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From Yarning to Learning

Decolonizing Education in Ambelin and Ezekiel Kwaymullina's Works

Abstract: In our article, we examine how Ambelin Kwaymullina explores alternative forms of postcolonial education i.e., through Aboriginal storytelling/yarning. Drawing from 'Message From the Ngurra Palya' (2020) and 'Teacher/Decolonizer' (2024), as well as 'Catching Teller Crow' (2018), written with her brother Ezekiel, we consider how the works mobilize yarning to actively challenge hegemonic forms of education. Yarning, we argue, carries great anti-colonial potential and can be identified as a formally distinct literary approach. Rooted in Indigenous Australian epistemologies, yarning serves as both an educational method and a form of resistance to colonial narratives. Through close readings we highlight its role in fostering connection, transmitting knowledge, and imagining decolonized futures. 'Message from the Ngurra Palya' envisions a hybridized educational basis featuring blended Indigenous and Western scientific literacies. 'Teacher/Decolonizer' critiques the burdens placed on Indigenous peoples while advocating for inclusive, relational teaching practices. 'Catching Teller Crow' embodies yarning through both its form and content, emphasizing intergenerational learning and the recovery of marginalized histories. Collectively, these texts demonstrate how literary yarning can resist hegemonic systems and inspire alternative forms of learning. We call for a broader engagement with yarning as a transformative, decolonial practice, particularly in addressing pressing global challenges.

As scholars of literary studies, we are compelled to tell you that stories are powerful, that storytelling is meaningful, and that there might be some value in spinning tales that goes beyond mere entertainment. You expect a big 'but' here, yet we will not offer one. We will offer a caveat, however. In the context of Australia, particularly in that of yarning, there is a specific decolonial, educational capacity to the oral tradition and its literary counterpart. Aboriginal people have made it clear: Teresa Cochrane has said that her yarning – her storytelling – is academia;[1] referencing David Suzuki's work, Jimmy Smith has also called attention to the ways in which oral traditions have preserved Indigenous knowledges.[2] Marnee Shay, an academic in Indigenous Education Studies, has even identified what she calls "Collaborative Yarning Methodology" based on existing Indigenist research conceptions.[3] The centrality of yarning to education is, thus, reflected in educational practices of writing, learning, and collaboration respectively.

Conventionally, yarning may be understood as unconventional. Its lack of all-encompassing standard stems from its widespread and differentiated use across the Australian continent. While, as Alexus Davis elaborates, "[y]arning is a term commonly used by Indigenous Australians that simply means to communicate", she goes on to note how the different "rules, languages and protocols" for "conducting conversations and sharing information" result in various forms of yarning.[4] While it, thus, becomes difficult to speak of 'yarning' rather than 'a (form of) yarning', some common facts do emerge. "Indigenous Australian people

1 See Bec Beutel, Teresa Cochrane, Anke S. K. Frank: Yarning Together, s.p.
2 See Jimmy Smith: Land, Sky & Waters, s.p.
3 Cf. Marnee Shay: Extending the Yarning Yarn.
4 Alexus Davis: Birthing Vital Stories, p. 107.

have been practicing Yarning for thousands of years. It is integral to Aboriginal peoples' traditional (and contemporary) ways of understanding and learning".[5] We are primarily interested in the ways in which yarning might manifest in the context of literary narrativization, whether as a form of writing or as an educational practice advocated in literary works. According to wawa biik, a cultural organization managed by the Taungurung Land and Waters Council, the Taungurung people define yarning in these terms:

> Yarning is a way of connecting and purposefully sharing knowledge through narrative. It can include anecdotes, stories and experiences […] Yarns are typically non-linear and free flowing – so that means that topics and themes may seemingly go off on tangents, but these themes are often revisited, allowing for connections and learnings to surface as different parts of the yarn come together.[6]

Yarning might be read as a connective structure, one which may offer multiple non-linear forms of expression. Instead of positing or upholding a sense of linearity in terms of conventional, westernized temporal regimes, yarning may often chafe and resist these notions, exposing them for their constructed nature. In other words, as Geia, Heyes, and Usher point out:

> Aboriginal yarning is a fluid ongoing process, a moving dialogue interspersed with interjections, interpretations, and additions. 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.[7]

Rather than merely reflecting a meandering stream of consciousness, yarning carries an ontological restructuring capacity that activates the aforementioned resistance to dominant (neo)imperial regimes of time and order. Geia, Heyes, and Usher go on to contend that this is made in part possible by the "threads of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Island history" embedded within yarning, which allows it to travel "into the present tense".[8] Tyson Yunkaporta argues that yarning and story together carry a sense of transformative potential and identifies them as key to the process of addressing far-reaching global issues like that of the ongoing climate crisis. He claims, in the context of global warming, that, the solution requires diverse stories to come together and to allow action to be taken.

> Through the generative practice of yarning […] [w]e sit together, lots of different people with different narratives, and we form an aggregate of narratives, and some of those are outliers, and some of those are similar to each other. But […] we have powerful thought […] when we have diverse narratives coming together. And even when they're contradictory, they're still together comfortably. And that's when you get the complexity of story and then of course arising from that, the complexity of thought, that allows for some kind of meaningful interface.[9]

For Yunkaporta and for us, yarning is about a multiplicity of story forms coming together, at times in accord and at times in seeming conflict. Our literary understanding of yarning is one such form that we hope can provide some small contribution to powerful thought. While Yunkaporta sees 'written yarns' with a

5 Ibid., p. 108.
6 wawa biik: What is Yarning, s.p.
7 Lynore K. Geia, Barbara Heyes, Kim Usher: Yarning / Aboriginal Storytelling, p. 15.
8 Ibid., p. 15.
9 Tyson Yunkaporta: Main Program | Tyson Yunkaporta, s.p.

degree of skepticism, stating somewhat tongue-in-cheek, that "literary causes brain damage",[10] he does suggest mixing oral and written systems, referring to writings by the Greek philosophers "as dialogues, a record of yarns they'd had".[11] He highlights "yarning as a method of knowledge production and transmission" and as a way of "challenging grand narratives and histories",[12] which can be recorded in writing as long as it remains primarily an oral form.

In terms of literary studies, yarning ought to be understood in terms of how literature might itself engage with forms of yarning. While certainly not oral, literary works, especially poems, are known to carry oral residue and are nonetheless implicated in speech acts, if merely through their representation. Additionally, all three texts by Ambelin (and Ezekiel) Kwaymullina refer to yarning as a form of education. This is done directly, as in 'Message from the Ngurra Palya' and 'Teacher/Decolonizer', both of which mention 'yarnings' as essential to foster more positive ways for Indigenous and non-Indigenous people to co-exist. In 'Catching Teller Crow', however, it is more indirect, since yarning – "connecting and purposefully sharing knowledge through narrative"[13] – is central to the process of learning about the past. This occurs both on a content level, as the protagonists do sit together and share knowledge through speaking, and on a formal level, as the sections of the novel which are most focused on educating about the past – both recent and historical – are in the form of a verse narrative embedded within the prose narrative as being told to the characters and thus explicitly connected to oral poetry. We thus understand literary yarning to involve a mixture of representational and formal elements that centralize existing forms of yarning expressed primarily by Aboriginal writers. These forms of writing are themselves inherently decolonial and an example of 'writing-back' to invoke the old postcolonial paradigm. In a 'yarningup' event related to recent publications of Ambelin Kwaymullina and Karen Wyld, Kwaymullina states that Indigenous writers are "working in forms that are not [their] own and subverting those forms to suit [their] purposes"[14] and adding a witness statement in the form of a verse narrative to the Kwaymullinas' Young Adult detective novel may count as one of those subversions.

