

## Article

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# Indigenous Online Creative Responses to the COVID-19 Pandemic Lockdown in Western Australia

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**Abstract:** In response to the worldwide COVID-19 pandemic in 2020, many communities of endangered Indigenous languages have utilised digital technologies and created online language resources with renewed motivation. In this article we explore the ways that Noongar community members have shifted, adapted and persisted in creating new language revitalisation resources for their endangered Aboriginal language, describing three case studies of video content created and shared online through social media as localised responses to the pressing need for easily produced, accessible and engaging online approaches to support Indigenous communities and their languages.

**Keywords:** Australian Aboriginal languages, COVID-19, Indigenous, online, social isolation

## 1 Digital Technologies, the COVID-19 Pandemic, and Indigenous Creative Responses

Indigenous communities have been disproportionately affected by the COVID-19 pandemic in terms of health outcomes (Bambra et al. 2020; Yashadhana et al. 2020); psychological effects of the COVID-19 pandemic in general (Newby et al. 2020); and the potential mental health impact of social isolation specifically, where Indigenous wellbeing is associated with connection to family and community, and having a sense of control (Usher, Bhullar, and Jackson 2020). Indigenous communities have also faced challenges at this time relating to maintaining their language and cultural

heritage, including fears regarding the health of senior language speakers, and working under the imposition of social distancing measures (Rosenblum 2021). Around the world, Indigenous language workers responded to the pandemic by significantly shifting their face-to-face teaching and learning activities to online spaces, and by developing and sharing resources through social media to stay connected (Chew 2021; Gallant 2021; McIvor, Chew, and Stacey 2020b; McIvor, Sterzuk, and Cook 2020c). Chew (2021, 239) (emphasis added) writes of language revitalisation in the United States and Canada that Indigenous language work:

[...] had to halt immediately for the safety of Indigenous communities. Language speakers, teachers, and learners paused momentarily to regroup in the face of rapid changes, new dangers, and overwhelming uncertainty. *Then many did what Indigenous peoples have always done in the face of danger and hardship: persist.* With community members social distancing and isolating at home, social media quickly became a key space for both documenting and facilitating shifts, adaptations, and persistence.

Indeed, far from producing “stop gap” measures to simply continue work during the pandemic, many language revitalisation teams report expanding their projects, responding to the COVID-19 pandemic and social distancing measures with a “renewed pull” and commitment to language work through the use of social media and digital technologies (Eisen 2020). Social media has long been utilised in language revitalisation as

an active space for gathering and sharing language through Facebook pages and groups, Twitter feeds and hashtags, Instagram accounts and videos posted to TikTok and YouTube to promote language use in the home, share lessons, and nurture humour and joy in the process of learning (Rosenblum 2021).

According to the NETOLNEW Research Partnership at the University of Victoria (McIvor et al. 2020a), such use of social media and digital communication for Indigenous Language Revitalization increased 64% during the early months of the pandemic, with “the emergence of more online [Indigenous] language programming than one can keep track of” (Sinclair 2020).

To give just a couple of examples, Gwich’in language activist Jacey Firth-Hagen increased her level of language

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video production during the pandemic in addition to her #SpeakGwich'inToMe twitter campaign (Eisen 2020). Firth-Hagen states that “I thought, ‘This is the perfect time to share the language, and if someone wants to learn they may have more time on their hands’” (Eisen 2020). Similarly, the Living Tongues Institute for Endangered Languages reports an increase in the pandemic of people downloading toolkits from the Institute to make “talking dictionaries,” for which they hold regular webinars with language workers internationally (Eisen 2020; Living Tongues 2022). Although some Indigenous communities in the USA had previously been concerned about risks of exploitation associated with moving their languages into digital spaces, the pandemic coincided with a boom in online Indigenous-language learning (Maher 2021).

