Binung Ma Na Du: Cultural Stories and living histories on Wakka Wakka Country

AIATSIS Indigenous Research Exchange project 2022-2024

Report February 14th 2024

Ethics approval number: EO316-20220215

Acknowledgement of Country

The Binung Ma Na Du team acknowledges the Traditional Owners and their custodianship of the lands on which we meet.

We pay our respects to their Ancestors and their descendants, who continue cultural and spiritual connections to Country.

We recognise their valuable contributions to Australian and global society.

The Brisbane River pattern from *A Guidance Through Time* by Casey Coolwell and Kyra Mancktelow.

Thank you and acknowledgement

The project team acknowledges and pays respect to the traditional owners of the lands where these stories were developed, written and filmed, the Wakka Wakka people.

We recognise the strengths and diversities of all involved in the project.

We thank our partners in the project, the Cherbourg Shire Council, Murgon SHS and Cherbourg SS.

We thank every contributor to this project.

Project team

A/Prof Marnee Shay, UQ (Chief Investigator)

Prof Grace Sarra, QUT (Chief Investigator)

Mr Fred Cobbo, Adjunct UQ/QLD Health (Chief Investigator)

Prof Margaret Kettle, CQU (Chief Investigator)

Iris-Jean Blow, UQ (Local Research Assistant)

Arlene Langton, UQ (Local Research Assistant)

Image: (left to right) Prof Margaret Kettle, Mr Fred Cobbo, A/Prof Marnee Shay, Prof Grace Sarra

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Research background

Indigenous language revitalisation is increasingly recognised as vital in strengthening culture and identity in Indigenous communities (McIvor, Napoleon, & Dickie, 2009). Often, when schools embark on an Indigenous language program, there are many barriers to overcome, as the process of colonisation prevented Indigenous people from speaking their language, much less keeping the language alive (Lowe & Giacon, 2019).

One barrier identified by the partners of the Binung Ma Na Du project in the communities of Cherbourg and Murgon was the need for contemporary curriculum resources to support language teaching in the community. While there are growing resources for schools to teach Indigenous Studies curriculum, schools often rely upon Elders and other community members to share their knowledge of local histories and cultures. This project aimed to understand how schools and local Indigenous communities can collaborate through co-design to develop highly localised curriculum resources, particularly in implementing local Indigenous language curricula.

Project aims

1) Document the process and experiences of Indigenous peoples and school staff in developing local curriculum resources using a co-design approach to develop stories to embed local Indigenous knowledges and perspectives into school curriculum (research data)

2) Develop a series of digital and written stories from Wakka Wakka Country to enhance the Wakka Wakka language teaching program (research output and impact)

Research outputs:

Video stories, podcasts, written stories

2 bilingual books (one from Cherbourg SS and one from Murgon SHS)

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Why explore codesign as a process?

- Gives Indigenous peoples and communities a voice

- Should enable shared-decision making

- Attends to power dynamics

- Developing shared expectations and outcomes

- Reciprocity and giving back to communities

(Blomkamp, 2018; Butler et al. 2022; Dillon, 2021)

Image: Wakka Wakka yarning circle

Methodology

The project honours ethical Indigenous research principles such as reciprocity (AIATSIS, 2020) by ensuring an equal emphasis on the development of outcomes for the community and schools, as well as undertaking research to understand how schools and communities can use codesign as a process to develop local curriculum resources.

The project was completed through undertaking the following phases:

Phase one: storytelling workshops in community, primary school and high school with Uncle Boori Monty Pryor and Prof Anita Heiss

Phase two: development of video stories, written stories, podcasts and bilingual books (with Wakka Wakka school language and culture studies teachers at primary school and high school)

Phase three: undertaking interviews or collaborative yarning with community members and key school staff. Finalise films and website development.

Phase four: launching the project in the community showcasing outcomes and findings from the project

Photo: Prof Anita Heiss storytelling workshop

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Research design

This project is underpinned by Rigney's Indigenist principles of privileging Indigenous voices, resistance as the emancipatory imperative and political integrity (Rigney, 1999). The data includes perspectives from non-indigenous school leaders and practitioners, but the emphasis is on ensuring Indigenous voices are central to understanding how codesign may enable collaborative relationships between schools and communities to develop local curriculum resources.

