Sovereign and pseudo-hosts: The politics of hospitality for negotiating culturally nourishing schools

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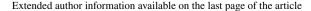
Abstract

Since contact, there has been a foundation of inhospitable interactions between the original sovereign peoples of the Australian continent and Eurpoean arrivals. Despite government policies appearing to shift from assimilative practices to reconciliation processes in the latter half of the 20th Century, ongoing interactions continue to be factious, caught up in discourses of power/knowledge, and, perhaps provocatively, couched primarily in misunderstandings. In the Australian schooling space, while there has been increased attention paid to the academic success of Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander students, and greater inclusion of their families, communities, and cultural practices, non-Indigenous led schools continue to be hamstrung by their epistemic inertia – the cognitive inability to move beyond the fear of getting it wrong, offending, or being labelled racist. In this paper, we argue that the major impediment to ongoing and unresolved discord is concealed in the onto-epistemological foundation of what it means to respect, accept, and work with. To address this, we take up Welcoming to Country practices and Derrida's concept of hospitality to interrogate how more nuanced conceptualisations of reciprocity may be used to move beyond performative acts of reconciliation. The outcome of which may be a reimagining of practices that are relational and responsive for embracing and nourishing Indigenous cultures and languages.

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The problem with a reconciliation agenda in education

Many people working in the education sector, or living and working as part of Indigenous[1] communities in Australia and the Torres Strait, are familiar with, and tired of, the invocation of 'Closing the Gap', and the baggage of deficit discourses that it brings (Bishop et al, 2019; Rudolph, 2016; Whatman & Duncan, 2012). Despite over a decade of ostensible efforts to reduce gaps between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians, metrics related to health, education, and wellbeing demonstrate the inability of the existing system to effect change (Truscott & Malcom, 2010; Turner, 2019). Such data highlights the ongoing consequences of the Australian government's failure to bring Indigenous peoples to the table as shared decision makers (Turner, 2019). The original *Closing the Gap* targets were enacted to serve Western government interests, without sufficient input from, and without *listening* to Indigenous peoples. While Indigenous peoples were consulted and invited to provide recommendations for improvements, engagement was tokenistic and their voices consequentially ignored in favour of governmental agendas. As Morgan (2019) argues, this has been a purposeful process of situational design employed to create a culture of educational failure and [epistemic] "assimilation by subterfuge" (p. 115).

To c*lose the gap* between Indigenous students and their peers, the Australian government and successive state-based education policies and directives have pursued a reconciliation-driven schooling agenda. This agenda posits the healing of past injustices, acknowledgement, respect for the unique identity of sovereign Indigenous peoples, and champions collaborative engagement. The importance of authentic engagement between schools and Indigenous families cannot be overstated. As a recent systematic review of Australian research (Lowe & Galstaun, 2020; Lowe et al., 2020) identified, genuine and purposeful community and school engagement (Auerbach, 2012) was a primary tool to counteract negative and pervasive intergenerational effects of schooling. Yet, reconciliation is operationalised by contemporary settler–colonial education spaces to restructure notions of inclusion and thereby offer themselves "a resolved future, free from both the trauma of a violent colonial past and the incommensurability of Indigenous rights and knowledges" (Lowe et al, 2021a, p. 83). As this happens, there is a tension between recognising the unique identities and sovereignty of Indigenous peoples with an ideological prioritisation for assimilation. The latter is driven by rendering an epistemically corrosive form of Australianness that maintains a colonial-inspired vision of Australian identity (see Education Council, 2019). To (re)establish power within a society where acceptance of, and working with, multicultural peoples and practices has become a central tenet of schooling policies, the Australian education system continues to exercise its authority in service of an assimilatory agenda, all-the-while appearing to champion diversity and inclusion.

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[1] While we understand this nomenclature is tied to socio-cultural debates about meaning and relevance, we have used this term as inclusive practice when referring to Aboriginal peoples and Torres Strait Islanders of the Australian continent and surrounding islands.

