

Describing the food choices of Aboriginal children attending an afterschool cultural program from two different knowledge systems: The importance of Country, community, and kinship

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Abstract

Aims: This study describes a program co-created with Aboriginal communities to strengthen cultural ties with the children. Food data are reported from two knowledge systems (lenses): Western and Aboriginal relational, focused on Country, community, and kinship.

Methods: A cultural program was undertaken with primary school children of Aboriginal heritage, on Yuin nation, over 10 weeks including culturally appropriate practices (painting, bushtucker, and dance). We report mixed method food outcomes framed by Western (quantitative) 24-h recall and Aboriginal relational methods (qualitative) captured by cultural images, yarn-ing and continuous consultation methods to expose lessons from community and Country, to extend kinship.

Results: In total, 111 children (79 providing food data) across three regional communities commenced the program. A storying approach to food data collection and interpretation was preferred. The number of serves of seafood products, such as fish increased, vegetable consumption improved, intakes of dairy improved in quality and energy intakes from discretionary foods decreased across the programs. Qualitative data exposed six themes: Eating with family, competing agendas, food as medicine, applying cultural practices, food choices driven by 'post-invasion tradition' and community events, which deepened our understanding of the food data. Teaching the importance of the ocean and water saw participants engage with family in practices such as fishing to improve overall awareness of culture through food.

Conclusion: The kinship system in a cultural context supported positive shifts towards accessible food choices driven by messages from Country. While the changes cannot be isolated to the program, cultural immersion drove change and strength-based reporting.

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KEYWORDS

Aboriginal relational methodology, children, community program, food choices

1 | INTRODUCTION

Food is not only a biological need but extends to intangible elements including spirituality, well-being, connection, and safety. In the context of culture, food meaning stems from food practices through to relationships with person, place, and Country.¹ Despite variability between cultures, a pattern of respect for the land, ancestry, family, and community are common²; with community from an Indigenous standpoint, considering social, political, and geographical elements including people.³

For Australian Aboriginal people, Country is a living entity central to relationships. Country understands that we as humans, are a part of nature not separated: Country is self, self is Country.⁴ The separation of humans from Country (colonisation) has impacted Australia and people globally. Aboriginal pedagogies, alongside food, look beyond what was eaten, incorporating who it was eaten with, where it was eaten, why it was eaten (or not eaten), what it means to eat and seasonal availability to optimise physical and spiritual health. These spiritual elements include food in ritual, dance, ceremony, and create an understanding within Aboriginal communities.

Re-contextualising food and research beyond Western frameworks (decolonisation) is paramount to studies with Indigenous peoples.⁵ For example, Panelli et al.⁶ discussed Maori cultural interconnection with well-being, while their health is documented using a deficit model. Similarly, the Australian Aboriginal meaning of health encompasses more than physical elements considering social, emotional, and spiritual factors.⁷ Unsurprisingly, Australian studies also report Aboriginal health from a deficit,⁸ creating further indifference.⁹ As dietitians and nutritionists, we need to consider decolonising methods by moving to understand food in culture and its meaning for the whole person.

In Australia, Aboriginal lifestyles are disrupted by colonisation;¹⁰ reduction of spiritual connectedness. Food practices are impacted by a lack of acknowledgement of the Aboriginal understanding of Country. Farming practices were destroyed, demolishing Country.¹¹ The eating patterns and food awareness of Aboriginal peoples have changed from locally sourced whole foods to commercially purchased, as industrialisation changed practices. Today, intergenerational change is evident, and many Aboriginal children are unaware of the meaning of food, or its spiritual relevance to self and community.¹² As researchers we needed to consider the personal, social,

and political implications of our methods. Throughout the project that we report here, we were at times faced with ethnographic refusal but respectfully avoided these topics and redirected inquiry.^{13,14}

