

## Thesis abstract

### Prioritising Blak voices: representing Indigenous perspectives in NSW English classrooms

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This thesis explores how English teachers in New South Wales represent Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples to their students through the texts they select in Year 7–10 classrooms, and how they approach the teaching of these texts. This investigation is urgent due to the ways in which both the Australian Curriculum and New South Wales Syllabus documents attempt to promote Indigenous perspectives, histories, and cultures across all key learning areas. It is important that all students learn about Indigenous peoples, histories, and cultures through the prioritisation of Indigenous voices. Furthermore, it is a necessity that Indigenous students can see themselves mirrored in the texts they are taught in the English classroom. Non-Indigenous students must also experience texts that enable them to “see” into Indigenous worlds and develop an understanding of Indigenous worlds.

The study utilises a foundational conceptualisation of Sims-Bishop’s “Mirrors and Windows” to build a new conceptual framework to understand Indigenous representation through texts. Through the consideration of texts as mirrors and windows, Indigenous-authored texts have the power to mirror identities for Indigenous students and provide a window for non-Indigenous students to see into a world different from their own. It is also crucial to understand

the ways texts are utilised in the classroom to represent Indigenous peoples to all students. This two-part research methodology prioritises Indigenous research paradigms, including Indigenous Standpoint and the Cultural Interface. This methodology includes a mixed-method questionnaire (Phase 1) and two-part conversations with a range of English teachers (Phase 2). These yarning conversations are crafted into individual Profiles of Practice as a way to reframe the understanding of participants as cases, thus humanising their role in the research process. It also prioritises the role of stories and storying as a relational and cultural practice that can be embedded within research contexts.

It is important to understand this educational landscape of representational practice as it is non-Indigenous teachers who are largely responsible for representing Indigenous voices to their students. This thesis addresses the professional concerns of authenticity, positionality, and fear that educators experience when embedding Indigenous perspectives. This ultimately leaves us with the theoretical challenge of speaking on behalf of others, and therefore, we are able to interrogate the pervasiveness of the settler colonial project that permeates education. Through this, educational stakeholders can be supported to influence and develop their practice by prioritising

Blak voices. Ultimately, this research investigation offers a set of recommendations and a framework to guide teachers and educational stakeholders to understand the act of representation for their educational practice.

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