Rethinking Education in Postcolonial Australia

So-called educational practices within British colonies, but in Australia in particular, were tinged with genocidal ambition. Educational systems, systems which thrived upon standardization and conformity inherently aimed to weaken Aboriginal communities, through a linkage to "a missionary zeal to 'Christianise' and 'civilise' in order to eradicate the vestiges of what were seen as 'primitive'

10 Tyson Yunkaporta: Sand Talk, p. 166.
11 Ibid., p. 166.
12 Ibid., p. 170.
13 wawa biik: What is Yarning, s.p.
14 Ambelin Kwaymullina, Karen Wyld, Elfie Shiosaki: Yarningup Aboriginal Women's Storytelling, p. 124.

cultures and replace them with a European way of life".[15] Oftentimes, the forced displacement of children, what is now called the Stolen Generations, would be carried out with the alleged desire to produce a more assimilated native population, alongside other "policies of exclusion, separation, [and] segregation".[16] In Amanda Barry's words: "The education of Aboriginal children was culturally destructive, breaking down traditional family structures, erasing language and cultural practice – 'internal colonialism' ".[17] Tellingly, such educational damage did not end with the decolonization of Australia. Australian education has "absorbed much of the colonial mindset" and still carries "attitudes of paternalism" and the "programmes are still assimilationist in orientation".[18] Decolonization, it seems, remains as relevant as ever.

Narratives serve an important role in education even before considering a broader postcolonial perspective. Historical narrativization, for instance, is key to the instruction of history, albeit not always uncontroversial, since there are various competing definitions of 'narrative'. If we take a narrative to be "an overview understanding of the sequence and significance of sweeps of history or key episodes",[19] then there can be no doubt that history and historical education are full of narratives. Teachers are "shaping […] history into narrative stories […] as an important access point"[20] and as a way of increasing students' interest in the subject, though there is a certain amount of skepticism towards narratives as well because of a concern that such narratives might "be reproduced in an uncritical fashion".[21] In spite of such reservations, the connection between history and story is undeniable. As Grant Bage states in 'Narrative Matters – Teaching and Learning History through Story', "[h]istory is the construction and deconstruction of explanatory narratives about the past, derived from evidence and in answer to questions".[22] Using fictional stories rather than non-fictional narratives, however, is somewhat more contentious. The historical novel is credited with the "innate ability to encourage an audience into being knowingly misinformed, misled and duped",[23] which would arguably characterize it as the polar opposite of education. At the same time, historical novels can be used "to challenge mainstream and repressive narratives"[24] and recover previously ignored voices. It is important that such marginalized and alternative voices continue to offer counterpoints to master narratives of history, even more so in the (mis)information age. Australian historical fiction has already been "the focus of heated public debate about the role of fiction in representing the past",[25] surrounding specifically Kate Grenville's novel 'The Secret River' (2005), which aimed at "reinscrib[ing]

15 Nina Burridge, Andrew Chodokiewicz: An Historical Overview of Aboriginal Education Policies in the Australian Context, p. 12.
16 Ibid., p. 12.
17 Amanda Barry: Equal to Children of European Origin, p. 41.2.
18 Tom O'Donughue: Colonialism, Education and Social Change in the British Empire, p. 791.
19 Kate Hawkey: 'Could You Just Tell Us the Story?', p. 264.
20 Ibid., p. 265.
21 Ibid., p. 270.
22 Grant Bage: Narrative Matters, p. 33.
23 Jerome De Groot: The Historical Novel, p. 6.
24 Ibid., p. 3.
25 Kate Mitchell: Australia's 'Other' History Wars, p. 253.

and reactivat[ing] Aboriginal Australian history in the contemporary historical imaginary",[26] but was written by a white author. Nonetheless, as Kate Mitchell claims, the novel "writes Australia's traumatic history into contemporary cultural memory, eschewing objectivity in favor of constructing an affective approach to a shameful traumatic",[27] thus making full use of the emotional power of storytelling. While historians have frequently criticized "elevat[ing] fiction as a mode of historical understanding",[28] there is also the argument that fictional narratives are "best suited to telling a particular kind of truth about the past",[29] an argument that we would tend to agree with and that we see as fitting with the idea that yarning can be an effective and relational method of teaching.