Practices of exclusion do not occur by error; they are situated deeply in this post-colonial state's fear of losing control. In Australia, they are used to dispel the case for Indigenous educational sovereignty. One way in which this emerges is via the incoherent arrangement of Indigenous knowledge within the curriculum (Lowe & Galstaun, 2020; Lowe et al., 2020). While appearing to accommodate the desires of Indigenous peoples, the *othered* positioning of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander histories and cultures as non-mandatory, cross-cultural priority and contextual *perspectives* serves a primary pedagogical purpose of upholding the primacy of the subject discipline curriculum in which it is placed (Australian Curriculum Assessment and Reporting Authority (ACARA, 2021)). As Lowe and Galstaun (2020) argue, this has created a situation where Indigenous knowledges are 'seen' throughout the curriculum, prompting criticism from radical conservatives (e.g. Latham, 2020), yet in "atomised ways that makes them incoherent, epistemologically de-natured" and consequently, effectively absent (p. 94). The relegation of cultural practices and knowledges to the periphery represents not only ongoing assimilation but a fallacy of cultural inclusion (Weuffen & Willis, 2021).

Schools sit within complex social discourses of culture where competing local cultures represent microcosms of migrant experiences. Often championed under a multicultural inclusion banner (Hage, 2002) the politics of Australian schooling functions as a charade of 'social cohesion' (Education Council, 2019). Within this regime, education of Australian students is unequivocally linked to unquestioned assertions that Western, Imperialistic, and Christian ontological roots summatively define 'Australian-ness', and that Indigenous identity is to be tolerated so long as it remains socio-culturally and politically subsumed under the umbrella of national social cohesion. As Lynch et.al., (2011) argue, hospitality – as an expression of socio-cultural cohesion – is a form of social and economic exchange that can be enacted as a "means of controlling the 'other' or stranger" (p. 5); i.e. those who are seen by degrees to be alien. In the Australian education space, where reconciliation is championed but monoculturalism epitomised, schools face an added responsibility of enculturating students into a nebulous notion of citizenship, in this case, *Australianness* that represents settler–colonialist Imperialist ideologies (Phillips & Lampert, 2012). The dissonance occurring within schooling spaces is what Bourdieu (1985) describes as "the symbolic struggle over the production of common sense", a struggle in which the state is "the holder of the monopoly of legitimate symbolic violence" (pp. 731–732).

In this paper, we take up the lexicon of hospitality to provocate that education has been provided to Indigenous peoples on a conditional basis, constructed to ensure compliance, and where cultural practices – such as reciprocity – are appropriated by the state to normalise the Westernisation of Indigenous rituals and through them, the Indigenous mind (Haig-Brown, 2010). Interrogation of hospitality practices within education not only exposes the subtlety of assimilative interpersonal relations but offers up an alternative way of thinking about culturally nourishing schooling practices for Indigenous peoples', authentic engagement, and success.

Can schools be hospitable spaces for Indigenous peoples?

The failure of purported 'responsive' policies, such as *Closing the Gap* and *Reconciliation*, manifests via the assumed Western Imperliast settler authority of what is legitimate, what is of priority, and ultimately, the ideological framework through which schooling occurs. In this section, we turn first to view the enactments of *Welcome to Country* practices of Australian Indigenous peoples and marry this with Derrida's (2000) notion of hospitality to (re)conceptualise the operationalisation of Australian contemporary schooling, with its conditional, and largely tokenistic *inclusion* of relations with Indigenous peoples, and their histories and cultures as a series of pedagogically disjointed and epistemically unrelated 'perspectives' in the Australian curriculum. Through the lens of hospitality, we interrogate whether the challenge of authentic and responsive engagement with Indigenous peoples, their histories and cultures, is underpinned by a foundational misinterpretation of cross-cultural interactions and/or a purposeful strategy of assimilation, often presented as reconciliation. The need is urgent, given that "discussions about what can be done – socially, ethically, and politically – to break the status quo that perpetuates oppression, inequality, and racism in many parts of the world" (Zembylas, 2021, p. 768) are still occurring in contemporary socio-cultural contexts. Across international contexts, these include the removal of statues celebrating racist figureheads (Kwoba et al., 2018), and the Black Lives Matters movement (Watson et al., 2020).