While there are similarities between Indigenous communities, differences occur due to the personality and nature of Countries of Australia, impacting practices. For example, communities co-located with the ocean likely employ practices related to the sea. Equally, food may be considered toxic or medicinal, yet an understanding of this knowledge is tied to culture and the way communities operate,¹⁵ and needs to be shared. Despite strong kinship with community and Country in some areas, challenges arose from colonisation in an ability, or willingness, to share local stories which form the basis to Aboriginal learnings—vital to the development of children, as Country, within a community. Experiences of past generations also created reticence amongst Aboriginal communities in sharing their stories.¹⁶ Our team navigated this across the journey of our project, outlined below, finding that a strengths-based approach and open communication aided the growth of relationships, towards a common goal.

Due to challenges from colonisation, some children are distanced from their heritage and in turn their community and Country; the basis to Indigenous health.⁷ Cultural ties with food are vital, yet survival is challenged due to adversity and a Western lens of health. When considered within Aboriginal communities, the relationship between people, food, and places, requires recognition due to the interconnection with culture. For our study, and aligned with our methodology, kinship refers to the relationships physically, emotionally, and spiritually that form part of a community.¹⁷

Drawing on this link, our study focused on food-related successes as part of our community-focused approach. We describe outcomes of a program co-created with Aboriginal communities to strengthen cultural ties with Aboriginal children. Co-creation occurred through a relational theoretical and methodological approach including continued personal and professional (relational) partnership meetings (beyond consultation) with varying local Aboriginal community members/stakeholders.¹⁸ For example, following funding success, our project idea was taken to the community who felt that it did not align with best-practice for working with Aboriginal communities.¹⁹ Utilising McKnight's²⁰ Country-centred approach where Country is the core knowledge holder and teacher, the community was also viewed as

Country and we put into practice the community wishes for the program, reviewed in partnership with academic protocols. Use of the term ‘we’ recognises not only the authorship team but our ongoing partnership and collaboration with Country and the Aboriginal communities who guided the program design, participated in and/or led the program activities, iteratively evaluated the program and challenged our perspectives. To maintain cultural safety, our academic team members were accountable to the community, for example regularly sharing data in meetings for review, feedback, and approval. Our aim for this study was to provide insights about food data from Aboriginal children attending our cultural program reported from two knowledge systems: a Western lens and one from Country, community, and kinship. We utilised the McKnight and colleagues^{20,21} “Mingadhuga Mingayung” ...approach focuse[d] on identifying similarities through stories to guide non-Aboriginal people in Yuin ways of knowing, learning and behaving with Country’. (20, p. 276). Our steps towards decolonisation occurred by finding points of connection within the contested knowledges and protocols by placing Country as the key entity within our relationship(s). Through this, we begin to decolonise research methodologies and highlight the importance of viewing nutrition, food, and food contexts from an Aboriginal perspective, bringing in spirit.¹² This challenged our implementation, information gathering, evaluation, and reporting while being respectful to Country, community, and existing nutrition science approaches—working *with* the communities instead of researching *about* the communities.

2 | METHODS

We present our mixed methods research from two knowledge frameworks: a Western lens and a lens focused on Country, community, and kinship, to demonstrate lessons learned, and report our findings using the CONSIDER statement (Supporting information S1).²² We intentionally framed this section to compare and contrast our Western nutrition science lens which is heavily based in quantitative methods, with an alternative lens. Our lens that focuses on Country, community and kinship largely includes qualitative methods and re-interpretation of our quantitative findings. Our data are from a study of primary school children of Aboriginal heritage (aged 5–13 years) participating in a 10-week cultural program. Detailed methods are documented elsewhere.²¹ In brief, following consultation,¹⁸ after-school programs were co-created with Aboriginal communities of the South Coast of New South Wales, Australia. The curricula were developed by each community and two Aboriginal mentors (one male and

