

Katrina Thorpe · Cathie Burgess ·
Suzanne Egan · Valerie Harwood

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Katrina Thorpe
The University of New South Wales
Sydney, NSW, Australia

Suzanne Egan
School of Social Sciences
Western Sydney University
Liverpool, NSW, Australia

Cathie Burgess
The Sydney School of Education and Social
Work
The University of Sydney
Camperdown, NSW, Australia

Valerie Harwood
The Sydney School of Education and Social
Work
The University of Sydney
Camperdown, NSW, Australia

ISBN 978-981-96-1768-5 ISBN 978-981-96-1769-2 (eBook)
<https://doi.org/10.1007/978-981-96-1769-2>

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We dedicate this book to the Aboriginal community-based educators who collaborated with us on this project as educators and advisors without whose knowledge, generosity of spirit and courage, this project would not have been possible. Special thanks to Aboriginal Community Facilitator Julie Welsh who facilitated connections and relationships with Aboriginal community-based educators and organisations, to provide transformative experiences for our students. We are deeply grateful for their generosity and always humbled and inspired by their courage, strength and commitment to ensure that the next generation of teachers are better prepared to build relationships with Country and community and teach the true history of this nation.

Acknowledgements We acknowledge the Country upon which this project is centred, the Gadigal of the Eora Nation, and pay our respects to Elders and custodians past and present. We believe that sovereignty was never ceded and so tread lightly on this land.

We would like to acknowledge the university students and early career teachers who generously gave their time to think about and articulate their experiences of Learning from Country in the City and how they have mobilised this in their everyday practice. As early career teachers, their confidence, enthusiasm and passion to make a difference in their schools are testament to the impact of learning from Country, Aboriginal community-based educators and embracing truth telling. Their descriptions of the challenges, insights to overcoming these and successes they experienced when starting out in their new career give us confidence for the future of teaching and the education system.

Special thanks to Pam Firth our copy editor for her patience, expertise and efficiency in editing our manuscript and getting it all together for the publisher. Thank you to Dharawal Man Michael Fardon for transforming our sketches into the drawing that became the Learning From Country Framework. Also thanks to Ella Cutler whose creativity in drawing the maps, detailing and assembling the visual material for the book will be greatly appreciated by readers who will get a deeper sense of the Learning from Country in the City journey.

Chapter 1 of this book includes an adaptation of the article by Burgess, C., Thorpe, K., Egan, S., & Harwood, V. (2022). Learning from Country to conceptualise what an Aboriginal curriculum narrative might look like in education. *Curriculum Perspectives*, 42(2), 157–169 and is used under a Creative Commons CC BY licence. Changes include rewriting some of the passages and adding original material.

Chapter 2 of this book includes an adaptation of the chapter by Thorpe, K. titled Learning From Country: Aboriginal-Led Country-Centered Learning for Preservice Teachers, (pp. 1–23). Reprinted/adapted by permission from Springer Nature Customer Service Centre GmbH: Springer, International Handbook on Education Development in Asia-Pacific by W. O. Lee, P. Brown, A. L. Goodwin, & A. Green (Eds.), Springer Nature Singapore, 2022.

Cultural Sensitivities Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander readers are advised that this book contains images and names of deceased persons.

Competing Interests The authors have no competing interests to declare that are relevant to the content of this manuscript.

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Chapter 1

Storying Our Journey of Learning from Country



Abstract This chapter outlines the central purpose of the broader and ongoing project to reimagine the pedagogical spaces and places where Indigenous knowledges are foundational and central in school and teacher education, creating contexts for decolonising education. We begin by introducing the story of the project we call Learning From Country (LFC) in the City. As part of the storying process, we introduce our positionality within the teaching and research process and our personal and professional experiences that led us here. We then present a pedagogical framework that was created as part of this project which aims to visibilise the work of centring Country and Aboriginal-led voices in our teaching and research. We show how the LFC Framework developed iteratively as we experienced Country with local Aboriginal community-based educators, preservice teachers, with each other as teacher educators, and then later reflected on these experiences with early career teachers. Integral to this is our individual and collective positioning as a research team of Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal researchers in relation to Country, in relation to each other, and in relation to the research project. Through storying our relational research and teaching journey and the outcomes of this, we hope that this will inspire your work in this area so that it can be applied to diverse locations and contexts.