Derrida's notion of hospitality has been taken up by a range of scholars internationally to explain the interactional nature of schooling, religion, politics, citizenship, and human rights (Lynch et al., 2011; Morgan, 2019). Reflecting Foucault's (1977) theorisation of power/knowledge to illuminate the world views and thought process of those in a perceived position of power, the lexicon of hospitality enables examination of the interplay between the privileged and the *other*. The binary dichotomy of duty and responsibility between *host* and *guest* is an interactional process of welcoming, giving, receiving, and reciprocity. As Lynch et al. (2011) argue:

> Hospitality, as a metaphor, thus links separate but related worlds of meaning, conjuring up certain assumptions, fantasies, threats and promises in order to make sense of the lived experiences and tangible quality of human relations … to convey certain meanings of belonging and comfort, protection and inclusion, difference and strangeness, violence and exclusion within everyday encounters between people, objects, and places (p. 12).

In the general sense, a guest is welcomed into the host's place so long as they agree to, and abide by, the rules set by the host. In return, the host gives the guest temporary access to defined areas of their place, cares for their physical wellbeing, and invites interpersonal stimulus. When little to no consideration is taken to meeting the needs of individual guests, conditional hospitality exists. The ideological engagement and practical interactions of conditional hospitality play out in Australian education spaces by the hosts – schools – designating the content

to be studied, the spaces in which learning will be undertaken, the times during which socialisation and learning occur, and enforcement of codes relating to behavioural conduct and social interactions (to name a few). In such spaces, Westernised settler colonialism is endorsed each day in the foundational structures of schools which informs a "collective cognitive dissonance when it comes to the question of acknowledging the invasion and brutality that characterized Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal contact" (Morgan, 2019, p. 126). For example, while community and cultural programmes, such as Clontarf,[2] form a critical component of schooling for many Aboriginal students, knowledge of their functioning or value is often lacking among peers and/or staff within the school more broadly. Such lack of knowledge supports "the settler–colonial architecture of the school [and gives rise to] performative acts of cultural inclusion" (Weuffen et al., 2022). Ideologies of education that underpin such performative acts have been curated to be inhospitable to Indigenous students, families, and communities, thus, ensuring a treacherous navigation and assertion of their own identities and cultures. This in turn has informed cross-cultural engagement where foundational settler ideologies are enacted to undermine, marginalise, and/or silence Indigenous peoples.

The colonised sovereign host

Since contact between Indigenous peoples on the Australian continent and European explorer–settlers, there has been an ontological misunderstanding of hospitality, giving, receiving, and reciprocity. As passed down through sovereign oral stories, and recounted by Clendinnen (2005), when British explorers landed, Indigenous peoples invited them onto Country through millennia-old ceremonial practices. While there are numerous accounts in the historical archives suggesting cultural misunderstandings of these intricate practices of hospitality, these very same records indicate that the British settlers understood enough to record that these interactions had the "appearance of courteous hospitality" (Clendinnen, 2005, p. 263). These were intimate cultural engagements between Elders/custodians of Country and the settler–visitor, whose Dreaming had little or no connection, knowledge, or relationship to the land. Their passage through Country could only be undertaken via safe enactment of the protocols of acknowledging the Dreaming of those whose lands they traversed. The enactment of re-inscribing these relationships and responsibilities of hospitality that drew on Dreaming tied to Country, fashioned the interactions between the host and guest in and on Country and laid down the moral and ethical foundations of the reciprocal engagement that we now know as a *Welcome to Country*.

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[2] The Clontarf Foundation commenced in 2000 with a single academy located at the Clontarf Aboriginal College in Waterford, WA. The programme catered for 25 students and was operated by two staff members, including founder and current CEO Gerard Neesham. More than 20 years on, the Foundation operates 138 academies in WA, NT, QLD, NSW, VIC and SA, supports more than 10,000 participants and employs over 520 dedicated staff members.