In the context of mobilizing yarning, it is important to acknowledge, as Pratt puts it, that "[w]ithin Indigenous communities, the role of storytelling has been, and remains, a powerful and primary means of knowledge transfer".[30] This transfer of knowledge is not merely an exchange of ideas for what may be considered conventionalized readings, in fact, one of the strengths of yarning is the possibility to return to the yarn and rethink its interpretation.[31] The interpretative act, an act that is not expected to be measured or graded to specific metrics allows for a pedagogy that is not so much concerned with preparing its students for careers under late stage capitalism, but rather seeks to convey differing valences of knowledge to different individuals. Importantly, the knowledge acquired through yarning is tied firmly to place and affirms as well as reprioritizes the "role of narrative in memory and knowledge transmission" in opposition to colonial education structures.[32] Learning here is also understood not as a means to an end, but instead as a lifelong process. Indeed, Jimmy Smith, referring to his people, the Wiradjuri, claims "[o]ur system of education is inclusive, and everyone gets through. It's about lifelong learning".[33] The transfer of knowledge that continues today through yarning is one that affords effective alternative ways of educational expression and acquisition.

Weaving Futures: Literary Yarning and Decolonizing

We argue that the three Kwaymullina texts – the fictional poem 'Message from the Ngurra Palya', the non-fictional poem 'Teacher/Decolonizer' and the young adult speculative fiction novel 'Catching Teller Crow' – engage with Aboriginal 'systems of education' on various levels. 'Message from the Ngurra Palya' projects such methods into the future and posits that 'yarning circles' will be decisive in fostering a more positive way of existing in the world that even includes speculative staples such as spacetime travel. 'Teacher/Decolonizer', a poem

26 Ibid., p. 253.
27 Ibid., p. 254.
28 Ibid., pp. 253 f.
29 Ibid., p. 257.
30 Yvonne Poitras Pratt: Digital Storytelling in Indigenous Education, p. 117.
31 Cf. Bec Beutel, Teresa Cochrane, Anke S. K. Frank: Yarning Together, s.p.
32 Tyson Yunkaporta: Sand Talk, p. 170.
33 Jimmy Smith: Land, Sky & Waters, s.p.

within an academic essay collection, specifically uses the poetical form to impart instruction on how to establish a decolonial teaching practice, while 'Catching Teller Crow' engages with yarning and teaching on content, formal, and readerly, extratextual levels. The following close readings will bring to the fore the ways in which Ambelin Kwaymullina and her brother Ezekiel Kwaymullina embed yarning as an educational and relational practice into their writing.

'Message from the Ngurra Palya', written in 2020 as part of the 'After Australia' anthology, approaches education and its connection to yarning in a speculative mode. The text itself is deeply postcolonial, writing against existing hegemonic discourse by making use of the speculative future to present a utopian vision 'after Australia' as it is in our contemporary. Set in 2050, and sent back to 2020, the poem presents an Aboriginal futurism in which "Indigenous scientific literacies" and "Western technologies"[34] have come together. In doing so, time travel becomes possible, as linear, imperial time is proven to be non-existent. Instead, there is "[o]nly the now | with all possibilities | enfolded by | and unfolding from | what is".[35] The ability to travel and communicate through time is where both yarning and education enter the poem. Firstly, the poem is constructed as the initiation of a conversation between two different times and / or realities – perceived as 'present' and 'future' according to "the failed construct of linear time which forms a dominant point of reference for the iteration of reality to which this message is addressed".[36] The message itself is only intended to give a glimpse into the future following from "the last gasps | of a dying empire"[37] rather than to educate the past recipients, but the procedure involved in sending the message as well as its content both model successful yarning education. The poem locates the beginning of a more positive future in a panel discussion, in which "Aboriginal people were talking | about the keys to opening up a better future"[38] – a type of event which already occurs frequently in our 'present', as acknowledged by the lyrical I. However, the key difference is that the proposed solution is "listened to"[39] and prompts further "conversations | Different peoples | coming together | sharing knowledge | sharing aspirations | a thousand small beginnings | towards dismantling | settler colonialism".[40] 'Coming together' and 'sharing knowledge' is how diverse peoples are learning to co-exist and imagine new structures of being as well as new structures of education, not unlike Tyson Yunkaporta's aforementioned claim to the power of story and of yarning.

