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ARTICLE

Kaartdijin Bidi (Learning Journey): Place-based Cultural Regeneration at University

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Abstract
Imagine being in a university that functions in a place-based culturally regenerative way. In this concept paper, the authors bring together theory, practice, and experience, in the service of transforming universities towards place-based cultural regeneration. At present, Australian universities operate using an economic philosophy of neoliberal corporatism characterised by hierarchical management strategies, competitive tendencies, patriarchal values, and discourse characterised by bifurcation or binary thinking. These features illustrate a worldview that is entangled with the meta crises of our times such as climate change, species loss, hatred/intolerance, and unfathomable violence. The authors consider ways of moving towards a place-based, Indigenous-informed, practical, relational way of learning, being and knowing differently. The paper tentatively assembles a local, place-based culturally regenerative worldview based on living, vibrant, responsive places that embrace people who collaborate with Country – in the Indigenous sense of deep relationality. Within this worldview, the authors propose collaborative ways of governing, teaching, learning, and leading that is necessary for place-based cultural regeneration. In conclusion, the authors outline a pathway towards universities as places of regenerative cultures, which prioritise the nurturing of learning to live and work beyond the current societal paralysis on the road to collapse.

Keywords: Climate change education; co-becoming with Country; decolonisation; place-based regeneration; transformative learning; university education

Introduction: *Kaartdijin Bidi* (Learning Journey)

This paper responds to an invitation to speak with university students and staff interested in sustainable practices at Murdoch University. We anticipate the paper will be seen as a respectful and polite provocation for Australian universities: a call to action. Commentators point to meta crises and poly crises compounding in the world today (Irwin & Everth, 2024). Presently, Australian governments ineffectively deal with issues like climate change, species loss, violence, the mental health crisis, inequity in education, despair, and youth suicide (Fogliani, 2019; White, Ferguson, Connor & Shea 2022). On the other hand, for at least a decade there has been international acknowledgement that Indigenous knowledge needs to be an essential part of response to climate change (for example, see International Panel on Climate Change, 2014, p. 19). As Escobar, Osterweil, and Sharma (2024) say, the wrong foundational story is at the heart of modern living, as relationality was lost with modernity. They say let us "remake relationships and

systems centred in care; not in the myths of scarcity, separation, and supremacy" (p. 61) where our existence is that of neoliberal individuals. Rather, we are beings who live in relation with the more-than-human world (Bawaka Country et al. 2016). Young people need to learn this at home, in community, and in education systems.

Towards this end, in this paper we wonder how to transform universities towards a local, place-based culturally regenerative world of practice — one that is healthy, adaptable and resilient (Wahl, 2016). In developing the notion of place-based culturally regenerative universities, we take Murdoch University as a model for imagining action for change[1] through undertaking a speculative, metaphoric *kaartdijin bidi* (learning journey). In doing this, we use images of an actual *bidi* (pathway) through Noongar Country, to visually draw attention to the necessary experience of being-with and walking-with place (Wintoneak & Blaise, 2022).

We acknowledge Whadjuk Noongar *Boodjar* (Country) where Murdoch University is located; we recognise Whadjuk Noongar *moort* (family/people); and we privilege Noongar *kaartdijin* (knowledge). The trilogy of *Boodjar, moort* and *kaartdijin* — each highly significant concepts with broad applicability — outline a Noongar foundational story of deep relationship. Each element of the trilogy is more comprehensive and inclusive than the English translation, so we will continue with the Noongar terminology (Collard, Harben, & van den Berg, 2004). The continuing knowledge of living place as family is aeons old — it is a birthright of all Australians. We *can* remake ourselves so that our lived experience is of bringing forth a deeply relational world, one that we are co-responsible for.

To do this in Noongar *boodjar*, we need to recognise and be familiar with Noongar ways of knowing, being and doing, as it is a different worldview to that of a mainstream, Western rationalist mindset. For example, it is necessary to understand the depth of relationship known as *goorduboodjar* — which means love of place — because *boodjar* (Country) is the centre, the heart of the worldview. Here, more-than-human beings and landscape features are known as kin or family. This is a lifetime undertaking that is experiential and located in place. It simply cannot be learned by reading words on a page because learning is situated, sensuous and relational, with *boodjar* as teacher. Similarly, *boodjaree*, which means full of life and pregnant (South West Aboriginal Land & Sea Council, 2024) is an extension of the word: *boodjar*. This illustrates *boodjar* as productive, fertile, nourishing and creative.

At the outset, we offer a simple distinction between sustainability and regeneration. Sustainable activities sustain what exists; regenerative approaches help restore ecology and the local, place-based cultures that care for them (Wahl, 2016). In this paper, when we use the term "regenerative," we mean local and place-based, referring to traditional and/or Indigenous knowledge sets. Capra says, "regeneration is the essential process of life ... it is self-organising, and philosophically, it is the meaning of life" (Capra & Wahl, 2023). Indigenous cultures have always recognised this as First Law, or the Law of the Land (Redvers et al., 2020). For instance, "[O]our values, ethics and culture support sustaining the environment and balance of life as the primary intent of law" (Redvers et al., 2020, p. 4).

Indigenous cultures and ways of knowing, being and doing are restorative and culturally regenerative by their nature; a principle that is valued in the Australian schools cross-curriculum priority of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Histories and Cultures. Australian Universities highly regard Indigenous people and knowledges (Universities Australia, 2022):

> To ensure success, Indigenous people should lead efforts to develop, implement, monitor and evaluate the embedding of Indigenous value systems and knowledges into university structures and into research. This includes embedding these knowledges into curricula, and formal strategies that ensure that students take with them a strong foundational understanding of Indigenous values and knowledges. (Universities Australia, 2022, p. 54)

[1]We recognise and deeply appreciate the steps already taken by the Murdoch University academic community towards incorporation of the local, place-based ideals in this paper.