Fig. 1 The Australian Sovereign host: Colonial guest relations over time

Welcome to Country ceremonies are more than physical exchanges of interactions between the Custodians of the lands and those visiting. They are a proclamation of reciprocal onto-epistemological processes tied deeply to the nature of existence and working with the essence of the place and the beings who inhabit it. A Welcome to Country is a declaration that the visitor is granted protection and bestowed hospitality so long as they acknowledge and respect lores and laws (Dudgeon & Bray, 2019; Bradley, 2012; Rose, 2003). Kennedy (2018) suggests that the Welcome to Country is a verbal contract, where an invitation is met with recognition, and where space is made for building relationships formed on respect, responsibility, and reciprocity. Despite the historical records demonstrating clearly that British arrivals understood the hospitality afforded to them, evidence-based expositions highlight that they either tokenistically accepted, or refused to learn, respect, and work within the implicit conditions that bound their entry onto Country. This is because, "they wanted the land for their colony-building enterprise, and they took it" (Clendinnen, 2005, p. 263; Wolfe, 2006). Exposure of this purposeful subterfuge though has not negated arguments that the British misunderstood the conditions of hospitality and assumed no nation-state occupied or had sovereignty over the land—*terra nullius*—a convenient concoction of colonial legal doctrine that become the backbone of the settler–coloniser's relations with Indigenous Australians (Cahir et al., 2019). This was, and is used, in conjunction with the assertion that the British did not consider Indigenous peoples human (Smith, 2021)—an existing ideology present in the constitution of the Australian nation—let alone consider them equal, on the basis that they were not able to identify a *chief*[3] to negotiate with. This impacted cultural interactions and provided the basis for "controlling the *other* or *stranger*" (Lynch et al., 2011, p. 5). Such complexities have led to fractious and unstable relations in the schooling space, where uncertainty and hyper-attentiveness to cultural sensitivity is used as an excuse for limited action, all-the-while maintaining conditional hospitality enabled by the power/knowledge structures of settler colonialism.

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[3] *Chief* is a title given by European settler–colonists to the spokesperson of a First Nations community who has the authority to speak, make decisions, and functionally oversee governance of their people. In Australia, there were/are no *chiefs* because Indigenous cultures are predicated on the basis of egalitarianism and that certain people – Elders – have a collective responsibility for making decisions that affect the rest of the community.

Given that Indigenous sovereignty was never ceded (see Bishop, 2022), Indigenous peoples are to be assumed the rightful *hosts* of the non-Indigenous education system (see Fig. 1). Yet, over a century of colonial expansion and invasion, the settler has usurped Indigenous peoples' *host* rights via acts of conquest, invasion, biological warfare, genocide, law, and policy. Through these systematic, unrelenting, and unsubstantiated claims predicated on anthropological illegal notion of *terra nullius*, settler–colonialists have established themselves as the presumptive hosts of the Australian land mass and its governance, effectively attempting to usurp Indigenous sovereignty. The colonial hegemony underpinning these acts created the socio-political conditions by which the settler–colonist *guest* took possession of the rights of *host,* the effects of which saw the rights of the *sovereign Indigenous hosts* dispossessed without status (Goodall, 1996). Becoming the *settler host* has not been a single act. As indicated in Fig. 1, it has been a subtle coercive process occurring across all levels of relational interaction between the state and Indigenous peoples, including where cultural (mis)appropriation occurs, and where approved practices of culture become, in many instances, a pantomime of black and white interactions in Australia (Whitehouse et al., 2014). Furthermore, as Lynch et al., (2011) point out, "the fact that hospitality shares its linguistic roots with words like hostility, hostage, and enemy should not be overlooked" (p. 5).

In recent times, non-Indigenous Australians have sought to replicate relational practices via 'invitations' to local Elders to enact an 'Acknowledgement' or a 'Welcome to Country' as a means of conjuring acts of cultural respect and inclusion while maintaining their dominion as the *colonial host*. 'Invitations' to Elders that enact ancient moral and ethical conventions of 'Welcoming' or 'Acknowledging Country' for important events are afforded under the broader policy umbrella of multicultural education and Reconciliation (Pelizzon & Kennedy, 2012). The Australian government and schooling institutions have taken upon themselves the position of *host* on Indigenous lands, conducting or inviting 'Welcomes' and 'Acknowledgements' as if they are the rightful sovereign heirs of Aboriginal Country and, therefore, the mediators of social control. The adoption of these conventions, and others such as occasional celebrations of 'cultural' food, arts and holidays, allows schools and institutions to claim cultural inclusivity, without having to materially threaten their own position of power as *pseudo-hosts*. Yunkaporta and Shillingsworth (2020) state that "culture is not what your hands touch—it is what moves your hands" (p. 3), suggesting that a deeper ontological shift will be required for schools to be truly culturally responsive in their relational positioning to those who still claim sovereign status as Indigenous peoples.

