Yurunnhang Bungil Nyumba: Infusing Aboriginal ways of being into teaching practice in Australia

Lisa Buxton
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Lisa Maree Buxton

MPhil, MA, GDip Secondary Ed, GDip Aboriginal Ed, BA.

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Sydney Campus

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Acknowledgement of Country

Protocols

The protocol for introducing oneself to other Indigenous people is to provide information about one’s cultural location, so that connection can be made on political, cultural and social grounds and relations established. (Moreton-Robinson, 2000, pp. xv)

I would like firstly to acknowledge with respect Country itself, as a knowledge holder, and the ancients and ancestors of the country in which this study was conducted, Gadigal, Bidjigal and Dharawal of Eora Country. I would also like to acknowledge my own ancestors of Bundjalung and Yugambeh Country. Taking this time to pay my respects to these peoples and countries through this acknowledgement is to locate myself firstly as an Aboriginal woman and then as the researcher of this study. This also allows other Aboriginal people to locate me and determine the relatedness that may exist.

Further Acknowledgements

To my family. I am truly grateful Mum, Dad, Lynda Michelle, Christopher Raymond, and Casey Michael, for your continuous and unparalleled love and support you have all given me opportunities and experiences that have made me who I am.

I have received the benefit of guidance by Elders on and off Country. In particular, I would like to acknowledge two for their staunch support over more than twenty years: Aunty Doctor Elsie Heiss for her ongoing cultural and spiritual guidance; and Aunty Diat Marie Callope who is always up for a yarn, reminding me who I am and cheering me on, our spirits walk together.

Oomera Edwards for her generous spirit and willingness to share her extensive knowledge, with whom it was a privilege to develop Guyunggu. With her gentle guidance we created a framework for learning that has continued to guide my professional practice decades later. Guyunggu would not have been possible without you and Yurunnhang Bungil Nyumba would not have come into being.

Leesa Watego for your friendship, honesty, and your unwavering support. Terrie Lowe, thank you for being my language ‘sat-nav’, getting me back in the right direction. Julieanne Manson for guiding me across the ‘cultural bridge’ and getting me out of my head. Ladies you kept me sane.
The experience and knowledge I have gained over the past 25 years within education, has not been gained by myself. It has been hard fought and earned in partnership with my Goori, Koori and Murri colleagues, you are all strong and solid women who continue to provide me with personal and cultural support, and educational expertise.

I have not taken this research journey alone. To my two supervisors, Professor Marguerite Maher and Professor Kevin Watson, it has been an honour and privilege to have you as my supervisors. Thank you for your tremendous amount of encouragement, patience, feedback and guidance in navigating this space.

I thank each of the teachers who were participants in this study who gave thoughtful and insightful feedback during the interviews so that I was able to refine the professional learning and development framework and who continue, some three years later, to still continue to infuse Aboriginal ways of being into their teaching.
Declaration

The work contained herein is the candidate’s own work and contains no material which has been accepted for the award of any other degree or diploma in any university or other institution. To the best of the candidate’s knowledge, the thesis contains no material previously published or written by another person, except where due reference is made in the text of the thesis.

Signed, Lisa Maree Buxton, on the 10th November 2019
# Table of Contents

Contents
Acknowledgement of Country ........................................................................................................ ii
Protocols ......................................................................................................................................... ii
Further Acknowledgements ......................................................................................................... ii
Declaration ...................................................................................................................................... iv
Table of Contents ........................................................................................................................... v
List of Figures and Appendices ..................................................................................................... 1
Glossary of terms ......................................................................................................................... 2
Abstract .......................................................................................................................................... 4

Chapter 1 Overview of the Thesis ................................................................................................. 5
1.1 Background: Australian Professional Standards for Teachers ........................................... 5
1.2 Context and framing of the current study .............................................................................. 7
1.3 Country ................................................................................................................................... 9
  1.3.1 Country as first teacher ................................................................................................... 10
1.4 Terminology in the local context ............................................................................................ 11
1.5 Research Questions ................................................................................................................. 12
  1.5.1 Overarching research questions ...................................................................................... 12
  1.5.2 Subsidiary questions: ....................................................................................................... 12
1.6 Overview of methodologies ..................................................................................................... 12
  1.6.1 Phase 1 – Case study: Establishment of baseline data ................................................... 13
  1.6.2 Phase 2 – Design-based methodology ............................................................................. 13
  1.6.3 Phase 3 – Evaluative research elements: Yarning circles via technology .............. 14
  1.6.4 Research sample ............................................................................................................. 14
  1.6.5 Design for data collection and analysis .......................................................................... 15
1.7 Overview of theoretical frameworks ....................................................................................... 16
  1.7.1 Cultural interface theoretical framework ........................................................................ 16
  1.7.2 Adult education and teacher professional development theoretical framework 16
1.8 Significance of the study .................................................................17
1.9 Ethical considerations .....................................................................18
1.10 Limitations .................................................................................18
1.11 Visual interpretation ....................................................................19
1.12 Outline of the thesis .................................................................20

Chapter 2 Background to the study ..................................................23
2.1 Introduction ..................................................................................23
2.2 Challenges from leading Aboriginal educators ................................24
2.3 History of approaches to Aboriginal education in Australia ..........27
  2.3.1 ‘Clean, clad and courteous’ and ‘exclusion on demand’ .................27
  2.3.2 Aborigines Protection Act .........................................................27
  2.3.3 Attempts to assimilate Aboriginal people ....................................27
  2.3.4 Unsettled year: the 1970s and 80s ...........................................28
  2.3.5 Modern trends .........................................................................29
  2.3.6 Bringing them home ..................................................................29
  2.3.7 Uluru Statement from the Heart ...............................................30
  2.3.8 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander youth imagine ....................31
2.4 The current state of affairs in Aboriginal education .......................33
2.5 Government responses and policies ..............................................34
2.6 Closing the Gap to open the door ................................................35
2.7 The development of the Australian Curriculum ............................37

Chapter 3 Recognising and valuing Aboriginal ways of seeing and doing ..39
3.1 We all have potential for success ................................................39
  3.1.1 Connections with the passing on of knowledge ..........................39
  3.1.2 Valuing Aboriginal knowledges ...............................................39
  3.1.3 Exploring Aboriginal ways of knowing and being .....................40
  3.1.4 Eight Ways: pedagogy framework .........................................41
  3.1.5 Mingadhuu Mingayung a cultural experience and pedagogy ........42
Chapter 6 Moving to the second phase of the research .......................................................68
  6.1 Adult education and teacher professional development theoretical framework ...........68
    6.1.1 A definition ...........................................................................................................68
    6.1.2 Andragogical principles .......................................................................................68
    6.1.3 Essence of professional development ..................................................................69
    6.1.4 A need for sustained support ..............................................................................70
    6.1.5 School-wide culture of professional development ...............................................71
  6.2 Phase 2 Methodology: Design-based Research ...........................................................72
  6.3 Theoretical framework and methodology weave together .......................................73

Chapter 7 Second journal article .......................................................................................74
  Abstract: ......................................................................................................................74
  Acknowledgement of Country ......................................................................................74
  Introduction ..................................................................................................................75
  Research question .........................................................................................................76
  Justification for the current study ..................................................................................76
    Challenges have been voiced .....................................................................................77
    Mainstream education valuing Aboriginal ways of seeing ..........................................78
  Theoretical Framework .................................................................................................79
  Methodology ................................................................................................................80
    Methods .......................................................................................................................80
    Yurunnhang Bungil Nyumba (learn respect to teach) ....................................................81
  Findings and discussion .................................................................................................82
    What participants found most useful ..........................................................................82
      Being placed in Country ...........................................................................................82
      Teacher as guide .......................................................................................................83
      Building an emotional library ..................................................................................84
      Practical application during the in-school day ..........................................................85
    Participant recommendations ......................................................................................86
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Time on County</td>
<td></td>
<td>86</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teaching of the Dreaming</td>
<td></td>
<td>87</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kinship Responsibilities and community protocols</td>
<td></td>
<td>88</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ongoing support and mentoring for two reasons</td>
<td></td>
<td>88</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conclusion</td>
<td></td>
<td>90</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter 8</td>
<td><em>Yurunhang Bungil Nyumba</em> framework refined</td>
<td>91</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8.1</td>
<td>Framework critiqued and refined</td>
<td>91</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8.1.1</td>
<td>Examples of changes from participant feedback</td>
<td>91</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8.2</td>
<td>Final background information and teaching strategies</td>
<td>92</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8.3</td>
<td>Experience One: Learning through a sense of place</td>
<td>92</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8.3.1</td>
<td>Experience One: Background information for teachers</td>
<td>92</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8.3.2</td>
<td>Experience One: Suggested teaching strategies</td>
<td>95</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8.4</td>
<td>Experience Two: Little ones’ connection to Country</td>
<td>98</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8.4.1</td>
<td>Experience Two: Background information for teachers</td>
<td>98</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8.4.2</td>
<td>Experience Two: Suggested teaching strategies</td>
<td>102</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8.5</td>
<td>Experience Three: Community in Country</td>
<td>106</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8.5.1</td>
<td>Experience Three: Background information</td>
<td>106</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8.5.2</td>
<td>Experience Three: Suggested teaching strategies</td>
<td>110</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8.6</td>
<td>Experience Four: Broadening view of Country</td>
<td>115</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8.6.1</td>
<td>Experience Four: Background information for teachers</td>
<td>115</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8.6.2</td>
<td>Experience Four: Suggested teaching strategies</td>
<td>118</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8.7</td>
<td>Experience Five: Belonging to Country</td>
<td>121</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8.7.1</td>
<td>Experience Five: Background information for teachers</td>
<td>121</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8.7.2</td>
<td>Experience Five: Suggested teaching strategies</td>
<td>124</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8.8</td>
<td>Experience Six: Different ways of seeing</td>
<td>127</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8.8.1</td>
<td>Experience Six: Background information for teachers</td>
<td>127</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8.9</td>
<td>Experience Seven: Finding the balance to walk with Country</td>
<td>134</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
8.9.1 Experience Seven: Background information for teachers ........................................ 134

Chapter 9 Yarning circles via technology ........................................................................ 141
  9.1 The blog .......................................................................................................................... 141

  9.2 Research design for Phase 3 – elements of qualitative evaluation ............................. 142
    9.2.1 Methodology – qualitative evaluation ....................................................................... 142
    9.2.2 Method ....................................................................................................................... 143
    9.2.3 Findings ...................................................................................................................... 143

Chapter 10 Third Journal Article ....................................................................................... 145
  Abstract/Purpose ................................................................................................................ 145

  Acknowledgement of Country ............................................................................................. 145

  Introduction .......................................................................................................................... 145

  Methodology and methods ................................................................................................. 147

  Concepts explained for teachers ....................................................................................... 149

Overview of the professional learning provided in Phase 2 of the research .................... 151

The philosophy of Yurunnhang Bungil Nyumba (Learn Respect to Teach) .................. 151
  First: Teacher as guide – learning through a sense of place ............................................. 151

  Second: Little ones’ connection to Country – children’s business and place in Country. ................................................................. 151

  Third: Community in Country – place-based knowledge.................................................. 152

  Fourth: Broadening view of Country ............................................................................... 152

  Fifth: Belonging to Country – Country is home ................................................................. 152

  Sixth: Different ways of seeing – The arrival of another people .................................... 152

  Seventh: Finding the balance to walk with Country ......................................................... 153

Design elements of effective professional learning and development .......................... 153

Findings and discussion: participant views linked to seven elements for effective PLD .. 153
  PLD is content focused ....................................................................................................... 154

  PLD ensures active learners ............................................................................................... 154

  PLD allows for collaboration ............................................................................................ 156
# List of Figures and Appendices

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Figure/Appendix</th>
<th>Page Number</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Figure 1: Standing solid and tall</td>
<td>48</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 2: Coming together to change the tide</td>
<td>62</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 3 Two-way Learning</td>
<td>73</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 4 <em>Yurunnhang Bungil Nyumba</em>: Unfinished Business</td>
<td>172</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Appendix A – the letter to principals</td>
<td>181</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Appendix B - the participant information sheet</td>
<td>182</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Appendix C – the consent form signed by participants</td>
<td>185</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Appendix D – sample interview questions</td>
<td>189</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
## Glossary of terms