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We regard these statements as mandates.

Whilst our examples in this paper are from Noongar Country, various elements of Indigenous knowledge resonate with features of ecological philosophy (Mathews, 2022), or new materialist perspectives (Gamble, Hanan, & Nail, 2019), post-humanism (Stengers & LaMarre, 2023), ecological feminism (Ojeda et al., 2022) or others who see a unified vision of deep inter-relationality. In this paper, we refer to these standpoints as place based. Our examples pertain to worldview rather than persons per se.[2] By worldview, we mean one's philosophy of life, mindset, paradigm or outlook — one's beliefs about the reality that influences perception, thinking, valuing, knowing and doing. For example:

> Our worldview is not a rational structure; it reflects the mood of the times, the metaphors we use, and our models of the world; it encompasses our total sense of who we are, what the world is, and how we know it; (Kurio & Reason, 2021, pp. 376–377).

We see the world through a worldview. In this paper, we see and understand a deeply relational world, that is knowing, that is alive, that is sentient, animate, and responsive (Bawaka Country et al., 2016; Kurio & Reason, 2021).

Because they are bastions of a western rationalist/ neoliberal managerialist mindset (Schwittay, 2021), we advocate for universities to begin to enact local, place-based cultural regeneration from the ground up — using Indigenous and place-based wisdom. This is a prefigurative step towards imagining and creating the living culture we need — in universities and therefore, society — to address the overlapping crises of modernity that impact local, national and planetary wellbeing.

Peter Senge (2006) described ways to create organisations that are capable of continuous learning and adaptation; arguing that collaborative leadership and the creation of a shared vision are essential. The goal of this paper is to envisage pathways and practices towards this goal simultaneously at multiple intersectionalities and organisational levels of universities; creating processes and customs for living, working and being that enhance life in a systemic way that are transferrable across multiple scales — local, regional, planetary. In the book: *Designing Regenerative Cultures*, Wahl (2016) suggests that attention to systemic relationships and interactions, while attending to the quality of information flows and connections, helps learn how to regenerate whole system health.

This calls for us to imagine, elaborate and not provide pre-determined solutions — allowing emergence, imagination, and creativity to lead. In the past, solutions have often become tomorrow's problems because of poor identification of the cause, lack of attention to relationships and interconnections, short-term rather than long-term thinking, or persistent managerial or neoliberal thinking. Radical flexibility offers a systemic approach that begins with fundamental questions about the kind of education, the manner of life, and the type of future that is wanted, and for whom (Veletsianos & Houlden, 2020). To be in relation, the authors point out, is to be deeply responsible in a holistic way. It is being able to respond in a life-supporting way to one's more-than-human community, one's ancestral and future kin (relations) — human and other — while meeting one's own basic human needs for connection. The concept of a more-than-human community was popularised by Abram (1996), who described the human as relation within a community of all species — as sensuous participant in a sentient, animate world.

Research method

Kaartdijin bidi is our research method, part of a feminist anti-colonial methodology (Wintoneak & Blaise, 2022). The method and methodology support the project of imagining and creating different potential futures. We use the Noongar metaphor of *kaartdijin bidi* — which means a

[2]We want to avoid the trap of assuming a person's standpoint based on gender, heritage, appearance or any other marker.

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Figure 1. Kaartdijin bidi – Knowledge Pathway, learning journey. This pathway is in Kalgalup Regional Park, Wardandi Boodja (Bunbury region).

Noongar knowledge pathway — to creatively navigate a way into and beyond the corporate university, using place-based (in this case, Noongar) knowledge systems (See Figure 1). The significance of *kaartdijin bidi* in this paper is fourfold. First, it is about knowledge acquisition and learning. Second, it is that *boordiya* (leaders, persons who know *bidi,* the tracks) are responsible for maintaining, burning, healing and caring for Country — including its stories, more-than-human kin, ceremonies, arts, music, and spirits or *wirrin.* (Poelina et al., 2020). In other words, Noongar *boordiya* have significant cultural wisdom that offers a local, place-based standpoint on longstanding problems that may be entrenched in colonial ways of thinking. Third, *Kaartdijin bidi* is visual, metaphoric, poetic and locally practical. Fourth, it is about the experience of moving on Country, especially walking. To walk with Country is to experience and get to know Country, to develop a learning relationship of reciprocal care.

After positioning ourselves and introducing the research questions, in this paper *kaartdijin bidi* takes us through four interconnected parts: the first exploring the notion of caring for Country, in the sense where caring for a sentient, animate world brings health to Country. The second part of the paper develops a critique of a neoliberal society — of which universities represent the mainstream in terms of worldview and neoliberal assumptions and use educational and hierarchical power to privilege certain types of knowledge and marginalise other knowledge sets. The third part of the paper considers governance responsibilities in an era of formal recognition of Noongar traditional ownership *kura, yeyi, burdawan* — past, present, and future. The fourth part

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of the paper envisages a local, place-based regenerative culture that is innately transformative, focusing on leadership, teaching, and learning. The discussion and conclusion propose that universities develop local, place-based regenerative cultures, implying they will each be different because of their responsivity to their local places. Some universities currently show some or many of these place-based characteristics.

Positionality and research questions

We are a group of four multi-generational Australians, two born in Noongar Country, one in Gadigal Country and one in Dharug Country; three of whom now live in Noongar Country. One of us (Len) is Noongar, two of us are Murdoch alumni and all are committed to transforming society using Indigenous wisdom.

The research questions we respond to are as follows:

- What does care for Country mean, and how is this a decolonising practice?
- How can universities become places of cultural regeneration?

Caring for country

Kaartdijin bidi is clearly navigable in this section. We set out walking, stepping carefully with senses engaged.