Presented from a self-authorised dominant ideology, the Australian education system positions itself as the *host* of the Indigenous *guest* in the fractured lexicon of hospitality. The education delivered to Indigenous students continues to be largely mediated through rigamarole where the usurping host enacts their assumed rights through a deficit lens to the superior western imperialist standard. Teachers and students continue to be caught up in the systemic, onto-epistemological oscillations of assimilatory policy and practices. This is, of course, not news to Indigenous Australians and their allies. As Morgan (2019) notes, "little has changed in Aboriginal education over the years, with most experiences for Aboriginal students being one

where they are treated as 'guests' in a foreign, Eurocentric, and at times hostile environment" (p. 113). In this paradigm, Indigenous students are invited to participate in education so long as they adhere to the system's rules (i.e., required to attend classes in designated spaces, wear a prescribed uniform, use English as the primary means for communication, and undertake learning activities aligned to Western-designed curriculum). The failure to acknowledge, respect, and adopt relational and nourishing practices of inclusion that bind Indigenous perspectives and knowledge into the fabric of education creates antagonistic schooling environments where students continue to face unsafe situations, experience marginalisation, and have their epistemic sovereignty ignored.

Antagonistic school environments

Recent scholarship has identified the pervasiveness of systemic racism in school policies and practices (Moodie et al., 2019), the broader level of relational intolerance within the Australian political body (Dunn & Nelson, 2011), and its cumulative impact on Indigenous students (Bishop et al, 2019; Lowe et al., 2014). The conditional hospitality of schooling is highlighted clearly as Indigenous students are caught in the power/knowledge relations that position them, their cultural knowledge, and languages in the dichotomy of being the *legitimate-illegitimate* Australian. On one hand, Indigenous peoples are acknowledged and recognised as the Traditional Custodians of the lands and waters, hence the legitimate First Australians. Yet, on the other, by the continuing actioning of the fiction of *terra nulius* via governance, inherited wealth, land ownership, and political representation, Indigenous peoples are positioned as illegitimate. Furthermore, in social discourses, they are amalgamated / positioned peripherally and/or silenced within the larger metanarrative of Australia's multicultural society, as one of many cultures that sit under the dominant Eurocentric, Christian, English, white Australian identity. This further solidifies their positioning as illegitimate Australians. Within this neo-colonial framing, the Australian education system, through state mandates, has assumed the authority of the *host,* inviting Indigenous students and their families to participate in schooling – *on* the proviso *of* conditional hospitality. While we use the term *invitation* as a means of explaining the interaction between the host and guest within a hospitality framework, in reality, Indigenous students and families are penalised, and deficit discourses (re)inforced, if they do not attend schooling that is *mandated* for all Australians. In this sense, the *invitation* afforded is offered on the condition that to be successful, Indigenous students need to conform to the assimilative processes of schooling in ways that trivialise Indigenous ways of knowing, being, and doing through largely meaningless and ephemeral programmes.

