

# Learning and teaching Gumbaynggirr through story: Behind the scenes of professional learning workshops for teachers of an Aboriginal language

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This study unpacks characteristics of the Gumbaynggirr context and aligns them to the rationale, development, and delivery of a set of workshops designed to support community members teaching their language in schools in New South Wales, Australia. In this community adults learn Gumbaynggirr primarily via material made available through historical and linguistic research. Community language revival endeavours have been in progress for some years and are now further expanding into schools. Supporting school teaching of languages being revived is a complex yet under-reported matter, a gap this paper starts to fill. To this end we detail how the strengths of personnel and language resources at the heart of Gumbaynggirr revival efforts allow story to emerge as a focus for the workshops. The project is a collaboration between local community members and university-based colleagues some distance away. The behind-the-scenes planning for the workshops and associated learning and teaching resources are the basis of the research reported here. Methodologically it responds to a community-determined agenda and applies a translational research intent. That is, it shows how tailored input from academic disciplines can maximize language and culture outcomes for teacher development in a revival context.

**1. Background and context** Recent legislation to recognize and protect Aboriginal languages (New South Wales Government 2017) is one of a number of initiatives in recent decades that Aboriginal people have called for and shaped, and that attempt to repair centuries of neglect and maltreatment of their languages. As positive as this policy setting may seem, it is nevertheless considerably distant from on-the-ground practicalities of how language revival programs can be enacted. In the case of translating such a high-level policy into school programs, this involves supporting local community members to perform language teaching tasks confidently in classrooms even where most are not trained teachers, have early levels of language proficiency

themselves, and few teaching resources. There is very little practical research about responding to contextual pressures and opportunities, to best support school programs which take into account the nature and accessibility of existing language materials, community language proficiency, and teaching experience levels. This study therefore documents decisions and processes underpinning a series of professional training workshops designed for the Gumbaynggirr context. It takes a strengths-based approach that harnesses the agency of people working locally for their language.

The project described in this study is a collaboration between (a) Muurrbay Language and Culture Centre (hereafter referred to simply as Muurrbay), a Gumbaynggirr community-run organisation located in the town of Nambucca Heads, (b) a network of schools with Gumbaynggirr programs, and (c) university-based colleagues. It builds on several decades of Gumbaynggirr people's assertion of their linguistic and cultural heritage rights and their previous collaborations with academia, government and non-government organisations.<sup>1</sup>

**1.1 Gumbaynggirr language revival** Gumbaynggirr Country is located along a subtropical stretch of coastal NSW and extends west into the rain-forested hinterland of the Great Dividing Range (Figure 1).<sup>2</sup> Since 1986, Gumbaynggirr people have been working to bring their language back into use again, after it suffered severe interruption to intergenerational transmission as a result of invasion and the long course of colonization (Walsh 2001; Ash et al. 2010; Stebbins, Eira, & Couzens 2018:27–29, 163–206). The revival process has involved gathering knowledge remembered by Elders, researching archival records, and producing a linguistic analysis on the basis of those various sources. This work led to publication of a dictionary and grammar (Morelli 2008; 2015) and a set of traditional narratives (Morelli, Williams, & Walker 2016), coordinated through Muurrbay.

From the late 1990s sufficient research had been accumulated to enable Muurrbay to begin to teach adults. While some had childhood memories of hearing Elders using at least some Gumbaynggirr, by the 1990s adults had not heard the language for a long time (if indeed ever) and needed to learn it afresh, from the start, as a second language. The extensive research for the dictionary and grammar lay the foundation for development of teaching materials, initially for adults and more recently for younger learners. A portion of these materials has been published (Long 2007; Muurrbay Aboriginal Language and Culture Cooperative 2012), and teachers are always look-

<sup>1</sup>The authors thank William Bayldon Public School and Muurrbay Aboriginal Language and Culture Cooperative for supporting and hosting the workshops. Ella Alexander provided administrative support to ensure smooth running and documentation of the workshops. Kitty Laghina volunteered her time and skills during the workshops while also working on her Honours research. Steve Morelli checked all versions of the story texts which formed the basis of the workshops. We could not have done it without him. A Dean's Education Innovation Grant from the University of Sydney School of Education and Social Work enabled Poetsch's and Angelo's involvement in the project and production of resources for the teachers. Associate Professors Alyson Simpson, Lesley Harbon, and Ken Cruickshank provided valuable guidance for our project and paper during 2017–2018. Finally, we'd like to thank the anonymous reviewers and editors who gave feedback which clarified and enriched our paper.

<sup>2</sup>The term *country* – as in *Gumbaynggirr Country* – is commonly used in Australia, especially in varieties of Aboriginal English, to refer to the land associated with specific languages. It is similar to the term *Nation* in the North American context.

ing for new ideas to continue to engage their students. The project we report on in this paper is one part of a larger, long-term fabric of activity.