While many language workers have responded (at least initially) to the pandemic with new motivation, language revitalisation has always involved exploring digital technologies that have “predate[d] the global pandemic and will endure beyond it” (Daurio and Turin 2021, 1), from “wax cylinder recordings to digital audio recordings, e-mail to chat, video recordings to interactive audio video conferencing, and/or surfing the Internet to playing interactive computer games” (Galla 2009, 173). While such digital technologies present many opportunities for language revitalisation efforts, language workers in this field have long recognised that within those opportunities are also challenges. In the first instance, it must be noted that digital technology and social media, like any other language revitalisation resource, can become what Dauenhauer and Dauenhauer (1998, 70) call a “quick fix” or “cure-all,” meeting a community’s enthusiasm for materials development that “sit on a shelf” (Galla 2016, 1146) without actually increasing the community’s engagement with the language. Further, Galla (2016, 1144) cautions that “the amount of investment – time, money, and resources – it takes to effectively utilize a tool to its greatest potential for Indigenous language learners and speakers,” including the equipment and training to create online resources, as well as access to the Internet and devices, is a “valid concern” (see also Elliott 2021; Wemigwans 2016). Digital and online technologies are far from being a silver bullet to address the complex issue of Indigenous language endangerment.

## 2 This Paper

This paper contributes to the discussion about how language workers have been challenged and motivated to explore digital and online technologies in response to the

COVID-19 pandemic, through three cases studies of online resources developed for the endangered Noongar language of Western Australia. Like other language workers globally, our team was motivated by the possibility of a lengthy lockdown in Western Australia to explore a range of creative ways to put Noongar language resources online.<sup>1</sup>

The university-based research team consisted of Dr. Roma Yibiyung Winmar, Professor Clint Bracknell, and Dr. Amy Budrikis. Roma Winmar is Elder-in-Residence at Edith Cowan University (ECU). She is one of the state’s most experienced Noongar language teachers, having taught at Moorditj Noongar Community College for more than 20 years, as well as sitting on the Department of Education’s Curriculum Council in setting standards and educational expectations for Noongar language. She is also a celebrated artist and performer. Clint Bracknell is a musician and researcher with maternal Noongar connections. He is currently Professor in the School of Languages and Culture at the University of Queensland, with a focus on language and song revival, and has led many projects on Noongar language revitalisation. Amy Budrikis is a linguist and research adviser at ECU, and has worked extensively with Roma Winmar and Clint Bracknell on community-centred Noongar language revival projects.

The three case studies selected for discussion in this paper are projects that the research team has had the most involvement with, allowing for the most in-depth reflection. They were also selected as they represent a broad range of technical skill and resources required, allowing an exploration for the intersection of resource intensity versus audience engagement. In case study 1, we discuss the use of simple mobile phone videos shared via Facebook to adapt an in-person bilingual Noongar/English “KindiLink” class for pre-primary aged children. In case study 2, we look at the “guerrilla-style” development of Noongar language karaoke videos for children in the middle of the lockdown; and in case study 3 we discuss the high-level production of Noongar language “webisodes” that focus on elements of the natural environment.

The analysis of the KindiLink videos (case study 1) and the development and analysis of the Noongar language resources in the karaoke videos and webisodes (case studies 2 and 3, respectively) were funded by a small external grant provided by the Western Australian

<sup>1</sup> While fortunately the most restrictive period of physical distancing restrictions only lasted four weeks, we note that there was a lot of discussion and uncertainty at the time about how long the lockdown would last, and about the likelihood of needing to enter another lockdown period later while the pandemic remained (and remains) active globally.

Government Department of Health to investigate the impact of COVID-19 on different communities. As such, the development of the online language resources represents a realistic scenario in language work, utilising both planned and opportunistic activities. The development of the karaoke videos and webisodes were informed by an in-depth interview with Dr. Winmar who worked on the Kin-diLink videos for pre-primary aged children. These two cases were also shaped by the different opportunities afforded during the pandemic for different modes of video production, i.e. minimal production team in outdoor setting versus full professional team in a studio. Finally, the webisodes in case study 3 were specifically designed to explore how the content itself of the videos could support social connectedness and wellbeing during periods of social distancing, addressing the specific context of the pandemic. We critique these case studies in light of considerations that creating online language resources requires a) ongoing community engagement to avoid creating “quick fix” or unused resources; b) funding and training to utilise digital technologies for online language revitalisation activities; and c) the capability to support some sense of the community and sense of connection established in face-to-face work.