Collaborating yarning methodology (CYM) was used as the primary method for data collection (Shay, 2019). CYM utilized yarning as an Indigenous method for understanding perspectives on codesign and developing storyboards of textual responses with Indigenous participants. Some participants chose to be audio-recorded in place of a storyboard. However, CYM was the primary approach used.

Analysis of the data was undertaken inductively using qualitative thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006). These were coded initially from each question and then themed as patterns emerged across the data.
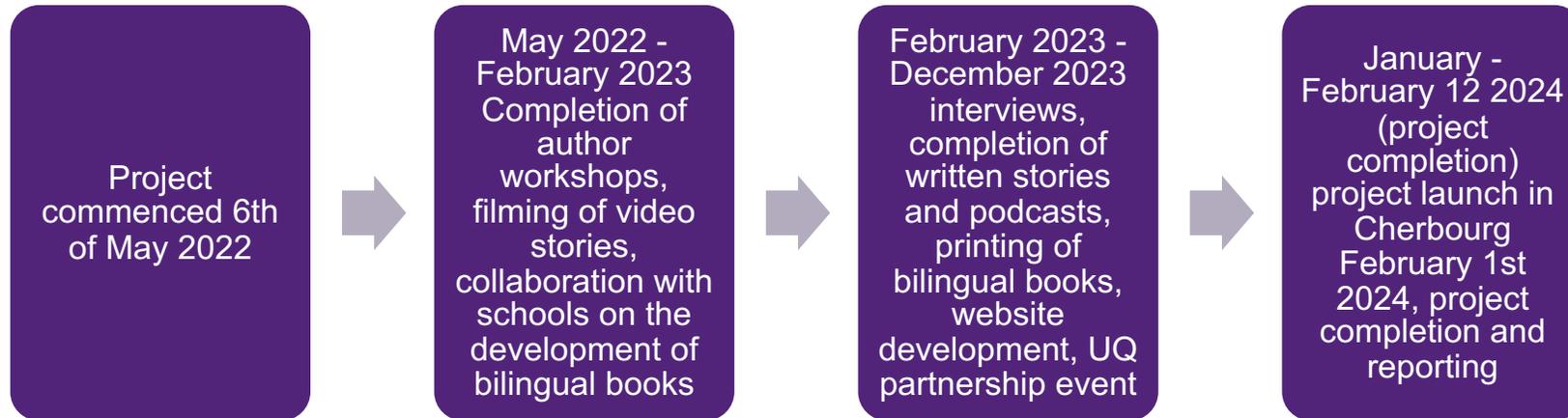
Project timelines

| Project commenced 6th of May 2022 | → | May 2022 - February 2023 Completion of author workshops, filming of video stories, collaboration with schools on the development of bilingual books | → | February 2023 - December 2023 interviews, completion of written stories and podcasts, printing of bilingual books, website development, UQ partnership event | → | January - February 12 2024 (project completion) project launch in Cherbourg February 1st 2024, project completion and reporting |

Image: Filming Tyronne Murray

Participants

Image: Uncle Boori Monty Pryor delivering storytelling workshops

A total of 287 people participated in this project.

Participation includes:

- contributing a video, podcast, bilingual book, or written story (34)

- participating in collaborative yarning about codesigning local curriculum resources (28)

Approximately 200 Cherbourg State School and Murgon State High School students participated in storytelling workshops with Prof Anita Heiss and Uncle Boori Monty Pryor.

Approximately 25 adults from the Cherbourg community participated in storytelling workshops with Prof Anita Heiss and Uncle Boori Monty Pryor

Results

A total of 28 adults participated in collaborative yarning about codesigning local curriculum resources to support Indigenous language revitalisation.

22 participants were Indigenous peoples from Cherbourg or Murgon and 6 non-indigenous participants undertake various roles at the local primary school and high school.

Participants

21%

79%

■ Indigenous ■ non-Indigenous

Results

The data that explored the question 'what does good codesign look like in developing local curriculum resources for schools' showed a cohesive picture of conceptions of successful codesign as a process.

Almost a third of participants clearly articulated that good codesign is, in essence, about community voices and input as the foundation. Other key lessons from this data include the importance of bringing the 'right' people together, ensuring Elders are part of the process and bringing both parties together in developing a codesign project.