**Figure 1.** Location of Gumbaynggirr Country

While Muurrbay is recognized as the expert organization for Gumbaynggirr language research and development, it also supports social and cultural events and practices, e.g. dance and art groups, song writing, and musical performances. Further, other organizations in Gumbaynggirr Country, staffed by people who refer to Muurrbay's work, extend the language into their own work. For example, Bularri Muurlay Nyanggan ([bmnac.org.au](http://bmnac.org.au)) offers after-school programs for Aboriginal students, weekly community classes, an annual cultural camp for families and learning from Elders. It has also developed social venture programs such as cultural training for staff of businesses and organizations in the region, and tours and experiences of Gumbaynggirr knowledge of Country. Yarrawarra Cultural Centre ([yarrawarra.com.au](http://yarrawarra.com.au)) has programs in its bushland acreage, e.g. dance performances and instruction, fibrework workshops. It also has a cultural heritage collection and a gallery showcasing local artists. Indigenous Rangers care for Gaagal Wanggaan National Park, take visitors to sites within it, and research and share knowledge of bush foods, medicines, and Gumbaynggirr stories of land ([pmc.gov.au/indigenous-affairs/environment](http://pmc.gov.au/indigenous-affairs/environment)). Forestry NSW works with Aboriginal communities across the state, for places that have historic, scientific, and social value ([forestrycorporation.com.au](http://forestrycorporation.com.au)). In Gumbaynggirr Country this has included bilingual interpretive signage for self-guided walks and tours of significant places. Some of this wide range of activities is available to Aboriginal people only, while others are for Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal local, national, and international visitors. Language revival work is set within and alongside numerous initiatives for Gumbaynggirr land, culture, identity, and knowledge systems.

**1.2 Schools and students in Gumbaynggirr Country** Schools referred to in this paper are affiliated with the ‘Gumbaynggirr Language and Culture Nest’, another current government-supported initiative, in partnership with Aboriginal people in the state. There are also ‘Nests’ for four other Aboriginal languages in NSW. The term ‘Nest’ here does not refer to an immersion crèche/preschool where old people who are full speakers spend time with young children as a means of restoring intergenerational transmission of their heritage language. Instead, the ‘Nests’ in NSW can be characterized as a network of people learning and teaching in educational and community settings. The aim of each ‘Nest’ is to encourage and produce more speakers and teachers, by building a continuous language learning pathway, from preschool through to post-school years (Aboriginal Affairs NSW 2013:18–21).

Presently 20–30 schools in towns throughout Gumbaynggirr Country have language and culture classes, and are therefore a part of the ‘Nest’. Most programs run in primary schools, but also three high schools offer Gumbaynggirr and one of those offers a senior years class. These programs are guided by syllabus documents which have been co-developed with Aboriginal people over several years (Board of Studies NSW 2003; Board of Studies Teaching and Educational Standards NSW 2015). The syllabuses are frameworks only, however, and it is up to local communities to develop their own language-specific teaching materials. Therefore, as with the legislation for Aboriginal languages, the ‘Nest’ and syllabuses are supportive but require considerable local community input and skills development.

The authors are acutely aware that schools as sites for teaching Gumbaynggirr is not a straightforward premise. Fundamentally this is because, of course, people have not traditionally used classrooms and second language (L2) teaching for acquiring their language, and so the domain is culturally foreign. Also, within living memory and until recently, Gumbaynggirr has been excluded from schools. A range of views exists within the community regarding schools as places for language teaching and learning (e.g. Bularri Muurlay Nyanggan Aboriginal Corporation 2017; Katz et al. 2018). Some cite problems such as the restrictions that classroom environments place on teaching approaches, expectations of teaching through literacy rather than oracy, and limits on community control over delivery of the programs. Others cite benefits such as respect for their language through its inclusion in curriculum offerings, increased intercultural understanding between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal students as a result of learning Gumbaynggirr together, and Aboriginal teachers as role models. Most people appreciate various perspectives, and most opinions lie somewhere along the continuum.

Learners of Gumbaynggirr in schools include: Aboriginal students who are Gumbaynggirr or identify with a different Aboriginal group, who speak a variety of English and may or may not have heard some Gumbaynggirr words or expressions in their families; non-Aboriginal students from immigrant family backgrounds, who may or may not speak their heritage languages at home; and students with English-only home backgrounds. This is thus a culturally rich and diverse group of learners. It is learning the language of the land on which they live and learn that unites them.

**2. Our project** This project took place over the course of a school year and was simultaneously a training and research undertaking. The training aspect encompasses a series of three 1–2 day professional learning workshops for Gumbaynggirr teachers, delivered on-country. The research aspect of the project consists of documenting the processes and decisions for the training. These two aspects of the project are interwoven, and they are outlined in §3 below.

**2.1 Research approach** In initial discussions, Muurrbay identified the teachers’ dual needs for language proficiency and language teaching skills, and so providing these became the overarching direction of the project (Poetsch, Jarrett, & Williams (2018) also discuss the on-going nature of these aims). There was also a sense of urgency for this professional development to begin, as many teachers were about to commence work with the ‘Nest’, which was rapidly expanding at the start of the school year. Thus, the project was determined by a community organisation, and the research can be characterised as a *ground-up* endeavour to apply documentation and related research in the service of communities for use-oriented reclamation (Leonard & De Korne 2017a).

The authors pursued what we consider to be a *translational* approach. Translational research has an increasingly valued profile in the health sciences (Rubio et al. 2010; National Health and Medical Research Council 2016). In health contexts it tends to refer to investigations relating to points along a relatively linear research trajectory from pure scientific research to endpoint applications. In the context of our project, a *translational* approach entails drawing on language documentation through ongoing cultural practices and “Western” academic disciplines for a specific community-oriented purpose. Primarily our project grew out of strengths within the community, including Gumbaynggirr storytelling practices and the commitment of adults to learning and teaching their language. At the same time we drew on ideas outside the community, from the fields of linguistics and L2 pedagogy.