This need to re-create some sense of community and connection through online language videos was particularly pertinent to the context of pandemic-imposed physical isolation and lockdowns. We wanted to explore supporting social connectedness through both the form and content of the resources themselves. In terms of form, mobile technology, online content and social media are lauded for the opportunities they provide to “promote connection to family and community, provide cultural continuity and help young people to stay involved with friends” (Walker et al. 2021, 3), as well as facilitating the sharing of digital resources (Carew et al. 2015). In terms of content, developing and sharing online resources associated with Indigenous language, culture and Country may assist Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples to maintain social and environmental connection. Further, Indigenous languages, culture and understandings of Country<sup>2</sup> are frequently linked with positive social and emotional wellbeing outcomes (Abbott 2004; Dockery 2011; Phipps and Slater 2010). The link between maintenance of language, culture and cultural identity, and positive social and emotional wellbeing amongst

Indigenous peoples, is well documented (Dockery 2020; Hopkins, Zubrick, and Taylor 2014; Marett 2010; Roe 2010; Sivak et al. 2019). Recent studies such as the Barnjarla Language and Wellbeing Study (Sivak et al. 2019) in particular point to the positive effect that language revitalisation programmes have for Indigenous communities’ perceived social connectedness and social and emotional wellbeing, suggesting both a challenge and an opportunity to adapt language revitalisation resources as a response to periods of social distancing.

### 3 Background: Noongar Language and Language Revitalisation Activities, Pre-COVID-19

Noongar is the language of the Noongar people, who constitute the largest Indigenous cultural bloc in Australia, extending from Dongara on the west coast to Esperance along the south coast of the Southwest of Western Australia. As the first peoples of Western Australia to meet the full impact of British colonisation in the nineteenth century, Noongar have long endured dispossession, dislocation, racism and poverty (Haebich 2018). The initial years of frontier conflict dramatically diminished the Noongar population and subsequent government policies of segregation and assimilation in the twentieth century actively suppressed the Noongar language. Largely because of the importance of Noongar language to Noongar identity, members of the Noongar community have worked under extreme pressure to ensure its persistence (Bracknell 2020; Kickett-Tucker 2009).

A range of colonial observers (Moore 1842; Symmons 1842), ethnographers (Bates 1931; Hassell and Davidson 1936) and at least one linguist (Laves 1932) recorded and described the Noongar language, but it was not until the late 1960s that Wilf Douglas consulted with the few remaining speakers he could locate and published a substantial study (Douglas 1968). In Australia, the gradual relaxation of restrictions associated with Aboriginal language use in the 1970s coincided with a resurgence of interest and celebration of Aboriginal languages and culture. In 1985 at a Noongar language meeting near the town of Katanning, Western Australia, linguist Nick Thieberger noted “clear interest among members of the Noongar community to record what was still known among the older people and to pass that knowledge to younger people” (Thieberger 2004, 7). Ensuing meetings involving language custodians such as the late Cliff Humphries, Kathy Yarran, Ned Mippy, Hazel Winmar and Peter Farmer Snr resulted in

<sup>2</sup> In an Aboriginal context, the term, “Country,” written with a capital letter, signifies land as “nourishing terrain,” alive, multidimensional and intertwined with local Aboriginal people and culture (Rose 1996, 1).

the recognition of at least three mutually intelligible Noongar dialects and agreement on a Noongar spelling system, and the development of resources which would support the introduction of Noongar language teaching at schools (Bunbury Noongar Aboriginal Progress Association 1990; Whitehurst 1992; Woollorton and Collard 1992). Although it remains critically endangered, the consecutive Australian Bureau of Statistics census results show an ever-increasing number of respondents claiming Noongar as a language spoken at home, from just 167 people in 1996 to 475 people in 2016 (AIATSIS 2022). While this survey data does not account for fluency, it clearly demonstrates increasing identification with the language consistent with language revitalisation efforts elsewhere in southern Australia (Walsh 2001).

Noongar language has been taught sporadically at Perth schools for the last 30 years, including at Moorditj Noongar Community College, where Dr. Winmar is employed as a language teacher, and the language continues to be revitalised in a variety of ways. This includes the development of illustrated books, the establishment of a Noongar language centre, language classes for adults and reincorporating use of the language in other cultural activities such as dance, music and song. Just a few weeks prior to the COVID-19 lockdown, a full and uninterrupted 80 minutes of Noongar was brought to the stage for a general audience in the production of *Hecate*, a Noongar adaptation and translation of Shakespeare's *Macbeth*, co-presented by Perth Festival, Yirra Yaakin Theatre Company and Bell Shakespeare (Bracknell et al. 2021). While such large-scale language revitalisation activities, such as a national tour of *Hecate*, have not yet found an online alternative during the pandemic, other activities have been more easily transitioned to online spaces, as illustrated in the following case studies.

