

Utilising Indigenous and non-Indigenous Methodologies in Occupational Therapy Research with Families in Australia: Reflections from Practice

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With thanks to **University of the Sunshine Coast** and **Southern Cross University**, who supported these projects through internal research grants



Acknowledgment of Country

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Background

The oldest continuing culture in the world (Study Australia, 2025)

Ongoing health inequities

as a result of colonisation and oppressive systems that continue to re-inscribe racism (Reid et al., 2019),

Elevated risk of:

- *chronic health conditions
- *lower life expectancy

compared with Australia's non-Indigenous population (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2021; Gardiner, 2021).

Western and Indigenous Research Paradigms are different:

Knowledge is considered relational in an Indigenous paradigm,

And

shared rather than individually owned (Pidgeon & Riley, 2021; Wilson et al., 2020).

Why Indigenous Methodologies Matter in Research



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- **They reposition Indigenous Peoples as knowledge holders, not research subjects**
Indigenous methodologies are grounded in Indigenous Ways of Knowing, Being and Doing, recognising lived experience, culture, Country and relationality as legitimate sources of evidence.
- **They strengthen cultural safety and therapeutic relevance**
Research designed with communities produces interventions that are culturally responsive, contextually grounded, and more likely to support meaningful participation, wellbeing and occupation.
- **They improve research quality, rigour and impact**
Community-led questions generate richer data, deeper insight; more effective translation into practice.
- **They challenge deficit and pathology-based frameworks**
Indigenous methodologies privilege strengths, resilience, identity and connection: reframing health and disability through holistic and relational worldviews.
- **They align with global human rights and decolonising health systems**
Supporting Indigenous self-determination in research aligns with UNDRIP and global commitments to equity, inclusion and social justice.

Aim of this presentation

To explore how Indigenous and non-Indigenous methodologies can be used side by side in occupational therapy research

Implications for occupational therapy research practice.

Overview of Studies

Appetite 203 (2024) 107676



Contents lists available at ScienceDirect

Appetite

journal homepage: www.elsevier.com/locate/appet



The Caregiver Perspectives Project:

Exploring the Perspectives of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Caregivers around early education and support in Australia

Bernie, C., Menzel, K., and Walker, S.

(Manuscript under development)

‘Handing down of beautiful knowledge’: Yarning with workers about feeding practices and mealtimes in Australian First Nations families

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Received: 5 May 2025 | Accepted: 9 September 2025

DOI: 10.1111/1440-1630.70049

REVIEW ARTICLE



‘Ask someone, what is their Dreaming?’: Exploring occupational performance coaching with service providers supporting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families

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Abstract

Introduction: Culturally responsive health services have been highlighted as

Indigenous Methodology: Research Yarning

A collaborative process involving the researchers and participants contributing to the Yarn meaningfully (Atkinson et al., 2021).

Purposeful sharing of stories
(Walker et al., 2014, Kennedy et al., 2022)

A flexible process and can be adapted to a specific community (Dean, 2010)

Other Yarning types:
Social Yarning or Collaborative Yarning
(Bessarab & Ng'andu, 2010)

Cross-cultural Yarning
(Coff & Lampert, 2019)

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Co-design

The meaningful involvement of key stakeholders and service end-users

Shaping research priorities

Shaping research questions

Informing research design and guiding its delivery



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CRICOS: 01595D | TEQSA PRV12082



Slattery, P., Saeri, A. K., & Bragge, P. (2020)