Translational research that explicitly investigates how products of documentation can be utilised for a language revival context is uncommon. Yet accessible language materials and effective teaching/learning strategies are inherent requirements of language revival efforts. In our experience, even resources that have been designed for learner audiences, like learner grammars or language guides, do not automatically translate into accessible material for community members. It is the reworking of them aurally, verbally, and face-to-face over time (as Muurrbay has been doing with the community for over 20 years) that unpacks this material so learners can engage and internalise it. This reworking and unpacking of language resources are the kinds of translational processes reported on in this article, because learner-teachers can gain communicative skills through cooperative learning contexts that implement L2 pedagogies and practices based on informed understandings of language research and documentation.

The process of unpacking and reworking the language documentation or description (in this case the grammar, lexicon, and discourse of Gumbaynggirr) through languages pedagogy (in this case a variety of selected L2 learning and teaching strategies)

for their practical use by teachers (in this case Gumbaynggirr people with early stage language and teaching confidence levels) is translational in nature. The researchers posited that our project participants could benefit from pedagogies used by languages teachers – Gumbaynggirr and others – which they were able to experience and take up or not. Ultimately, they could make pedagogical choices from a position of knowing some of the various options and possibilities. Productive educators and their pedagogies are eclectic and dynamic. L2 learning and teaching is not limited to any single path, and the field of languages pedagogy locates itself in a post-method era (Kumaravadivelu 2003; Brown 2007).

In the spirit of translational work, our paper aims to lay bare the *how* and the *why of the how*, that is how learning and teaching Gumbaynggirr through story was made possible for this revival context and why knowledge from relevant disciplines led to and contributed to this pathway for professional learning for this particular grouping of community members for this specific teaching purpose and context at this stage. Our paper reveals the decisions behind selecting story as the bridge between some Gumbaynggirr language research, L2 pedagogy, and the professional workshops for people who want to teach their language in school programs.

We see the translational approach here as attuned in intent, but also distinct in focus from the positionality of decolonising the science of linguistics (e.g. Leonard 2017; Leonard & De Korne 2017b; Stebbins, Eira, & Couzens 2018). Our translational focus represents an attempt to use knowledge of Gumbaynggirr (sourced ultimately from linguistic research) and language teaching (sourced from community practices and L2 pedagogies more generally) via the bridge of storytelling, an ongoing community practice, but augmented for classroom pedagogy. We explore tools that the disciplines of linguistics and languages pedagogy might together offer Gumbaynggirr teachers. Our translational focus and operational scope will hopefully not be seen as disregarding wider political issues of recognition of Indigenous ontologies, knowledges, and practices in the face of relentless colonial and colonising forces.

This paper provides a rich description of multiple considerations underpinning workshops that met a community-determined agenda. Throughout the life of the project, plans and products emerged through numerous conversations amongst collaborators in face-to-face discussions and via various communication channels from a distance. In developing workshop content and materials, the authors were accommodating characteristics and realities of the in-situ context. We were at once researchers of professional training needs and possibilities, suppliers of the training, and resource developers. While many individuals and organisations collaborated on the project, it was the authors who kept track of the decisions that informed the content and materials developed for the workshops. As data for this research, we principally report on our own qualitative participant observations, triangulated with formal and informal feedback from the workshop participants throughout the year, and input from several people who did not directly participate in or present at the workshops but who contributed ideas and support, including Muurrbay staff and school colleagues.

**2.2 Participants** Approximately 20 teachers attended each workshop. They are local Gumbaynggirr community members with much personal knowledge of their community and its history. Their motivations for teaching in school programs include improving educational experiences of younger generations (compared with their own often negative schooling experiences), and strengthening Aboriginal students' understanding of their own identity and non-Aboriginal students' understanding of Gumbaynggirr people, culture, and Country (Laginha & Mahboob 2018).

Of the current 20–30 school programs, only three are taught by registered teachers. The majority are taught by Gumbaynggirr people with the position title of *Aboriginal Language Tutor*. They are employed on a casual basis, and several of them work in more than one school, travelling from one to another for a set number of teaching hours on timetabled days each week.<sup>3</sup> Although they are called *Tutors*, in fact they teach full classes (with the regular class teacher in the room with them). Due to the range of participants' qualifications and experience, they will be referred to collectively more accurately for the remainder of this paper as *teachers/tutors*. Another characteristic of the cohort is that they are in early stages of learning Gumbaynggirr. At the time of this study, weekly TAFE Certificate 1 or 2 classes were available to them in the towns of Macksville, Coffs Harbour, and Grafton,<sup>4</sup> and Muurrbay was preparing to offer its own Certificate 3 course.

In the context of this study, the three authors can be described as participant-observers, as we developed, delivered, and appraised the workshops and drew together the combined expertise of all stakeholders and contributors.