## 4 Case Study 1: KindiLink Moves to Facebook

In the first case study we discuss the benefits and challenges of continuing to provide services for children who were not able to attend KindiLink through the initial lockdown period in March–April 2020. KindiLink is a “play-and-learn” initiative to support Indigenous children in the year before they start kindergarten by providing a transition period from home to school, and is attended by both the children and their carers (Barblett et al. 2020). Dr. Winmar and her non-Aboriginal teaching colleague

worked together to film short videos using a mobile phone, and then shared these videos in a closed group for the KindiLink community on Facebook. They also created small packages of paper-based activities to deliver to each family at home. The videos captured the basic routine of a typical KindiLink school session, with a mix of Noongar and English. For example, one video started with a greeting song with pauses for children watching at home to respond with their name (a response they are already familiar with), then moves into singing “What’s the Weather?/Nadja Woorala-la?” with hand actions and body movements. The videos were filmed in the usual classroom setting and the presenters are fun and upbeat with a relaxed manner in the interaction between them. Overall, the videos feel engaging and naturalistic, and are sustainable to create, with no specialist equipment or facilities, re-takes, or editing required.

In terms of supporting community engagement, Dr. Winmar suggests that one of the reasons the KindiLink sessions were well received as online videos is that the face-to-face sessions themselves before the pandemic were designed to support and guide the parents and caregivers as the “first teachers” of their own children, whether at home or at KindiLink:

because the parents had been with us [at KindiLink] too, you’re actually showing the parents, guiding the parents, when they’re at KindiLink. You’re not necessarily doing everything; you’re just guiding them into what they need to do. So, if you give them all of the props and everything else, well, they’ve got it at home. They *are* the first teachers.

This allowed for a more natural transition to using the videos at home, where the family were already comfortable with “being the teacher” for their children. Similarly, children are shifting from watching television to engaging with educational language and music content through online platforms such as YouTube, signalling a new area for research (Izci et al. 2019). Dr. Winmar reported that the response received by her and her colleague from the families was very positive, as families were happy to see the videos and commented that the videos engaged not just their children but themselves and other family members too. The videos also had the benefit of being easy to play on repeat, a recognised feature of online video learning and flipped classrooms (Castrillo de Larreta-Azelain 2020; Engin and Donanci 2014), and made it easy for caregivers to do something educational at home with their young children. Most importantly, Dr. Winmar felt that during a period of uncertainty where most other routines were disrupted,

the videos offered a way for children to maintain part of their KindiLink routine at home, making them feel more comfortable.

## 5 Case Study 2: Koorlangka Karaoke

The second case study concerns the production of a series of Noongar children's song videos with "Karaoke" style subtitled lyrics, titled *Koorlangka Karaoke*, filmed and produced in the middle of the 2020 lockdown period. These involved a higher level of production than the KindiLink Facebook videos as they were filmed on a video camera (rather than mobile phone) with lapel and stereo field recording mics, and each song was practiced and recorded multiple times. However, the aim of these videos was still the intersection of maximum quality with minimum time, resources and physical contact, as a total of 10 videos were filmed entirely over two afternoons with the two authors in the back and front yard with Dr. Winmar, carefully maintaining physical distancing requirements. After the videos were edited and subtitled, another member of staff at ECU, Cassandra Edwards, offered to add hand-drawn digital animations. Upon viewing the videos, Dr. Winmar suggested that they would be more engaging for young viewers if they had a strong beat. In response, the second author of this paper Dr. Bracknell overdubbed guitar, bass, vocal harmonies and electronic drums. While these additions substantially added to the production quality of the videos, the final version of each *Koorlangka Karaoke* episode came about organically, without external support.