The poem describes a world in which there are "on-Country learning places | where Elders and other critical thinkers | teach people how to transform patterns of thought | so they can live in ways | that sustain all life".[41] While the poem does not specify how exactly teaching takes place, we can draw conclusions from the way in which the crew of the Ngurra Palya perform their scientific work

34 Ambelin Kwaymullina: Message from the Ngurra Palya, p. 239.
35 Ibid., p. 248.
36 Ibid., p. 239.
37 Ibid., p. 244.
38 Ibid., p. 245.
39 Ibid., p. 246.
40 Ibid., p. 247.
41 Ibid., p. 242.

and make decisions. The vessel for their journey across spacetime is "designed by Indigenous scientific literacies | and built with Western technologies",[42] which suggests that an education enabling people to undertake this kind of futuristic voyage likewise includes both Indigenous and Western ideas. Additionally, the decision-making on board the spacetime vessel takes place within "yarning circles | over many cups of tea",[43] which seem to be an essential institution of the near-future society. The yarning practices, technology and implicit educational structures are all innately pluralized, hybrid ones that begin not with a binary colonizer-colonized relationship, but rather with a speaker-listener relationship founded on connection and mutual desire for understanding. While the poem does not contain concrete suggestions for decolonial educational practices, it posits that teaching, learning, and understanding depend on the connections and communication inherent to yarning practices.

'Teacher/Decolonizer', one of Ambelin Kwaymullina's most recent poems, renders the idea that teaching can happen through storytelling concrete. Published in the essay collection 'Critical Racial and Decolonial Literacies – Breaking the Silence' (2024), the text straddles the boundary between literary text and academic essay through the use of the poetic form for 'academic' content. The first stanza contains a thesis statement – namely that the lyrical I, who, like Kwaymullina, is an Indigenous Australian woman in academia has been an educator all her life. That this is born out of necessity is made clear as well, as the lyrical I is "born into | an attempt | to stem the tide of ignorance | before I drown in it | before we all do".[44] The next two stanzas clarify that this need for Indigenous people to educate others to protect their own existence "comes at a cost"[45] as the added workload to their regular (academic) professions includes "[…] worry | fear | grief | pain | anger | exhaustion".[46] Here, Kwaymullina makes good use of the affordances provided by the poetic form stressing each individual word and thus the respective emotions and concomitant emotional labor, evoked by them. It is important to note how the emphasis on emotion – typical for the poetic register – is later juxtaposed with expert theoretical language surrounding the field of didactics and scholarship. Despite Kwaymullina's initial harsh criticism, expressed in justifiably intense emotional terms, that the burden of education is placed on Indigenous people, the poem provides suggestions on how to ensure that education is decolonized. Following her direction might allow the burden to educate to be transformed into something more equally distributed among the participants in teaching, learning and storytelling and thus produce an alternative form of education that is based on connections and mutual understanding.

In order to foster new "pathways"[47] that do not rely on settler-colonialism, Kwaymullina stresses that there must be "conversations | yarnings | with local

42 Ibid., p. 239.
43 Ibid., p. 240.
44 Ambelin Kwaymullina: Teacher / Decolonizer, p. 317.
45 Ibid.
46 Ibid., p. 318.
47 Ibid., p. 318.

Indigenous peoples | nations"[48] so that a new kind of education can take place. This education is meant to understand racist thinking in order to dismantle it, rectify the distorted knowledge about Indigenous peoples accumulated by colonial scientific endeavors, and uphold the value and significance of non-western "knowledge-ways | law-ways | landholding-ways".[49] The following stanzas showcase the lyrical I's principles "[a]s a teacher" in the form of various rhetorical questions that delineate which teaching practices Kwaymullina promotes. The questions are directed inwards ("Have *I* embedded respectful behaviours";[50] "Is *my* curriculum strength-based";[51] "Is *my* curriculum evidence-based"[52]) but can be seen as directed towards the poems' readers as well, especially since they are likely to be educators within academia, considering the assumed target audience of the academic publication in which Kwaymullina's poem appears. Kwaymullina also provides some answers to these questions, suggesting that a decolonial teaching practice may include valuing "the great resilience | knowledges | cultures | of Indigenous peoples" while also "interrogat[ing] the structures of settler-colonialism".[53] Further, she suggests that decolonial scholarship ought to consider "the voices of Indigenous peoples as the primary sources of our own cultures | laws | histories | systems"[54] to avoid reliance on colonial scholarship, which was previously used to describe and categorize Indigenous cultures. She also advocates for an inclusive version of academia that incorporates not only Western scientific models, but also "Indigenous knowledges | systems | research methodologies".[55] As in 'Message from the Ngurra Palya', Kwaymullina's idea of decolonizing education and academia is not based on separatism that denies all Western-derived systems, but rather on the connections between Western and Indigenous sciences, "the points where two worlds meet"[56] as the space from which a new, decolonial teaching practice may emerge.