one female) ran the programs. Children attended weekly on two occasions to undertake cultural activities such as painting, bushtucker, dance, and music. It was hypothesised that by supporting a cultural focus for the children, we would see positive improvements to food choices due to the links of food, with culture, through Country. The children provided assent with informed written consent from the child’s parent or legal guardian. Ethics approval for this work was from the Human Research Ethics Committee of the University of Wollongong (2015/240). Our original design was developed for a Western funding application including health behaviour measures (diet, physical activity, sedentary behaviours) collected at commencement (pre-) and follow-up (post-). This study reports our food outcomes only. Participants recalled their intakes pre- and post-intervention using an interviewer administered 24-h recall with multiple pass methodology.²³ While parents/guardians of younger children are usually encouraged to support this approach, none were able due to data collection during school hours. Children were also provided with digital cameras (Nikon Coolpix S01 model) for the duration of the program to capture photos at the program and home that represented culture to them, inclusive of food. For this study, only photos related to food were utilised to give participants an opportunity to voice the place and meaning of food in their lives.⁴ The children were also asked to capture photos of food before and after consumption to complement the recall data within a two community pilot. We held separate yarns with participants, their parents, and teachers’ post-program about experiences with the program(s). Yarning is an informal discussion in a comfortable and culturally safe space creating a shared journey through a relationship of stories and teachings from Country and people.²⁴

We have previously published our evolving study methodology.²⁵ We learnt from the communities, our Aboriginal research team member (AM) and Country that we needed to change our approach.²¹ Our Aboriginal storytelling¹⁸ approach, referred to as Aboriginal relational research methodology, placed Country at the centre of our project to reduce the colonial influence of research practice. We utilised Aboriginal ways of knowing, learning, doing, and being (relational); however, extended upon this by stating and implementing Country as the knowledge system, storyteller, and teacher.

We placed emphasis on decolonising the design and methods by implementing Country as a methodology (knowing, learning, doing, and being).²⁶ Our approach did not attempt to prioritise Aboriginal ways of knowing and doing, but rather our relational model considered respect and relationships that informed experiences and were used as a lens for viewing culture. Therefore, we considered, and consider, Country as a point of

connection for all people and entities and common to the lenses we report.

Preliminary analysis of the 24-h recall data demonstrated an importance of the child voice⁴ and showed that our initial approach did not reflect the underpinnings of Aboriginal health. By including yarning,²¹ we were exposed to new insights about foods, meals, and eating occasions that were not captured quantitatively. Our yarning approach was informed by academia,^{24,26,27} Country (inclusive of the local community sharing protocols), and the Aboriginal academic within our team who is a member of the partnering community.²¹ In brief, yarning was conducted outside for children and inside for adults. As noted above, we utilised local cultural protocols adapted to children or adults, as required. Our research team led and observed the yarning. Observations included both participants and Country. We also considered the different levels of autonomy of children within Aboriginal communities.²⁸

For the food data, we were guided by community and Country and engaged with the participants at the site of each program which varied from local schools to an Aboriginal mission. Online 24-h recalls were deemed inappropriate due to Internet connectivity, and a pen-and-paper format did not resolve this challenge. We felt the rigid structure of the recall missed the contextual information about foods reducing it to 'when' and 'how much'. Information about 'with whom' and 'why' are vital to the child voice and their growing connections to culture. The digital camera pilot presented a preference of the children to capture more than food photos, representing other elements of culture. Photography was, therefore, redirected, as reported elsewhere,⁴ and regular yarns about the whole program shaped future iterations, including a preference for storying methods.²¹

Dietary data for the nutrition science lens were analysed using Foodworks software (v10, 2020, Xyris Pty Ltd, QLD) and AUSNUT 2011–13 food composition database.²⁹ We engaged an independent researcher to confirm our data quality and correct errors using source data verification.³⁰ We examined the plausibility of the intakes based on reported energy and basal metabolic rate for age and sex.