Overall, the videos were quick to produce and given the small file size were particularly appropriate to share on social media platforms such as Facebook, through links to the dedicated YouTube channel. The first video shared was *Dambart Yerderap* ("Three Little Ducks") on the Kuringkurl Katitjin (School of Indigenous Studies at ECU) Facebook page, as a "sneak peek" of the Mayakeniny resource page that hosted the other videos.<sup>3</sup> This video is by far the most watched and shared recent content on the school page, with 9000 views, 157 "like" and "love" reactions, 121 "shares" and 41 comments within a few weeks of uploading. These data showed that the video was shared widely amongst the Noongar and non-Noongar

community, including by many organisations such as community radio pages and childcare centres. People also shared this resource with other people in their own Facebook networks by "tagging" them in the comments. As well as commenting positively on the video ("I love this so much," "That is wonderful," "Moorditj!"), people commented that this was a "great resource for AIEOs" (Aboriginal and Islander Education Officers) and "the Noongar country ECE [Early Childhood Education] teaching network," and that they wanted more resources like this, as well as calls for Noongar language classes. Some people commented that they had shared or were going to share the videos with their own children and grandchildren. In all, the response to *Dambart Yerderap* and to the *Koorlangka Karaoke* shows the reach and impact that such language learning videos can have, even with low-cost or in-kind production, particularly if they are shared on social media and are able to "tap into" a community. The comments on the videos also suggest that a significant factor in the popularity of these videos is that they not only tap into an expressed need for online Noongar language resources, but that many viewers know personally or know of Dr. Winmar through her many years of teaching and connections as an active member of her community – thus gaining the motivational benefit of engaging with instructional content that is made by a familiar teacher (Engin and Donanci 2014).

## 6 Case Study 3: Webisodes

Following the success of the *Koorlangka Karaoke* videos produced in lockdown, the ECU research team focused on producing another series of Noongar language video content, with higher-production values that could be achieved in face-to-face studio sessions after the restrictions were lifted. This series also utilised the majority of the project budget. The team looked ahead to supporting social connectedness during potential future periods of lockdown, by focussing on the theme of Country in the videos, given the critical role that connection to Country plays in social and emotional wellbeing (Abbott 2004; Cervinka, Röderer, and Hefler 2012; Kingsley et al. 2013). The hypothesis put forward by the research team is that such video content would positively support Noongar (and non-Noongar) community to a) learn some Noongar language and b) feel more connected with their Country and culture during periods of social isolation and lockdown. These videos constitute the third case study of this paper, introducing an interesting point of comparison and difference

<sup>3</sup> Mayakeniny (<https://www.mayakeniny.com/>) is a website created by the project research team to host Noongar language and performance resources developed as part of the ARC Discovery Indigenous project *Restoring on-Country Performance*.

in the amount of time, funding and expertise that went into making the videos compared to *Koorlangka Karaoke*.

The team contracted an external production company, L’Unica Productions, as well as collaborating with actor/director Kylie Bracknell, to script, film and produce five videos or “webisodes” of 2 minutes length, in Noongar language. It was decided to make the videos in Noongar language only without using English, following the principle of immersive language learning (Hinton 2001; Littlewood and Yu 2011; Swain and Lapkin 2013). The tone of the videos was intended to be suitable to audiences of any age, not just children, so that they could be enjoyed by families and utilised by adults who are also interested in learning Noongar. The content of four of the videos – birds and elements – speaks to the importance of establishing and maintaining a connection to Country and to the natural environment, particularly in periods of lockdown where access to Country may be limited. The first video of the series, *Djert – Learn the names of birds in Noongar (Part 1)* – has been viewed more than a thousand times, and was featured in the Department of Biodiversity, Conservation and Attractions newsletter as a resource to “support community involvement in bushland conservation.”

To explore the questions of community engagement and feelings of connectedness to Noongar culture and community, an online survey was made available through the Webisodes page on the Mayakeniny website. The survey included questions pertaining to five areas:

**Demographics.** This included whether the respondent identified as Aboriginal/Noongar or as non-Indigenous,

their age and gender. It also included a question about whether they had a role as a caregiver and/or teacher, to ascertain what sort of reach the webisodes had in terms of being accessed by people who might watch or share the webisodes with children. A total of 24 viewers completed the survey, as summarised in Table 1. These respondents represented a wide demographic of viewers, with some broad tendencies: nearly half the respondents identified as Noongar or other Indigenous (45.8%); the majority of respondents were female (75%), between 40 and 59 years old (62.5%) and were in a position of providing care for children, as a primary caregiver, teacher or both (58.3%).

**Accessibility.** These questions probed whether access to a reliable Internet connection and mobile technology could be a limiting factor in the dissemination and accessibility of the videos when people have to stay at home. e.g. “What kind of device did you watch this episode on?,” “What kind of Internet connection did you use to watch this episode?” Viewers watched the webisode on either a smartphone or a laptop/desktop computer, with no further issues flagged regarding Internet connectivity.