Connections and relationships are equally central to Ambelin and Ezekiel Kwaymullina's young adult novel 'Catching Teller Crow', in which it is precisely the connections between the Catching women, which foster learning between generations. Unlike the two poems, the novel depicts yarning directly within the text, and thus allows for stronger conclusions to be formed as it includes yarning both representationally and formally. At first, the novel follows the narratives of Beth Teller and Isobel Catching, two Aboriginal girls who are both dead but still remain tethered to the living world. Beth Teller, together with her father, the white police officer Michael Teller, investigate a fire at a children's home, first considering Catching a witness, only to realize that she and her friend Crow, a girl who disappeared twenty years ago, are more integral to the case than first thought. 'Catching Teller Crow' engages with conceptions of education

48 Ibid.
49 Ibid., p. 319.
50 Ibid., our emphasis.
51 Ibid., p. 320, our emphasis.
52 Ibid., our emphasis.
53 Ibid.
54 Ibid.
55 Ibid., p. 321.
56 Ibid.

by juxtaposing the local and national institutional failings with the successful yarning education which allows Isobel Catching, one of the novel's three female protagonists, to survive and ultimately serve justice for past wrongs to her community. Catching's narrative begins with a road trip initiated by her mother in order to teach her "words that control fire"[57] by telling her stories of her female ancestors and encouraging her to draw strengths and lessons from them. Catching then continues yarning, first by talking to Crow in their shared imprisonment, thus encouraging her to gain courage and eventually take revenge on her tormentors. Catching also extends the conversation to the non-Aboriginal community by talking to Michael Teller. Their shared yarning allows him not only to solve the case, but also to overcome his grief and serve as an instrument of future justice in Australian society.

'Catching Teller Crow' focuses specifically on the way in which a predominantly white police force routinely fails Aboriginal women even in the present-day, but also on the failings of a social system that still overwhelmingly takes Aboriginal children out of their families.[58] The initial case at the heart of the novel centers on a burned down children's home, but the two detective figures – Beth and Michael Teller – soon realize that the case reaches back twenty years into the past and includes a number of missing girls, such as Sarah Blue, the title's 'Crow'. Michael Teller remarks that her file is "thin, for an investigation into a missing kid",[59] which is later confirmed to be due to racist bias within the police force:

> 'If a white girl had gone missing like that, just vanished on her way home from school-' he shook his head in disgust – 'there'd have been an outcry. It would have been on the news, in the papers, something everyone talked about on the street. Instead, the only people speaking for Sarah – her family, her friend – were ignored.'[60]

It is precisely these kinds of injustices that prompt Beth's father to be different, to "pay attention"[61] and to recognize Catching's storytelling as "telling the truth in a different way",[62] even if he does not always interpret it correctly and, at some points of the story, is deliberately excluded from the complete story shared by the three Aboriginal girls.

Aboriginal storytelling takes perhaps its greatest form in Isobel Catching's prose-poetry narration, which avails the Tellers' efforts to uncover the crime at the heart of the novel, but also the greater continued crime of predation on predominantly Aboriginal girls and young women. As Isobel's mother tells her daughter, "[k]nowledge can be a weapon",[63] which, though originally said to

57 Ibid., p. 28.
58 We (cf. Lucas Mattila, Bettina Burger: 'Connections light up across time and space' – Detectives in the Magical Realist Web of Female Relationships in Catching Teller Crow) directly take up these points in another article by addressing how 'Catching Teller Crow' makes use of magical realist and detective fiction conventions to articulate alternatives to and to criticize systems of patriarchal and racial oppression such as police forces and foster homes: two institutions which necessarily share strong historical bonds to the Stolen Generations.
59 Ambelin Kwaymullina, Ezekiel Kwaymullina: Catching Teller Crow, p. 80.
60 Ibid., p. 128.
61 Ibid.
62 Ibid., p. 55.
63 Ibid., p. 47.