The food ID codes of the food composition database include a nested hierarchical system whereby the first two digits correspond to a coarse food grouping and the first five digits a granular grouping separating out, for example, the different types of meat. We aggregated food groups with ID codes commencing 17, 18, 20 to form a meat and meat products group, codes 23, 24, 25 to form a vegetables and legume products group, and codes 26, 27 to form a discretionary group aligned with Australian Dietary Guidelines.³¹

We pooled data for the three communities, categorised by food groups and consider children attending

multiple programs as independent for each visit. We calculated changes in participant numbers consuming each food group and differences in the number of consumers and serving size pre- and post-program using SPSS software (v25, IBM Corporation, Armonk, NY). Data normality was inspected visually using histograms and Shapiro Wilks tests. Non-parametric data were expected due to the sample size though we did not log transform the data. A chi-square with Fisher exact test was planned between food groups at each time point by sex, though test assumptions were violated, and we deemed the method unsuitable.

Guided by Country and the community, the collated recall data were re-interpreted to emphasise strength-based outcomes. Our analyses prioritised food group changes over nutrients or over who was/was not reporting certain food choices. The communities considered the timing of the program to expose why shifts occurred and whether they were evolving rather than occurring at one point in time. Local knowledges were our drivers, as were messages from Country across the local seasons. We discussed lifestyle patterns of the participants revealing events of cultural importance.

Our yarns included researcher notes of observations. Discussions from the yarns were audio recorded and the data were transcribed verbatim using Otter AI software (Mountain View, California USA, <https://otter.ai/>) and we confirmed the quality by verifying the recording with the transcript. Outcomes were discussed by unpacking data from the yarns to explore key themes. Messages were extracted and used as talking points in our community consultations to understand meaning behind the words/data. We held consultations face-to-face at a site central to all communities and shared meeting notes with attendees. We uncovered a process to capture an adult (researcher) understanding of the child spirit⁴ through these methods.

3 | RESULTS

One-hundred-eleven children enrolled in the program with data for 84 (8.7 ± 2.0 years pre-program) available across three communities. Five children withdrew during one program. Seventy-nine participants completed dietary data (94%) obtained pre- (38 female, 41 male) and 67 (92%) post- (34 female, 33 male).²¹ One participant was excluded due to implausible data. Quantitatively (Western lens) the food data (Tables S1 and S2) reveal shifts in the number of participants reporting food groups pre- and post-program. A decrease in the number of female and male participants reporting sweetened beverages and soft drinks and the average serve per participant

decrease over time. The same pattern was observed for water and other beverages, while fruit juice remained stable for the number of females and increased for males, despite consistent mean reported energy. Females report an increase consumption of pasta products, with a decrease in the number of males reporting this choice. Consumption of breakfast cereal increased for both sexes, with oats and porridge remaining stable for females and increasing slightly for males. The consumption of sweet and savoury biscuits and cake-type desserts decreased for all, though the contribution of energy increased for some related food groups (sweet biscuits). The number of participants reporting fish and seafood products increased as did the serving and energy contributions for all. Contrary to this, processed meats consumption decreased, as did the energy and serving size for all. For mixed dishes with beef or poultry, an increase was only reported by males, while it decreased or it remained stable, respectively, for females. Finally, intakes of sugar, syrups, and honeys increased for all with chocolate and chocolate-based confectionary also increased for females, likely due to a change in participants and serving sizes for both sexes.

Community consultations revealed factors not captured using the planned (Western) methods. The communities expressed a need for storying of food data due to the overlap of other elements of life for participants. The following are themes not captured using our 24-h recall method or by viewing photos without context.

The first theme was 'Cooking and sharing food with family'. Images of fish and chips consumed with family members demonstrated the influence and strong connections of family (Figure 1). The child's explanation of the image reveals a deeper understanding of the type of fish, person who sourced the fish and its historical relevance.

Importance was placed on the shared occasion, cultural practice, the relative(s), and learnings at the time of photo capture and consumption as also outlined by a 5-year-old who described the meals provided by her grandmother with reference to key food items.