Introduction to Learning from Country in the City

This book is based on a 5-year teaching and research project that we called Learning From Country in the City (LFC). This is an ongoing project where the teaching and research inform each other. This interdependence supported ongoing reflexivity on our purpose, aims and outcomes, and included ongoing iterations as both teaching and research developed over the years. In many ways, this project is a story about storying. It was and continues to be an ontological journey of learning through being and doing. This story begins not with a focus on knowledge to be transmitted but instead

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foregrounds relational Country-centred learning led by local Aboriginal community-based educators (see Glossary about this preferred terminology) on Gadigal land of the Eora Nation—now referred to as Sydney.

While we explore the notion of learning from Country in more depth in Chap. 2, in the context of this book, this process involves immersive Aboriginal (see Glossary about this preferred terminology) learning experiences outside the classroom on Country. Here, Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal preservice teachers walk with, listen to, and learn from Aboriginal community-based educators on Country. “Country” is an Aboriginal English word that attempts to translate the relational connections between Aboriginal people, place, and the nonhuman world. Like Country et al. (2020) and Dolan et al. (2020), we acknowledge that “Country-centred” pedagogies are not new but have been taught for millennia and passed down by thousands of generations of Aboriginal peoples across the country.

Country can be experienced differently by each person, and it can also be (and often is) experienced differently over time by the same person. This is because Country, as we will further explore in this book, is dynamic, alive, and correspondingly, demands a dynamic and lived approach to learning. These pedagogical processes can also be simultaneously exciting, uncomfortable, challenging, and transformational for all involved.

In the city of Sydney where this project was undertaken, the notion of learning from Country is significant because despite the existence of Country *everywhere* in Australia, there are pervasive stereotypes that Aboriginal peoples’ connections to culture and place exist only in rural and remote areas such as “the bush”, “the desert”, or “the outback” (Fredericks, 2013). Aboriginal people living in the city are often perceived to be absent and/or inauthentic (Harrison et al., 2016). As Porter (2018) noted, “because most of us live in towns and cities—we appear unable and unwilling to grasp that this urban country is also urban *Country*” [author’s emphasis] (p. 239). This teaching and research project speaks back to and challenges this fiction.

In this book, we share experiences of LFC in the City through the voices of Aboriginal community-based educators, preservice teachers, early career teachers, and ourselves as teacher educators and researchers. All people involved in the teaching and research project are educators. Together, our stories highlight how LFC destabilises teaching–learning dynamics by de-centring teachers as “experts”—an expectation many of us are trained to live up to. Our initial sense of reduced agency is supplanted by feelings of belonging, as relationships with Country and community develop, and we begin to see Country as a teacher, mentor, and guide. These relationships open-up new ways of being, doing and knowing and new pedagogical ways to engage students with Aboriginal communities and Country.

Who Are We?

We come to this writing and research gradually and gently from many years of learning, teaching, and research in Aboriginal education and Studies, and through our personal and professional engagement in Aboriginal community contexts. To understand how we came to this moment is to understand our own positionalities. All authors are researchers on the project, and three also teach subjects that incorporate LFC pedagogies and experiences. As an Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal team, we share a commitment to reshaping power relationships through privileging Aboriginal voices in the curriculum and to affecting Aboriginal student learning outcomes and community engagement. We acknowledge that Aboriginal sovereignty has never been ceded, and as we work on Gadigal Country (Gadigal is the Aboriginal word for the local area in Sydney where LFC occurs), we believe that this “place” should be the focus of our efforts to reshape power relations. In the next section, we introduce ourselves and our individual journeys leading to this research and teaching.

Katrina Thorpe. I’m a Worimi woman who lives and works on Gadigal Wangal Land. I’ve been involved in Aboriginal education for close to 30 years and have taught Indigenous Studies across a number of disciplines including social work, nursing, health, and community development. In sharing my story about my involvement in this project, I would first like to acknowledge the influence of Gadigal Wangal Land on my teaching and research and pay my respects to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Elders, community, and educators who have worked tirelessly to create the opportunities that influence my work today.