The definitions in this glossary are within my way of seeing and knowing. There are a number of Aboriginal language words and Aboriginal English words. The meanings of these words can differ in different communities across Australia depending on Country.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Term</th>
<th>Definition</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Biddiagan</td>
<td>Darkinyung word for pipis</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bilongil</td>
<td>Bundjalung word for paperbark tree</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bundjalung</td>
<td>Language family that is spoken in north-eastern New South Wales</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bungil</td>
<td>Darkinyung word for respect</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Darkinyung</td>
<td>Language family that is spoken on the central coast of New South Wales</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Doodem</td>
<td>An Anishinaabe First Nation Canadian language word for clan that was borrowed into English as Totem (Thompson, nd.)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fish traps</td>
<td>These are human-made stone weirs designed to trap fish with a falling tide. There are also basket fish traps that can be placed in creeks.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gugiyn</td>
<td>Bundjalung word meaning fast</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gai-marigal</td>
<td>Aboriginal people of northern harbour and beaches of Sydney</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Guyunggu</td>
<td>Darkinyung word for ‘way of being’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jabreen</td>
<td>The maker of boomerangs – the Ancestral spirit that made Yugambeh people human.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jullum</td>
<td>Bundjalung word for mullet</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kinship</td>
<td>Aboriginal kinship systems are detailed and complex as they are the basis for how people relate to each other, their roles and responsibilities in family and community. These systems of relationship vary across Australia.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Message stick</td>
<td>A message stick is a small (between 10 and 30 centimetres) flat piece of wood usually carved or painted with symbols and designs to convey a message.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Midden</td>
<td>Middens are an archive of Aboriginal people living with Country.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Term</td>
<td>Description</td>
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<tr>
<td>-------------</td>
<td>---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nahri</td>
<td>Bundjalung word for play</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ngawan</td>
<td>Bundjalung word for lili pili plants</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nguruny</td>
<td>Bundjalung word for emu</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nyumba</td>
<td>Yugambeh word meaning ‘to teach’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ochre</td>
<td>Ochre is Country based pigment and minerals used in performances, ceremonies and works of art.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Skin names</td>
<td>These are distinct Aboriginal language names within the moiety system that identify particular genders and generations.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Songlines</td>
<td>Songlines are a way of explaining the creation and connections people have to particular areas in their Country.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Totem</td>
<td>An Aboriginal English word to describe emotional and spiritual connections that exist between an Aboriginal person and a particular animal, bird, fish, or plant.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yarn up</td>
<td>Free and open conversation based on trust.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yulunga</td>
<td>Darkinyung word for games</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yulungagi</td>
<td>Darkinyung word for toys</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yurunnhang</td>
<td>Darkinyung word for learn</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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Abstract

In the current educational climate of teacher accountability, the Australian Professional Standards for Teachers require teachers to demonstrate their level of competence in meeting the descriptors of the Standards that are grouped into three domains of teaching: Professional Knowledge, Professional Practice and Professional Engagement. The professional knowledge domain includes Standard 1 ‘Know students and how they learn’, and Standard 2 ‘Know the content and how to teach it’ (AITSL, 2011, p. 3). Teachers in New South Wales, Australia, have been familiar with Teaching Standards for many years, however, with the introduction of National Standards across Australia, two new Standards appeared that are the key focus areas related to the current study:

1.4 Strategies for teaching Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students; and
2.4 Understand and respect Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people to promote reconciliation between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians.

Phase 1 of the current study, within a cultural interface theoretical framework and using a multiple case study methodology, investigated to what extent successful, experienced teachers felt competent to meet the two new Standards. A purposive sample of primary school teachers (n=32) from five Sydney Catholic schools took part in all phases of the study, data being collected in semi-structured group interviews. Findings in this phase of the research were that there was general lack of confidence in teachers’ ability to meet these Standards and participants identified professional learning and development (PLD) they would find useful.

In Phase 2 of the research, a PLD framework was developed in response to participants’ needs. Working in an adult education and teacher professional development theoretical framework and using design-based research methodology, the PLD was implemented over two days in the first school. Feedback acquired through group interviews allowed for refining and tailoring of the PLD. Following the tenets of design-based methodology, the PLD was then provided consecutively at the participant schools with participant feedback informing further amendments each time. Findings were that participants considered the experience of being on Country and then relating the learning experiences to their children in school, to be the most useful aspects of the PLD. Together with participants, background information summaries and suggested teaching strategies for each of the learning experiences were developed, refined and finalised.

In Phase 3 of the study, still working in an adult education and teacher professional development theoretical framework, elements of qualitative evaluation methodology provided opportunity to determine the long-term views of participants on the extent to which the PLD had altered their classroom practice and what the impact on children had been. Feedback was gained from participants a few months, a year, and two years after they had undertaken the PLD to gain their wisdom with hindsight. Findings were that participants would value ongoing support. Consequently, a password-protected blog was developed, creating a community of learners who were afforded the space to ask questions and share resources with peers.

This Doctor of Education thesis by publication comprises three peer-reviewed journal articles written as part of the study and they are woven into the fabric and story of the thesis.
Chapter 1 Overview of the Thesis

This research project Yurunnhang (learn) Bungil (respect) Nyumba (to teach) is presented as a Doctor of Education by Publication with three publications included. It is therefore necessary for the reader to understand the three phases of the research and why it was necessary to have a complex design, encompassing more than one methodology and more than one theoretical framework. First, this allowed me as researcher to elicit the sort of data that would provide the opportunity for rich interpretation of the data and therefore answer the overarching research question; second, the two frameworks supported the interpretation of data in the different phases of the research.

I start this introductory section with an explanation of the Australian Professional Standards for Teachers as the current study centres around teachers’ perceptions of their capacity to meet the two specific Standards in relation to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander education and the professional learning and development that ensued to assist them to do so.

1.1  Background: Australian Professional Standards for Teachers

“There is ‘broad consensus that teacher quality is the single most important in-school factor influencing student achievement.” (Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development, 2005, p. 2). The Australian Professional Standards for Teachers (the Standards) describe the key elements of quality teaching and makes explicit the knowledge, practice and professional engagement required across teachers’ careers (Australian Institute of Teaching and School Leadership [AITSL], 2011, p. 1). The Standards are grouped into three domains of teaching: Professional Knowledge, Professional Practice and Professional Engagement. The professional knowledge domain includes Standard 1 ‘Know students and how they learn’, and Standard 2 ‘Know the content and how to teach it’ (AITSL, 2011, p. 3). Within these standards there are two key focus areas related to the current study:

1.4 Strategies for teaching Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students; and
2.4 Understand and respect Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples to promote reconciliation between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians.

Implicit in the development of the Standards “is the understanding that throughout their teaching life, teachers like other professionals will be actively engaged in updating and extending their professional knowledge and practice” (Cole, 2012, p. 2). In New South Wales teachers are used to being required to provide evidence that they meet professional standards.
With the introduction of the Australian Professional Standards for Teachers the two new Standards – 1.4 and 2.4 – were as follows, reflecting teachers’ expected developing skills, knowledge and practice through their careers:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Focus</th>
<th>Graduate</th>
<th>Proficient</th>
<th>Highly Accomplished</th>
<th>Lead</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>1.4 Strategies for teaching Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students</strong></td>
<td>Demonstrate broad knowledge and understanding of the impact of culture, cultural identity and linguistic background on the education of students from Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander backgrounds.</td>
<td>Design and implement effective teaching strategies that are responsive to the local community and cultural setting, linguistic background and histories of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students.</td>
<td>Provide advice and support colleagues in the implementation of effective teaching strategies for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students using knowledge of and support from community representatives.</td>
<td>Develop teaching programs that support equitable and ongoing participation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students by engaging in collaborative relationships with community representatives and parents/careers.</td>
</tr>
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</table>
**Standard 2 - Know the content and how to teach it**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>2.4 Understand and respect Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people to promote reconciliation between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians</th>
<th>Graduate</th>
<th>Proficient</th>
<th>Highly Accomplished</th>
<th>Lead</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Demonstrate broad knowledge of, understanding of and respect for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander histories, cultures and languages.</td>
<td>Provide opportunities for students to develop understanding of and respect for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander histories, cultures and languages.</td>
<td>Support colleagues with providing opportunities for students to develop understanding of and respect for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander histories, cultures and languages.</td>
<td>Lead initiatives to assist colleagues with opportunities for students to develop understanding of and respect for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander histories, cultures and languages.</td>
<td></td>
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(AITSL, 2011, p. 9)

### 1.2 Context and framing of the current study

The current study is embedded in the aspiration for Aboriginal children and young people to have the same educational outcomes as their non-Indigenous peers where currently and historically there has been an enormous difference in these educational outcomes. It is also situated in the positive framing of a way forward, while at the same time acknowledging and being sensitive to the negatives that are a fact. In Australia, for example, there are discrepancies on many levels between Aboriginal peoples and non-Indigenous Australians: life expectancy, average income, general health and wellbeing. Aboriginal peoples feature, however, with a higher percentage than non-Indigenous Australians in relation to the jail population, psychological distress, and suicide rates. The evidence is unambiguous and the statistics are confronting:

- An Aboriginal boy born in 2015-2017 is likely to live to 71.6 years, approximately ten years less than a non-Aboriginal boy (who could expect to live to 80.2 years).
An Aboriginal girl born in 2015-2017 is likely to live to 75.6 years, which is almost ten years less than a non-Aboriginal girl (who is likely to live to 83.4 years) (Australian Government Productivity Commission, 2019)
• In 2016, babies born to Aboriginal mothers were twice as likely to be low birth weight than babies born to non-Aboriginal mothers (Australian Indigenous HealthInfoNet, 2019, p. 2);

• Kidney disease is seven times more common for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, and diabetes five times higher than non-Indigenous Australians (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2014, p. 57-59);

• Adult imprisonment rate increased 77 per cent between 2000 and 2015, and juvenile detention rate has decreased but it is still 24 times the rate for non-Indigenous youth (Australian Government Productivity Commission, 2016, p. xxviii).

• One in three children (35% or 18,409) on care and protection orders is Indigenous, despite Indigenous children comprising only 5.5% of the Australian population aged 0-17 (Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, 2018, p. 96).

• At the time of the current study the suicide rate amongst young Aboriginal men “is the highest in the world” (Australian Youth Development Index, 2016).

In 2014 the Prime Minister’s report to the Australian Parliament on ‘Closing the Gap’ stated:

No-one should be under any illusion about the difficulty of swiftly overcoming two centuries of comparative failure. Nevertheless, it would be complacent, even neglectful, to not redress, from day one, the most intractable difficulty our country has ever faced (Australian Government Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet, 2014, p. 2).

While the documentation of these statistics might suggest a negative framing, this is not the case in the current study; however, these statistics are acknowledged as the baseline. That this is the starting point. Additionally, this study is more positively framed as it focuses on the evidence that there is still a powerful emphasis on recognition and reconciliation within Australia with the realisation that it is not the responsibility of Aboriginal peoples alone to turn these statistics around. “It is clear that Closing the Gap is a national responsibility that belongs with every Australian” (Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet, 2017, p. 5). Over a decade ago, all Australian governments committed to six ambitious targets to ‘close the gap’ of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander disadvantage. Cairey (2016 in TEDx) stated that one of the greatest challenges she found in her work was that Australians are operating from different worldviews and she believes that the more we understand each other’s worlds the better we can work together, but it has to be two-way.
Now, while coordinated action is welcome, there was an oversight: these measures of success did not include things that Aboriginal peoples value or were skilled at, like knowledge of the land, strength of family connections, language and resilience. It means they – Aboriginal peoples – are measured up against a non-Indigenous worldview and not theirs. It means that there is a cultural bias in the system that sets them up to fail. And so many Aboriginal peoples are left feeling like they do not measure up and are never going to (TEDx, 2016).

This current study contributed to the recognition of and valuing of different worldviews being incorporated into classroom practice to the benefit of the teachers in relation to their perception of their self-efficacy and to the benefit of Aboriginal children and young people whose needs will better and more culturally appropriately be met.

This current study is grounded firmly in the discipline of education where a clear example of this move to reconciliation is evidenced in two new mandatory Standards that focus on the issue of teacher capacity to (a) meet the needs of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students in schools and (b) their understanding of Aboriginal histories and knowledges such that they can assist non-Aboriginal students to play their part in the reconciliation process.