> Country in Aboriginal English is not only a common noun but also a proper noun. People talk about country in the same way that they would talk about a person: they speak to country, sing to country, visit country, worry about country, feel sorry for country, and long for country. People say that country knows, hears, smells, takes notice, takes care, is sorry or happy. Country is not generalised or undifferentiated ... country is a living entity with a yesterday, today and tomorrow, with a consciousness, and a will toward life. Because of this richness, country is home, and peace; nourishment for body, mind, and spirit; heart's ease. (Bird Rose, in Poelina et al. 2019, p. 3)

The deep cultural relationship with Country underpins an obligatory responsibility, or collective commitment that can never be broken (Kinnane, 2004). Capitalised C in Country and L in Land depicts the degree of respect for Country and Land referred to in this paper. Caring for Country is like caring for family, in the kincentric ecology sense. The awareness is that life will be viable only when people understand the natural elements of an ecosystem around them as kin — relations (Salmon, 2000).

Indigenous ownership of and belonging to Country is an ancient and continuing connection that has endured for millennia. Since Indigenous ways of knowing, being and doing have co-produced and cooperatively maintained Australian landscapes, always regenerating its health, wealth and lifeforce, we recognise that our Country needs us now. Developing a feeling, hearing relationship with Country is important work (See Figure 2). Everyone needs to take up a regenerative way of living, working, and understanding. This is what we mean by caring for Country. It is what Poelina, Webb, Wooltorton, and Godden (2024) call waking up the snake, referring to arousing the consciousness of the people. An example of this is below, narrated by Sandra.

Narrative: Awakening

> Sandra spend a lot of time in Collie, in Noongar country in southwest WA (Wooltorton, Poelina, & Collard, 2022). The little house that I stay in is where the edge of town meets a

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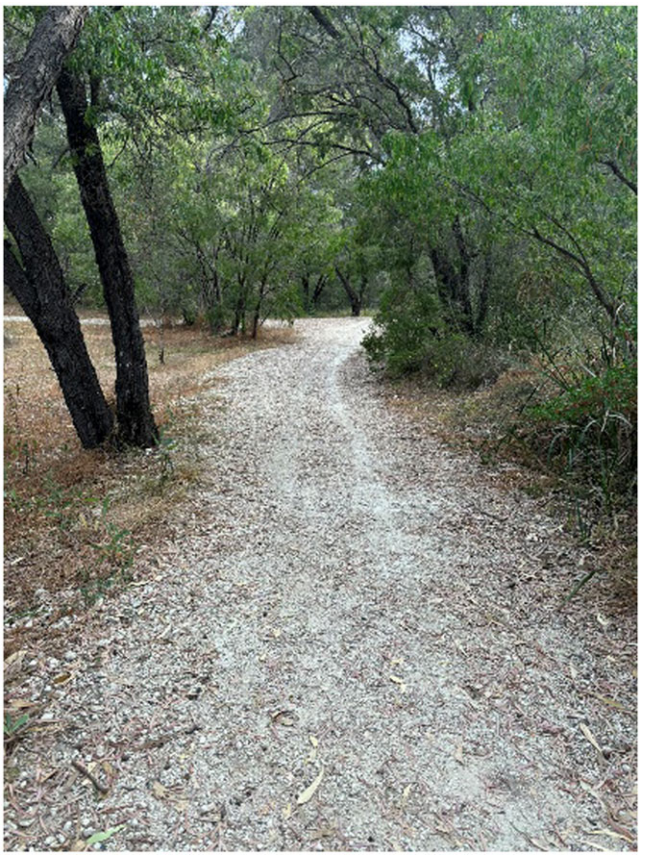

Figure 2. Kaartdijin bidi is easy to navigate at the start.

forest where the Collie River flows. There are tracks through the forest to a significant pool in the river where, once upon a time before now, Ngangungudditj walgu, the sacred hairy face snake, dropped off its people (Northover, 2008). The edge of a town or village makes it very easy to communicate with the beings of the more-than-human world (Abram, 1996).

The place-ecology of the little house on the edge of Collie town features a great many animals and birds – some very rare and endangered, such as karrak the red-tailed black cockatoo. It is very easy to learn to respond to these beings while walking through the forest or along the river. Soon, I acquired the habit of responding to birds when I felt called. I would go outside, sing out in response, and sometimes continue to the river – along the road or through the forest. I became very familiar with the noisy but responsive wardang the crow, the musical, communicative kurlbardi the magpie, and many more – pink and grey galah and white corella to name a few. These responsive and communicative practices became part of my every day.

One day, I took a bus to Perth and was walking along the eastern end of St Georges Terrace in the city. It was a treed part of the city, close to Derbal Yerrigan, the Swan River. I suddenly heard wardang the crow, and kurlbardi the magpies singing out. I felt like singing out in response, as I was in the habit of doing. Suddenly, I felt myself silently asking: 'why are you calling me here? It would be shameful for me to call back here because I'm in the city, and

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everyone will think I am mad'. I put my head down and continued walking in shame. At that moment, I felt a huge empathy with Fanny Balbuk, who was one of the Noongar women who walked a very similar track near Derbal Yerrigan, 200 years ago. The records don't say whether Fanny called out to the birds or not as part of her daily habits, but I suddenly felt that she probably wanted to do this; but could not in a place increasingly dominated by colonials and colonisation. She was caught between two worlds.

That was a transformative moment for me, helping me to realise that experiences that offer affinity with the more-than-human, is not dependent on Aboriginality or any other Western category of being. It is a human responsivity, that we all carry – albeit deeply buried for some. Some of us might deny that we have a capacity to respond to the call of what might be called the wild. But we all do as a gift of being human (Poelina et al., 2024).