Underpinning the privileging/othering dichotomy present within conditional hospitality is the notion of power and control. The exercise of this power defines the conditions of relational interactions, the access to resources and supports, and notions of schooling success—and controls their enforcement via the power to exclude and punish (Guenther et al., 2019). Moodie (2018) argues that interactional process of power, race, and Indigenous presence is framed within the neo-colonial

project of legitimising itself through race capital to underpin public enactment of policies. These policies are essentially an operationalisation of conditional hospitality towards Indigenous populations where challenges to settler–colonial histories are ignored or replaced by the frippery of 'culture' to write notions of sovereignty out of colonial memory (Furo, 2018). The recent rhetoric around *tolerance* and *inclusivity*, while trying to demonstrate acceptance, highlights the conditionality afforded to the *othered* student. Within schooling, this emerges in relationships where "non-Aboriginal people create and administer the terms and conditions that regulate Aboriginal involvement and participation in education systems" (Morgan, 2019, p. 121). The ability of the settler host to define who, and under what conditions, others can enter the space, or be excluded, is inherent to conditional hospitality and marginalising certain identities and cultures. Yet, as Latunde (2016) says, the transformational power of hospitality emerges when it is intrinsically embedded in authentic relationships, which can be "trusting and [through] moral bonds recognise diversity and resist dominant power [structures]" (p. 6). As the coloniser enforces these interactional rules upon Indigenous people*,* they do so from the precarious place of perceived security from impending dangers; as they alone sought to define the parameters of welcoming, giving, and receiving, of which they are familiar, and the threat of the exercise of power to enforce them. When mobilised within the processes of schooling, conditional hospitality for, and of, Indigenous students, knowledge, and voices, is inextricably tied to control and power. Evidence of 'white fragility'[4] comes to the surface within schools when this 'power' is threatened by acts of student and community resistance (Morgan, 2019).

Empirical research based on teachers' attempts to implement culturally and relationally responsive practices has highlighted a level of epistemic inertia – often shrouded in claims of ignorance or fear. We argue that underpinning such epistemic inertia is a depth of indifference or understanding about the histories and cultures of Australian Indigenous peoples (Baynes, 2016). While initial teacher education has taken up the requirement of mandating courses to improve teacher confidence and support the inclusion of Indigenous identity within school cultures, as well as strategies to support student success, these are foundationally predicated on the *performance of* inclusion rather than genuine inclusion (Pelizzon & Kennedy, 2012). This is evidenced by objectification of such things as flags, murals, or the renaming of public spaces / buildings. Such practices are superficial, tokenistic, a placebo for genuine engagement, and situated in negative discursive power/knowledge relations that exist between schools and Indigenous communities (Pointer & Drake, 2021). This often results in repetitious misinterpretations of contemporary reconciliation practices, which become harmful and insensitive habits of institutionalised cultural inclusion. Yet, when reconciliation-focused efforts are authentically operationalised via strong reciprocal relations that celebrate Indigenous onto-epistemologies, changing these destructive dynamics becomes imaginable and possible (Lowe et al., 2019).

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[4] Defensive vocabulary and behaviour exhibited by a non-Indigenous person when conceptions of racism are questioned / challenged.

Towards a regime of tolerance and hospitality

While schools operate under a settler–colonial ideological framework, Western notions of *inclusion, respect*, and *reconciliation* need to be interrogated to consider how they may become receptive to Indigenous peoples' insights into systems of government that were initially designed to erase them (Whatman & Duncan, 2012). Deeper recognition of schools' responsibility is critical because, as Ruitenberg (2018) maintains, "it is clear that hospitality cannot be said to have taken place if [non-Indigenous] educators fail to see, interrogate, and change the degree to which education spaces are marked by whiteness" (p.258). Bretherton (2004) argues that relations based on tolerance and interrogation of knowledge and schooling structures are key factor to ensuring equitable participation and learning outcomes. Essentially, the central proposition is that recognition, acceptance, and *working with difference* is essential if schools are to foster genuinely inclusive interpersonal relations that underpin a level of genuine hospitableness to the aspirations of Indigenous peoples. This proposition invites a radical rethink of how Indigenous peoples are positioned as *the other,* or a guest, especially when constructed using well-worn policy tropes of inclusion and tolerance (Rigney & Hattam, 2018). While Derrida's critique assisted with understanding the inherent conceptual challenge of conditional hospitality to the outsider, Zembylas' (2011, 2019) more recent work has identified the constitutional realities of the state's hospitality practices. Such practices manifest in the construction of policies that position the student as *guest* to the vagaries of schooling. In particular the willingness to establish rules of relational hospitality instead of the hyper-focus of tethering acceptance based on antagonistic tolerance. Zembylas (2011, 2019) identified a conceptual weaknesses of Derrida's conditional hospitality when the constructs of tolerance and inclusion and practices centred on defending the political and social status quo emerge. Here, policies of inclusion, or even acknowledgement of prior occupancy, are grounded in the symbolic spaces of co-existence, where visible displays of inclusion are seen as magnanimous demonstrations of the guest's gift of political inclusion and acceptance. These caveats, which have their policy lineage in violent acts of dispossession, frame the states' hospitality to the Indigenous guest only to a point where the Indigenous person's presence does not cause discomfort to the state, the school, or the non-Indigenous student and their family (Zembylas, 2011). Within such framing, there is little wonder why many Indigenous students are resistant to the claims that their presence is accepted by the school.