One of the important insights teachers needed was an understanding of Aboriginal peoples’ view of Country.

1.3 Country

Following Aileen Moreton-Robinson (2013), an Aboriginal woman of the Goenpul – part of the Quandamooka nation on Stradbroke Island in Queensland, I use the term Country here as follows:

To mean not only the tracks of land to which we are inextricably tied but it is also the term used to denote Indigenous peoples who have bloodline to that Country through creator and ancestral birth. This interconnectedness is the basis of Indigenous sovereignty, which informs our standpoint as embodied socio-cultural and historically situated subjects of knowledge. (p. 335)

In Aboriginal ways of seeing and knowing, Australia is a vast land of many Countries. Ambelin Kwaymullina (2005), a palyku woman from the Pilbara region in Western Australia, positions Country within Aboriginal ways of knowing:
Country is much more than a place. Rock, tree, river, animal, human – all were formed of the same substance by the Ancestors who continue to live in land, water, sky. Country is filled with relations speaking language and following Law, no matter whether the shape of that relation is human, rock, crow, wattle. Country is loved, needed, and cared for, and Country loves, needs, and cares for her peoples in turn. Country is family, culture, identity. Country is self. (p. 12)

Ontologically, this is important as in Aboriginal ways of becoming, of being in existence and in reality, all relate back to Country and to place and described further in 1.3.1 below. Consequently, this was a strong focus in the development of the framework leading teachers to being able to utilise these understandings in their work with children and young people in their classrooms.

From an epistemological perspective, in Aboriginal ways of seeing, being and knowing, knowledge comes from the Dreaming and those ancient stories are the genesis of all knowledge, and through ongoing experience on Country. This is explained further in Chapter 8 where the framework is critiqued and refined.

These ontological and epistemological perspectives guided the ultimate development of the PLD provided for teachers and, importantly, the way it was provided for teachers, with them being on Country for a full day experiencing learning in an Aboriginal way of seeing and being.

1.3.1 Country as first teacher

There has long been an understanding in education that learning environments are pivotal in activating children’s interactions with teachers and peers, enhancing or inhibiting their sense of belonging, and that the environment has a significant influence on their learning success (Guardino & Fullerton, 2010; Severiens & Wolff, 2009; Waters & Maynard, 2010). Educational philosophies such as Reggio Emelia advocates that the environment is the third teacher after the parent and the schoolteacher. Taking a slightly different stance, in Aboriginal ways of teaching, Country is the first and eternal teacher. When the time is right, family and Elders teach children: “Country is their first teacher, but children do not realise it as they are too little” (O. Edwards, personal communication, 23 October 2016). It is vital to stress that Aboriginal ways of knowing, doing and being are Country-based. As a human being one’s relationships and relatedness to all entities with one’s country are developed through stages of learning and growth (Edwards & Buxton, 1998; Martin, 2009; Harrison & McConchie, 2009; McKnight, Hoban, & Nielson, 2010).
1.4 Terminology in the local context

Although the terms Indigenous, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander are commonly used now, it is important to note that these names are “the legacy of colonisation” (New South Wales Department of Community Services, 2009, p. 7). Before, during and after what some Aboriginal peoples see as invasion, Aboriginal peoples identify themselves by their Country. The use of the term Indigenous has evolved through international law. In Australia, this term can be seen to deny the diversity of Aboriginal sovereignty and seen to deny the Australian Aboriginal experience. That is, this continent is under the custodianship of over approximately 600 different nations, and not simply one Indigenous People.

Other collective terms also in use are First Peoples or First Nations. While not denying the powerful worldviews embedded in such terms, within my own cultural framework, they are not the terms that will be used. The term Aboriginal also continues to be problematic for some as it is an imposed English word. However, it is, for historical and cultural reasons, my preferred word. Along with Goori, Koori, and Murri, language ‘nation’ names are most appropriate for New South Wales, given that Aboriginal peoples in Australia are not one homogenous group. As such, I wish to recognise, acknowledge and respect Aboriginal peoples of Australia, each with their own Country, unique cultures, languages and histories.

In this study, I express my views from my perspective as a Bundjalung and Yugambeh woman. I do not have experience with and cannot speak for Torres Strait Islander peoples, cultures, identities and languages. In this thesis I follow the view summarised in the resource produced by the New South Wales (NSW) Department of Community Services (2009), developed by their Aboriginal Services Branch in consultation with the Aboriginal Reference Group:

As Aboriginal peoples are the original inhabitants of NSW, and as the NSW Government only has a specific charter of service to the people of NSW, this document refers only to Aboriginal peoples. References to Torres Strait Islander peoples will be specifically stated where relevant. It is important to remember that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures are very different, with their own unique histories, beliefs and values. It is respectful to recognise their separate identities. (p. 1)

I therefore refer to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander when documented as such in government policies and/or statements. Otherwise, I prefer the term Aboriginal. The term Indigenous is frequently used in government and education documents, in part for expedience, rather than using the longer Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander term and some leading
Aboriginal educators, whom I have quoted, have used this term, however that is the only time I use it.

In line with all government policy, in using the terms *non-Indigenous* or *non-Aboriginal* in this study, I mean no disrespect to anyone, but it is necessary to have a descriptor for people who are Australian but not Aboriginal.

### 1.5 Research Questions

In the current study there was one overarching research question and four subsidiary research questions.

#### 1.5.1 Overarching research questions

The overarching research question in the current study was: How can teachers be empowered to strengthen pedagogy and meet the Australian Professional Standards 1.4 and 2.4 comprehensively to produce more positive outcomes for all: Aboriginal, Torres Strait Islander, and non-Indigenous children, and young people?

#### 1.5.2 Subsidiary questions:

1. What elements would participants like to see in a professional learning package to enhance their capacity to meet Standards 1.4 and 2.4?
2. What aspects of the professional development package did participants find most useful?
3. What suggestions would participants have for improving the professional development framework such that it would be transferable to other contexts?
4. What is participants’ evaluation of the effectiveness of the PLD and online forum in supporting their professional learning needs in the longer term?

In the structure of this thesis by publication, the first journal article answers research question 1; the second answers research questions 2 and 3; and the third journal article answers research question 4. The answers to these four questions lead to the answering of the overarching research question which is discussed in the concluding section of the thesis.

### 1.6 Overview of methodologies

This naturalistic, interpretive study employed qualitative research methods to answer the overarching question with four subsidiary questions. The complexity of the study meant that mixed methodologies were employed in three distinct phases of the research design:
1.6.1 Phase 1 – Case study: Establishment of baseline data

In this phase of the study, a multiple case study methodology was utilised. “Case studies provide a unique example of real people in real situations” (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2011, p. 289). Employing a multiple-case design (Yin, 2014) allowed for the similarities and differences between the schools to be clearly articulated. A range of data across five primary schools was gained, some with high or low Aboriginal enrolments and some with low or high socio-economic status (SES). This phase of the study established that teachers did not feel confident in their ability to meet Standards 1.4 and 2.4. The data elicited what professional learning teachers would like to have access to so that they could firstly achieve the Proficient level of the Standards 1.4 and 2.4 and then move to the higher levels.

1.6.2 Phase 2 – Design-based methodology

In the second phase of the study, the development and implementation of the professional learning and development, design-based research methodology was utilised and is described in the second journal article. In this phase of the research, a professional learning package was developed and implemented with one school initially. Participants provided feedback on the professional learning including suggestions for improvement. It was then refined and offered to teachers in three more schools, following the same process each time with data gathered from participants and refinements effected on the basis of their feedback. There were four iterations of implementation of the professional learning and development (PLD) package, feedback, refinement and then implementing it once more with a different school. Thus, the framework was finalised and confirmed to its current format (see Chapter 8).

There are a number of definitions of design-based research and it is still developing as a methodology. Seminal to design-based methodology is that it requires:

- addressing complex problems in real contexts in collaboration with practitioners;
- integrating known and hypothetical design principles with technological affordances to render plausible solutions to these complex problems; and
- conducting rigorous and reflective inquiry to test and refine innovative learning environments as well as to define new design principles (Brown, 1992, & Collins, 1992, cited in Herrington, McKenney, Reeves, & Oliver, 2007, p. 4090).

In the current study, the complex problem was how to empower teachers to be competent and confident to meet the Standards 1.4 and 2.4 by infusing Aboriginal ways of being into their
planning and teaching. Different approaches were trialed on the strength of feedback after each iteration of the PLD, until there were no significant suggestions for improvement.

1.6.3 Phase 3 – Evaluative research elements: Yarning circles via technology

In supporting the notion that PLD should be ongoing and not a one-off event, further feedback was sought a few months, a year and two years after participants had undertaken the PLD.

In the third phase of the research, evaluation of the PLD after a time found that participants would value ongoing support. A community of learners was therefore developed with consistent, ongoing support offered through a password-protected blog that all participants could access. This blog afforded teachers the space where they could ask questions and share resources with their peers. At the end of a year, participants were invited to provide a reflective piece on the long-term influence (or not) of the professional learning, how it affected their planning and practice, and any effect it ultimately had on the outcomes for children and young people in their classes. This phase of the research therefore utilised elements of qualitative evaluative research methodology.

Evaluation refers to judgement, whether alluding to everyday, subjective assessments people make, or whether one is referring to more formal evaluation noted as “disciplined inquiry” (Schwandt, Lincoln & Guba, 2007, p. 22). Evaluation provides a collection and analysis of information about outcomes and structure of programs or interventions and how participants review these immediately and in retrospect. The intention in evaluation research is to study what existing knowledge has caused relevant programs to look like in practice and how participants view their effectiveness, and then move towards improvement. The evaluation component of the current study was providing participants’ evaluation after a year or more of the PLD and what, further, they would recommend.

1.6.4 Research sample

A convenience sample of five Catholic schools from the Eastern region of Sydney took part in the study. They were schools which I had access to as Leader of Learning Aboriginal Education with Sydney Catholic Schools. It was, furthermore, a purposive sample as I selected schools of differing demographics and with different Aboriginal enrolments. There were 32 participants across the five schools. A breakdown of the participant demographics is included as part of the third journal article in Chapter 10.
The number of participants was limited to six per interview. As Patton (2015) explains, “qualitative inquiry typically focuses on relatively small samples…selected purposefully to permit inquiry into and understanding of a phenomenon in depth” (p. 52). To have 32 participants at the outset was potentially too large a number, but I was aware the study would take a number of years and I was ensuring there would be sufficient participants at the end of the study to provide useful data. In any event, the same 32 participants were all still happy to be involved some three years later.

1.6.5 Design for data collection and analysis

Data were collected from semi-structured group interviews with voluntary members of school leadership teams and teachers from five schools. Semi-structured group interviews were used to gather data as recommended as it promotes “the exploration of more complex and subtle phenomena” (Denscombe, 2010, p. 173). Up to six staff members from each of the purposively selected schools were invited to take part in the group interview. It was important that the study’s participants should understand the interview questions in the same way in order to assist data coding and remove the possibility of uncertainty (Silverman, 2005).

As the participants had been working together for a while, there was likely to be a level of trust between them and, potentially, a common goal with the research. Furthermore, since participants were contributing to the content of the professional development program to be developed, it was useful that they heard what others had to say (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2011).

Merriam and Tisdell (2016) maintain that data analysis is “the process of making sense out of the data” (p. 202) and discovering the answer to the key research question of the study in the form of categories, themes or findings. In qualitative inquiry, data collection is commonly a simultaneous process, thus the two are merged (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016; Sarantakos, 2013). In the current study, this was the case as each phase of the research needed to be completed before the next could take place. In Phase 2 of the research, using design-based methodology, it was important to complete the data analysis from one school before amending and refining the learning framework for implementation at the next school. Thematic analysis of the transcribed interviews allowed for the disparity in views as well as the similarities to be identified. Pondering the data (Braun & Clarke, 2006) ensured that I could “clearly define what the themes are and what they are not” (p. 92). The analysis of the data, leading to a discussion of the findings are included in the three journal articles.
1.7 Overview of theoretical frameworks

There were two different theoretical frameworks used in the collection, analysis and presentation of the data in this study. In the first phase of the research, establishing the baseline data, a cultural interface theoretical framework (Nakata, 2007) was most useful as it provided a platform to explain challenges teachers experienced, working from their worldview, in a cross-cultural context.

In the next two phases of the research, the development and implementation of a PLD package for teachers, an adult education and teacher professional development framework was utilised as it described the elements required for professional learning to be effective.