My experiences in tertiary education, both as a student and teacher, have had a profound and transformational impact on my life trajectory. It’s hard to say where the educational journey began because it is lifelong, but I certainly had a clear sense throughout my high school and tertiary studies that education was failing to address pervasive stereotypes and racism towards Aboriginal peoples. After completing a Bachelor of Education, I went back to university to study a Bachelor of Aboriginal Studies to more deeply understand Indigenous social and political histories as a foundation of being part of creating the change I wanted to see in education.

My academic career began as an associate lecturer teaching mandatory Aboriginal education subjects at The University of Sydney. Looking back, I’m encouraged by the progress that has been made in “Indigenising the curriculum” at universities. However, in recent times, I’ve been increasingly concerned to push back against systems where Indigenous peoples and knowledges are becoming entangled in what Troiani and Dutson (2021) called the “edufactory”, where “the imperative of the neoliberal university is to continuously increase performance—measurable in ultimately economic terms, imposing a new auditable disciplining, and quickening pace, of learning, thinking and working” (p. 5). Here, the pace of work is unrelenting, and “success” is often measured through end-of-semester feedback results that don’t often accommodate or recognise the complex work and emotional labour involved in addressing racism in our classrooms. Increasingly, while the rhetoric of the university espouses the importance of Aboriginal community engagement and “co-design”,

there is less and less time for this work to be undertaken as the administrative load increases to address neoliberal metrics. After undertaking this project and hearing the voices of Aboriginal community-based educators, preservice teachers, and early career teachers, I am convinced that the collaborations and personal and professional relations built between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal peoples and Country are more important than ever. This is slow and rewarding work that enables teachers to see the world outside the classroom and connect with people and Country to create a more sustainable future.

Cathie Burgess. I'm a non-Aboriginal educator with more than 40 years in Aboriginal education and parent of Aboriginal children involved in local community sports, cultural activities and organisations on Gadigal Country. I am currently a lecturer and researcher in Aboriginal Studies and education, Aboriginal community engagement, LFC, and leadership in Aboriginal education programmes at The University of Sydney. I maintain strong connections with schools across the state through research activities, advocating for Aboriginal Studies (as a syllabus in the New South Wales [NSW] curriculum) at local and national levels, speaking engagements, and convening annual conferences for teachers, Aboriginal community consultants, and students. My lifelong commitment to Aboriginal education is acknowledged through being an Honorary Life Member, NSW Aboriginal Education Consultative Group, and a Life Member, Aboriginal Studies Association (NSW).

But what is the story behind the resume? It is a story of the power of education to uplift, inspire, change, and teach us critical lessons for life. What I have learnt in Aboriginal contexts is that as a teacher, I am not the expert; how little I know and how everyday racism was part of my childhood. So, I became determined that future generations of kids would not grow up ignorant or racist. I listened and learnt from the first teachers of this country, Aboriginal people, and they gave me some tough lessons along the way, lessons I am now grateful for and lessons I am still learning. I learnt that being vulnerable is not a weakness but a strength that helps build relationships and continue our learning journeys.

I also learnt the importance of engaging with students, families, and community members in nonjudgmental, supportive, and respectful ways, the criticality of mentors and mentoring—supporting and being supported by colleagues who understand you—and acknowledging that everyone has something to contribute. Starting each day with a clean slate, and the gift of being a teacher and learner in all its pain and glory, is the key to making a difference.

While I have a personal and professional passion and commitment to Aboriginal education, I am aware of my White privilege and the accompanying cultural biases, and so I am guided by Aboriginal family, colleagues, and friends in this lifelong learning journey that never ceases to surprise and reward.

Suzanne Egan. I am a non-Indigenous researcher and educator of Irish Catholic ancestry and grew up mostly on Bidjegal land in Sydney. I've lived for quite a long time on Gadigal land and more recently work on Dharug land in Liverpool at Western Sydney University. I first joined the LFC project when I was based at The University of Sydney, first as a casually employed researcher “helping” out here and there, doing

some of the “leg work” on the project and progressively becoming more involved over time. And yet from the outset, I’ve never felt or been treated as any less than a full member of the research team. In my experience, having been “employed in” to work on multiple research projects, this is unusual and to me is testament to the community-led nature of the project.