Jarrett grew up in Gumbaynggirr Country, where he has also raised his own family. He has been learning his language through classes offered periodically at Muurrbay since the late 1990s, and makes deliberate efforts to incorporate his language into daily life. Jarrett has a central role in the Gumbaynggirr 'Nest'. He is responsible for maintaining existing school programs and responding to new schools that contact him to establish one. He travels significant distances each week to mentor teachers/tutors individually in their respective schools. Finding community members who are prepared to work in schools poses a significant challenge for Jarrett. Turnover can be high, and demand outstrips supply. Retention of teachers/tutors and building their confidence are important concerns for Jarrett. In addition to school-based work, Jarrett teaches Gumbaynggirr to adults, including the Indigenous Rangers and those in the Certificate courses mentioned above, as well as informal learning groups.

Poetsch has collaborated with Jarrett and Muurrbay on language programs in the past, as part of her varied and on-the-ground work and relationships with Aboriginal community members across NSW since the early 2000s (Poetsch 2014). Angelo and Poetsch's experience span linguistic work, languages teaching, and teacher training

<sup>3</sup>The insecure nature of their employment was raised in a review of the 'Nest' (Katz et al. 2018).

<sup>4</sup>NSW TAFE (Technical and Further Education), the public sector provider of post-secondary vocational education and training, has campuses in cities and towns throughout NSW and has offered Certificates 1, 2, and 3 in Aboriginal languages since 2007. These are designed to develop listening, speaking, reading, and writing skills in the local language alongside cultural knowledge (not teaching skills). They are offered where and when a suitable Aboriginal languages teacher is available, and there are sufficient interested students to make up a class. For more information, see Cipollone (2010).

across the spectrum of language ecologies, learner ages, and learning settings. They are currently both university-based researchers and teachers. Among other things, they lecture in the Master of Indigenous Languages Education coursework program at the University of Sydney (Hobson et al. 2018).

The initial catalyst for the choice of story as a cohesive focus for the training and research reported here lay in Jarrett's own trajectory as a Gumbaynggirr teacher. At earlier stages of his language learning journey, and at the beginning of his language teaching career, he would tell stories in English, peppered with a few Gumbaynggirr words. These days he is able to invent short stories for learners and tell them completely in Gumbaynggirr. His storytelling includes a strong performative element with action, gesture, and dramatic use of voice and props. He had successfully begun to develop and employ a story repertoire as a way of growing his students' listening skills. It was clear to Angelo and Poetsch that these oral texts had the potential to be taught in ways that would increase learners' productive as well as receptive skills in the language, and their ability to understand not just the general storylines but also more details of the plots and language.

With their linguistic, language teaching, teacher training, and resource development backgrounds, Angelo and Poetsch recognized story to have strong potential to upscale productively for less experienced Gumbaynggirr teachers/tutors. As a training strategy, a focus on story ticked many boxes. It reflected Jarrett's language skills and teaching strengths. It harnessed existing language resources and Muurrbay staff expertise. It could be modified for teachers/tutors with varying levels of proficiency. Seen from a strengths-based, language teaching, training, and resource development perspective, story had much to recommend it initially.

**2.3 Previous research** Even though the use of story in language teaching has been investigated extensively, we found that this body of research does not speak straightforwardly to the Gumbaynggirr revival context. We provide a selective review of that literature here, by focussing more narrowly on research about story in L2 teaching, then specifically in Indigenous language contexts.

Much of the existing research refers to languages with large speaker populations and/or comparatively long written traditions (e.g. German, Indonesian, English) where teachers can access a significant body of texts for classroom use, such as picture books, short stories, and novels available in print and multimedia formats. Kirsch (2016) for example demonstrated how stories, as authentic texts in the target language, enhance learners' use of target language vocabulary items and sentence structures. Further, such research has informed publications for pre-service and registered language teacher audiences with practical ideas and activities for teaching through story (e.g. Wajnryb 2003; Browett & Spencer 2006). Another part of the body of research demonstrates how stories can also be tools for developing intercultural skills through engaging with literature in the target language, getting to know the social context of specific texts, genres and modes of storytelling, and teaching through activities which enable students to also reflect on their own culture and society (Morgan 2011). Previous research has shown, then, that students can not only learn new aspects of the



target language as they are exposed to and work with forms and structures in stories, but they can also learn various perspectives and ways of being that are associated with the culture and are embodied in stories and storytelling.

Publications referring specifically to stories as teaching tools in Indigenous communities and endangered languages with relatively small speaker populations are also available. For example, Hinton (2003:90–91) advocates storytelling for contexts where the teacher isn't fluent, and gives an example teaching sequence used by Karuk woman Nancy Steele. Hinton's advice is, "*Have your mentor tell you a story and record it. Ask her to translate it for you*". This illustrates the use of story for language learning where adults and children have shifted towards speaking English, but the community still has older people who are fluent L1 speakers of their traditional language, comfortable with telling entire stories in their language.

Similarly, in an Australian context, a guide for teaching teams (comprised of Elders, community members, and linguists) includes a module on stories for use in schools in Western Australia, a state that has a wide variety of Aboriginal language ecologies (Western Australia Ministry of Education 1992). The story module in this publication suggests activities to enable learners to listen, read, and respond to stories but recommends it as suitable for communities where the language is well known among the adults and where children may be speakers of the language (85–86). The story module in the guide is primarily for language maintenance or endangered language ecologies, and thus does not assume that storytelling is (easily) achievable in a language revival ecology.