1.7.1 Cultural interface theoretical framework

In order to provide a deep level of analysis of the data in the first phase of this study, Nakata’s (2007) cultural interface theory constituted a suitable framework as it provided a means to capture the nuanced and multi-dimensional nature of the place of non-Indigenous teachers charged with the responsibility of meeting the needs of students as articulated in Standards 1.4 and 2.4. Martin Nakata (2007), a Torres Strait Islander man, “captured this complexity and conceptualised it as a broader interface” (p. 198). What he has termed as cultural interface is embodied by points of intersecting trajectories. Nakata (2007) explained as follows:

It is a multi-layered and multi-dimensional space of dynamic relations constituted by the intersections of time, place, distance, different systems of thought, competing and contesting discourses within and between different knowledge traditions, and different systems of social, economic and political organisation. It is a space for many shifting and complex intersections between different peoples with different histories, experiences, languages, agendas, aspirations and responses… All these elements cohere together at the interface in the everyday. (Nakata, 2007, p. 199)

Participants in the current study expressed views that align with those articulated by Nakata (2007).

1.7.2 Adult education and teacher professional development theoretical framework

There is a general dedication on the part of teachers to expand their “experience of dialogic approaches to learning, in order to respond in contingent and practical ways to the needs of learners as they arise” (Widin, Yasukawa, & Chodkiewicz, 2012, p. 17). Phases 2 and 3 of the current study followed Groundwater-Smith and Mockler (2009) who described professional
development as more effective when teachers are able to explain the reason for the PLD and see the effort they make as paying off in their ability to have input so that they “close the gap” between their own “moral authority and moral agency” (p. 136-137) and the external pressures imposed upon them. In the current study, teachers were not compelled to undertake the PLD, they wanted to so that they could meet the new Standards.

What constitutes effective PLD is an intricate web of factors such as participant choice of topic, the way the PLD is delivered, and that it is sustained and not a once-off event. Elements such as ongoing support (Darling-Hammond & Bransford, 2005), activities being learner-driven (Hull, 2013; Montgomery, 2013), real life experiences being applicable to their specific context (Westbrook, 2005), and opportunity for reflection (Mason & Wetherbee, 2004) were utilised in the final PLD package.

1.8 Significance of the study

The statistics related to Aboriginal peoples in Australia (see 1.2) and the opportunity to mitigate these statistics are of significance in the current study. What is particularly appealing is that the findings of this study do not provide evidence that teachers have increased knowledge and skills to meet only the needs of Aboriginal children in schools; it is to the benefit of all children.

As teachers are the most significant factor in children’s learning, it is vital that they feel competent and confident to meet the needs of all children in their classes, in the case of Standard Descriptor 1.4 specifically Aboriginal children. Findings from the first phase of the current study found that experienced, successful teachers did not feel confident to meet the Standards 1.4 and 2.4 and they provided the initial foundations for the development of appropriate PLD that was implemented in Phase 2 of the study. Participants reported how they were emboldened to infuse Aboriginal ways of being into their planning and teaching.

Participants supporting one another and accessing ongoing support from others – which continues even now three years after first implementation of the PLD in the first school – gave rise to Phase 3 of the research and is discussed in Chapter 9 – Yarning circles via technology. There, a password protected blog was set up for researcher and participants to share ideas, concerns, questions, and answers.

The content of the seven PLD activities will soon be made available to teachers online, and this may contribute to increased reach of the value of the PLD. Teachers from other jurisdictions may find this accessible resource useful. This is discussed further in Chapter 10.
1.9 Ethical considerations

All participants in the current study were adults, fluent in English, and were ensured of voluntary participation with the right to withdraw at any time without prejudice. Therefore, a low risk ethics application was approved by the University of Notre Dame Australia’s Human Research Ethics Committee – reference number 016035.

As participants were all employed by Sydney Catholic Schools, this system also provided ethics approval – reference number 2016007.

Please see:

- Appendix A – the letter to principals;
- Appendix B - the participant information sheet;
- Appendix C – the consent form signed by participants; and
- Appendix D – sample interview questions

All protocols relating to ethical conduct of the research were followed. As noted in my ethics applications, I was conscious of the potential perceived power imbalance between participants and me as researcher and also possibly between participants where some were part of the school leadership team, and others not. To mitigate against a voice being lost, participants were offered the opportunity for an individual interview if they preferred, rather than taking part in the group interview. Furthermore, they were offered the opportunity to email me to explore any of the questions further, and some participants did this. Moreover, I stressed at the outset, that although I was the researcher in this instance, they all knew me from my ongoing work with Aboriginal children and young people in their schools. Indeed, I found that the level of trust already established led to uninhibited participation by the teachers.

1.10 Limitations

One limitation of the current study relates to the generalisability of the findings due to the sampling strategy. As I was at that time the Leader of Learning Aboriginal Education, participants were from a convenience sample of schools to which I had access. Furthermore, it was a purposive sample because, from all the schools I had access to, I specifically chose schools with different demographics and different Aboriginal enrolments. Teacher participants were from five schools (n=32) which is substantial, but since all teachers were from Catholic schools, there is not the assurance that teachers from other schools might not have provided other, alternative, perspectives.
A further limitation relates to generalisability of the value of final iteration of the PLD framework. In the design-based section of the study, Phase 2, four schools took part, with the PLD being evaluated and refined each time. Data saturation appeared to have been achieved at that point, but once again the fact that they were all Catholic schools is a limiting factor of the research. All schools were also in the Sydney area of New South Wales in Australia. The findings are therefore not readily generalisable to other centres within Australia nor to teachers of other First Nation children in other countries. The process, the philosophy, the concepts and the principles of the current study probably will be useful to other teachers in Australia and beyond, but the research here cannot claim that.

1.11 Visual interpretation

In a departure from Western conventions, I present four paintings I completed during the study that offer visual representation of different stages of the research.

The first one has been included in the first journal article. It is entitled “Standing solid and tall” and represents the potential for Aboriginal children to stand proudly in their culture. The deep roots in the Country are the history, policies and educational statistics, impacting on the wellbeing of Aboriginal children and young people, which is the context of the study. Growing from history and statistics is a realisation that a transformative learning pedagogy should be adopted. The trunk of the tree symbolises strength and layers of meaning. I interpret the development of the Standards as evidence of goodwill and a newfound willingness to do something positive: to grow in understanding through professional learning. The branches are the new directions; the leaves represent the findings of this study. The bright blue sky represents the unlimited potential and benefits that this new knowledge might achieve.

The second painting, entitled “Coming together to change the tide”, represents my own learning with Oomera as guide who helped me in the development of the PLD. This is a moment in time represented by the centre circle of a life-long learning journey in developing connections to Country, which goes off the canvas as my journey continues.

The third painting I entitled “Two-way Learnings”. The painting represents the day on Country where teachers experienced the learning journey themselves first and then the day in school where teachers who teach the same aged children came together in yarning circles to discuss and develop appropriate activities for the children in their classes. The children are in the centre, because that is where they should be. The strong central image represents teachers’
learnings on a number of levels of themselves that they will use to guide the children in the centre of the painting.

The fourth painting is entitled “Yurunnhang Bungil Nyumba: Unfinished business”. In the background are spirit guides, Elders and cultural guides past and present. Solid in the centre is Country, sky and sea with parallel teachings and learnings. Some of the tracks change direction; others are unfinished to represent an open mind for new learnings. It is a deliberately unfinished painting because the work is not finished. The reach of the framework needs to be extended into other schools, school systems and Countries.

Providing cohesion and a visual expression of the implementation of the study, the paintings also capture its various facets: layers of lessons, like chapters in a book, in the library of Country.

### 1.12 Outline of the thesis

Chapter 1 provided an introduction to this study. It described the Australian Professional Standards for Teachers, at the centre of the study. It provided a short statistical framing for the study which feeds into the significance of the study – the empowerment of teachers to infuse Aboriginal ways of being into their planning and teaching, thereby better meeting the needs of both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal children in their classes. Methodologies for the three Phases of the research were described and the two theoretical frameworks were discussed. Limitations of the study were noted. A description was provided of the four paintings that I completed to represent the various phases of this study.

Chapter 2 provides a background to the study including a brief history of Aboriginal education and its implications for children today.

Chapter 3 addresses Aboriginal ways of being and doing that underpinned the pedagogy in the PLD provided to teachers.

Chapter 4 is the first journal article and includes the first artwork. It underscores the positive framing of the study. The article discusses Phase 1 of the research – reporting teachers’ views on their capacity to meet the Standards 1.4 and 2.4 and the PLD they would like to see to strengthen their practice.

Chapter 5 discusses the philosophy and principles of Yurunhang Bungil Nyumba (Learn respect to teach) that formed the basis of the PLD offered to teachers in the Phase 2 of the research. It is there that the second painting is presented representing the relationship I have with guides who influenced me in the completion of this study.

Chapter 6 presents the adult education and teacher professional development framework that informed the development and delivery of the PLD for teachers. It also includes the third painting depicting teachers’ learning journey and their application of those learnings in their school contexts.

Chapter 7 is the second journal article that documents the findings from Phase 2 of the research:


Chapter 8 discusses the finalisation of the Yurunhang Bungil Nyumba framework and includes, for each of the seven learning experienced, the background information for teachers and the suggested teaching activities for children. These were developed on the feedback from participants and in collaboration with them.

Chapter 9 includes the research design for Phase 3 of the research and the role played by the blog in the ongoing support for participants after the on-Country and in-school days of PLD.

Chapter 10 is the third journal article that discusses the findings of Phase 3 of the research.


Chapter 11 comprises further discussion relating to the research questions and the conclusion. It is also where I have placed the last painting, the unfinished one, representing the unfinished business still to be completed in enhancing teachers’ capacity to meet Standards 1.4 and 2.4.

Below is a timeline summarising the overall research journey:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Action</th>
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| 2016 | **Phase 1 of the research:**  
Baseline data establishing what teachers would like in their PLD to meet the Australian Professional Standards for Teachers  
First journal article documenting this phase of the research submitted |

21
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Details</th>
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</table>
| 2017 | First journal article published  
**Phase 2 of the research**: Theoretical development of the Yurunnhang Bungil Nyumba framework – first four learning experiences developed  
Implemented on-Country day and in-School day with first school with four learning experiences  
Semi-structured interviews to gain feedback  
Refinement of first iteration of PLD and development of fifth learning experience |
| 2018 | **Phase 2 of the research continued**: Implemented PLD at second schools using five learning experiences  
Semi-structured interviews to gain further feedback. Development of sixth and seventh learning experiences  
Second journal article submitted and published  
**Phase 3 of the research initiated**: Implementation of the blog |
| 2019 | **Phase 2 of research continued**: PLD using seven learning experiences implemented with third and fourth schools.  
Semi-structured interviews to gain feedback.  
**Phase 3 of the research initiated** Continued collaboration using the blog.  
Third journal article submitted and published in 2020. |
Chapter 2 Background to the study

2.1 Introduction

A number of themes weave together to inform the background to all three phases of the current study. Amongst others, it outlines literature on attitudes and approaches to Aboriginal education in New South Wales and nationally. It further provides examples of a range of challenges made by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander educators to the dominant culture’s systems of school and educators to better meet the needs of Aboriginal children and young people. It is evident within the literature that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples have voiced the need for systems of schools to value and include Aboriginal knowledges and perspectives into mainstream education systems of schools and the schooling experience of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people. The Australian Professional Standards for Teachers (AITSL, 2011), which have a renewed focus on teachers’ responsibility in relation to the education of Aboriginal children and young people and teaching all students about Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander histories, cultures and languages, is a policy response to non-Indigenous people’s calls for recognition, reconciliation and social justice.

Craven (2000) has long argued that social education needs to make a significant long-term contribution to reconciliation and social justice by ensuring the truth about Australia’s history becomes more actively shared and more widely known. Craven (2000) also asserts "the greatest contribution to telling the truth about our history can be made by teachers" (p. 63). The inclusion of Aboriginal cultures, histories and languages in standard school curricula has also been identified as playing an important role in building both Aboriginal and non-Indigenous student understanding and appreciation of Indigenous histories and cultures and addressing racism and discrimination (Watego, 2012).