The Noongar woman referred to in the vignette, Fanny Bulbuk, is now widely credited with being the state's first environmentalist, calling out to members of parliament in their brand-new government building in the decades-old colony of Perth. She let them know in no uncertain terms she was disgusted with the shocking destruction of wetlands — her homeland and food supply — now buried under Perth's tall buildings. She was also incensed by the blocking of her walking trails by fences and houses. It is said that she knocked down fences with her digging stick, walking in the back, and out the front door of houses blocking her pathways (Pickering, 2017). She sets an example for us, still applicable nearly 200 years later.

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Literature review: Universities as colonial/corporate relics in need of regeneration

Kaartdijin bidi visits colonial and neoliberal power in universities.[3] Teaching, learning, governance, and the structures for determining research funding often reproduce oppressions that academics seek to renounce. Below, we highlight colonial positions that broadly underscore the current condition.

Stances such as colonisation that are rejected by Indigenous cultures and others, are renamed in western rationalist positions through western institutions such as western law, arguing (for example) the legality of the common actions Indigenous Elders and others see as extractive colonisation (Poelina, Brueckner, & McDuffie, 2020). Here, *kaartdijin bidi* takes us through the libraries and halls of power, allowing a close-up view. The terrain here is sandy, uphill and difficult (see Figure 3) given what we might discover about our hallowed halls.

Colonisation and power

Perth — like most Australian cities — has a history of massacre,[4] murder, rape, pillage of stolen Land and stolen generations (City of Vincent, 2024; Ryan et al., 2022) that needs acknowledgement by all Australians. Government-corporate partnerships maintain colonisation on a grand scale, drawing Australians into complicities such as fossil fuel dependence, no-choice plastic use and corporate food reliance (Liboiron, 2021). These government partnerships oversee extractivist regimes in Indigenous and more-than-human landscapes and destroy places, people, and cultures without social licence (Poelina et al., 2020). Using the plastics life cycle, Liboiron (2021) models an anti-colonial practice that privileges land, relations, and ethics. The politics of ridding plastic from our lives is a beginning.

[3]As authors, we point out that this critique is based on a literature review, and NOT on any specific university.

[4]See Galup » City of Vincent Library. Colonials renamed Galup to Lake Monger, until recently.

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Figure 3. Here, kaartdjjin bidi as metaphor is sandy, uphill and generally hard work when dealing with power.

Whiteness

Some philosophers explain the structures of whiteness (for example, Moreton-Robinson, 2015). This argues that patriarchal white sovereignty denies an Indigenous ontology outside of the logic of capitalism, that limits land possession to those with certain attributes. Rather than an identity, Moreton-Robinson (2015) explains that whiteness refers to a system of privilege and power that is culturally and socially fabricated to recognise itself as the zenith of the pecking order. Therefore whiteness, in this sense, can determine hierarchy, inclusion, domination, exclusion and "what counts" in society and education. In this way, whiteness is a hegemonic universality, that occludes foundational violence and historical narratives of inferiority that linger today (Dudgeon & Bray, 2023). This logic renounces Indigenous sovereignty and maintains white normativity (Walton et al. 2018). The appropriate response from educators is to participate in decolonising the structures of schools, universities and society to counter dominant discourses and practices (Walton et al., 2018).

Using the logic of whiteness, Palmer, Walsh, and Batorowicz (2022) show how colonialism casts shadows that continue to deny or suppress knowing the "founding wound" of the colonial invasion for Indigenous peoples. In this way, economic projects of consumption continue as the coloniser intended, resulting in policies that exclude Indigenous participation and the living Land. On the other hand, there is a continuing Indigenous future of "radical resurgence" and rejection of defeat. "[I]n these futures, creative imaginaries show pathways out of a dystopian present to

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relational futures that connect all things, human and nonhuman" (Palmer et al., 2022, p. 1). This project is underpinned by an Indigenous resurgence:

Neoliberal corporatism

Neoliberal corporatism is connected to and interweaves universalising rationalities such as whiteness into its structures of power and oppression that cast an increasingly wide net of inclusion. This is because their funding, practices, policies and governance reflect market hallmarks such that even traditional ideals such as originality or relevance have been changed into measurable units (Benner & Holmqvist, 2023). Within its university enmeshments, neoliberalism denigrates and displaces university educators through colonising practices that invalidate and render academic work — the behind the scenes nurturing, developing and caring work — invisible in systematic ways (Morley, 2023). She explains that radical reform can uncouple the ethical and substantive dimensions of the (educational) lifeworld from systemic neoliberal managerialism that leaves higher education paralysed (Morley, 2023).

In his paper, Springer (2016) states: "While negation, protest and critique are necessary, we also need to think about actively fucking up neoliberalism by doing things out of its reach" (p. 287). As resistance, he advocates prefigurative politics, which rejects neoliberal hierarchy, centrism, and authority by implementing embodied practices of relationality and organisational forms that lead to living the changes we create; embracing the joy and conviviality of "grounded immanence of the *here and now* of actually making a new world" (Springer, 2016, p. 288). Universities offer sites of possibility for creating and enacting place-based care, enabling the participation of peoples, and regeneration of cultures and knowledges suppressed since colonisation began.

The bifurcation of nature

To continue with the thread of universalising rationalities such as whiteness and neoliberalism, some meanings that are "whole" in place-based outlooks and Indigenous philosophies, are bifurcated in everyday modernity. For example, the binaries of culture/nature, matter/meaning, mind/body, people/nature are commonly held misunderstandings of an undivided reality (Poelina et al., 2023). Philosophers Stengers and LaMarre (2023) show that the bifurcation of nature is absurd in the generation of "foolish enterprise and irrational hope" (p. 35). At its heart, bifurcation means "separating nature into two different registers" (Stengers & LaMarre, 2023, p. 35). Bifurcation is of course ridiculous — but this dominates western rationalist lives and thinking. Stengers and LaMarre (2023) lament the deferring of practical knowledge to those with authority — who are informed by theoretical or abstract/objectivist knowledges. Can we civilise modernity, they wonder, or are we living through its collapse? Will we bequeath a world in ruins, they ask? Or — we ask — will we hand down a healthy Country?