[describing photo] P: My grandma at her house ... Cooking... I: Why did you pick this photo...? P: Because I love my grandma... make me breaky, dinner, lunch and let me have snacks and let me have chocolate.

(Girl, aged 5 years)

The second theme exposed 'Competing agendas'. Considering other after-school activities exposed football training held at the same time as our culture program and attended by many participants. Sport influences beverage choice, as mentioned anecdotally, and increased amounts



"I can't remember what the fish was. Fish and chips... That's what's ... jewfish. And my uncle caught it... Like the black fellas hunting the fish and getting 'em and taking 'em back to the camp and eating 'em and sharing with their family."

(Boy, aged 11 years)

FIGURE 1 Photo from an 11-year-old boy.

of foods consumed. The 24-h recall did not create a means to capture foods eaten before or after training, nor did it include relevant prompts for the participants, suggesting a diet history interview could be prioritised. The influence of sport was mentioned by teachers and the wider community.

Yeah. Well, that was one of the things we found last year was, you know, sports had start[ed]-... yeah... so all the kids were at football.

(Site 1 Teacher Term 2, 2018)

Footy season may be a big impact on these results

(Community meeting notes Term 4, 2018)

The third theme revealed 'Food as medicine'. As participants engaged with the program curricula, the seasonality and meaning of food on Country became a focus. For example, bushtucker varied with notable differences in the colder months of the year. Below, one participant described his recollection of bushtucker and medicines. He was able to recall the names of plants and his experience of tasting another.

P...what kind of bushtucker there is...Just remembered that I learnt some new plants like the golden wattle and the geebung and the horrible medicine that tastes like - Pooh... I: Was that the sarsaparilla? P: Yeah that's what it was sarsaparilla leaves.

(Site 1 Follow up yarn, Boys, Term 3, 2016).

The fourth theme was 'Applying cultural practices - fishing'. As kinship connections strengthened so did their awareness and willingness to learn practices of obtaining food, passed on from mentors by storying. The participant yarned about the photos, shared the meaning of culture and bare witness to methods of food harvesting not evident in the 24-h recalls. Stories shared about boats and fishing trips with family and of shucking oysters, were all

themed around co-location of Country with the sea. The quotes below outlined participant preferences for future iterations of our program, describing new learnings they hope to experience.

P: We can make the fishing rod and then we can fish and then we can cook it...on the fire... P: I know how to make fishing rods... You just get a long stick and then cast it out...P: That's the old-fashioned way...

(Site 2, Follow up yarn Term 3, 2017)

The use of experiential learning, aligned with the autonomy of Aboriginal children, was a driver of participant understanding of culture. This created flexibility in connecting with children and their families (recruitment) by including siblings of Aboriginal children (kinship), and adjusting the curricula based on day-to-day messages from Country. The quote below described fishing experiences in relation to food practices. (Names have been changed to a pseudonym to maintain anonymity.)

P2: Just try to catch like flathead and brim... If it's big enough we like cook it. P1: My favourite fish is flathead. P3: Yeah. I've caught ... I think I've caught a giant flathead... P2: I love fishing in the harbour and like we sometimes take the boat out the back of the harbour, around the headlands sorta thing... P1: Me and [Mark] go and cook on the barbie...Yeah I like doing that.

(Site 1 mixed yarn, Term 3, 2016)

The fifth theme revealed 'Food choices driven by "post-invasion tradition"'. As our program evolved, the need to provide healthy foods selected by the mentors became apparent. Programs initially began with cordial as a drink and snack options such as party pies. Yarning about the change in the participants highlighted choice shifts to include fruit and vegetable options and that many earlier food choices have meaning within the community. By example, Devon (processed meat) sandwiches with tomato sauce were often mentioned by mentors. When stories were shared, these sandwiches represented memories of passing of knowledges, lived experience, and shared stories of connection and colonisation. Despite the stories occurring during community consultations, food was also the basis to some activities. Some of the mentor-created program activities asked participants to categorise foods based on how frequently they should be consumed (Figure 2) or whether they are considered traditional or modern-day foods (Figure 3).