Politically, in Australia, there has more recently been a move to have everyone recognise they have a part to play in reconciliation between non-Indigenous Australians and Aboriginal peoples. Teachers play a key role in ensuring the next generation feel empowered to play a positive role in this reconciliation endeavour. As a consequence, many educational providers and individual schools are investigating ways to establish learning environments that improve engagement and educational achievements of Aboriginal children and young people. A key feature of such a learning environment is the positive attitude teachers hold towards reconciliation. For teachers to be able to progress from ‘graduate’ to the ‘proficient’ level of the Standards, it is essential they demonstrate that students are provided with opportunities “to
develop understanding of and respect for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander histories, cultures and languages” (ATSIL, 2011, p. 9).

2.2 Challenges from leading Aboriginal educators

There is increasing evidence from both international and Australian literature suggesting that Aboriginal children and young people’s wellbeing is enhanced by the recognition of their distinct cultural identities and how this can have a positive effect on students’ self-esteem and self-efficacy. Nicholson, Spiller and Pio (2019) document creative government strategies that bring together Indigenous and Western practices that enhance the self-efficacy of Indian people in diverse countries they immigrate to. Eley and Berryman (2019) highlight the need for transformative educational reform in New Zealand. They note that while a goal of education for decades in Aotearoa New Zealand has been for all children and young people to reach their full academic potential, nevertheless there are those within our society “that are underserved by our education systems …[including] those who come from Indigenous, poor or other diverse groups such as students with disabilities” (p. 123). Teachers are teaching at the cultural interface which holds complexities (Eley & Berryman, 2019). These complexities “include the situation of worsening disparities between rich and poor which disproportionately position Māori and those from Pacific Island backgrounds in situations of poverty” (Ritchie, 2016, p. 25). As noted by McNamara and Naepi (2018) teachers need to be able to boost the success of these learners “by fostering relationships with instructors and fellow students that are embedded within the relational model of self that is often absent in individualistic-oriented Western academic settings” (p. 340). The Te Kotahitanga Project, started in 2001 in New Zealand, had as its aim improving the achievement outcomes of Māori learners who had historically been disadvantaged by the educational system (Bishop, Berryman, & Wearmouth, 2014). These authors developed the Effective Teaching Profile during this project. They identified practices that can be observed in effective cross-cultural teaching as follows:

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<th>Te Kotahitanga ETP</th>
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<td>care for their learners as culturally located individuals;</td>
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<td>have high expectations of the learning for learners;</td>
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<tr>
<td>have appropriate learning activities so as to promote learning;</td>
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<tr>
<td>engage in a range of discursive learning interactions with learners;</td>
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</table>
know a range of strategies that can facilitate learning interactions; and promote, monitor, and reflect upon learning outcomes that in turn lead to improvements in Māori learners achievement and share this knowledge with the learners.

A key finding was that teachers must “explicitly reject deficit theorising as a means of explaining Māori students’ educational outcomes and take professional responsibility for the learning of their students” (Grudnoff, Haigh, Hill, Cochran-Smith, Ell, & Ludlow, 2017, p. 319).

In relation to Australia, Perso (2012) has stated the need to:

Use a strength-based approach is essential for relationship building and validating Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures, it is also essential for quality teachers to build on what students already know and the way it is embedded in their identities. (p. 18)

This author is suggesting that it is essential that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander advisers, teachers, regional community liaison officers, learning support staff and students are valued for who they are, what they know and the skills they bring with them into the learning environment of a school. At the time of the study, policy documents and literature highlighted cultural difference with research focussing on how Aboriginal children and young people can be assisted to ‘fit into the system’ (Stronger Smarter Institute, 2014, p. 2), rather than exploring what Aboriginal children and young people bring with them to school and incorporating this into their learning experience.

There have been challenges from leading Aboriginal educators critiquing, for example, what research is achieving when underpinned by deficit thinking of ‘closing the gap’ (Martin, 2009). Peter Buckskin, a Narungga man, contends “Australian education jurisdictions need shock treatment to jolt them into reality, taking responsibility for the systemic failure to provide the culturally safe place that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students need to learn and develop” (Buckskin, 2013, p. 1). Agreeing, Mick Dodson, a Yawuru man, stated “Education is something we’ve let slide miserably in recent decades. We’ve failed a lot of children in that time” (Dodson, 2009, p. 1). Another dominant voice in the education arena, Chris Sarra (2007), a Goreng Goreng man, holds that “[f]or too long I think many of us as educators have colluded too easily with the notion that Indigenous children are automatically underachievers at school.” (p. 6)
The importance of valuing Aboriginal knowledges is highlighted; a cultural lens helps us to see each child and their relationship to their own family and community from their perspective. “The presence of interactive effects between cultural affinity and factors such as self-esteem and self-efficacy has been investigated in several studies” (Colquhoun & Dockery, 2012, p. 3-4). When non-Indigenous educators are working with Aboriginal children and young people, the endeavour is “multi-layered and multi-dimensional space of dynamic relations” (Nakata, 2007, p. 199) as the life-worlds come together. Given that the majority of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people today are attending schools with non-Indigenous school leadership teams and being taught and supported largely by non-Indigenous teachers in their classrooms, the relationships between Aboriginal and non-Indigenous is significant in children’s schooling experience (Matthews, Watego, Cooper, & Baturo, 2005).

Standard 2.4’s focus area is “understand and respect Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples to promote reconciliation between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians.” (ATSIL, 2011, p. 9). Within the literature there was little research that investigated teachers’ expertise in this area. One entitled: An exploration of teachers’ knowledge about aspects of Australian Indigenous history and their attitude to reconciliation (McClure, 2008) found that of the teachers sampled, most considered increasing their knowledge of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander history an important aspect of the reconciliation process. Further, a positive attitudinal change was found after teaching based on their improved understanding of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures. Today, many teachers express concern at their own lack of knowledge and confidence with this content (Maher & Buxton, 2015).

Teaching children and young people respect for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples involves more than just knowledge or skills, it also involves the development of children and young peoples’ attitudes and values. Effective teachers examine their own personal understandings about Aboriginal peoples and communities, have the ability to interact with and engage with children and young people while, at the same time, knowingly critique their content area. Critiquing a content area requires passion, curiosity, humbleness, patience and resilience; all the characteristics educators strive to develop in their students (Watego, 2012). This author argues that if teachers need to have increased “knowledge about” Aboriginal communities and history, it really is up to the teachers themselves to have an awareness of their own practice – both as an educator and as a learner. There appears to be a resistance to modelling resilience, courage, curiosity, and adventure. Yet there is an expectation that students will apply these same characteristics to their lives.
To understand and interpret the data in the current study, it is necessary to have a clear picture of the historic-political moment in which this study found itself.

2.3 History of approaches to Aboriginal education in Australia

This historical section is necessary to frame and provide background to this current study. There have been several different approaches to Aboriginal education over the past 140 years and brief summary is provided.

2.3.1 ‘Clean, clad and courteous’ and ‘exclusion on demand’

As long as Aboriginal children were ‘clean, clad and courteous’, they were permitted to attend their local school following the Public Instruction Act of 1880 which introduced compulsory “free and fair” education for “all children if they lived within a two-mile radius of a school” (Fletcher, 1989, p. 57). Many were hopeful that with a Western education, the problem of Aboriginal children’s low achievement would no longer persist. “The federation itself was founded on the assumption that the Aborigines would, quite literally, disappear” (Whitlam, 1997, p. 1). Later in 1902 the Exclusion on Demand policy was introduced which stated that, “Aboriginal children could not attend school if an objection was received from just one non-Aboriginal parent, and were deemed unclean” (policy cited in Fletcher, 1989, p. 8). Interestingly, this policy was not removed from the New South Wales Teachers’ Handbook until 1972. Emphasis was given to “normal white values and habits” (Fletcher, 1989, p. 274) in the hopes that in removing Aboriginal children from their culture, they would fit better within what had become the dominant culture.

2.3.2 Aborigines Protection Act

In 1915, the Aborigines Protection Act enabled the Aborigines’ Protection Board to remove Aboriginal children from their parents. Aboriginal people did not consider it to be protecting them as young children under the age of 10 were sent off to be trained as servants or labourers. As noted by Cadzard and Maynard (2006) Aboriginal children “suffered through educational segregation and were denied opportunities in the school system” (p. 6).

2.3.3 Attempts to assimilate Aboriginal people

Protectionism was replaced by a policy of Assimilation where government decided that Aboriginal peoples 'not of full blood' should be absorbed or 'assimilated' into the wider ‘white’ population.
As recently as 1961 at the Native Welfare Conference of Federal and State Ministers, the policy was amended to include all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, not only those of ‘not full blood’:

The policy of assimilation as a means that all Aborigines (sic) and part-Aborigines (sic) are expected to attain the same manner of living as other Australians and to live as members of a single Australian community, enjoying the same rights and privileges, accepting the same customs and influenced by the same beliefs as other Australians. (Reynolds, 1972, p. 175)

Gradually, however, there came the understanding that Aboriginal students were not sub-standard – they were considered to be of average intelligence:

Research has indicated that the pupils are of average intelligence, and that social deprivation and depressed environment are the reason for initial retardation rather than low intelligence. Aboriginal children are now seen as disadvantaged members of the general community rather than a substandard racial group. (New South Wales Department of Education cited in Fletcher, 1989, p. 274)

This view did not recognise or respect the rich and diverse cultural backgrounds of Aboriginal children and young people, and this view is still prevalent in some areas of Australia today. Because they were considered to be generally wanting academically, Aboriginal children did not attend school beyond year three. Sarra (2014) describes a conversation with his mother which illustrates how this played out for people:

My mum dreamt of being an archaeologist when she was a child. It was an ambition she was denied, not because she was intellectually incapable but because she was only allowed to stay at school until year 3. When I asked her why, she replied: “I guess they just thought of us as uncivilised natives, and that we weren’t capable of learning”. (p. 1)

Today there are still grandparents who recount similar stories.

2.3.4 Unsettled year: the 1970s and 80s

Fletcher (1989) described the 1970s as “a new decade of disquiet and discontent” (p. 308) in Aboriginal education. Aboriginal peoples had the agency to actively challenging racial
discrimination and institutional racism. It was only in 1972 that principals were no longer permitted to refuse entry to Aboriginal students (Parbury, 1999).

Finally, in the 1980s, we see elements that became the foundation of modern views on education for Aboriginal people, within which the current study takes place. Watts (1982) describes how government policy moved “from an assimilationist stance in 1965, to an emphasis on self-determination in 1973, and thence, in 1975, to an expressed goal of self-management” (p. 3).

2.3.5 Modern trends

From the 1990s there has been a call for the inclusion of Aboriginal ways of seeing and being form them “to be empowered in terms of the Western world and in retaining or rebuilding Aboriginal identity as a primary identity” (Harris, 1990, p. 48). This has been termed ‘two-way’ schooling where “schools can be structured so that the new skills learned from another culture can be added to a person’s primary cultural makeup, rather than displace it” (Harris, 1990, p. 114).

Yunupingu (1994) described it as both ways of schooling as both cultures would be able to maintain their language and their culture.

2.3.6 Bringing them home

The report relating to the removal of Aboriginal children from their families, Bringing them home, was released in May 1997. The report found that the policy of forcibly removing Indigenous children fell within the international legal definition of genocide (Commonwealth of Australia, 1997). The inquiry noted that from 1948 onwards, “the date of the Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide, there were clear statements on the content of the crime of genocide and its unlawfulness” (Commonwealth of Australia, 1997, p. 236).

Denying this, in April 2000, the government of the time made a submission to the Senate Legal and Constitutional References Committee inquiry into the stolen generation that rejected recommendations of the Bringing them home report. It claimed that: “There is no ‘stolen generation’; the number of people forcibly removed was significantly less than the report had suggested; that the methodology of the report was flawed; and that there is no basis for making reparations, including monetary compensation” (Herron, 2000, p. 5). It was not until 2008 that
Kevin Rudd, the then Prime Minister of Australia, with bipartisan support, made a formal apology to the Stolen Generations. Aboriginal children are still removed from their families:

Tonight, around 17,000 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children will sleep away from their homes. Away from their families and separated from their cultural identity. We know without a major change that number will triple by 2,035. When the ground-breaking Bringing Them Home report was released in 1997, Australia was shocked to learn that 20% of children living in out-of-home care were Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander. Now 20 years later, our children make up 35% of those in care. This is a national crisis. (Sarra, 2017, p. 1)

This all is justification for the current study: if education can meet the needs of Aboriginal children and young people and their families can feel comfortable in our schools, we can redress these statistics.