Strengthened by Indigenous resurgence

Given the universalising rationalities and embedded structures of power in the colonial project, our response needs to be a caring and life-affirming place-based cultural regeneration of universities and society. For this reason, it is underpinned by Indigenous resurgence, which depends upon — while being part of — decolonisation (Williams, 2021). Writers such as Dudgeon et al. (2023) describe an Indigenous turn. They say it is a collective of place-based social movements across the planet that advocate new lifeways, new types of epistemic justice, and collaborative governance that are guided by First Law or lores. Principles such as justice and relationality, and the ethics of truth telling, reciprocity, respect and love, function to safeguard future generations; and are recognised as essential for safeguarding planetary life (Dudgeon et al., 2023).

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Next, with this stronger idea of how colonisation and power impact our lives and universities, we step towards embedding Noongar and place-based values at the heart of the university, beginning with governance. In a spirit of imagining a prefigurative politic, *kaartdijin bidi* is hopeful here — because it is a collaborative enterprise created by intergenerational experience. Beyond the coerciveness of neoliberal corporate universities, we hear the messages of Country and place-based wisdom, meaning we attend to beauty, using more intuitive, spiritual, and revelatory ways of knowing often associated with feeling rather than thinking. Buhner writes, "the hidden face of nature can only be seen with the heart" (cited in Harding, 2022, p. 165). We need the rational *and* the intuitive, the imaginal and the experiential.

Governance

Effective transformation is both top down (structural) and bottom up. In 2006, the Federal Court determined that native title had survived in the southwest of Australia since pre-colonisation, where it had not been extinguished by Government conventions and private ownership. The resulting Single Noongar Claim recognises that Noongar have maintained connection with Country. The Western Australian Government appealed but signed an agreement with the South-west Aboriginal Land and Sea Council in 2010. An Act of Recognition of Noongar people was passed by the Government of Western Australia (2016). This is the most comprehensive in Australia; aiming to bring a Noongar voice to government and community (Government of Western Australia, 2016).

Governance is the way an organisation or institution makes decisions, is controlled and how staff are accountable for its actions. We wonder how the Murdoch University Senate recognises Noongar *boodjar, moort and kaartdijin* on its Senate? What are the pursuant obligations of universities to traditional owners, given Noongar sovereignty in the past, present and future?

> [Indigenous] sovereignty is a spiritual notion: the ancestral tie between the land, or 'mother nature', and the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples who were born there from, remain attached thereto, and must one day return thither to be united with our ancestors. This link is the basis of the ownership of the soil, or better, of sovereignty. It has never been ceded or extinguished and co-exists with the sovereignty of the Crown. This ancestral tie is central to using our knowledge for looking after our land and sea Country. Our knowledge is current, relevant, dynamic, and adaptable. We use it today, as we did in the past, to look after Country our way. (Poelina et al., 2019, p. 2)

In general, how does Murdoch's Senate, governance processes and administration recognise Indigenous sovereignty? How are Noongar Elders and Noongar community members part of Murdoch's Senate, and how is Noongar voice part of Murdoch's modus operandi? How is the Noongar obligation to care for *boodjar* being enabled? What actions are in place to protect the endangered carnaby's cockatoo on campus, or protect kwenda habitat? And how are Noongar ways of knowing, being and doing embedded into each course? Perhaps most important of all, how does Noongar-informed and inspired governance flow to students in a reciprocal exchange of imagination, creativity and prefigurative enculturing?

A preliminary investigation of the Murdoch University Senate through public documentation (Murdoch University, 2022)[5] is impressive in that the three themes of its strategy 2023–2030, called *Ngala Kwop Biddi* — Building a Brighter Future Together — are Sustainability; Equity, Diversity and Inclusion; and First Nations.[6] These themes are linked to the core activities of

[5]Strategy 2023-2030 | Murdoch University

[6]Upon reading this, Sandra feels tears of joy! As a Murdoch alumnus with a PhD in Sustainability and a Master of Education (Hons) in Aboriginal Education, she is grateful for Murdoch's continuing commitment.

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education, research and engagement; with three enablers at its heart — people, systems and facilities.

Creating regenerative cultures

Here we address the question of how universities can create a regenerative culture. We advocate learning together because renewal is more effective when we are collaborative and committed. We show that building a regenerative culture requires students and staff to gain place-based experience; use creative and critically reflective practice (questioning one's own practice); and apply reflexivity, which is planning or action in response to reflection on experience (Wooltorton & Reason, 2023).

It is encouraging to know that place-based worldviews are strengthening everywhere; environmental recoveries draw down carbon in ways not even imagined[7]; politically engaged, plastic-free lifestyles are necessary and emerging[8] (Blumhardt & Prince, 2022); youth strikes for climate change have impact (White et al., 2022); and the arts are increasingly being recognised (Rooney, Blaise, & Royds, 2021). The transformation towards a world of regeneration is underway.