To improve Indigenous students' experience of education, a fundamental shift is required to settler–colonial notions of inclusion. A fundamental rethinking and operationalisation of interpersonal relations—which is a foundational underpinning of Indigenous onto-epistemologies —, addressing issues of structural racism, and responsive and authentic inclusion of Indigenous perspectives is needed by the Australian schooling system and teaching practices (Guenther et al., 2017). Furthermore, in a step towards this space, Lowe and Galstaun (2020) call for a future of culturally nourishing schools by suggesting that Indigenous students need to flourish and thrive at school, rather than just survive. A culturally nourishing schooling

environment, focused on success, requires a fundamental shift in valuing others. Research (see, for example, Yosso, 2005; Lowe et al., 2021b) demonstrates that relational approaches to student engagement, such as pedagogies that centre strength-based cultural wealth in ways that nourish the success of *othered* students, is critical. As Freire (1970) argues, "only as they [the other] discover themselves to be 'hosts' of the oppressor can they contribute to the midwifery of their liberation pedagogy" (p. 48). In a study focused on exploring relations between able-bodied teachers and dis/abled students, Anderson (2010) observed that when schools worked actively to overcome ignorance and fear via informed and reflective interpersonal relations, the classroom environment was seen as welcoming, accepting, and adaptive to all student needs. In a similar vein, the body of Indigenous educational research (Lowe et al., 2021c) indicates that schools still need to understand the importance of students' access to quality language and cultural programmes that bind them relationally to Elders and Country. We argue that the establishment of quality programmes that celebrate and centralise Indigenous onto-epistemologies changes the relational dynamic between the school and community and shifts the conditions of hospitality towards an ethic of collaboration and interpersonal engagement.

We maintain that a pivot to thinking about Australia's socio-cultural relations between descendants of Sovereign Indigenous peoples, British colonisers, migrants, and refugees via a *host–guest* (re)positioning offers up a rethinking of success for Indigenous students through a culturally nourishing educational framework. Mobilisation of a hospitality framework moves from the logic of tolerance and inclusion to effective practices centred in interpersonal and relational connectedness (Zembylas, 2019). Reimagining educational practices that are more responsive to Indigenous students, cultures, and languages operationalises the power held by schools and positions them at the forefront of affecting new relational practices. Lowe et al. (2021b) argue that to address power/knowledge imbalances, mentored professional development programmes focused on affecting epistemic change via deeper understandings of success-based and culturally nourishing approaches to engaging and responding to Indigenous students are critical to "providing a high-quality education [system] that is responsive to Aboriginal communities" (p. 471).

Where to from here?

Through our discussion of the lexicon of hospitality in education, we argue that a more tangible narrative by which to interrogate and envision culturally nourishing schooling practices for Indigenous students emerges. Because sovereign Indigenous peoples of the Australian mainland and Torres Strait Islands are now inextricably intertwined within non-Indigenous governance practices, we suggest that there is an urgency for schools and Indigenous communities to reconceptualise interpersonal relations that foundationally centralise Indigenous onto-epistemologies. Rather than relationships based on bounded notions of tolerance and institutional respect, they must embrace an ethic of unconditional hospitality. One that perceives and responds to intolerant acts of neo-colonial policymaking that obscure the everyday acts of

schooling and underpin the epistemic assimilation and obliteration of Indigenous ontological distinctiveness (Zembylas, 2011).