2.3.7 Uluru Statement from the Heart

The importance of the Uluru Statement is that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples initiated the conversation. The dialogue process leading up the National Constitutional Convention at the base of Uluru on the 23 – 26 May, 2017. Professor Megan Davis, a Cobble woman, stated that such a move “was unprecedented in Australian history as there has never been such a process that has been convened for and hosted by First Nations people on constitutional reform” (Davis, 2017, paragraph 1, section 9). The Uluru statement from the heart (2017) reads as follows:

We, gathered at the 2017 National Constitutional Convention, coming from all points of the southern sky, make this statement from the heart:

Our Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander tribes were the first sovereign Nations of the Australian continent and its adjacent islands, and possessed it under our own laws and customs. This our ancestors did, according to the reckoning of our culture, from the Creation, according to the common law from ‘time immemorial’, and according to science more than 60,000 years ago.

This sovereignty is a spiritual notion: the ancestral tie between the land, or ‘mother nature’, and the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples who were born there from, remain attached thereto, and must one day return thither to be united with our ancestors. This link is the basis of the ownership of the soil, or better, of sovereignty. It has never been ceded or extinguished, and co-exists with the sovereignty of the Crown.

How could it be otherwise? That peoples possessed a land for sixty millennia and this sacred link disappears from world history in merely the last two hundred years?
With substantive constitutional change and structural reform, we believe this ancient sovereignty can shine through as a fuller expression of Australia’s nationhood.

Proportionally, we are the most incarcerated people on the planet. We are not an innately criminal people. Our children are aliened from their families at unprecedented rates. This cannot be because we have no love for them. And our youth languish in detention in obscene numbers. They should be our hope for the future.

These dimensions of our crisis tell plainly the structural nature of our problem. This is the torment of our powerlessness.

We seek constitutional reforms to empower our people and take a rightful place in our own country. When we have power over our destiny our children will flourish. They will walk in two worlds and their culture will be a gift to their country.

We call for the establishment of a First Nations Voice enshrined in the Constitution.

Makarrata is the culmination of our agenda: the coming together after a struggle. It captures our aspirations for a fair and truthful relationship with the people of Australia and a better future for our children based on justice and self-determination.

We seek a Makarrata Commission to supervise a process of agreement-making between governments and First Nations and truth-telling about our history.

In 1967 we were counted, in 2017 we seek to be heard. We leave base camp and start our trek across this vast country. We invite you to walk with us in a movement of the Australian people for a better future. (Uluru Statement from the Heart, 2017)

The Uluru Statement from the Heart in 2017 was a call for peace and the Referendum Council proposed reforms – a roadmap to peace. “Prime Minister Turnbull dismissed it four months later, inventing a fiction that the enhanced participation of First Peoples in Australian liberal democracy amounted to a ‘third chamber’ of the parliament” (Davis, 2017, paragraph 1, section 1).

2.3.8 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander youth imagine

In 2019, a group of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people have gathered in East Arnhem Land for the Youth Forum at Garma. This forum was facilitated by the Australia Indigenous Mentoring Experience (AIME) and resulted in the Imagination Declaration which is addressed to the Prime Minister and Education Ministers across Australia.

To the Prime Minister and Education Ministers across Australia,

In 1967, we asked to be counted.

In 2017, we asked for a voice and treaty.

Today, we ask you to imagine what’s possible.

The future of this country lies in all of our hands.
We do not want to inherit a world that is in pain. We do not want to stare down huge inequality feeling powerless to our fate. We do not want to be unarmed as we confront some of the biggest problems faced by the human race, from rising sea levels, which will lead to significant refugee challenges, to droughts and food shortages, and our own challenges around a cycle of perpetuated disadvantage.

It’s time to think differently.

With 60,000 years of genius and imagination in our hearts and minds, we can be one of the groups of people that transform the future of life on earth, for the good of all.

We can design the solutions that lift islands up in the face of rising seas, we can work on creative agricultural solutions that are in sync with our natural habitat, we can re-engineer schooling, we can invent new jobs and technologies, and we can unite around kindness.

We don’t want to be boxed.
We don’t want ceilings.
We want freedom to be whatever a human mind can dream.

When you think of an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander kid, or in fact, any kind, imagine what’s possible. Don’t define us through the lens of disadvantage or label us as limited.

Test us.
Expect the best of us.
Expect the unexpected.

Expect us to continue carrying the custodianship of imagination, entrepreneurial spirit and genius.

Expect us to be complex.

And then let us spread our wings, and soar higher than ever before.

We call on you and the Education Ministers across the nation to establish an imagination agenda for our Indigenous kids and, in fact, for all Australian children.

We urge you to give us the freedom to write a new story.

We want to show the world Aboriginal genius.

Over the coming months we’ll be sharing the declaration with thousands of Indigenous kids across our nation and together we’ll stand to say, “set an imagination agenda for our classrooms, remove the limited thinking around disadvantage, stop looking at us as a problem to fix, set us free to be the solution and give us the stage to light the world”.

We want the imagination agenda in every school in the nation, from early childhood learning centres through to our most prominent universities.

To our Prime Minister and Education Ministers, we call on you to meet with us and to work on an imagination plan for our country’s education system, for all of us.

We are not the problem; we are the solution. (Youth Forum Garma, 2019)
Aboriginal young people have high expectations of themselves and their culture; this current study sought to advance their aspirations.

### 2.4 The current state of affairs in Aboriginal education

Current Australian education policies tend to assume that the main measures of success for Aboriginal Australians is their assimilation into the dominant culture through the mastering of English literacy and Western norms (Buckskin, 2013). He asserts that the understanding of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander histories, cultures, languages and shared experience since Colonisation has been relegated to the margins. Buckskin (2013, p. 2) advocated for a reshaping of Australian education more generally when he stated “Aboriginal educators have been arguing for a paradigm shift in the way Western pedagogy and epistemology dominates the way Aboriginal students are being educated and assessed”.

While Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples make up three per cent of the Australian population, the younger demographic of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander population means they comprised 5.6 per cent of all school students in 2017 (Australian Bureau of Statistics [ABS], 2018). The non-government sector enrolment of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students has steadily increased over the past 10 years, from 8.9% in 2008 to 10.4% in 2017 for Catholic schools, and from 5.0% to 5.7% for Independent schools over the same period (ABS, 2018). With increasing numbers of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people in schools, there is a greater need for systems of schools to embrace culturally responsive schooling (Perso, 2012). It is an undeniable fact that in Australia today, “Indigenous students at all levels experience worse educational outcomes than non-Indigenous students” (Steering Committee for the Review of Government Service Provisions, 2007, p. 4).

At the turn of the century, as noted by Buckskin (2000) Aboriginal education remained in crisis. More recent statistics show little has changed. Evidence shows ‘the gap’ continues with regards to attendance, literacy and numeracy benchmarks, retention and completion. In May 2014, COAG agreed to a new target to close the gap between Indigenous and non-Indigenous school attendance by the end of 2018. Agreement to this target reflects the strong link between school attendance and student performance. There has been little change in the rate of attendance for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students from 2015 to 2017.

At the time of this study the ninth ‘Closing the Gap’ Prime Minister’s Report was released in which the Prime Minister of Australia stated that: “It is clear that Closing the Gap is a national responsibility that belongs with every Australia” (Australian Government Department of the
Prime Minister and Cabinet, 2017, p. 5). The report found that government and community efforts were only able to meet one of seven targets to boost health, education and employment to the level of the non-indigenous population.

### 2.5 Government responses and policies

The 1989 Hobart Declaration on schooling was a historic commitment to improving Australian schooling within a framework of national collaboration. For the first time, ten national goals for schooling provided a framework for co-operation between schools, States and Territories and the Commonwealth (Australian Education Council, 1989). The eighth goal was: “To provide students with an understanding and respect for our cultural heritage including the particular cultural background of Aboriginal and ethnic groups” (Australian Education Council, 1989, p. 2).

The 1999 Adelaide Declaration on National Goals for Schooling in the Twenty-first Century was the first mainstream declaration on schooling in Australia to make specific reference to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students instead of having a separate policy document that was only applicable to Aboriginal education. While the 18 goals were applicable to all school students, it included the following:

**Schooling should be socially just, so that:**

- **Goal 3.3** Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students have equitable access to, and opportunities in, schooling so that their learning outcomes improve and, over time, match those of other students.
- **Goal 3.4** All students understand and acknowledge the value of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures to Australian society and possess the knowledge, skills and understanding to contribute to, and benefit from, reconciliation between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians’ (Ministerial Council on Education, Employment, Training and Youth Affairs [MCEETYA], 1999, p. 3).

This was a broader focus that social justice is predicated upon all students learning about Aboriginal cultures and therefore has a dual purpose for Aboriginal education in school — improving the self-esteem of Aboriginal students and making the wider community more knowledgeable about Aboriginal peoples and their cultures. “Having a culturally inclusive schooling environment was seen as a remedy to the educational disadvantage of Aboriginal
peoples” (Zubrick et al., 2004, p. 43). This was further articulated in Ministerial Council for Education, Early Childhood Development and Youth Affair’s National Statement of Principles and Standards for More Culturally Inclusive Schooling in the 21st Century.

### 2.6 Closing the Gap to open the door

The Close the Gap Campaign for Indigenous Health Equality commenced in 2006 with the goal of closing the health and life expectancy gap between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and non-Indigenous Australians within a generation (Australian Government Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet, 2014). Since 2008, COAG has agreed and implemented the ‘closing the gap’ policy. COAG identified Indigenous issues as one of seven priority areas of national reform, set six targets for closing the gaps in outcomes between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians, and identified seven ‘building blocks’ that underpinned a National Indigenous Reform Agreement (NIRA). The six ‘Closing the Gap’ targets, relate to Indigenous life expectancy, infant mortality, early childhood development and employment, and two specific education targets:

- Halve the gap for Indigenous students in reading, writing and numeracy within a decade; and
- Halve the gap for Indigenous students in year 12 or equivalent attainment by 2020.

In 2014, the then Prime Minister of Australia added a new target to the exiting Closing the Gap targets: “Namely to end the gap between Indigenous and non-Indigenous school attendance within five years” (Australian Government Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet, 2014). At the Council of Australian Governments (2009) meeting every state and territory agreed with the Commonwealth on the need to publish attendance data from every school. At the time of this current study, as discussed in more detail in the first and second journal articles, this target is not on track to being met.

The disparities discussed above have provided impetus for Government to develop policy to address this. For example, the *National Declaration on Educational Goals for Young Australians* (Ministerial Council on Education, Employment, Training and Youth Affairs, 2008) advised:

> Meeting the needs of young Indigenous Australians and promoting high expectations for their educational performance requires strategic investment. Australian schooling needs to engage Indigenous students, their families and communities in all aspects of
schooling; increase Indigenous participation in the education workforce at all levels; and support coordinated community services for students and their families that can increase productive participation in schooling. (MCEETYA, 2008, p. 15)

The *Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Action Plan 2010-2014* (the Action Plan) endorsed by COAG on 23 May 2011, commits all governments in Australia to a unified approach to ‘closing the gap’ in education outcomes between Indigenous and non-Indigenous students. The Preface of that Action Plan states that:

Governments across Australia recognise Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples as the First Australians with one of the oldest continuing cultures in human history. They affirm the right of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people to sustain their languages and cultures and acknowledge associations with land and water. (MCEECDYA, 2011, p. 3)

As a result of this national commitment, the New South Wales Government has an ambitious Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Action Plan, which has stated targets to, within a decade, *close the gap* in literacy and numeracy between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal students and, by 2020, at least halve the gap for Aboriginal students in Year 12 attainment or equivalent rates. One strategy to achieve these stated targets is the establishment of the New South Wales Smarter Schools National Partnerships (SSNP) (MCEECDYA, 2011). The strategic focus is aimed at improving the educational outcomes of Aboriginal students through effective and sustainable reforms in classrooms and school communities through the establishment of focus schools across the state. Evidence of the fluidity at present and the continually changing political landscape is that the Smarter Schools National Partnerships initiative is now defunct.