encourage Isobel to pursue a more Western-centric school education, ultimately becomes her tool to overcome oppression and exploitation. The knowledge Isobel utilizes is grounded in family and based on the names of her ancestors, whose names she lists in her mind in order to gain strength. It goes beyond a mere comfort through remembrance, however, as Catching takes very concrete lessons from her ancestors' stories. She is told that "all the strengths of the Catching women flow down the family line and into"[64] herself and so she utilizes her great-grandmother's ability to "swim like a fish"[65] in order to save herself after an accident has led to the Catchings' car being trapped in a flash flood.

Aside from providing Catching with practical knowledge to help her survive, the stories of the Catching women also invoke the Stolen Generations multiple times and, in doing so, educate Young Adult readers about this long-lasting and oppressive period of Australian history.

> When your Nanna was little the government took her away from her mum. They had a law back then that let them take Aboriginal kids just because they were Aboriginal …[66]

Throughout Catching's verse narrative, further information about Aboriginal Australian history since the invasion by white settlers are revealed, including the fact that the laws which enabled the removal of Aboriginal children from their families, "lasted for generations"[67] and affected multiple women in the Catching family. While Catching is taught about her family history through her mum's storytelling, which she then shares with Crow and the Tellers, the reader is taught about Australian history more generally, going back as far as the earliest days of colonization.[68] There is not a great amount of detail or factual information, the readers are merely told that "[t]errible things happened to [Trudy Catching]" and that "[a]ll her choices got taken away",[69] but the passage may encourage the Young Adult readership to engage more deeply with Aboriginal Australian history, as it is so closely related to one of the focal characters of the novel.

Even on a formal level, Catching's narrative invokes traditional ways of yarning. It is narrated entirely in the present tense while referring to events that are in the past from the point of view of her listeners, Beth and Michael Teller – in a distinct contrast to Beth's own narrative, which follows more Western conventions of storytelling by employing the narrative past tense. Catching's narrative "is filtered through the memories of the past as the two move simultaneously and at points collide and reveals fragments of the future",[70] as Geia et al. state in a different context. Catching's narrative is further reminiscent of Geia et al.'s findings as "Aboriginal and Torres Strait Island yarns are rarely an individual construct; they carry within them the shared lived experience of their families,

64 Ibid., p. 28.
65 Ibid., p. 29.
66 Ibid., p. 31.
67 Ibid., p. 111.
68 A parallel strategy is employed in Doris Pilkington Garimara's famed 'Follow the Rabbit-Proof Fence' (1996), which similarly invokes a broader, inter- and trans-generational view of history through narrativization to come to terms with the Stolen Generations.
69 Ambelin Kwaymullina, Ezekiel Kwaymullina: Catching Teller Crow, p. 155.
70 Lynore K. Geia, Barbara Hayes, Kim Usher: Yarning/ Aboriginal storytelling, p. 15.

and communities".[71] This mirrors how Catching's narrative not only functions as a record of her own experiences but also as an educational narrative centering the Catching women.