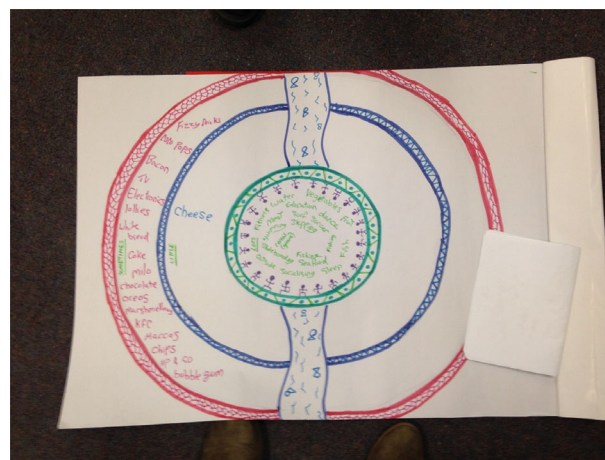


FIGURE 2 Our journey activity completed by participants at Site 1.

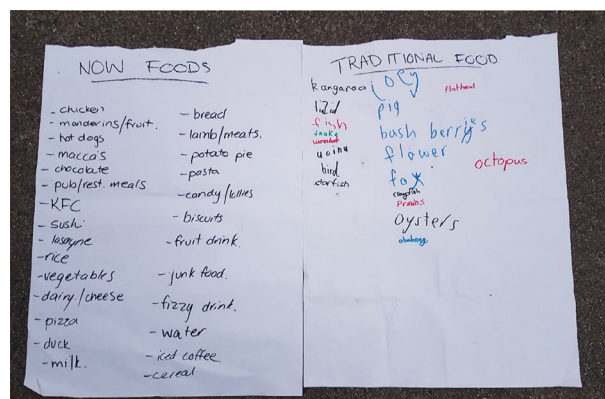


FIGURE 3 Food and nutrition activity (Week 3, Site 1).

The sixth theme highlighted 'Community events'. While the amount of confectionary reported during one program cycle was high, the recall only captured a 24-h period. Community discussions (Term 4, 2018) revealed the influence of Halloween as the programs ran during school Term 3. We verified this with the dates of the recalls. Further, programs run during school Term 4 echoed food choice reflective of the festive period typically captured using different forms of dietary assessment targeted to habitual intake.

4 | DISCUSSION

Our food data results highlight the importance of connecting two knowledge systems. Presented as lenses informed by Aboriginal relational research methodology, we attempt to expose a disconnect that can drive deficit reporting. The program we report, was successful, as demonstrated by multiple complete cycles in each

community,²¹ ongoing to this day. The outcomes appear to positively impact food choices, without intervening with food. The cultural focus appears to have resulted in positive food awareness likely due to the interwoven nature of food with culture. We learnt that by embracing 'child spirit' as our driver,⁴ the messages and understanding of food-related concepts aligned with Aboriginal knowledges. This challenged our thinking, highlighting a need to view our data differently. For example, from a Western lens, upon completing the program the participants were nearing the recommended intakes of fruit and vegetables based on sex and age. From an Aboriginal perspective, children were connected with Country to enjoy food sourced from the land. Yarning provided us with a deeper understanding around the food connections to Country which are embedded in food choice.

Country provided our mentors with opportunities to teach participants to forage for bush tucker while yarning about the cultural basis to including access to food and its availability.²¹ While the mentors encouraged the children to make healthy food choices by providing snacks, no formal training was provided. Food-related opportunities came from immersion on Country and sharing of stories. We believed the shifts in food choice may have emerged from a growing understanding of the relational approach of our methods and Country. The different world views that we present are emerging, however, the differences we see are contradictory to Aboriginal relational research methodology but can be used to identify connections through respect. As Lemke and Delormier,³² argue, maintaining principles of respect, responsibility, and relationships alongside different world views can overcome barriers, create a focus on partnership with Indigenous groups, and create new ways of knowing.