Prior to doing research in universities, I worked in community-based settings, mostly in organisations working to prevent gendered violence and with young people and their families. One of my most profound experiences during this time was observing the work of one of the service managers, an Indigenous woman who was newly appointed to our workplace. The youth service I worked for at that time was in an area of Sydney with one of the highest Aboriginal populations in the state, and yet we saw relatively few young Aboriginal people. This changed quickly after this person came on board with her easy manner (always offering a “cuppa” and a chat to anyone who came through the door) and quiet air of authority that communicated, without it needing to be said, “and don’t mess with me”. She knew how to work with community, knew the protocols, who to get in touch with, and how to start building relationships with the local Elders.

For me, this project has been the same; I’ve learnt, and continue to learn, so much from the Aboriginal community educators and their extraordinary knowledge and generosity of spirit, from the yarning circles I’ve been part of and from Cathie, Katrina, and Valerie in showing me how to “do” research differently. It’s a sort of learning that happens “under the skin”, so I find it hard to put into words and down on paper exactly, but I know I move just that little bit differently now. I work as a lecturer now in a school of social sciences, and I’m pleased that I have been able to incorporate some of my learning from the LFC project into the subjects I teach. I think LFC needs to be part of all university degrees. This is what I see as the “long game”, and I hope to play some small role in it.

Valerie Harwood. I’m a non-Aboriginal woman born on Kaurna Country (Adelaide). My parents came from England to Australia as part of the “ten-pound pom” (see Glossary for definition) scheme. Our family background is English and Welsh. I grew up in Adelaide and didn’t get to meet my extended family until I travelled to England after I had finished university. At university, I had studied education, getting a Bachelor of Education in Secondary Mathematics/Science with a second major in English. I have a range of experiences in education. I started out teaching in secondary schools in Adelaide. This changed during an extended trip overseas where I began working in London in youth work and education. This new career focus continued when I moved from London to Sydney. It was during this time in Sydney that I started my PhD, where I began researching young people’s experiences of being diagnosed with a behaviour disorder.

When I completed my PhD, my first job was as a research assistant in an organisation based in Mparntwe (Alice Springs). Although this was a short contract of few months, it was filled with extraordinary experiences such as several visits to Uluru where I was taken to community and taught about the Bungalow (known in “official” terminology as The Telegraph Station). From work as a research assistant, I moved

into positions as a teaching and research academic at university. As a university academic, I worked on research with AIME (the Australian Indigenous Mentoring Experience), and I collaborated with colleagues on LFC, beginning with Dr. Anthony McKnight at the University of Wollongong. Anthony generously brought me along to LFC teaching sessions that he ran with students. This included being able to attend sessions at the sacred Gulaga mountain on the far south coast of NSW. I later met A/Prof. Cathie Burgess and A/Prof. Katrina Thorpe when I began working at The University of Sydney and was invited to join them in their research and teaching on LFC.

When I recall my experiences of this learning, I reflect on how this is ongoing. For me, this means recognising and enacting the importance of learning from Country and learning about invasion and the impacts of settlement on Aboriginal people. As a professor in sociology and anthropology of education, I have made a commitment to bringing connections with LFC into the “mainstream” in education studies.

What This Means as a Team of Researchers

We are aware of our personal and professional insider/outsider positioning in institutions and within Aboriginal communities. Ongoing self-reflection, cultural humility, and a deep commitment to lifelong learning foregrounds an ethical and reverential stance to LFC. Each of our stories embodies who we are and why we are passionate and committed to this project, not for the life of the project but for lifelong learning. Quintero (in Phillips & Bunda, 2018) noted the importance of storying as an intergenerational tradition that recognises and challenges,

neo-colonial roots of our conceptions of children and families in my own country and around the world. Stories highlight institutional systems, the pedagogies, the assessments and daily life realities affecting learners who have been colonised, who are immigrants and who are currently migrating through uncertain global landscapes. (p. ix)

Phillips and Bunda (2018) further made the point that “stories are spoken, gestured, danced, dramatised, painted, drawn, etched, sculpted, woven, stitched, filmed, written and any combination of these modes and more” (p. 3) and so incorporate a far greater range of expression and experiences. We found that in the LFC project, the everyday practice of storying supported relational understandings across cultures, classes and modes of expression. As we are working with Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal preservice and early career teachers, Aboriginal educators from diverse backgrounds, and a range of local Aboriginal community organisations, storying, yarning, and listening are key to engaging with and understanding the LFC experiences and how we relate to these personally and professionally. As we conceptualised this project and built relationships to begin the work, Phillips and Bunda’s (2018) articulation of “storying” resonated with our experiences in this project:

We see storying as what you do in the propositions/conceptualisations of research, in the gathering of data with others, in the theorising and analysis of data, in the presentation of

research. Storying is axiological, ontological and epistemological. We argue for story as theory, as data, as process, as text on the ethical grounds of accessibility and foregrounding the marginalised. (p. 7)

First Nations Canadian Stó:lō scholar Jo-ann Archibald (2008) discussed “storywork” as powerful pedagogy that has the potential to draw people together and connect heart, mind, body, and spirit. To do this, however, there are ethical practices and processes that must be adhered to in local Indigenous community contexts. As stories are told in the presence of others, listening to and learning from the stories involves a reciprocal responsibility for the listener to reflect and act on this learning. We continue therefore to work alongside Aboriginal community-based educators on Country with our students and bring attention to the significance of their role and voice in education to facilitate students’ relationship with Country. It is useful here to draw on the work of Wilson and Spillman (2021) and their notion of “stories for Country” that they suggested are,

the individual byproduct of people spending time getting to know, understand, and love, their local place, and belong to that person. When the individual uses these stories to better themselves or impart wisdom, they should also remember their obligation to the place or entity that taught them this lesson. (p. 61)

In the next section, we explain the road travelled “to get here” and our continued obligations in undertaking this work.

How We Got Here

The LFC project emerged from concerns about surface-level approaches to the inclusion of Aboriginal curriculum content and pedagogies employed in education at all levels. This has also been a concern of several academics teaching mandatory Aboriginal education courses in initial teacher education (ITE) programmes (e.g., Burridge et al., 2012; Mackinlay & Barney, 2010; Moodie, 2019; Phillips, 2011; Thorpe & Burgess, 2012). They have identified key constraints for effective implementation of Indigenous education in ITE such as inflexible timetabling, discipline silos, overcrowded curriculum, time pressures, and financial limitations. These constraints often result in short “typical” lecture- or tutorial-style teaching, often taught by non-Aboriginal lecturers. This is counterintuitive to holistic, “hands-on”, pragmatic, and contextually situated Aboriginal teaching and learning approaches where knowing occurs through doing, and knowledges, understandings, and skills are connected to the real world through an epistemology of relationality (Keddie, 2014). Moreover, many experienced Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal researchers and lecturers have noted that non-Aboriginal university student responses to Aboriginal content can prompt emotions such as resistance, shock, guilt, confusion, and hesitation often fuelled by poor knowledge, a lack of confidence, and racism (Aveling, 2006; Bodkin-Andrews & Carlson, 2014; Thorpe & Burgess, 2016). When teachers lack the confidence and feel ill-equipped to teach Indigenous content, they often avoid

it (Moodie, 2019), contributing to the already inadequate and superficial approach to embedding Aboriginal content in the Australian Curriculum (Lowe & Yunkaporta, 2013).

In an attempt to counter this trend, Katrina and Cathie worked to expose students to new and engaging Aboriginal-led experiences inside and outside the formal classroom. Aboriginal guest speakers, special events, field trips, internships, festivals, and community days formed part of a repertoire of experiences. As time progressed, and we reflected on the student feedback, our own personal experiences, and the theoretical literature on Aboriginal cultural immersion and place-based learning, it became clear that those experiences that involved walking with Aboriginal people to explore local places and Country were inspiring and transformative. It was also clear there was a need for a repertoire of diverse and immersive experiences with Aboriginal people from all walks of life, not a “one-off” bush walk or class talk, for students to get a deeper sense of Country and develop their critical consciousness beyond surface-level learning. These learning experiences were and continue to be conducted at The University of Sydney and the surrounding urban environment, including Redfern—a significant site of sociocultural and political activism and home to diverse Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples from across Australia. Assessment tasks, such as documenting individual learning journeys and developing visual and digital resources, also provide opportunities for reflection to support personal and professional growth.