Three participants also emphasised the importance of methodology with a range of issues raised by further participants, such as the importance of yarning, bringing people together, clear and transparent communication and creating culturally safe spaces.

"Communities and schools work better together when we acknowledge and value the knowledge holders such has Elders, parents, and community"

(Sarah, community member and parent).

* All names with direct quotes are pseudonyms to protect the anonymity of participants.

What is the importance of having local curriculum resources informed by local knowledges?

100% of participants responded that having local curriculum resources is important.

Although every participant felt it was important, the reasons provided about why differed. These included:

- Important for reconciliation
- It is critical that students relate to the content
- Elevating community voices is important
- Ensuring Indigenous Studies resources are not generic and specific to place is critical
- Having local content in curriculum empowers communities
- Presence of local perspectives supports identity building and affirming of Indigenous students

One school practitioner commented that *"local resources don't age"*.

What are the important language features needed to support Aboriginal language revitalisation?

Participants provided a breadth of perspectives about important language features in supporting Aboriginal language revitalisation.

The most prevalent concept discussed was the need for visual learning and seeing Wakka Wakka language across all areas of schools and communities.

Further language learning suggestions included:
- Immersion in language (everyday use)
- Connecting to tribal lores
- Elder involvement
- Non-indigenous teachers being culturally capable
- Speaking the language e.g. appropriate words & pronunciation
- Inclusion of Aboriginal Studies
- Audio recordings
- Wakka Wakka dictionary
- Naming blocks (at the school) in Wakka Wakka
- Cultural books

What participants want policy makers to know about codesigning local curriculum resources to support Aboriginal language revitalisation

Responses to this question were so diverse that they could not be coded and themed. Responses included:

It's the responsibility of the school to get the community involved

Listening is vital

Ensure local relevance to policy approaches

Flexibility is needed

Community is the starting point

Learning 'our way'

Community voices are strong

Succession planning is needed for sustainability

One size does not fit all

Yarn with locals

Elder inclusion critical

Planning and actions with timeframes is important

Follow cultural protocols

Locals are experts

Value Indigenous staff and the knowledge they bring

Engage all community members, not just traditional owners

THE UNIVERSITY OF QUEENSLAND
AUSTRALIA

QUT

CQUniversity AUSTRALIA

How Indigenous students benefit from local perspectives in curriculum resources

100% of participants expressed that is highly beneficial to Indigenous students that local perspectives are embedded in cultural curricula.

The most prevailing theme to emerge from this data was the connection to local perspectives and its ability to affirm and strengthen the identities of Indigenous students, with 42% of participants making strong connections between these two factors.

Further to strengthening identity, another theme to emerge was building the confidence of Indigenous students and seeing success through curriculum resources that privilege local voices and knowledge.

Other aspects of benefits include the incorporation of role models through highlighting local people, empowering Indigenous students, building cultural safety, creating a sense of belonging at school and preventing suicide and youth justice interactions.

"it's about making our children feel proud - not of just of themselves, but of their people, of their ancestors. And that language they use is part of those old peoples. And... and I always say to them, "You take that language of the old people, you're gonna start acting like them old people". And I think our young people start to do that".

(Uncle Edward, Wakka Wakka Elder)

What are the benefits to non-indigenous students of learning local indigenous perspectives?

100% of all participants expressed that there are clear benefits for non-indigenous students in learning local knowledge, histories, languages and perspectives.

The two themes to emerge from data exploring this topic were understanding cultural differences and building relationships. Several participants felt that it was also empowering for non-indigenous students to develop an authentic understanding of history and culture where they live and a deeper understanding of how to contribute to reconciliation.

"It's when I was growing up in high school I did German and it was no use to me as an adult.

If they learn Wakka Wakka they learn the language of this place first and they need to learn the language of this place and we need to learn they're language to come together and live in harmony.

We all call Australia home and we need to all respect that".