**Watching with family.** These questions explored whether watching the webisode was a shared family activity, including watching with children in the family, and asked about children’s response to the webisode (from the respondent’s perspective) to get an understanding of the broader intergenerational appeal of the webisodes. Only one respondent reported that at the time of the survey they had watched the webisode with a child; as such no data are available regarding children’s actual responses to the webisode. However, all respondents reported that they would share the webisode with other family members, and felt that it was “very important” to “extremely important” that their family had access to a resource like this.

**Connectedness.** These questions assess the viewer’s feelings of connectedness to language, culture, Country, and each other, e.g. “This webisode makes me feel proud of my culture,” “This webisode makes me want to learn more language,” “This webisode makes me feel more connected to the people around me.” Note that questions about connectedness to culture were only asked of respondents who identified as Aboriginal/Noongar. Results for these questions are summarised in Figures 1 and 2, and discussed further below. Figure 1 gives results for those questions asked only of those respondents who identified as Aboriginal or Noongar specifically, and Figure 2 gives survey results for questions asked of all respondents regardless of identity.

**Overall webisode evaluation.** The final questions in the survey asked about whether viewers enjoyed the webisode overall, how likely they were to use something

**Table 1:** Survey respondent demographics ( $n = 24$ ).

Characteristic	Relevant categories	$n=$	Percentage
Age (years)	18–29	2	8.3
	30–39	3	12.5
	40–49	7	29.2
	50–59	8	33.3
	60–69	4	16.6
Gender	Male	6	25
	Female	18	75
Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander	Noongar = 7		
	Aboriginal, not Noongar = 4		
	Total Aboriginal	11	45.8
Caregiver and/or teacher?	No	13	54.2
	Yes – both	5	20.8
	Yes – caregiver only	7	29.2
	Yes – teacher only	2	8.3
	No	10	41.7

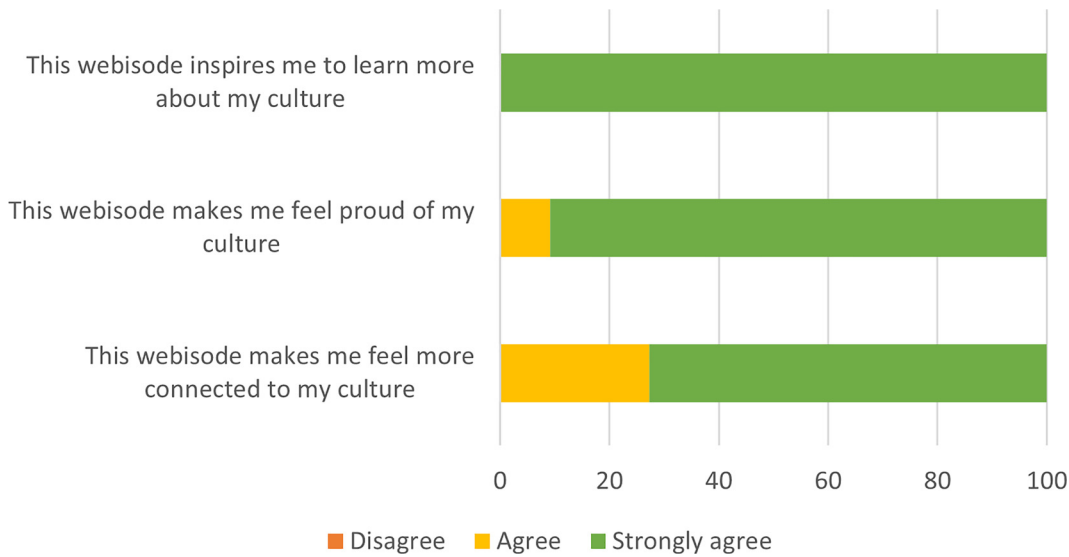


Figure 1: Indigenous and Noongar responses to the webisodes (n = 11).