Research indicates that key influences in effective change in any school are a supportive principal and a supportive school executive. In each of the identified New South Wales focus schools, it was expected that:

Every principal of a focus school will within two years be required to participate in a leadership program to assist them lead improvement in learning outcomes of Indigenous students. … [and] Education providers will deliver professional learning to teachers to ensure high levels of cultural competency to inform the best teaching strategies for Indigenous students. (MCEECDYA, 2011, p. 16)
Additionally, schools and their leadership teams would need to implement the amendments in the Australian Curriculum.

2.7 The development of the Australian Curriculum

In Australia the federal government agreed to the development and implementation of a National Australian Curriculum that explicitly identifies three cross curriculum priorities, one of which is Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander histories and cultures. This National Curriculum is described to be a world-class curriculum. However, some Aboriginal educators are less than convinced. Professor Mark Rose, a Gunditjmara man, coined the deliberately emotive phrase ‘silent apartheid’ to describe the ways in which Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander histories and cultures, have very little visible presence in the curriculum (Rose, 2012). He further argues, this has “denude[d] the nation of a consciousness that is essentially the basis for national identity and central to the path for national maturity” (Rose, 2012, pp. 67-68).

Agreeing with this sentiment, Price (2012) holds that the cross-curriculum priority will fail to be implemented if curriculum writers and authorities continue to marginalise and discount the value of Aboriginal knowledge in key subject areas. This content has always been indicative of knowledge/power relations within mainstream society. Under the new Australian Professional Standards 1.4 and 2.4, teachers are asked to deal with knowledge that was previously not privileged within standardised curriculum (Ma Rhea, Anderson, & Atkinson, 2012). Lowe and Yunkaporta (2013) in their detailed analysis of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander content currently in the Australian Curriculum, concluded that “education is still a long way from engaging with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander epistemologies” (p. 5). And while teachers are asked to engage with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander content, it can be viewed as “weak … tokenistic and overwhelmingly unresponsive to historical and contemporary realities” (p. 12). At the time of the current study, with the exception of the Geography and History key learning areas of the Australian curriculum, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander content has remained largely invisible (Rose, 2012; Lowe & Yunkaporta, 2013).

The principal’s responsibilities in the aforementioned statement can be linked to the National Professional Standards for Teachers’ fourth identified level of ‘Lead’. Focus Area 2.4 states that the teacher at this level should provide evidence of having been able to: “Lead initiatives to assist colleagues with opportunities for students to develop understanding of and respect for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander histories, cultures and languages” (AITSL, 2011, p. 11).
As Lee-Hammond and Jackson-Barrett (2018) has stated, “successive decades of ‘interventions’ have not transformed the way Australian education systems thought about education for Aboriginal children at a fundamental level” (p. 89). Despite noticeable effort over the past forty years, the gap in educational achievement and attainment between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal students remains. The Hobart, Adelaide and Melbourne Declarations, spreading over a timeframe of nearly twenty years, all had goals that allude to teachers improving their knowledge of, and skills in, educating Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people, and in guiding all students towards a better understanding and respect for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander histories and cultures.

One of the overarching objectives of Smarter Schools National Partnerships national initiative was Improving Teacher Quality National Partnership. With the aim of providing high quality teachers in New South Wales schools beyond the life of the Partnerships. The approach was defined by the strong research and evidence that linked teacher and school leadership capacity with improvements in school outcomes (Hanushek, 2004). The current study sought to augment current data and information and to play a part in ensuring that the current policy requiring teachers to demonstrate capacity in Standards 1.4 and 2.4, does not become yet another policy that has little positive effect on the learning outcomes of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people. Teachers need support to be able to work effectively with any new initiative. The current study therefore started off establishing teachers’ confidence in meeting the two Standards and developing and implementing PLD that would meet their needs in enhancing the capacity to meet the Standards.
Chapter 3 Recognising and valuing Aboriginal ways of seeing and doing

The challenge is for systems of education to acknowledge Aboriginal ways of seeing and doing, to recognise these realities as a way to find common ground and improve learning partnerships across knowledge systems. Recognition of Aboriginal knowledge and cultural underpinnings of learning can have positive impacts on Aboriginal children and young people.

3.1 We all have potential for success

There is a growing body of knowledge and literature, from a long history of trialling, implementing and enforcing different approaches to the teaching of Aboriginal students and teaching about Aboriginal histories, cultures and identities (see 2.3 for details). There are a number of important aspects that provide evidence of enhancing the engagement and academic success of Aboriginal children and young people. Some identified areas for success, discussed below, are a) connections with the passing on of knowledge; b) valuing of Aboriginal knowledges; c) exploring Aboriginal ways of being; and d) a pedagogy of reciprocal relationships with Country.

3.1.1 Connections with the passing on of knowledge

In Aboriginal ways of being, teachers are the ones who have been on the journey before; they act as supportive guides for the children and young people, to open the doors ahead, to facilitate the learning process, to unlock each young person’s learning potential (Alberta Education, 2005; Edwards & Buxton, 1998). In Aboriginal ways of teaching, learning and seeing, simply knowing the information and passing it on is not enough. Children and young people are supported, encouraged and challenged to own their learning, to make it a part of their lived experience and to reflect on what they have learnt. In Aboriginal ways of being, with knowledge comes responsibility – not to the person for their own development and gain, but for what this means so that they are in a position to contribute to the collective good of their community and Country (Edwards & Buxton, 1998; Martin, 2003; Moran, 2004; McKnight, 2015).

3.1.2 Valuing Aboriginal knowledges

For over forty years Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander educators have been arguing for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander knowledges to be included in the curriculum and
Karen Martin (2003) a Noonuccal woman (North Stradbroke Island), argues for a pedagogy in Australian schools that values Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander knowledges as equal to Western “ways of knowing, being and doing” (p. 9). It is important for teachers to look at where Aboriginal children and young people are at this point in time, to find out what Aboriginal children and young people bring with them to the learning experience and bring education to the learners in a relevant and meaningful way. Yunkaporta (2009) argues for the need to include authentic Aboriginal perspectives in the curriculum in ways that increase intellectual rigour and support mainstream academic success for Aboriginal children and young people. It can be argued that enhancing the outcomes of all learners is what all teachers would do as a matter of course to meet the diverse learning needs of the children in their classrooms, however, the Australian mainstream education system has largely failed in relation to Aboriginal children and young people. From the discussion above, it seems to reside in the failure of systems of schools and teachers to fully understand and to value Aboriginal ways of knowing as a complex knowledge system or to recognise that Aboriginal peoples, as holders and practitioners of knowledge, as being well placed to build on these and to have two frames of reference within which to interpret new information and knowledge. An important factor is teachers’ ability to start from Aboriginal children and young peoples’ knowledge base to help them bridge to the Western curriculum they encounter in schools (Nakata, 2008).

3.1.3 Exploring Aboriginal ways of knowing and being

We are part of the world as much as it is part of us, existing within a network of relations amongst Entities that are reciprocal and occur in certain contexts. This determines and defines for us rights to be earned and bestowed as we carry out rites to country, self and others – our Ways of Being. (Martin, 2003, p. 10)

Aboriginal ways of being are indelibly driven through ways of knowing and serve as guides for establishing relationships and relatedness (Martin, 2003). Ways of being are about the rights earned by fulfilling relationships to people and Country (Edwards & Buxton, 1998; Martin, 2003).

In the past, Aboriginal perspectives in the curriculum have been taught from an external perspective, as an academic study of a culture (Edwards & Buxton, 1998; Williams, 2013). This is articulated by Williams (2013) who maintains that many “may find the prospect of yarning up language and culture daunting and feel a need to seek external academic support to help us research our current cultural knowledge position” (p. 8). This approach to learning
allows teachers and students to remain separated from the material that they were learning about. In much the same way, students might be removed when learning about life in Rome in the Latin class. Edwards and Buxton (1998) argue that there is a vital difference between Aboriginal perspectives and cultural education. Learning through experiences, as with ‘Guyunggu’ (Darnginjung word for being), is “the first stage of an approach to learning from an Aboriginal point of view” (Edwards & Buxton, 1998, p. 4), allowing teachers and children to get a glimpse of an Aboriginal way of seeing the world. ‘Guyunggu’ is about learning a way “to be” (Edwards & Buxton, 1998, p. 4). Edwards and Buxton (1998) explain that the success of Guyunggu depends:

[on leading children to experience activities to which they respond emotionally. A sense of belonging, and all that it entails, requires that children develop an ‘emotional library’ on which they can draw, as they develop further understanding and, as further concepts are felt, rather than just known. In an Aboriginal way of learning, to be able to act on a concept, you must not only understand it at an intellectual level but be able to feel that concept at an emotional level. (Edwards & Buxton, 1998, p. 4)

This approach to learning has the potential to broaden and deepen both teachers’ and learners’ views of their world. This way of approaching the learning experience involves both teachers and children in a shared journey of growth and learning (Edwards & Buxton, 1998; Yunkaporta, 2009; Williams, 2013).

In Aboriginal ways of seeing, the teacher does not separate self from the process of teaching and learning. ‘Guyunggu’ recognises that teachers, children and young people are all part of a learning community (Edwards & Buxton, 1998). By becoming a part of this approach to teaching and learning, what one is doing is opening oneself to opportunities that deepen one's way of seeing the Country and discovering the many possibilities that exist to learn more about one-self and our place within this Country (Edwards & Buxton, 1998). These elements are clearly discernible in the final iteration of the PLD framework in the current study.

3.1.4 Eight Ways: pedagogy framework

Another element that became important during the current study is well articulated in Yunkaporta’s (2009) Eight Ways of learning. This is a pedagogy framework that can assist teachers to include Aboriginal perspectives through Aboriginal processes and protocols, to move beyond just content, to “learn through culture not about culture” (Yunkaporta, 2009, p. 4). It comprises eight interconnected pedagogies that see teaching and learning as
fundamentally holistic, non-linear, visual, kinaesthetic, social and contextualised. Yunkaporta’s framework is land-based, moving beyond content, to link Country and include community into a pedagogical process as discussed by him and others (McKnight, 2017; Yunkaporta, 2009; Harrison & McConchie, 2009). This is what the current study set out to accomplish with its PLD.

3.1.5 Mingadhuga Mingayung a cultural experience and pedagogy

McKnight, a Awabakal, Gumaroi and Yuin man (2015) introduced Mingadhuga Mingayung a cultural experience and pedagogy that is born out of his understanding of and relationship to Gulaga (place of teaching), Mother Mountain, a Yuin site of significance and her sister Biamanga (place of learning). “Mingadhuga Mingayung is to learn and know Yuin Country as a knowledge site and holder” (McKnight, 2017, p. 21), an approach to guiding non-Aboriginal academic and pre-service teachers in developing their understanding of and respect for Aboriginal ways of knowing, learning and behaving. McKnight is of the strong belief that for non-Aboriginal peoples to effectively embed Aboriginal perspectives there is a need for “people to understand and practice a respectful reciprocal relationship with Country” (McKintosh, 2017, p. 15). These elements are important in the development of Yurunnhang Bungil Nyumba, the framework developed in the current study.

In his study, McKnight (2015) sought to understand how six School of Education non-Aboriginal academics and twenty non-Aboriginal pre-service teachers engaged in Aboriginal ways of knowing, learning, practice and behaving with Yuin Country; they were given the opportunity of learning about self in kinship. His intended purpose was to introduce academics and pre-service teachers “to a life-long respectful reciprocal relationship with Yuin Country” (McKnight, 2017, p. 22). The research described in this thesis draws on a rich and living culture of Yuin knowledge in story/teachings. McKnight (2017) used Aboriginal storying combined with Western language and stories, to consider how best to implement and embed Aboriginal perspectives in teaching programs.

Today, there is another significant shift: it is becoming a requirement that teachers know how to infuse Aboriginal knowledge into their classroom practice. Teachers are therefore seeking advice on how to authentically engage with Aboriginal ways of knowing and engaging with Aboriginal families and communities to improve student engagement and achievement. While there is much written about Aboriginal styles of learning and the establishment and development of school and community partnerships, there is less written about how to teach in
an Aboriginal way. In New South Wales, there are three pertinent studies: ‘Guyunggu’, ‘Eight Ways’, and more recently ‘Mingadhuu Mingayung’. In summary, in an Aboriginal way of seeing, teachers need to go on the journey first to analyse their emotional response to the proposed pedagogy before they take children on that journey. This opportunity was provided to teachers in the current study.