In the southwest of Western Australia there are many Noongar projects open for public learning, although it is only about 40 years since Noongar cultural resurgence began consolidating. The Noongar Language Centre began in the late 1980s, recording language for the purpose of restoration and education. The information in blue is from *Layers of meanings in our landscapes: Hiding in full view*. (Wooltorton, Collard, & Horwitz, 2019). We invite readers to visit these places or websites:

> *"NoongarPedia",* https://incubator.wikimedia.org/wiki/Wp/nys/; *Keny mia; "Kaartdijin Noongar",* www.noongarculture.org.au/, *or "Noongar Boodjar",* http://noongarboodjar.com.au/. *Or visit Kodja Place, in Kojonup:* https://www.kodjaplace.com.au/;
>
> *Bilya Koort Boodjar in Northam,* www.bilyakoortboodja.com/; *or the Museum of the Great Southern in Albany,* http://museum.wa.gov.au/explore/education/museum-of-the-great-southern. *Or tour with custodians like Troy Bennell,* www.ngalangwongi.com.au/ *or others.*

Country as partner

We live in a responsive, sentient, animate world that is not the one Western rationalism knows (Bawaka Country et al. 2023). This requires being with Country in the outdoors (see Figure 4). Bawaka Country et al., state, "Country is spirit and song, Country is human and plant and wind and current, Country is knowledge. Country is everything and the relationships that bring everything to life." (2023, p. 280) This acknowledges that Country itself teaches through its agency, and requires interactive song, responsivity, and reciprocal feeling. In this context, the relationship of learner with Country is paramount. For instance:

> The fire cooks food and humans eat. This knowledge of cooking, the gift of food, shared by fire with humans (and birds of prey and others), and Country co-becomes in entangled, multiple ways. The fire makes charcoal, layers of which make up the land itself; digging layers of soil we find charcoal as Yolŋu presence through millennia. This also is the land teaching sovereignty, prior knowings, belongings, patterns, life. And this learning must be done

[7]For example, see: https://pleistocenepark.ru/, a Siberian project that actively draws down carbon following large-scale restoration.

[8]Be inspired by this praxis of rejecting plastics: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QBMuwWwkjM0).

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Figure 4. Kaartdijin Bidi: Walking with Country – human, plant, wind and current.

> properly, the right way. For us that means following Rom, Yolŋu Law. It also means honouring the sovereignties of Yolŋu people and Country, and their concomitant knowledge protocols. (Bawaka Country et al., 2023, p. 282)

Learning together

> If universities are going to dare to do difficult, complicated, risky, and unprofitable things [and instead meet] their commitment to the mission of education, research, and social impact [which] is the foundation for expansive life-changing learning, revolutionary discoveries, innovative solutions to otherwise intractable problems, and provide positive results for communities, locally and globally … [then] Now is the time for change.' (Bagshaw, 2023, p. 2)

It is definitely time to change society, and universities will need to be brave, carefully explaining and educating about the steps they take towards change. We assume that university governors and leaders have no more experience of place-based regenerative lifeways than any others, therefore the partnership principle of collaborative learning works at all levels of the university. It involves reciprocal mentoring, counselling, guidance, and mutually responsive support. Given the innovative context, creative ways of working are necessary at all levels: everyone is learning and brings their own knowledge sets.

Reciprocity in learning applies to human teacher-student partnerships, and there has been an increasing interest globally to involve students in the design of their learning experiences. Casey

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Figure 5. Kaartdijin Bidi – The Clearing at The End, Reflections on Mistruths, the Referendum and Relational Values of care.

reports "great promise for [Students as Partners] in their contexts, noting the cultural nuances that will need to be considered for widespread adoption" (2024, p. 164). Cook-Sather, Felten, and Bovill (2014) define Students as Partners as a:

> collaborative, reciprocal process through which all participants have the opportunity to contribute equally, although not necessarily in the same ways, to curricular or pedagogical conceptualization, decision making, implementation, investigation, or analysis (pp. 41–42).

When the idea of Students as Partners is applied to partnership practices such as peer learning and assessment, mentoring, co-teaching and team-based learning (Healey & Healey, 2019) they make for powerful possibilities in creating regenerative practices.

Yarning

We advocate yarning, an Indigenous pedagogical practice that enables reconnection of the human spirit. At its heart, it is about learning relatedness and connection to Country. Elders use yarning as a tool to teach introspection and analysis; as it is a way of exchanging knowledge at the heart of many Indigenous cultures (Yunkaporta, 2019). It is dialogical and mutual. Shay (2021) says for her it is about:

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> . . . the establishment of our relational connections (kin, country and community) and our reading of each other: physically; spiritually; socially and in a work setting, professionally. Equally, yarning is about listening. It is about listening to each other, listening to ourselves and listening to our (gut) feelings. (Shay, 2021, p. 63)

Yarning allows learning to unfold through Country and the process of storytelling where everyone feels safe and relaxed. This requires the group to ensure the right environment is established. This includes boundaries, expectations and responsibilities and it is important that individual, family, and community connections are each introduced (Shay, 2021).

The pedagogies of care wrap around yarning well; involving teaching that focuses on the needs of learners, where the teacher cares for learners and listens compassionately. Recently, pedagogies that utilise relational practices, requiring academics to be authentic, open, trusting, compassionate and encourage wellbeing, have been gaining traction (Denial, 2024). Many educators are turning to these pedagogies, as is suggested by Denial's definition of the pedagogy of kindness because it is "about attending to justice, believing people, and believing *in* people." (2024, p. 2, italics added). Below is an example of an intergenerational Noongar *kaartdijin* teaching and learning method that incorporates yarning, kindness, and care.

> In the South-West, yeye or today, as in kura or the past, Nyungar boordier or elders play a role as custodians of all knowledges, and in particular "special" knowledges, both theoretical and practical which are to be passed on. Today this continues through intergenerational Nyungar interaction using oral and written discourses. This, in turn, records and perpetuates the need to use Nyungar theory, language, values, attitudes and beliefs as a basis for intergenerational transmission of kaartdijin or knowledge, both theoretical and applied, by and among Nyungar. As each generation passes on, it is then our and their duty, as the current and future generation of Nyungar, to take on these custodial responsibilities, passing them on to our future generations. These include keeping harmony with social protocols in our past, current and future worlds by ensuring that each successive generation of regional Nyungar descendants, be they Whadjuck, Balardong or Minang, are brought up to understand and take their responsibilities and place as active participants and custodians of such ancient kaartdijin or knowledges. (Collard et al., 2004, p. 15)

In the intergenerational learning of Noongar *kaartdijin,* pedagogies involve responsibilities for care of people, place and knowledge in temporal and spatial worlds, enabling the continuity of deep relationships.