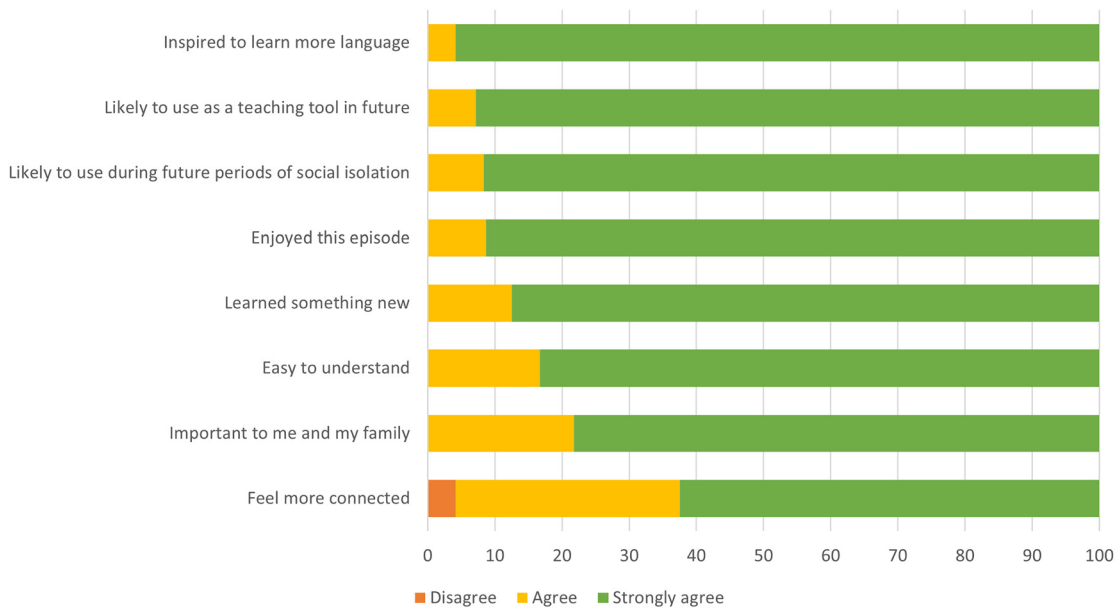


Figure 2: All responses to the webisodes (n = 24).

similar in future (particularly during hypothetical future periods of lockdown), what they liked about the webisode and how it could be improved.

The intention of the webisodes, to support and maintain viewers’ connection with Country and culture during periods of lockdown, is strongly demonstrated in these survey results, whilst the intention to support and maintain a feeling of social connectedness amongst viewers was more moderately demonstrated. In particular, all survey respondents who identified as Aboriginal or Noongar

agreed or strongly agreed that watching the webisodes made them feel more connected to their culture, proud of their culture and inspired them to learn more about their culture. Further, all survey respondents regardless of identity agreed or strongly agreed that the webisodes inspired them to learn more Noongar language, and that they learnt something new. While still figuring strongly, social connectedness, as represented by the statement “This webisode makes me feel more connected to the people around me,” ranked lowest in viewers’ responses to

the webisode, which is perhaps not surprising as the online webisodes did not directly connect people to each other (either face-to-face or via videoconferencing).

Overall, respondents noted that they enjoyed the short length and simplicity of the language in the webisodes and the repetition of spoken language, commenting that they liked “[b]eing able to hear Noongar spoken rather than reading it. You get to hear the pronunciation,” and “Loved that clips were short, visual, had repetition, bird noises and presenters from different ages/genders and didn’t have English subtitles. I find it easier to learn language with all those things.” Finally, 23 of 24 survey respondents said that they were “extremely likely” to use a resource like this in the future, particularly during periods of social isolation.

These survey results and comments suggest that there are particular benefits to learning and engaging with language through online videos, including the use of visuals, length, repetition, focus on spoken language, convenience and availability of Noongar teachers such as Dr. Winmar. While each of these elements is available in other language teaching formats such as in-person language classes, the combination of all these elements seems specific to a “webisode” format, and both Noongar and non-Noongar community members responded extremely positively.

## 7 Discussion and Recommendations

As expected, all the Noongar language resources adapted to online spaces in response to the COVID-19 lockdown were well received. As evidenced in the survey results elicited in response to the Webisodes and supported by the reflections of Dr. Winmar, these media promoted a strong connection to Country, culture, and language, and a moderate sense of social connectedness amongst viewers. Both the webisodes and *Koorlangka Karaoke* have received a consistent number of visits through the YouTube page up to this date, indicating ongoing community engagement. Of further interest concerning the future production of such online media, the *Koorlangka Karaoke* videos performed consistently best on Facebook and YouTube analytics, both in terms of total number of views and average percentage viewed (the average percentage of the video watched by viewers before they stopped watching). While the content of the resources are not comparable – subtitled song videos versus the short scripted dialogue of the Webisodes, for example – this finding reflects other studies of online video content, that informal videos with a more personal feel outperform videos with higher

production values (Guo, Kim, and Rubin 2014). Future studies could be designed to compare these variables more comprehensively.