Pre-recorded stories told by community Elders were utilized for teaching an endangered language at Jilkminggan community in the Northern Territory in Australia (Richards 1996). These stories formed the foundation for a classroom language teaching program to be delivered by Aboriginal trainee teachers who were speakers of Kriol (an English-lexified contact language) and were developing their own proficiency in their heritage language, Mangarrayi. Nevertheless, the language ecology in this community is far removed from a revival context, as it includes elderly L1 Mangarrayi speakers plus many adult community members with (varying degrees of) receptive and productive language abilities, owing to some experiences with Mangarrayi since birth.

Published stories are increasingly available in Australian Aboriginal languages, including for revival language contexts. Communities have also enthusiastically embraced various information and communication technologies (including Apps) for publishing their stories. See for example the significant work done on stories by the Victorian Aboriginal Corporation for Languages (vaclang.org.au). The traditional stories that have been reclaimed and retold in Noongar by the Wirlomin community in Western Australia are another example of language revival centring on story (Wirlomin Noongar Language and Stories Project n.d.; University of Western Australia Publishing n.d.; Angelo 2014). It is noteworthy for our study that story workshops with adult language learners was a strategy which successfully enabled Wirlomin community participants over the course of a year to develop a one hour

performance of these Noongar stories (Scott, Woods, & Wirlomin Noongar Language Stories Project 2011:30–33).

To accommodate learners' needs, published stories such as these might have an accompanying sound recording, an English translation, and/or a vocabulary list. Indeed, all these learner accommodations are made in the only children's story published as a book in Gumbaynggirr (Shannon & Muurrbay Aboriginal Language and Culture Cooperative 2006). However, stories told in an Aboriginal language, of themselves, are not specifically designed for learning and teaching purposes. Although the publication of stories undeniably marks a milestone for any speech community undertaking language revival, extra pedagogical and curriculum layers are required to transform these resources into engaging and manageable lessons for teachers/tutors and learners alike. Developing processes to upskill and support their delivery by novice language teachers/tutors who are learning their language adds a whole extra research dimension.

To sum up, in contrast to the language revival context in the present study, the literature tends to refer to the use of story for learning and teaching languages with a long written tradition and/or a large body of texts. Further, it tends to assume that the teachers are (a) L1 speakers of their languages and/or have access to Elders who are speakers of their languages and (b) registered teachers who could themselves take a story text and use it as a basis for creating effective language learning activities for their students. Nevertheless, there are the tantalising reports of successful story-based language learning in Indigenous contexts, in both school classroom and adult learning situations. The literature has demonstrated multiple benefits of story for L2 teaching, be it for promoting language acquisition and cultural understandings or as a culturally-embedded language teaching pedagogy. No research, however, equates precisely to a language revival context with largely untrained teachers/tutors delivering an ongoing classroom-based language program, and hence nor to the professional learning workshops we were preparing.

With previous research in mind, operating in a language revival context, through a translational research intent, and in response to unique characteristics of available documentation and skills of the collaborators, it was story that became the cohesive focus of the project reported in this study. The research focus points that came to be addressed are:

1. How can specific aspects of relevant disciplines be best used in the service of teachers/tutors in school programs?
2. How can teachers/tutors be effectively supported with story as a means for both learning and teaching their language?

**2.4 The stories and workshops** Three training workshops, held over one school year, each featured a different story. The first one focused on *Yanggaay* ('Shark'), a story about a man who got into some trouble when he went for an ocean swim but was fortunately assisted by his brother who was standing on the shore. The second one focused on *Waagi* ('Ghost'), a story about two naughty children not listening to

their mother who was telling them to go to bed. They hear noises in the roof and fear that a ghost is there. The third workshop focused on *Gurraam Waanyji* ('Poor Puppy'), a story about an innocent pet dog who was blamed by its family of owners for eating food the mother had cooked. The stories are not traditional narratives and are not, for example, creation stories nor Dreamtime stories. Rather they are newly created and reflect present day life experiences and the local environment. The first story was created by Jarrett. The other two were created collaboratively by Jarrett and Muurrbay staff (Long & Jarrett 2015). They have become a feature of Jarrett's teaching and appeal to a wide range of age groups. All of the stories sparkle with humour and drama, and he tells them with finesse.

At each workshop, participants were introduced to the featured story and learned it themselves. Each story included a mixture of familiar and new vocabulary items and language structures. For each story, the teachers/tutors were introduced to 5–10 teaching strategies.

**3. Findings** The development of the training (the rationale and choices behind the workshop content and associated resources) and the findings of our study (story as a cultural and pedagogical tool, and how to harness it for a language revival context) are interdependent. The authors and workshop participants arrived at shared understandings of the possibilities and parameters for the project, and enacted the priorities outlined below.

**3.1 Continuing oral traditions** The use of story drew on the community's long oral tradition. Much of the current knowledge of Gumbaynggirr comes from recordings of stories and conversations with speakers of earlier generations, notably of Harry Buchanan, made in the 1970s by Australian linguists Diana Eades and Terry Crowley, and of Phillip Shannon made by linguist Gerhardt Laves, a research student from Chicago who worked in Australia 1929–1931 (now published in Morelli, Williams, & Walker 2016). These historical records provide details about Gumbaynggirr storytelling style, including its dramatic quality, summarized by Steve Morelli and Muurrbay staff Dallas Walker (D.W.) and Gary Williams (G.W.) in their research on the Phillip Shannon stories.