(Lavell, Community member and parent)

Project impact and outputs

This project provided tangible benefits to the communities of Cherbourg and Murgon. Benefits include:

- Employment and research training of three local Indigenous researchers

- Provision of storytelling workshops by prominent Indigenous authors Uncle Boori Monty Pryor and Professor Anita Heiss

- Two launch events showcasing strengths and achievements from the project (One at the Ration Shed in Cherbourg one at The University of Queensland, funded by UQ)

- The completion of digital stories (videos, podcasts and written stories) all openly available on the Cherbourg Council Website. These stories are owned by the storytellers and governed by the community longer term

- Publication of two bilingual books to be used in classroom teaching of Wakka Wakka language and Indigenous Studies curriculum

- Findings will support the schools to continue collaborating with local communities and developing further local curriculum resources

Artist: Elaine Chambers

Binung Ma Na Du:
Cultural Stories and Living Histories on Wakka Wakka Country

Binung Ma Na Du: Cultural Stories and Living Histories on Wakka Wakka Country brings together schools and Indigenous communities to create local curriculum resources that support Aboriginal language revitalisation programs.

Through this project, a series of digital and written stories from Wakka Wakka Country have been created to enhance language and Indigenous Studies curriculums in local schools, and support cultural resurgence and resilience across the community. These stories showcase the strengths and rich histories, cultures and knowledges of Wakka Wakka people and mob from the Cherbourg and Murgon communities in Queensland.

The team worked closely with Wakka Wakka teachers at Cherbourg State School and Murgon State High School to develop Wakka Wakka language teaching resources. This collaboration also resulted in the publication of two bilingual books written in English/Aboriginal English and Wakka Wakka.

The project also explores how the process of co-design with Indigenous communities can better support schools and educators to teach Indigenous languages and cultures, as well as develop cultural curriculum that reflects local and contemporary Indigenous knowledges.

All stories remain the property of the community after the project has finished to ensure the community has resources to support cultural resilience and intellectual ownership for generations to come.

Research team: Associate Professor Marnee Shay (The University of Queensland), Professor Grace Sarra (Queensland University of Technology), Cr Fred Cobbo (The University of Queensland), Professor Margaret Kettle (Central Queensland University), Iris-Jean Blow (The University of Queensland) and Arlene Langton (The University of Queensland).

Research partners: Cherbourg Aboriginal Shire Council, Cherbourg State School, and Murgon State High School.
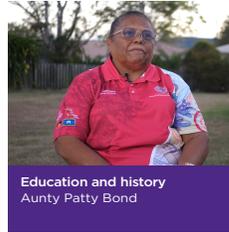

Artist: Elaine Chambers

Digital Stories

Keeping language alive
Uncle Eric Law

Education and history
Aunty Patty Bond

Growing up in Cherbourg — History and strength
Uncle Arnold Murray

Healing and community
Aunty Sylvia Bond

Working in education
Uncle Frank Malone

Binung Ma Na Du at Murgon State High School
Uncle Fred Cobbo and (now retired) Principal Simon Cotton

CGEN — Young women, identity and dance
Mia Sandow, Sam Cobbo, Nelly Bond, Belinda Crowley (not pictured)

