accordance with their interests, energy, relationality and protocols of respect. Agency is not only reactive, but proactive, in response to shifting notions of time and increased capacity for criticality through pattern thinking.

For example, at the time of writing there is a worldwide pandemic. In helping my nieces and nephews with their schoolwork that has now been moved entirely online, there is a noticeable absence of COVID-19 in the content being delivered. How are we preparing students for the future if they are not responding to the present? It seems that 'business as usual' has been the default in these (small, personal) instances; an insistence to continue practising exponents and analysing avant-garde artworks. Meeting pre-set outcomes appears to outweigh the importance of analysing and responding to what is happening now.

Inseparable – the weaving of the elements

> Aboriginal people seek to engage and participate in learning experiences that enriches them intellectually, but never at the loss of their cultural identity and the values and traditions that inform their identity (Morgan, 2018, p. 6).

It has been difficult to isolate these elements and try to talk about them individually, when it is clear that they overlap, fit together, and complement each other. Did you notice this as you read through the six elements? Pattern thinking teaches us how to see between and across the elements, and Relationality shows us how they are all connected. Country reminds us that teaching and learning happens in many ways if we are prepared to stop and listen, and Time reveals an entity that is bound to Country and Patterns, rather than numbers and universal 'truths'. Intergenerational reciprocity grounds us in our accountability to each other, and Agency keeps us responsive and adaptive to local and global contexts.

These important elements set the foundation for education sovereignty, offering an insight into the ways in which education has been happening here for tens of thousands of years. I wonder, did you catch yourself thinking about how these elements would (never) fit into a school setting? I do this too sometimes. But remember, they're not meant to, Indigenous education sovereignty is not about school reform, it is a movement towards systemic change; restructuring of entire systems, including how communities and families operate. It will also require a revolution of our current economic system, but let's leave that for another conversation!

Conclusion

Education sovereignty cannot be viewed in isolation from Indigenous sovereignty. Education has been happening in Australia for thousands of generations yet 'modern' society keeps deep and critical thinking at bay by forcing young people to attend school for 13 years, then expecting them to sell their labour eight hours a day, five days a week, 48 weeks of the year. There is little time for anything else. This model appears short-sighted, with profit and power underpinning the design of systems and structures. I understand that a common reaction to notions of education sovereignty may contain

arguments about practicalities, feasibility, or logistics (cf. Bishop, 2020). However, now more than ever, as the world faces the COVID-19 pandemic, we can see that systemic change is possible, and can happen quickly if we will it to. This current crisis presents us all with an opportunity to push for a momentous shift to change the way we interact with each other and the world. However, this will not be without challenges. It is important to remember that Whiteness has sought the eradication of Aboriginal Peoples and Indigenous Knowledges, infiltrating and colonising minds and bodies, far and wide.

Whilst Indigenous sovereignty remains unrecognised by the Australian government, and a great proportion of the Australian public, many Indigenous people remain staunch – our sovereignty has never been ceded. We are sovereign peoples. The six elements I have highlighted acknowledge this sovereignty and offer a more tangible way of seeing the processes involved in education sovereignty. The vignette from the National Indigenous Fire Workshop attempts to show these elements in action.

Education sovereignty needn't happen around the edges, on weekends or school holidays. And although the context I have presented is situated in Australia, there is potential these elements of education sovereignty can spark conversations elsewhere in the world, particularly among other settler-states. Education sovereignty is something that can and should be prioritised, for all young people, and for the health of future generations and Country.

Notes

1. 'Country', purposefully capitalised, is a term often used by Indigenous Peoples in Australia to refer to home/lands/skies/waters/places/entities.
2. 'Change the Date' is a campaign targeted at the Australian Government and general population to consider changing the date of 'Australia Day'. This is held on 26 January each year to commemorate the landing of the First Fleet, yet many Indigenous (and non-Indigenous) people see this as the beginning of a violent invasion, dispossession and genocide. See http://changethedate.org/
3. See Firesticks Alliance (2019)
4. Pseudonyms are used for anonymity

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author.

Funding

This work was supported by an Australian Government Research Training Program (RTP) Scholarship, Macquarie University Research Excellence Scholarship and Walanga Muru.

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