Most of the stories are really plays, largely made up of the speech of the characters, therefore we sometimes refer to the stories as story-plays. We expect that Phillip Shannon's stories, being the first recorded, would be closest to traditional story telling methods. Firstly they are entirely in dialogue. [...] It is our belief that the stories would have been acted out by the storyteller. We have experienced this ourselves as children (D.W., G.W.). The oral elements of these stories were told as direct quotes. Gumbaynggirr storytellers preferred dramatic presentation to merely talking about events. (Morelli, Williams, & Walker 2016:21)

The community has an ongoing and strong oral culture today. The art and craft of storytelling has continued through English. The use of the stories in the workshop series was an opportunity for participants to experience this again in Gumbaynggirr.

**3.2 Gumbaynggirr storytelling culture: ‘Keeping it fresh’** At the discourse level, the authors wanted to support Gumbaynggirr oral culture, where traditionally a story would not have been fixed in the manner of printed literature, as Morelli, Williams, & Walker (2016:24) note with respect to historical records of Harry Buchanan’s style.

**Various ways to tell a story.** Evidence that the same story may be told in different ways is found in Buchanan’s repeated telling of one story and in Smythe’s texts. The idea of a story being handed down and told as a set sequence of words is simply not correct. This is shown in the following examples from *How the sea was made* (southern version) in which Quoll is being drowned by the Koala Boys. In one retelling, Buchanan has Quoll calling out: *Muniima ngaya* ‘I shall turn to rock!’ In another version he has Quoll invoking outside spiritual powers: *Muniimba ngaanya* ‘Turn me into rock!’

The workshops kept such a dynamic oral tradition as a live possibility. The workshop materials incorporated variation in storytelling via audio-visual versions of the stories performed by Jarrett which did not match the written texts exactly. These alternative versions were not deliberately planned but emerged spontaneously during preparation of the materials. Observing Jarrett telling stories slightly differently each time, Muurrbay Chief Executive Officer, Bundjalung-Gumbaynggirr man Gary Williams, appraised this style positively to Poetsch thus: “*He always keeps it fresh!*”

At the same time, it was necessary to accommodate realities of the language revival context. So, the teachers/tutors were also provided recordings that exactly matched the written versions, in order to facilitate their learning of the stories and the language. Teachers/tutors new to Gumbaynggirr needed fixed versions, at least in initial stages of learning the stories, but they nevertheless experienced Jarrett’s active storytelling mode too.

**3.3 Contextualized language pedagogy** Stories provide an opportunity to expose learners to the target language holistically. We were aware that beginner teachers/tutors tend to rely heavily on word lists and often spend most of their classes speaking in English. This is not uncommon in programs in revival contexts, where early levels of teacher language proficiency and lack of confidence beyond the word level can cause plateauing of classroom language teaching strategies. By contrast, the stories in this project offered something pedagogically new and linguistically more complex, a way to add depth to the language programs in schools.

**3.4 Listening and speaking skills** Stories provide a ready-made way to focus on listening and speaking skills. While literacy is an important tool for language revival,

community members often report that oral skills are a priority for them. For example, former chairperson of Muurrbay Ken Walker, when interviewed for a documentary, stated:

My dream, my personal dream, is to one day be able to walk anywhere in my Country and hear my people speak my language [...] That's Muurrbay's aims. (Walker in Board of Adult and Community Education NSW 2006)

His point is partly about overcoming the dominance of English in Gumbaynggirr people's lives and Country, and partly about emphasising oral language use. Jarrett sees a role for literacy, but he too prioritizes oracy (Poetsch & Jarrett 2017).

Aboriginal languages like Gumbaynggirr could be strong as oral languages, until English came. We didn't need literacy before, when our languages were here alone. But now we use writing as a way to get the oral back. We need both writing and oral language. But we want to make sure that we are speaking.

In response to this community sentiment, the teaching strategies modelled at each workshop for each story were designed to develop teachers/tutors' communicative abilities, with an emphasis on oral over literacy skills. Pronunciation was also taught in the context of the story texts, and not as an isolated skill.

**3.5 Sustaining production of the target language** Stories offer a means for sustained speaking in the target language. Although strategic use of students' L1 is recognized as effective in some types of language programs (e.g. Cook 2001), for the Gumbaynggirr context and aims of this project, workshop activities and materials modelled use of the target without recourse to English as far as possible. Early in the learning and revival process, it is only via purposefully planned and carefully crafted extended tracts of spoken language that learners encounter more than occasional words or expressions in the target language. In an English-dominant setting, story fosters possibilities for sustained use of Gumbaynggirr and re-establishing domains of usage and interactional styles, amongst people who aspire to gradual re-emergence of a speech community.

**3.6 Grammar embedded in meaningful contexts** Stories are examples of *cultural units* for organising language learning according to social practice, rather than according to structural properties of the language (Leonard 2017). Stories enable learning of forms but in meaningful contexts, rather than in decontextualized grammar lessons. Through stories told exclusively in Gumbaynggirr, teachers/tutors could increase their understanding of how their language works and the accuracy of their own production.

For example, through the *Waagi* ('Ghost') story, learners hear and use various suffixes that distinguish tense (present), aspect (continuous), mood (command), and

dependencies (purpose) on the verb root *guungguwa* ‘sleep’. Examples such as the ones below were presented to the teacher/tutors in interlinear gloss format to illustrate for them the workings of a language, though it is decidedly not how we modelled presentation of materials to their learners in schools. These examples are drawn from different stages in the *Waagi* story.