The challenging question posed by many non-Indigenous led schools is how to operationalise genuine reconciliation in ways that facilitate culturally nourishing learning without being tokenistic—how to avoid reinforcing settler practices of inclusion via cultural and epistemic marginalisation. How may teachers speak back to schooling that is designed to enforce social cohesion through ill-defined notions of 'Australianness' (ACARA, 2021) and legitimise the inexorable assimilative policies and practices masked by uncritical *good intentions* (Bishop et al., 2019; Whatman & Duncan, 2012)? To this, we acknowledge that every initiative has a phase of 'becoming'. Sometimes things start at a superficial level, but they must start somewhere. If schools consider the need to create perfect and fully formed programmes at the outset which will be a panacea for all their existing deficiencies, they will likely be thwarted by their own perfectionism, caught up in the policy and practice bailiwick of neo-colonial governments, and come undone by the subsequent disappointment of outcomes. Sometimes, gestures that may be labelled tokenistic can be powerful signifiers of a commitment to the acts of being hospitable. But, they become tokens when further action is not taken, and the product is considered the endpoint. The beginning point isn't as important as actually *beginning.*

The beginning point for any work conducted by individual schools within a settler–colonial education system is to acknowledge the parasitic nature of the *settler host.* We do not suggest that the way to foster more culturally nourishing learning spaces for Indigenous students, and by extension, all students, is for either to assume authority. Rather, we argue that the way forward is a two-way engagement where power and responsibility are shared, where giving and receiving is predicated upon welcoming and acknowledging, and where people "can learn to engage with and learn from one another" (Lynch et al., 2021, p. 11). However, this requires an acceptance that interpersonal relations are the foundation of hospitality, and that working with others via a relational hospitality framework must "recognise and enable contestation and conflict to occur" (Lynch et al., 2011, p. 11), address difference, and work towards mutually agreeable resolutions. Discourses of paternalism, tolerance and pity, must be reorientated to centre the morality and ethics of interpersonal relations. Embracing a hospitality ethic facilitates proactive action and social relations that moves towards creating more culturally nourishing environments "whereby people may be both hosts and guest simultaneously" (Lynch et al., 2011, p. 10).

If schools are to become more hospitable to Indigenous students' participation and success, then a sustained shared responsibility for positional reflexivity is required. As a beginning point, schools, and the staff employed within, need to recognise where deficits in their own knowledge and skills exist and be dedicated to doing better. To address power/knowledge relations, there is a need for deeper understanding and commitment to reciprocal interactions and dedication to facilitating meaningful relations and programmes. Through the enactment of hospitality, non-Indigenous education leaders and Indigenous peoples are provided with a tangible framework by which to negotiate and work through settler–colonial ideological barriers for students' engagement and success, such as cultural mismatches and misunderstandings, a history of Aboriginal exclusion and/or racism from education

institutions, and discriminatory practices such as low expectations. This task is, admittedly, difficult, but the degree of difficulty, or complexity, should not be used as an excuse for inaction. If schools are ever to become hospitable places for Indigenous students and communities, tackling the difficult, complex, and/or uncomfortable is essential. One key to moving forward resides in schools and teachers breaking long-established habits of uninformed, tokenistic, and deficit-based inclusion practices (Zembylas, 2021) in order to understand the pseudo host nature of the Australian education system. The other is that non-Indigenous people must acknowledge the need to undertake an epistemic transference about how they think and act in their role as *host* to Indigenous students. This requires a paradigm shift, a moving of discourses, where the *settler host* acknowledges and accepts their original position as the *guest on Indigenous lands.* It requires interaction as necessitated by the demands of Indigenous reciprocity (Yunkaporta & Shillingsworth, 2020) and the responsivities of their role within the lexicon of hospitality. Maintaining movement towards deeper and more nuanced interpersonal relations with community through the integration of culture is one way to legitimatise, foreground, celebrate, and include local Indigenous onto-epistemologies.

Declarations

Conflict of interest The authors of this publication are free from conflict of interest to any company, patent, and/or funding source.

Ethical approval This is no ethics required for this paper as no empirical data was gathered and/or used.

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