What Denial and others offer are the opportunity to redress the meta crisis. She says:

> I take real joy in discovering how to be a better teacher by being in a compassionate relationship with my students and by honouring their humility in the things that we do (2024, p. 13).

She writes that a pedagogy of kindness is also practical belief of students, commenting that:

> [s]tudents have not, en masse, started doubting my abilities or my expertise, but have stepped forward to direct their own education in meaningful and exciting ways that I could not have thought of (2024, p. 11).

As relational beings, trust also means listening to and responding to the needs of learners. Transformative assessment built on trust looks like the kind Stommel (2023) advocates. His students grade themselves at the end of the semester after having engaged in authentic assessment,

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peer-review, and critical reflection. He reports that while he reserves the right to amend grades, he rarely needs to. The degree of responsibility for learning is clear.

Leadership for regenerative cultures

Here, *kaartdijin bidi* enables learning to lead learning and teaching in higher education from a place-based and Indigenous-informed worldview. It is a pathway that recognises universities as living, vibrant, responsive places where regenerative cultures can thrive (Figure 5).

In these complex times of metacrises, there is the question of whom leadership in higher education and education more generally is meant to serve, and what roles and function they should play in our lives (Stephenson, 2023). A pedagogy of hope and optimism offers educational leadership for enhancing individual and collective learning (Stephenson, 2023). How can we generate a pedagogy of hope and optimism despite the gravity of the situation? Is a post-crisis world possible? Maybe, and we speculate this world will be post-linearity, seasonal, place-based, and conceptually and ontologically relational. For this, we need experience and practice.

Transformative leadership (Shields, 2011, 2020) is a critical ethical leadership theory that deconstructs knowledge frameworks that perpetuate inequity and injustice and reconstructs frameworks that enable emancipation and democracy. Transformative leadership recognises, "the need to begin with critical reflection and analysis and to move through enlightened understanding to action" (Shields, 2010, p. 572). There is also a strong emphasis on the private and public good, emphasising service to human persons and other-than-human beings.

Here is a leadership story from *boodjar* — told by Noongar Elder Janet Hayden. In this story, *djidi djidi* (willy wagtail) is shepherd and protector for the little girls and their environment.

> Djidi djidi was always referred to as the little shepherd. Grandfather used to always talk about how he was his shepherd. We still or my girls relate to that, because no matter where we go, if there's something was wrong with the family, he will come and tell the girls, not so much me, but those two over there [daughters]. They will always warn them of danger or if something is happening. We grew up with those stories, how mischievous the little djidi djidi was and how they got their name. (Collard et al., 2004, p. 71, see full story)

The eight tenets of transformative leadership (Shields, 2019, p. 200) enable the transformation of higher education institutions into more equitable, inclusive, socially just and place-based learning hubs which are:

1. Accepting the mandate for deep and equitable change and transformation;
2. Changing mindsets: focuses on one's core beliefs, values and assumptions;
3. Redistributing power in more equitable ways: recognises that: *we need to listen to and hear all perspectives and consider each equally with equity at the heart;*
4. Balancing public and private good;
5. Focus on democracy, emancipation, equity, and justice;
6. Interconnectedness, interdependence, and global awareness;
7. Balancing critique and promise;
8. Exhibiting moral courage: reminds educators of the difficulties and challenges of being a transformative leader.

These tenets are relevant now more than ever as we face global evidence of prejudice, discrimination, violence, bifurcation, and polarisation that necessitate effective leadership, communication, and collaboration. The tenets offer guidance for truly transforming learning, teaching, governance, and assessment in ways that acknowledge a combination of historical forces, present needs, and future hopes.

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Discussion

Walking in Australia, footstep after footstep, communicates recognition that wherever we are, wherever we go, we are walking on Indigenous land, storied with experiences and knowledge kept current for tens of thousands of years. There is a logic here, of experience, care, relationship, and creativity. Many Indigenous groups uphold the sacredness of water, Country, and life, and recognise that all life forms are interrelated. Most Indigenous and place-based worldviews hold that humans are not in charge, or above or below others in the community of life, but part of it. This is portrayed in the *djidi djidi* (willy wagtail) story, where the carer and teacher is a bird; and more-than-human communication is intuitive, sensory or otherwise understood. Similarly, in the fire story by Bawaka Country (2023), above, the fire is agent who contributes gifts with more-than-human beings, while Country participates in entangled ways, teaching sovereignty, patterns and belongings in alignment with Yolngu Law, With a focus on caring for Country, bringing these ideas together highlights principles for action (Poelina et al., 2022). This is always an entirely local, place-based endeavour. Creating regenerative cultures at university is about collaboration, partnership, being within nature, understanding the way power works in relationships, learning, teaching, and governance, and recognising the need to work in new ways. Stengers and LaMarre (2023) advocate developing the art of attention, the arts of slowness, to care for life, to compose sympoiesis (collective creation/ creativity): the joy of interdependence. It is about valuing the arts *and* the sciences in holistic ways.