- (1) a. “*Guungguwa!*”  
 sleep.COMMAND  
 ”Sleep!”
- b. *Miimi-gu jurraang, “Yanaa galbi-gu guungguwaygu”*  
 Mother-ACTOR say.PAST go bed-TO sleep.TO  
 ‘Mum said, “Get to bed to sleep.”’
- c. “*Ngaaja ngiina jurraang guungguwaygu.*”  
 I.ACTOR you tell.PAST sleep.TO  
 “I told you go to sleep.”
- d. *Gamambi guungguway.*  
 Children sleep.PRESENT.CONTINUOUS  
 ‘The children are sleeping.’

**3.7 Language use beyond the classroom** Importantly, stories foster possibilities for interactional use of language, and thus contribute to broader aims of language revival in the community. All three stories included direct speech from characters that could be recycled for everyday interactions. The following examples taken from all three workshop stories illustrate expressions that could be spoken in everyday household contexts (as is the case for the examples above, from the *Waagi* story).

(2)

a.	<i>Ngaya yaam mirlaandiway</i>	I’m hungry!
b.	<i>Wunaa!</i>	Don’t!
c.	<i>Yaamagay!</i>	Here it is!
d.	<i>Biiway ngaaja!</i>	Not me!
e.	<i>Galang! Yi!</i>	Hey, look out!
f.	<i>Bunggi, yilaami gagu!</i>	Dive in [to the water], come on brother!
g.	<i>Garrada garrada!</i>	Hurry up!
h.	<i>Yaam nguunmarr</i>	It’s night time.
i.	<i>Ngaa, ngiinda ngarraangi buraal?</i>	Hey, do you hear a noise?
j.	<i>Waagi yaaban!</i>	A ghost is coming!

The workshop stories are embedded in today's Gumbaynggirr culture and can therefore reveal phrases that are useful for Gumbaynggirr learners which would not be on the radar of non-Gumbaynggirr people. *Waagi yaaban!* 'A ghost is coming!' is one such item. The telling of scary stories is not at all uncommon in stories told by Gumbaynggirr families (and in other Aboriginal communities). The stories contain good candidates for pre-assembled expressions that are useful in conversation beyond classroom contexts. This is consistent with the work of Amery (2009; 2016), which actively promotes the use of well-formed, socially meaningful formulaic utterances for revival contexts.

**3.8 Workshop products** The most fundamental resources that the authors produced through this project were the *Yanggaay* ('Shark') and *Waagi* ('Ghost') stories, which prior to the workshops existed in ephemeral form, told and used by Jarrett only. These needed to be reproduced in formats that would be accessible to the widening circle of teachers/tutors. Capturing the stories involved the authors working closely with Steve Morelli, the linguist who has specialised in Gumbaynggirr for the past 30 years. He assisted the authors by listening to Jarrett's oral tellings and collaborating with him on ways to say things well in Gumbaynggirr. We then produced them in text and audio-visual formats. Different levels of each story were developed, which varied in length and grammatical complexity to cater for the present range and future potential of Gumbaynggirr proficiencies amongst the teachers/tutors (and their students in schools). To accompany the text and audio-visual recordings, Poetsch and Angelo produced image-based versions of the stories using PowerPoint. This format is readily available in schools and enables the stories to be projected in classrooms with electronic white boards and also printed as booklets, with or without text. For this step we used an existing bank of images (Muurrbay Aboriginal Language and Culture Cooperative 2012).

Figure 2 summarizes the details of production of the *Yanggaay* and *Waagi* stories. The *Gurraam Waanyji* ('Poor Puppy') story had already been produced with a user guide by Muurrbay. So our main involvement in value-adding to this resource was to further edit and improve the text with advice from Morelli, to provide teachers/tutors with copies of the revised text, to use it as a way of extending the teachers'/tutors' language proficiency, and to ensure that, as newcomers to the Gumbaynggirr community language revival movement, they were practiced at ways Muurrbay recommended using it.

When the story text versions were settled, the authors developed teaching strategies and classroom materials to model and rehearse with the teachers/tutors. The strategies involved a combination of whole-part-whole activities (i.e. focus on the whole story text, zoom in on a particular target language element, refocus on the whole story text reinforcing that language element), and part-whole-part activities (teach a language element, meet it in the context of the story, revisit and consolidate the target language element). They included a variety of pair/group activities to develop receptive and productive skills, drawn from the field of L2 pedagogy. The final workshop additionally included time dedicated to pronunciation, taught by Morelli.

Figure 2. Production of each story

Workshop	Story	Print-based formats	Audio-visual formats
1	<i>Yanggaay</i>	Level 1, 2, and 3 of the story, with increasing lexical and grammatical complexity.	PowerPoint picture story with Gumbaynggirr text only, and audio files (spoken by Jarrett) embedded into each page. One PowerPoint picture version with no text or audio, for improvised telling of the story.
2	<i>Waagi</i>	Level 1 and 2 of the story, with increasing lexical and grammatical complexity.	Video recording of Jarrett telling the story in Gumbaynggirr only, using props and a set for the characters and events in the story. Gumbaynggirr subtitles only (no English subtitles) accompanied Jarrett's spoken text in the video.
3	<i>Gurraam waanyji</i>	A single version of the story, and a prepared script for a role-play.	Costumes for role-play.