Our research extended our ways of knowing. For example, our Western trained dietitian (YP), became aware of the limitations of quantifying nutrients and food intakes based on serve sizes. She learnt to recognise this awareness and translate it to practical and locally meaningful information through open conversation. This revealed deeper meaning for the outcomes that may otherwise have been missed. Twenty-four hours recalls, when repeated, can capture habitual intake. A single recall, as in our project, while advantageous to reducing participant burden and minimising literacy demands, only captures a window of intake. By aligning the assessment method with yarning, a better understanding of the data could be obtained. Meals consumed with family formed a basis to how food is viewed within ours and likely many other Aboriginal communities. This was not unexpected given kinship and family form the basis to Aboriginal culture.³³ Kinship networks exposed informal guardianship roles (e.g., aunts and uncles) and we saw

learnings of how food can relate to people in these networks through storying. For our participants, enjoying time with friends and family was a time of cultural reaffirmation with Country.

Throughout our programs, participants were introduced to identifying foods from Country and the importance of respect for plants, even the distasteful ones. Our links of culture with food exposed food not only for sustenance but community connections, Country and healing benefits. As participant connections to Country strengthened, we saw the development of reciprocal and respectful relationships. 'Not only can we use the food around us to heal ourselves, but we can also use it to heal the environment or ask for help from the environment' (34, p. 145). This quote suggests our findings are not unique but part of a complex relationship between people, food and Country.

The most notable shift related to fish and seafood choices, was likely due to the coastal communities and the messages from Country. The *Yuin* nation is perceived to border with the ocean to the East of Australia. Local title is being sought to extend to areas of the sea due to longstanding and continuous use of the land and waters by the communities.³⁵ Traditional fishing and shucking practices are common to coastal communities. Our programs created awareness and reaffirmed learnings by engaging children in these practices driven by Country as exemplified in this quote: 'To take the territorial lands away from a people whose very spirit is so intrinsically connected to Mother Earth was to actually dispossess them of their very soul and being...' (36, p. 7).

Differences in food selection were apparent. Participants who previously reported limited or no intake from certain food groups began reporting them after the program. While this cannot be isolated to the program, it suggested a changing awareness likely driven by culture. Hassel et al.³⁷ commented on the importance of relationships between food and cultural preservation. They explored the impact of colonisation and decolonisation to suggest a link between food and health experience faced by Indigenous communities. Our data, viewed solely from a Western lens, would show evidence of processed meats, added sugars, and low-fibre foods. However, when considering the implications of colonisation in Australia, the foods selected have a deeper meaning of hardship and/or poverty. By maintaining kinship and family connections, the food choices may create a sense of identity related to modern times. This impact of change was also acknowledged by Hassel with Indigenous peoples of North America. Their study explored barriers to participation of Indigenous scholars in food and nutrition programs recognising disciplinary 'blind spots' that may reduce with open lines of enquiry.

With an unawareness (or blindness) of the ‘whole’ participant, our nutritionists conducting the recalls did not prompt for potentially missing patterns of consumption. Examining the data without context means that a deficit lens to interpretation forms a narrative that we shy away from. Information about sports, as well as the physically active elements of our program were not captured. A sense of the whole participant was also absent when using the dietary recall alone. Our initial approach did not parallel the construct of culture and its broader meaning and could have driven deficit reporting.

Limited papers acknowledge strengths-based approaches to reporting nutrition research. Wilson et al.¹ elegantly frame the challenges faced by Aboriginal Australians due to colonisation, emphasising its necessity. Their paper suggests that we are not alone in our learnings. Wilson et al.¹ also refer to the biomedical (Western) model contrasted with the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander consideration of ‘the relational nature of our worlds and lives.’ Acknowledging these differences is vital to create awareness of negative meanings underpinning research. A recent study, including nutrition, reports outcomes with a deficit frame.³⁸ While likely not intentional, we challenge the researchers to consider if it is a deficit in their methods and suitability to the participants that was driving the reported findings; like our learnings about the limited suitability of Western methods for dietary assessment.