While the webisodes include atmospheric background music under the scripted Noongar dialogue, the *Koorlangka Karaoke* videos primarily function as music. It is entirely possible that the comparatively greater reach of *Koorlangka Karaoke* is due to the way each video in the series can be enjoyed as music, without mandating that audiences actively engage in language learning at all. However, there is a substantial body of evidence generally linking song with language acquisition. Generally, melody singing is widely acknowledged as an effective language learning tool, enhancing an “awareness of sounds, rhythms, pauses, and intonations” and reinforcing correct pronunciation (Fonseca-Mora 2000, 152). The mnemonic qualities of song can also assist in invigorating and sustaining language acquisition (Bracknell et al. 2021; see also Miyashita and Shoe 2009; Murphey 1990). Although a “language cannot be saved by singing a few songs” (Ellis and Mac a’Ghobhainn 1971, 144), across Australia, the use of song has proven to be popular and reasonably effective in teaching Aboriginal languages to children and adults (Amery 2001). Edwards and Hobson (2013) caution that hasty Aboriginal-language translations of English tunes like “heads, shoulders, knees and toes” may distort correct stress and pronunciation of the language and be counterproductive to language learning. However, knowledgeable teachers like Dr. Winmar have the foresight and skill to privilege the technical elements of their language when they adapt English songs. Some teachers advocate the use of “traditional” Aboriginal songs in language learning settings (Hobson et al. 2018). However, in many longstanding traditions of Aboriginal singing practices – including Noongar song idioms – sung language can be spoken and structured differently to spoken language (Bracknell 2017), which could confuse language learners. All Noongar language content in *Koorlangka Karaoke* was sung to the tune of well-known children’s songs. This juxtaposition of familiar musical content with the potentially unfamiliar Noongar vocabulary may have encouraged engagement.

Developing and sharing online resources for Noongar language learning, and cultural learning through language, also represents an opportunity to meet the growing demand for Noongar language, as identified by Colleen Sheratt and Charmaine Councillor, two Noongar language teachers (Noongar Dandjoo 2020). Sheratt and Councillor identify particular challenges to meeting this demand that online resources such as the media content created during the COVID-19 pandemic are particularly well situated to

address. Firstly, while children at some schools in the South-West have the opportunity to learn Noongar language as a school subject, the amount of time allocated is not enough to learn the language. Despite the WA State Government's (School Curriculum and Standards Authority 2016) notional time allocation of 2 hours of language study per week for students in Years 3–8, Noongar language lessons are often reduced to a single class per week, or omitted entirely in the event of a school excursion (Dr. Winmar, personal communication). Further, language learning and teaching in school often situates the language ideologically as a school subject, and as a collection of words and grammar, rather than an opportunity for communication (Armstrong 2012; Austin 2014; Smith-Christmas 2017). Finally, as Sheratt and Councillor note, even if children learn Noongar at school and take it to share at home, their family members likely speak very little Noongar, so children miss the opportunity to interact in Noongar outside school. The demand for more Noongar language learning opportunities outside the school domain is not just a matter of meeting the community's curiosity or passing interest in the language, but a targeted pedagogical strategy to meet the limitations of school-based language learning. The media content presented in the case studies here provide an opportunity for the whole family to engage with Noongar language in a non-institutionalised context, in ways that they can share with each other through the shared experience of watching the videos.

The three case studies discussed in this article highlight the benefits and opportunities that arise when Noongar community and language revitalisation workers adapt and create online resources for language revitalisation activities. Encouragingly, the creation and success of this language content is not dependent on greater production resources – though a larger budget allows for a greater variety of creative expression – but rather on the personnel and, dare we say, heart given to these projects. Such online resources can serve to keep communities connected during periods of social isolation, not only to each other through engaging with the resources in communal online spaces such as Facebook, but also to a sense of self and wellbeing through the presentation of the community's language and Country.

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