The modelled teaching activities were designed to be delivered in school programs, with the teachers/tutors and their students visiting and revisiting the story in lessons over successive weeks. Each teacher/tutor was provided with electronic copies of all of the text-based and audio-visual materials created, including teaching resources and explicit lesson activity steps for each story.

**3.9 Feedback** Feedback to the authors from teachers/tutors and other collaborators during the year indicated limitations and strengths of the project. Firstly, we have reported in on factors that determined workshop planning and implementation, but did not systematically measure participants' language proficiency before or after each workshop, nor investigate their uptake of the modelled teaching strategies with their own students. More time and financial resources would have enabled a fuller exploration of these factors.

We can, however, summarize participants' self-reported data, which was collected via workshop evaluation forms. All respondents 'agreed' or 'strongly agreed' (on a five-point scale) that they had learned more Gumbaynggirr. In addition, some participants commented on the value of learning the language content of the stories, e.g. new vocabulary items, grammatical structures, and improved pronunciation. All respondents 'agreed' or 'strongly agreed' that they had learned new teaching strategies. In addition, some participants commented that even if they did not use all of



the strategies with their current classes, they could use them in the future with other classes.

There were a small number of misgivings amongst the feedback. Reservations were expressed by two participants about the whole-part-whole teaching strategies advocated and modelled in the workshops. They had doubts about whether their students would be able to understand the stories in Gumbaynggirr unless supported by pre-teaching of significant amounts of vocabulary and structures, and much more use of the students' L1 (i.e. English) in the classroom.

Another participant commented on how a performative approach to teaching through story is not consistent with everyone's teaching style and persona. It is indeed the case that some of the strategies used by Jarrett to scaffold student comprehension rely on dramatic flair which he has in spades. Although the range of resources produced through the workshop series took some account of the need to differentiate on such grounds, more could be done. It would be valuable in the future to explicitly acknowledge different personal teaching styles, confidence levels, and language proficiencies, and practise classroom strategies that match. As the Gumbaynggirr teacher/tutor cohort increases into the future, there will be more collective language teaching experience to input into these endeavours.

The varied feedback outlined above indicates that each participant will take on board strategies that fit their own beliefs about language learning and their emerging identity and skills as a teacher/tutor. Jarrett's role in the 'Nest' enables him to support the teachers'/tutors' ongoing professional development.

The use of story clearly struck a positive chord with workshop participants. At one time or another, various participants expressed fond memories of their grandparents sitting around together, telling funny stories, stories of daily life, and old time stories, 'yarning'.<sup>5</sup> There were reminiscences about the kind of stories specifically told to children, e.g. scary stories about ghosts and monsters as a way to keep children close and safe; cautionary stories to get children to behave well; and stories to convey messages about the importance of siblings looking after each other. As children they would also tell each other stories, e.g. while walking back from the beach together during the day, and scary ones at night. One of the workshop participants, who has a high proficiency level comparable to Jarrett's, commented that she would like to start creating her own stories in Gumbaynggirr about her childhood experiences in memorable places with siblings and peers, growing up in Gumbaynggirr Country.

Finally, while the focus of this project has been on storytelling, we are conscious that a long-term language teaching program and future professional development workshops would also need to include a wide variety of pertinent and favoured topics in Aboriginal language programs, such as knowledge of Country, bush foods and medicines, family, and kinship.

**4. Conclusion** The road of language revival is necessarily a long one, with many possible routes and detours. This study explains how one segment of such a jour-

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<sup>5</sup>*Yarning* is an Australian English term, especially used by speakers of varieties of Aboriginal English, meaning socialising, telling stories, anecdotes, etc. to each other.

ney is being travelled for Gumbaynggirr, and how a series of workshops worked to clear a path for teachers/tutors at a given point in their careers, working in a particular situation. The workshops took place in a setting where a long-term community language and culture revival project is now branching significantly into school programs through the Gumbaynggirr Language and Culture ‘Nest’, an endeavour which is charting new ground.

The project reported in this paper highlights the need for tailored professional development. Creating effective teacher/tutor development in a language revival context can be supported by both linguistic and L2 teaching expertise for harnessing community expertise, unpacking formal linguistic knowledge, imparting language teaching pedagogies, and developing practical resources with and for the community. Story emerged as a powerful pedagogy as it embodies both meaningful language and associated cultural practices. This study illustrates that story has the potential to be a highly productive teaching tool in a language revival context, if carefully planned.

Underlying the workshops in this study is the formal analysis which has been critical especially in the early stages of Gumbaynggirr language revival when historical research and linguistic documentation and reconstruction were essential and the only way forward. Yet, on the ground, as this study reveals, time and effort are also required for applying and translating it for the purposes of L2 learning and teaching. This balance is one that Muurrbay has been working on with respect to adult language learning for many years. It is an ongoing challenge and the subject of this study, but not broadly reflected in the linguistic research literature.

Formal grammars and learners’ guides are written with the intention of describing how languages work, and stories have been published in Aboriginal languages. Our project has demonstrated that assisting community teachers to apply such information requires significant additional work. Rarely would a single person’s worth of professional knowledge be sufficient to the tasks outlined in this project. Partnerships such as the ones embedded in this study, can build community language capacity, grow a pool of accessible resources, add to teaching skills, and provide access to professional networks.

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