Being a proud Wakka Wakka business owner
Tyrone Murray

Telling stories our way through Indigenous media
Arlene Langton

Leadership and role models
Leighton Costello

Growing up strong in Cherbourg
Kimberly Barrett

The power of our ancestors and keeping identity strong
Iris-Jean Blow

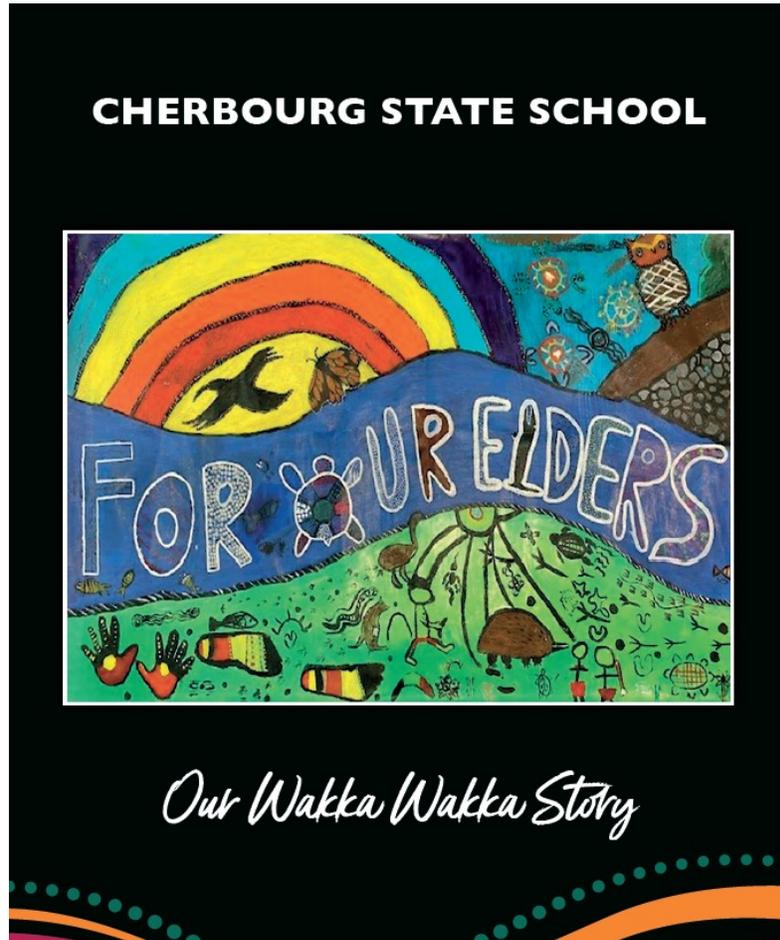**The power of storytelling**
Aunty Venus Rabbitt

Watch our digital stories

We acknowledge and pay respect to the traditional owners of the lands where these stories were developed, written and filmed, and the Wakka Wakka people. We thank every contributor to this project.