We also wanted to provide opportunities for students to hear “unfiltered” Aboriginal voices that have, at times, been challenging and confronting for some. As students find themselves in a position of bearing witness to Aboriginal truth telling, they begin to consider how to live ethically and sustainably in a place where sovereignty has never been ceded. We came to realise that for many students, there is an ongoing need to challenge colonial narratives and personal and professional identity-making processes that have silenced Aboriginal narratives of place, self-determination, and sovereignty. Furthermore, through experiencing the power of affect and embodied learning, we began to observe that together, students and teachers engage with their vulnerabilities and uncertainties to open-up, see, and experience teaching and learning through a different lens, one that places an emphasis on learning to connect with Country. For many students, this is an introduction to a new framing of what knowledge, knowing, and the knower looks like, feels like, and sounds like. For some of us, this can mean accepting that we are all at different points on a lifelong journey and, for those who are non-Indigenous, that we are implicated in the devastating dispossession of Aboriginal custodians of the land. With time, this can ground us, revealing paths of resistance, resilience, and activism to mobilise genuine change and, when invited, walk with Aboriginal peoples to repair and revitalise Country.

Defining Country

In Australia, Country is an Aboriginal English (a dialect form of English) word that describes land as a “living entity”; as Bird Rose (1996) suggested, Aboriginal “people talk about country in the same way that they would talk about a person” (p. 7). Aboriginal scholar Bronwyn Fredericks (2013) suggested that the term Country refers to specific Aboriginal nations, including the “knowledge, cultural norms, values, stories and resources within that particular area—that particular Indigenous place” (p. 6). Country et al. (2016) extended this idea by noting the need to understand the world relationally as “more-than-human beings” (p. 470), highlighting the temporal connections between the diverse living ecologies of Country that consist of the human and nonhuman.

While we use the term Country in our Australian context, the notion of “place” or place-based learning is more globally recognised, where location is at the centre, and relationships with local lands, ecologies, and habitats are integral to culture, history, and identity. As Ruitenberg (2005) suggested, “each place has a history, often a contested history, of the people who inhabited it in past times” (p. 215), and significantly, this involves “a spatial configuration through which power and other socio-politico-cultural mechanisms are at play” (p. 215). This is evident in the place where we carry out LFC: a place in a large city, a place that is at once thousands of years of continuous living history, Gadigal Country, invaded and with impacts of colonisation, and a place to which Aboriginal people impacted by colonisation and invasion have been drawn (Norman, 2021).

To approach the meaning of Country from an Aboriginal perspective requires us to listen carefully to how Country is described, discussed, or talked about by Aboriginal people. We pause here to listen to and reflect on the explanation of Country by Aunty Laklak Burarrwanga, a Datiwuy and Rirratjingu Elder and a caretaker for Gumatj:

Country has many layers of meaning. It incorporates people, animals, plants, water and land. But Country is more than just people and things, it is also what connects them to each other and to multiple spiritual and symbolic realms. It relates to laws, custom, movement, song, knowledges, relationships, histories, presents, futures and spirit beings. Country can be talked to, it can be known, it can itself communicate, feel and take action. Country for us is alive with story, law, power and kinship relations that join not only people to each other but link people, ancestors, place, animals, rocks, plants, stories and songs within land and sea. So you see knowledge about Country is important because it's about how and where you fit within the world and how you connect to others and to place. (Wright et al., 2012, p. 54)

This explanation by Aunty Laklak Burarrwanga helps us to recognise the depth and qualities of Country, the significance of the relationship that people have with Country and that Country is alive. We will continue to explore the complexity of Country in Chap. 2.

Storying the Framework

In the third year of this teaching and learning project, we started to yarn about what an LFC Framework might look like for our teaching as well as for others engaging in similar work. We wanted to create a conceptual tool that we could use in our classrooms to unpack the processes that participants experienced as powerful and transformative to their ‘on Country’ learning as they spent time with Aboriginal community-based educators. It was anticipated that a conceptual, process driven framework could be used to inspire preservice teachers’ in applying these concepts and processes when developing relationships with Country, Aboriginal people and communities in their future teaching contexts.