The connection of Western and Indigenous knowledges demonstrates the importance of relationships not only between people and entities, but also between knowledge systems. These learnings created a ‘third space’, an intersection,³⁹ towards decolonisation. We challenge other researchers to work towards this place of relational methodology when working with Indigenous communities, recognising the importance of both knowledge systems, identifying similarities, differences, and their meaning. Researchers in British Columbia emphasised this importance of incorporating knowledge exchange to highlight the Indigenous voice.³⁶ Bagelman et al.³⁶ suggested a need to expand the academic space to allow for modes of exchange. We argue this premise through the story of our program’s inception with an analogy of knowledge systems (Bird and Tree),¹⁹ like the feasting analogy used by Bagelman.

While the work of our program was co-created with the communities, a best practice approach,⁴⁰ we recognise our limitations. Our participants continued to attend school while completing the program and it cannot be determined if the school curriculum or societal trends influenced food choices. While these influences ‘could be’ measured using a different study design, it is not of reciprocal benefit. Further, food intakes were analysed as

reported, no adjustments were made, nor did the data represent habitual intake. This decision was made to ensure that the children gained maximal benefit from the program rather than burden from data collection.

In conclusion, it appears that our after-school program positively influenced food choices. While the program was not designed to change food choices ‘culture is about what is shared and gives cohesion to groups,’³⁷ which was evident during our programs. While we learnt to consider the methods used, the shared journey, and ongoing reflections, helped to create a program that highlights culture in the lives of Aboriginal children. Working with culture in communities, within different areas of the globe, signifies a need to be engaged and respectful with ongoing communication and reflection towards a common goal. We need an active awareness of the lens(es) we view our projects from. As nutrition researchers, we must ask ourselves if the outcomes could have a greater meaning if we think differently about the results. When working with Indigenous communities, only shared, respectful, and reciprocal approaches should be undertaken, remembering, as researchers, we should avoid being blind-sided in our thinking.

AUTHOR CONTRIBUTIONS

All phases of the program were undertaken alongside community consultation. *Funding support:* YP and RS. *Program planning and implementation:* YP, AM, and RS. *Quality assurance:* YP and RS. *Data analysis and interpretation, writing of draft article:* All authors. *Final draft:* YP, AM, GO, and RS. The research team: This study was led by a Western-trained non-Aboriginal dietitian (YP) with expertise in dietary methodology. The project was initiated following discussions between a Western-trained non-Aboriginal early career researcher (RS) and a Yuin academic (AM), as described elsewhere, including the relational shifts within the team and community. The team was also comprised of a Western-trained nurse (ST) and educator (GO), each non-Aboriginal. The project team was guided by community in relation to the study design and interpretation. The authors would like to acknowledge Yuin Country for its input to this research. The authors would like to thank all the children, their parents and the Elders directly involved in running of the programs. We would also like to thank the wider communities of the Nowra, Ulladulla, and Culburra regions of the Yuin nation for allowing us to work with you to achieve these outcomes. Acknowledgement also goes to the Cullunghutti Aboriginal Child and Family Centre and the University of Wollongong Global Challenges program for supporting the development and implementation of this program. A memorandum of understanding was established between the two

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CONFLICT OF INTEREST STATEMENT

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DATA AVAILABILITY STATEMENT

The data that support the findings of this study are available from the corresponding author upon reasonable request.

ETHICS STATEMENT

Approval for this work was from the Human Research Ethics Committee of the University of Wollongong (2015/240).

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SUPPORTING INFORMATION

Additional supporting information can be found online in the Supporting Information section at the end of this article.

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