Bilingual book: Cherbourg State School

Bilingual book: Murgon State High School
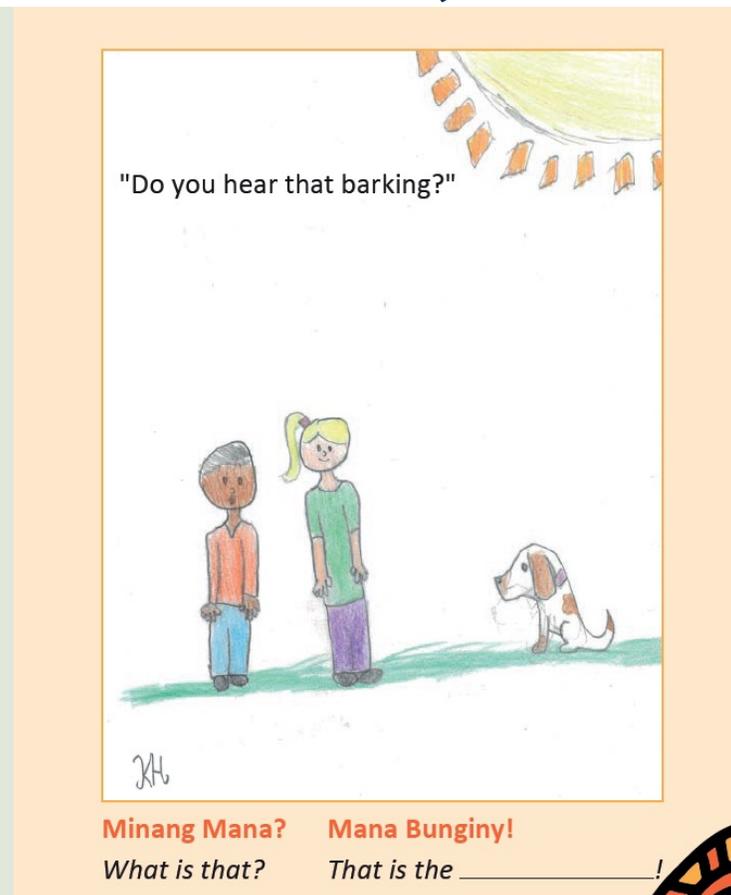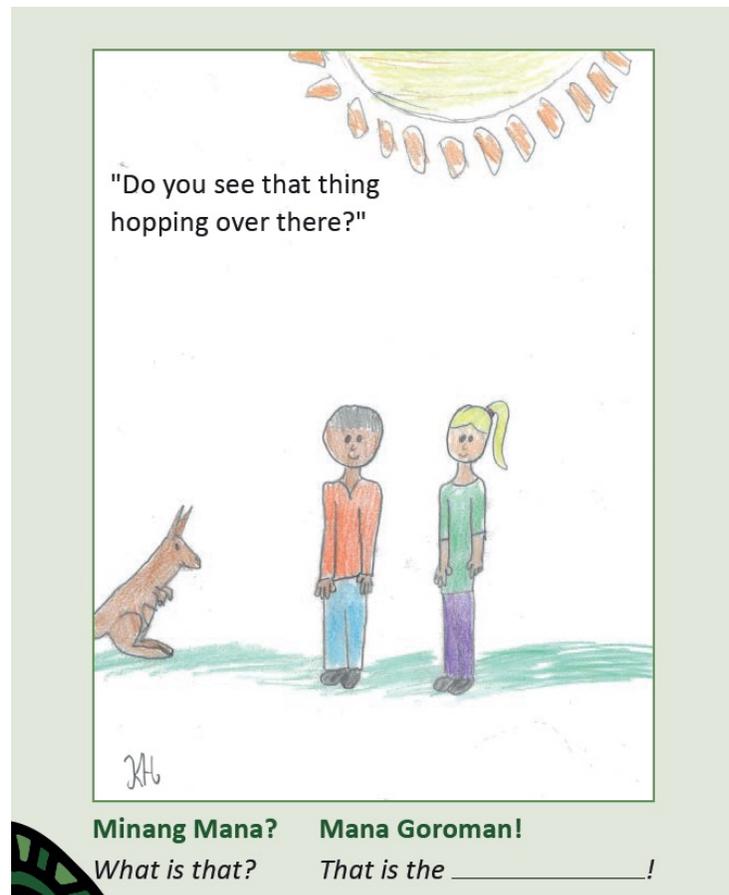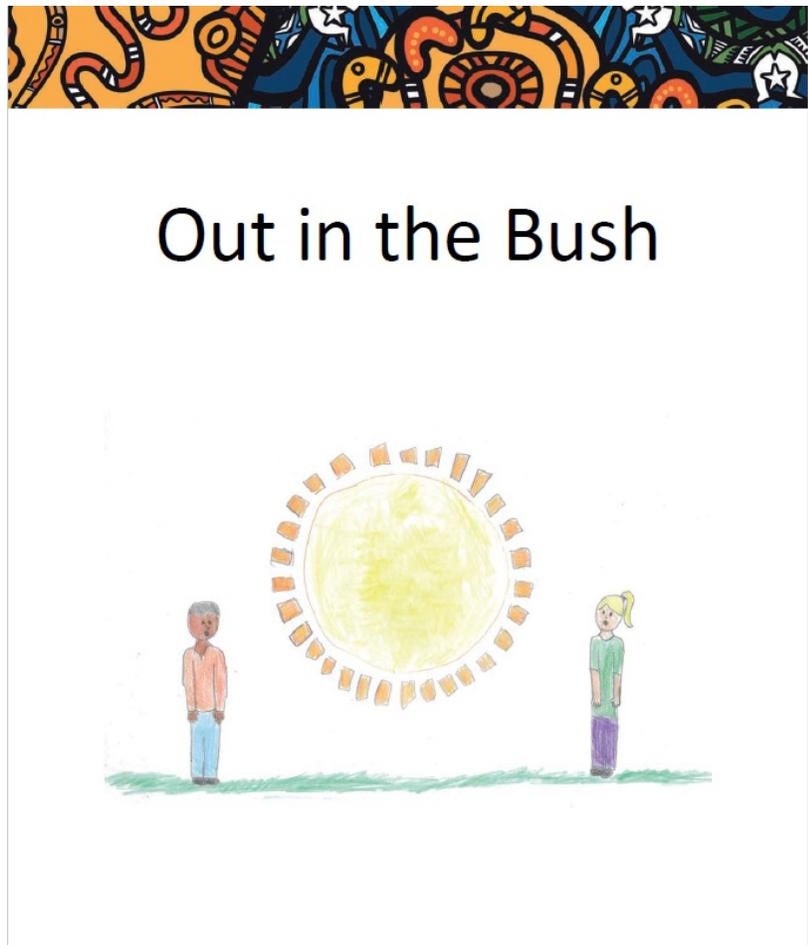
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Contact

For further information please contact A/Prof Marnee Shay at m.shay@uq.edu.au