We envision side-by-side partnerships to enable leadership, learning, teaching, and assessment in higher education to enhance agency, voice, and regeneration, attending to questions of democracy and multiple forms of justice. We need to focus on acting courageously and continuously ensuring more equitable learning environments and pedagogical practices for all learners. Jacobs et al. (2024) offers us hope. Biofuturing, is a theory/practice which incorporates multispecies speculative thought, bringing creative practices into academic discourse. They write:

> Just as biofuturing resides at the crossroads of transdisciplinary collaboration, multispecies entanglements, and multitemporal thinking, relational research and creation approaches that bridge, fuse, combine, and reconcile have the potential to nurture novel ways of understanding and connecting with the Earth's blasted landscapes. (Jacobs et al., 2024, p. 10)

Side-by-side partnerships for leadership and transformation are situated in Country, and are ground-up, community-based, collaborative, and inclusive.

Such new and adapted approaches require further pushing the boundaries of traditional higher education classrooms, and activities. We need to develop curricula that require active engagement inside and outside of the classroom environment such as through service learning, real-world projects, opportunities for work integrated learning and group leadership. An emphasis on experiential education, service learning and critical reflection also facilitates students' holistic development as ethical, competent, and transformative leaders themselves.

As we sit in a clearing at the end of *kaartdijin bidi* to reflect on our learning, we emphasise the necessity of Indigenous and place-based perspectives; and the need to recognise and critique forms of power, knowing the benefits and what is at stake. Indigenous knowledge is increasingly acknowledged as core to climate change mitigation and adaptation (Redvers et al., 2022). We are writing in the aftermath of the Juukan Gorge disaster, where over 40,000 years of rock art and other human records were destroyed by mining (Allam & Wahlquist, 2020). We also mention the dishonesty and unchallenged mistruths that preceded the Referendum on an Indigenous voice in the Australian constitution (Strating & Carson, 2023) and the sadness that followed it (Grant, 2023). We reflect on the recurring relational values of care, kindness, and trust; reminding us we need feeling, beauty, and intuition. Through our own yarning, we recognise that "crises" do not form a useful term as it is the language of the oppressors. It requires others to act with urgency,

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using interventionist authoritarian power and often, possibly with military support (Whyte, 2018). We all need to enact the change that honours Country and local, place-based knowledge systems using the attentive arts of creativity based upon experience.,

We commented earlier upon the necessity for responsiveness to place, community, and each other in a life-supporting way, that Veletsianos and Houlden (2020) call radical flexibility. It needs imagination rather than prescription, with a holistic, systemic approach that responds to meaningful questions concerning the type of future that is envisioned and/or possible. This potentially frames a new knowledge set, with fundamental capacities not currently part of a mainstream, Western rationalist mindset.

Conclusion

In this paper, the *kaartdijin bidi* — learning journey — revealed rich concepts for embarking upon the development of place-based culturally regenerative cultures at universities. We began with the idea of caring for Country, then critiqued insidious and ubiquitous universalising rationalities such as whiteness, and the structures of power that maintain them. We considered a cultural transformation of universities towards Indigenous cultures and wisdom through beginning with caring for Country in local, place-based ways and taking this spirit into governance, teaching, learning and leadership.

The journey passed neoliberal corporatism as the new setting for the modern university, where neoliberal premises of structural power determine privilege, marginalisation and what is taught, reduced, and measured. Australian universities currently keep alive the cultures and traditions of the Western academic "enlightenment". We need to rethink this, for the sake of healing climates, restoring damaged ecosystems, and nurturing social harmony.

Using a different foundational story, our learning revealed possibilities for more-than-human collaboration, enabling imagination and optimism through side-by-side partnerships as the foundation for transformative learning towards regenerative cultures. *Kaartdijin bidi* is Noongar, place-based, collaborative, and values *boodjar* (Country), *moort* (family) and *kaartdijin* (knowledge).

We drew on our experiences to explore what practices and theories might answer the research questions.

- What does connection to Country mean, and how is this a decolonising practice?

We showed that the Indigenous notion of belonging to Country is an ancient and continuing connection that continues despite colonial sovereignty, control, power, and authoritarianism. There is a more-than-human world that Indigenous ways of knowing, being and doing reveal to participants and kin, that is always regenerating health, wealth and lifeforce. Country needs all of us now to take up a regenerative way of living, working, and understanding — with Indigenous leadership and collaboration. This is what we mean by caring for Country. It is a decolonising practice in that it is community-based, situated, and is responsive, relational, and kin-focused. From this perspective life will be viable only when people recognise the natural elements of an ecosystem around them as relations (Salmon, 2000). Connection to Country is an innately decolonising practice in its incompatibility with neoliberal corporatism.

- How can universities become places of local, place-based cultural regeneration? Or how do we create the world we want to live in through our universities and schools?

To enable universities to become places of local, place-based cultural regeneration, we imagined a whole of education transformation beginning with worldview and relationality; implemented

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through governance, learning together and leadership. At the outset, a critique of power and associated assumptions about whiteness, neoliberal premises and certain knowledge sets is necessary — particularly a refutation of bifurcations such as that of culture/nature, where neither of these whole concepts are divisible or separable. A locally place-based regenerative culture is the journey and the destination. This cannot (by definition) be a universalising rationality. It is essential that Indigenous and place-based histories, cultures, and knowledge is valued as at least equal to Western rationalist knowledge. Cultural regeneration is spiritual, educational, holistic, and radically flexible as much as it is scientific, experiential, and practical.

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Len Collard is a Whadjuk/Ballardong Nyungar Elder from the Aboriginal people of the South-west of Western Australia. Len has held positions leading and teaching at Edith Cowan University; in Aboriginal studies as Chair in the ATSI Program at Murdoch University; as Associate Professor at Curtin University; as Winthrop and then Emeritus Professor at the University of WA; and as Adjunct Professor at The University of Notre Dame Australia. He has been the recipient of multiple Australian Research Council grants and has published significant papers in international peer reviewed journals.

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