During our early analysis, we began developing a framework to highlight the significance of being on Country as the ‘entry point’ for preservice teachers to develop a deeper and more nuanced understanding of the significance of Country to Aboriginal people. We also noted how Country nurtured their sense of belonging and respectful engagement when listening to Aboriginal community voices. Here the visceral and sensory experience of being on Country intertwined with story-telling and truth telling; an experience that awakened preservice teachers awareness of Aboriginal ways of being, knowing and doing. Harrison and Greenfield (2011) note,

Aboriginal knowledge is quite different to the content and information about Aboriginal people contained in the New South Wales syllabus, it is not something that can be packaged within a unit of work and taught out of context or away from the place where it was produced. (p. 66)

Through walking with, observing and listening to Aboriginal people in real time, the gap between “representing” Aboriginal people and Country in a detached manner is reduced.

Significant to the development of the framework was thinking about the critical role of truth telling by Aboriginal community-based educators in deepening students’ understandings of the impact of colonisation on the lives of Aboriginal people. Truth telling by Aboriginal people emerged while walking or other times while stopping, sitting and yarning at various locations. Urbanised places that have been dramatically changed through colonisation along with the Aboriginal art, community buildings and local parks we visited sparked memories and stories of Aboriginal people’s continuing connection to Country, and its significance to culture, identity, survival and resistance.

This opportunity for truth telling in our local context sits within calls for nation-wide Aboriginal truth telling. In recent times the Uluru Statement from the Heart, developed at the First Nations National Constitutional Convention in 2017, urged for a Makarrata Commission to “supervise a process of agreement-making between governments and First Nations and truth-telling about our history” (The Uluru Statement, n.d, para. 10). A substantial campaign followed this First Nations National Constitutional Convention, with the campaign focussing on a First Nations Voice to Parliament that would be decided via a national referendum.

On 14 October 2023, a national referendum was held that asked Australian citizens to vote “Yes” or “No” to giving Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people constitutional recognition that would enshrine a Voice in parliament. The referendum failed with a decisive 60.6% of Australians voting “No” (Australian Electoral Commission, 2023) to constitutional change. While Aboriginal people, interested citizens and media commentators are still engaged in discussion and debate about the implications of the failure of the referendum for truth telling processes (Thorpe et al., 2024), there remains an unwavering commitment by many Aboriginal people to ensure that truth telling processes continue. So “Voice” to “Treaty” and then “Truth telling” (in that order) focuses our attention on the democratic opportunities that remain to ensure Aboriginal voices and truth telling are heard in policy, everyday life and in education (Thorpe et al., 2024). As Thorpe et al. (2024), argue “Country-centred pedagogies offer an educational narrative for the future where listening to and entering into dialogue with Aboriginal community-based educators creates space for reconceptualising the democratic principles they can both work with” (p. 8).

As the Uluru Statement from the Heart shows, it is vital to ensure Aboriginal voices are heard. Importantly, empowerment and healing can occur when Aboriginal voices are heard, and the truth of history is shared and recorded on their own terms (Johnston & Forrest, 2020). Truth-telling processes in LFC engage with these imperatives, encouraging preservice teachers to challenge settler-colonial histories and embrace new ways of seeing, relating to and experiencing “living Country” (Thorpe et al., 2021). The emerging critical consciousness and the culturally sustaining practices that the preservice teachers aspired to, led us to consider Yunkaporta and Shillingsworth’s (2020) ‘Relationally Responsive Standpoint’ which incorporates metaphors for processing their learning. Their four-step process is described as follows:

The first step, Respect is aligned with values and protocols of introduction, setting rules and boundaries. This is the work of your spirit, your gut.

The second step, Connect, is about establishing strong relationships and routines of exchange that are equal for all involved. Your way of being is your way of relating because all things only exist in relationship to other things. This is the work of your heart.

The third step, Reflect, is about thinking as part of the group and collectively establishing a shared body of knowledge to inform what you will do. This is the work of the head.

The final step, Direct, is about acting on that shared knowledge in ways that are negotiated by all. This is the work of the hands. (Yunkaporta & Shillingsworth, 2020, pp. 11–12)

The metaphors used in these processes, for instance the gut, the heart, the head and the hands, are relevant to preservice teachers, because this emphasis assists them to develop a deeper understanding of Aboriginal ways of being, knowing and doing. This is because positioning the gut and heart ahead of the head and hands, destabilises Western learning processes. In this way, respect, relationships and emotional engagement is prioritised over information acquisition (Yunkaporta & Shillingsworth, 2020), challenging the way in which we think about teaching and learning processes. This sense of ‘unlearning’ or ‘relearning’ helps to prompt students to develop their