On a more abstract level, 'Catching Teller Crow' also educates non-Aboriginal readers on aspects of Aboriginal Australian epistemologies. In the "Authors' Note" at the end of the novel, the Kwaymullina siblings state that their writing was "informed by two sets of stories that are the inheritance of Aboriginal peoples",[72] that is stories of connection to Country, family, and culture, as well as stories of colonial violence. The novel incorporates both sets of stories and shows how storytelling can be used to both strengthen the aforementioned connections and heal from the violence endured – "as Catching knows, it is stories that get you through and bring you home".[73] In doing so, as we have argued before, the "Catching women […] upon the force of personal histories"[74] invoke the "lost voices and discarded fragments" which continue to be "pushed to the margins of consciousness by imperialism's centralizing cognitive structures".[75] The novel effectively showcases how Aboriginal voices can reclaim their place in history and share Aboriginal perspectives on the world. "It's all in the story",[76] Beth says, referring to how Catching finds the strength to escape her abusers while also encouraging others, such as Crow and Beth herself, to heal. Catching's strength – her special ability, so to speak – is in itself a part of an Aboriginal epistemology as she is able to "walk all the sides of the world",[77] which shows what the Kwaymullinas also state as part of their belief system in their authors' note; that "connections can also reach past one cycle of existence to shape the next"[78] and that a separation between life and death is not as strict as Western thought may suggest. Sofia Ahlberg refers to this experience as readers being released "from categories of knowing that crowd out a sense of wonder"[79] and considers it "a particular form of actively holding space for indeterminacy that allows a reader to become a conduit for new experiences on their own and other cultures".[80] Ahlberg uses the term 'in story' which "is adapted from the Indigenous Australian phrase, 'on Country', as Tyson Yunkaporta describes it involving people in a culturally prescribed protocol that joins stories to beliefs and practices"[81] for the active and conversational engagement with literature that we associate with 'yarning'. In 'Catching Teller Crow', the Kwaymullinas' yarning is present on multiple levels – first as the means by which a new, non-imperial order is brought into being,[82] and then again, more importantly, as a formal feature that educates readers on Aboriginal history and epistemology, even if merely at the middle grade level.

71 Ibid., p. 15.
72 Ambelin Kwaymullina, Ezekiel Kwaymullina: Catching Teller Crow, p. 191.
73 Ibid., p. 192.
74 Lucas Mattila, Bettina Burger: Connections light up across time and space', p. 21.
75 Stephen Siemon: Magic Realism as Postcolonial Discourse, p. 415.
76 Ambelin Kwaymullina, Ezekiel Kwaymullina: Catching Teller Crow, p. 186.
77 Ibid., p. 186.
78 Ibid., p. 191.
79 Sofia Ahlberg: Magic, Literature and Climate Pedagogy in a Time of Ecological Crisis, p. 67.
80 Ibid., p. 67.
81 Ibid., p. 66.
82 Cf. Lucas Mattila, Bettina Burger: Connections light up across time and space', p. 26.

Conclusion

Yarning, we have shown, offers a forward-looking potential for ways of rethinking education in the (neo)imperial context. 'Message from the Ngurra Palya' reminds readers of the importance of yarning in the context of technological development and research, chiming with other works referenced in our article. The poem calls for a hybridized form of advancement in future societies but importantly links that to action that can be taken now, to take Aboriginal scholarship seriously and enter into a dialogue – to begin yarning – with it. 'Teacher/Decolonizer' establishes the necessity of recognizing alternative forms of education on the basis that the lyrical I has been forced to take on the burden of education and necessarily suffer under unpaid (emotional) labor. In the poem, Kwaymullina calls upon academics to come together – to yarn – in order to shatter "settler colonialism".[83] However, the potential of yarning for education is not only tied to research and the academy, but also relevant to younger audiences. The Kwaymullinas' 'Catching Teller Crow' demonstrates how yarning can intersect across form, representation, and on the readerly, extratextual level to argue for and in fact educate with yarning.

While we have only demonstrated one iteration of literary yarning through our analysis of the Kwaymullinas' work, we are certain yarning may take many different literary forms and allow people across the world to learn and rethink some of the dominant global north/western conceptions of our times. As Judy Iseke notes:

> Storytelling is a tried and true pedagogic practice that reflects the epistemologies of Indigenous communities. It may well challenge the very notions of what we think good teaching is and what educational processes we might consider in our educational environments. Storytelling is a process that can be simple for children, with growing complexity for the more deeply knowing, and can be a powerful space for the development of knowledge and skills.[84]

Now more than ever, in a time of environmental crisis, it is especially worth engaging with yarning as an educational practice, due to its unique ties to the specificities of place. Whereas our intervention here is minor in terms of the enormity of problems faced in Australia and in the world, perhaps it may spur discussion and encourage academics to, at the very least, listen to Aboriginal voices when they speak up at panels, and when they invite others to yarn with them. Importantly, to do so is not to simply listen and become passive, but to come together and share knowledge in order to answer the coming issues our world may face.

83 Ambelin Kwaymullina: Teacher/Decolonizer, p. 247.
84 Judy Iseke: Indigenous Storytelling as Research, p. 574.

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