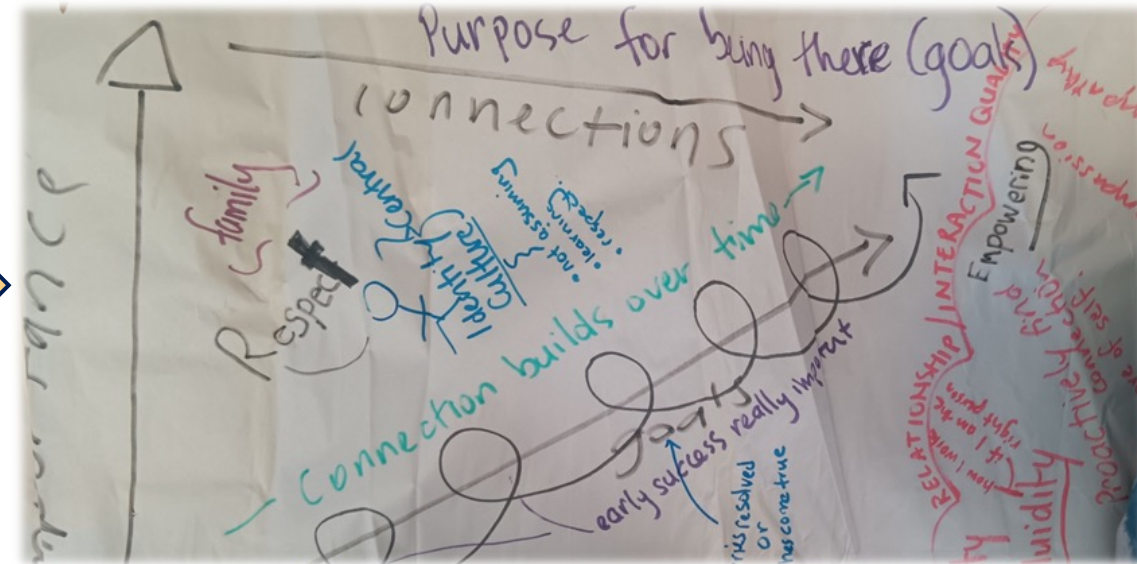


Visual participatory mapping

A collaborative visual method

participants **create** and **share** drawings or maps to express knowledge, values, and relationships

Example of visual mapping

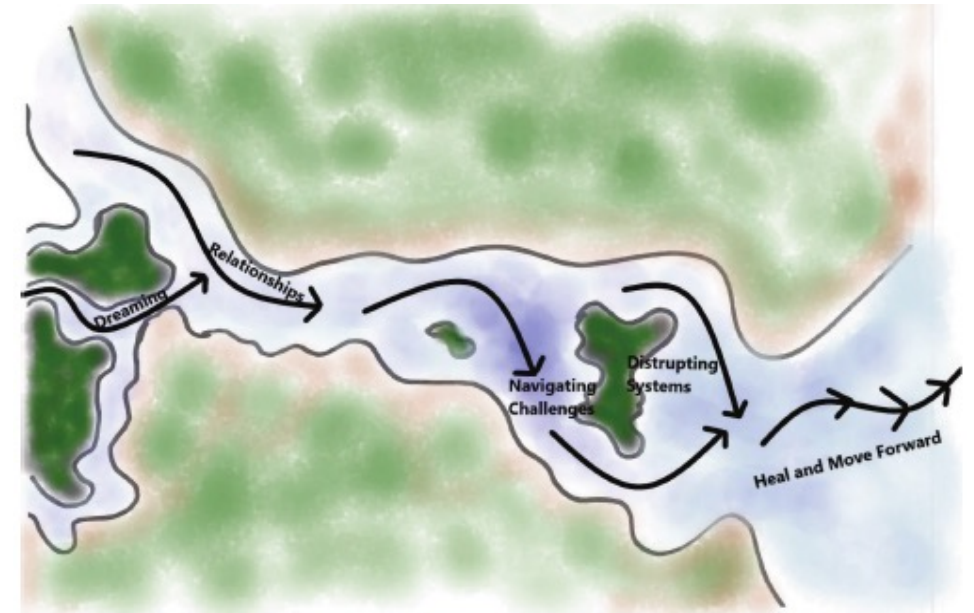


supports
collective reflection and negotiation of
meaning

Thought Ritual Approach vs Western Data Analysis Methods...

Thought Ritual:

An Indigenous data analysis method that uses relational, narrative, and cultural practices to collectively interpret data through patterns, connections, and transformation (Yunkaporta & Moodie, 2021).



VS

Reflexive Thematic Analysis
(Braun and Clarke, 2022)

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Conclusions:

- Indigenous and Western methods can coexist; critical that Western methods do not overshadow Indigenous methods that have existed for millennia and should be prioritised in research involving Indigenous stakeholders and/or service users
- Codesign and Reflexivity is non-negotiable; to be considered at all research stages
- Regionality matters in research design and methods, yet there are more broad Indigenous methods that are gaining momentum in the literature – still no one-size-fits-all approach
- Indigenous data analysis often not linear; at odds with sequential analysis and presentation of data that is typically observed in Western science
- Occupational therapists should be open and have a responsibility to learning, reading and speaking with others. OK to give it a go and learn

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