3.2 Implications for the current study

The Australian Government and education providers are, at this point in time, being challenged to reduce the disparity between Aboriginal and non-Indigenous student outcomes. The inclusion of Aboriginal knowledges and ways of seeing in school pedagogy is only, in part, a result of attempting to better Aboriginal students’ educational participation and engagement. Effective teaching strategies that are responsive to the local community and cultural setting, linguistic background and history of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students (AITSL, 2011) represent good practice for all teachers. It is to “know students and how they learn” (p. 9). However, at the preservice teacher education level, “there is a pattern within the Australian … literature showing a separation and imbalance between Indigenous content and the transfer of effective teaching skills” (Moreton-Robinson, Singh, Kolopenuk, Robinson, & Walter, 2012, p. 1).

It is now time to understand the educational needs of Aboriginal children and young people living at the interface of two cultures, their own and the mainstream Western culture, from their perspective (Nakata, 2008). This current study seeks to assist teachers “to develop their knowledge and understanding of the impact of culture, cultural identity and linguistic background on the education of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students” (AITSL, 2011, p. 9).

The first journal article in this current study, provided in the next chapter, explores how competent teachers feel to meet Standards 1.4 and 2.4, and it provides findings related to their recommendations of what they would like to see in a professional learning and development package to assist them to comprehensively meet those Standards. These recommendations became the foundation of Phase 2 of the current study.
Chapter 4 First journal article

The first journal article reports the findings of the first subsidiary research question:

What elements would participants like to see in a professional learning package to enhance their capacity to meet Standards 1.4 and 2.4?

The article is presented here.


Abstract

Australia’s teachers Professional Standards require teachers to demonstrate proficiency in Aboriginal pedagogy, history and perspectives. This paper will outline their introduction and the concern that teachers may feel about implementing them. It discusses the findings of a study investigating a group of primary teachers’ perceptions of their capacity to meet these standards. An Aboriginal research paradigm underpinned the design of the study, which took place within a cultural interface theoretical framework (Nakata, 2007). A multiple case study methodology was utilised and data were gathered using group interviews, which were analysed using thematic coding. Findings were that teachers did not feel confident in meeting the two specific standards. Their suggestions for professional learning that would meet their needs are presented.

In a departure from Western conventions, a painting by the author offers a visual representation of the research study. Providing cohesion and a visual expression of the implementation of the study, the painting also represents its various facets.

Introduction

I would like to firstly acknowledge with respect the ancestors of the Country in which this study was conducted, the Gadigal, Bidjigal and Dharawal people of Eora Country.
I would also like to acknowledge my own ancestors the Mununjali people of Yugambeh Country and Nganduwal/ Minjunbal people of Bundjalung Country. Taking this time to pay my respects to these peoples and countries through this acknowledgement is to locate myself firstly as an Aboriginal woman and then as the researcher for this study.
Past to present for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander learners

In Australia today, much has been written about the fact that education for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people is far from equitable (Buckskin, 2012, 2013; Dodson, 2009; Martin, 2009; Sarra, 2009). For example, “Indigenous student (47.2%) attendance rates are lower compared to non-Indigenous students (79.4%) from the first year of high school to year 12” (Buckskin, 2013, p. 4). Low attendance often equates to poor achievement and “Indigenous students (45.4%) are less likely to complete year 12 compared to non-Indigenous students (88.1%)” (Buckskin, 2013, p. 4). Statistics show a persistent trend of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students performing in the lower bands in literacy and numeracy. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander educational outcomes are measured against minimum mainstream standards, which are supported by the government rhetoric of ‘closing the gap’. These statistics are a result of a continued deficit model of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander funding and approaches to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander education. The deep-rooted system in my painting discussed below represents a history of polices entrenching deficit thinking, which contributes to current educational statistics. What is not revealed in these statistics from government and educational provider reports, is that “for too many Aboriginal students’ families, schooling continues to be an unfulfilling experience and in too many ways, an unfulfilled goal” (Martin, 2009, p. 1).

Martin (2009) has argued that, in order to improve education outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people, there needs to be recognition of, and a space for, Aboriginal worldviews. This would seem to indicate that Aboriginal ways of seeing, knowing and being would need to be at the forefront of any professional learning for school leaders and classroom teachers.

Challenges have been made by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander education leaders to mainstream education to enhance the wellbeing of Aboriginal children and young people. They suggest that this can be achieved by recognising their distinct identities and the use of a “strength-based approach” (Perso, 2012, p. 18) to build relationships with Aboriginal parents, families, caregivers and communities. In the painting (Figure 1) the trunk of the tree symbolises standing solid in Country, cultural identity, and community.

Justification for the current study

The current study sought to enhance understandings of how contemporary inequitable educational outcomes can and should be improved if we are to meet our international and
national obligations. Australia has agreed to be bound by the United Nations *Convention on the Rights of the Child* (1990) which states that all children have the right to an education that lays a foundation for the rest of their lives, maximises their abilities, and respects their family, cultural identities and languages. As a signatory to the *Declaration of the Rights of Indigenous Peoples* (United Nations, 2007), Australia has recognised in particular the right of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families and communities to retain shared responsibility for the upbringing, education and well-being of their children, consistent with the rights of the child.

In the education sphere, where this study is nested, concerted collective action on the part of key stakeholders has resulted in there being a focus on the education of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people in the *Australian Professional Standards for Teachers* (AITSL, 2011). There are four levels in the Standards, depicting increasing levels of knowledge, skill, and leadership, running from *graduate* for those just completing their teacher education course to *lead* describing principals and executive teams. There are 37 Professional Standards that teachers are obliged to meet and provide evidence of meeting on graduation, and as they become increasingly expert teachers. The Standards reflect and build on national and international evidence that a teacher’s effectiveness has the most powerful impact on students. This has been well articulated in Hattie’s (2008) work, where he synthesises a wide range of research on what has the most positive effect on student learning.

There is a groundswell of goodwill evident in Australia and a determination to improve outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students. Concrete evidence of this is that government, largely made up of non-Indigenous people and expressing their will, has developed the two Standards specifically related to meeting the educational needs of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students and teaching about Aboriginal cultures, histories and languages to all students, thus harnessing the commitment of all to the notion of reconciliation.

A report (Ma Rhea, *et al.*, 2012) commissioned by the Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership found that teachers across the country argue “that much more can be done to improve what is being offered” and that there is a “lack of systemic level planning for teacher professional development in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander education as part of workforce development” (p. 52).

This study sought to contribute to the body of knowledge that may lead to improved outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people. The bright blue sky of the
painting (Figure 1) symbolises this space for new knowledge and the potential benefits for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people at the cultural interface of schooling. In order to achieve this, in the current study, teachers’ perceived capacity to meet the two Standards 1.4 and 2.4 were explored, together with their views on what professional learning they would recommend in order for them to feel confident about meeting the two Standards in question.

**Visual representations**

The research project investigated a group of primary teachers’ perceived confidence in meeting the following Australian Professional Standards for Teachers (hereafter the Standards) from the Australian Institute for Teachers and School Leadership (AITSL):

1.4 Design and implement effective teaching strategies that are responsive to the local community and cultural setting, linguistic background and histories of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students; and

2.4 Provide opportunities for students to develop understanding of and respect for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander histories, cultures and languages (AITSL, 2011).

I think in terms of visual conceptualisation, therefore I created a painting, Figure 1: *Standing solid and tall* (Buxton, 2015), which represents aspects of the literature review, the findings and the positives as the findings culminate in action that may potentially enhance educational outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people into the future.

The concentric circles in this painting represent learning on the different levels. The yellow and orange represents the spirit moving in between realms of knowledge – physical, intellectual, emotional and spiritual. The blue represents water – a natural resource vital for life, an energy source, custodial relationships expressed through cultural practices. The browns and ochre represent Country, the foundation of knowledge. The trunk of the tree symbolises strength in and layers of learning. The roots deeps within Mother Earth represent grounding in life lessons.
The painting is also a visual representation of the study in its entirety. The deep roots in the country are the history, policies and educational statistics, impacting on the wellbeing of Aboriginal children and young people, which is the context of the study. Growing from history and statistics is a realisation that a transformative learning pedagogy should be adopted. The trunk of the tree symbolises strength and layers of meaning. I interpret the development of the Standards as evidence of goodwill and a newfound willingness to do something positive: to grow in understanding through professional learning. The branches are the new directions; the leaves represent the findings of this study. The bright blue sky represents the unlimited potential and benefits that this new knowledge might achieve.
Theoretical framework

In order to best ground the research and to guide the interpretation of the data, this study took place within a cultural interface theoretical framework (Nakata, 2007). Building an Indigenous standpoint into a theoretical framework requires more than the inclusion of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander narratives and perspectives (Foley, 2003; Nakata, 2007; Yunkaporta, 2009). It requires the recognition of the existence of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander knowledge systems and an understanding of the complexities of the cultural interface. Therefore, an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander standpoint can never be reduced to just the inclusion of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander content (Nakata, 2007). Edwards and Buxton (1998) explained an Aboriginal way of being as an interrelatedness of people, land and spirit. Dennis Foley (2003), a Gai-mariagal man, conceived this epistemological standpoint as grounded in Aboriginal knowledge of spirituality and philosophy.

Cultural interface framework

In order to provide a deep level of analysis of the data in the current study, Martin Nakata’s cultural interface theory constituted a suitable framework as it provided a means to capture the nuanced and multi-dimensional nature of the place of non-Indigenous teachers charged with the responsibility of meeting the needs of students as articulated in Standards 1.4 and 2.4. Martin Nakata (2007), a Torres Strait Islander man, “captured this complexity and conceptualised it as a broader interface” (Nakata, 2007, p. 198). What he has termed as cultural interface is embodied by points of intersecting trajectories. Nakata explained as follows:

It is a multi-layered and multi-dimensional space of dynamic relations constituted by the intersections of time, place, distance, different systems of thought, competing and contesting discourses within and between different knowledge traditions, and different systems of social, economic and political organisation. It is a space for many shifting and complex intersections between different people with different histories, experiences, languages, agendas, aspirations and responses… All these elements cohere together at the interface in the everyday. (Nakata, 2007, p. 199)

Nakata argued that the elements and relationships in this space are how one’s thinking, understandings, knowledges, identities and histories change in a continuing state of process, our “lived realities” (Nakata, 2007, p. 199). According to Nakata there are three guiding principles to Indigenous standpoint theory. Firstly, Indigenous people are entangled in a very
contested knowledge space at the cultural interface; secondly, to move forward it is necessary to recognise the continuities and discontinuities of Indigenous agency; and, thirdly, there needs to be the understanding of the continual tension that informs and limits what can be said and what is left unsaid in the everyday (Nakata, 2007, pp. 215-216).

Nakata (2001) has also described the successful application of the cultural interface theory in schooling as requiring that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander ‘lifeworlds’ be the starting point. He recommends that the next step is extending learners in the overlap with non-local realities, maintaining continuity with the past while learning skills relevant to the present and the future. He further asserts that the cultural interface approach is not simply a platform for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students to transition into mainstream education, but is a “source of innovation, critical thinking and problem-solving skills that are relevant for learners of any culture” (Nakata, 2001, p. 8). This approach could counteract deficit views of culture and go a long way to removing tokenism, by skilling up teachers and in turn young people in the art of critical reflection without losing their own cultural standpoint.

**Purpose of the research**

The purpose of the research was to investigate a selection of primary teachers’ views on their current capacity to meet the Standards 1.4 and 2.4, and if they perceived a gap, what professional learning they would suggest.

**Methodology**

*Case study*

The current study utilised a multiple case study methodology. “Case studies provide a unique example of real people in real situations” (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2011, p. 289). A multiple case studies methodology was utilised to gain a range of data across five primary schools, some with high or low Aboriginal enrolments and some with low or high socio-economic status (SES). This range of cases was used to gain greater depth for an analysis of emerging concepts and key themes, which provided me as researcher with the ability to see trends common to all sites and those particular to specific circumstances. Case studies “recognize the complexity and ‘embeddedness’ of social truths ... (and) can represent something of the discrepancies or conflicts between viewpoints held by participants” (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2011, p. 292). Furthermore, it provides “participants’ lived experiences of, thoughts about, and feelings for, a situation” (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2011, p. 290).
This current study sought to investigate the breadth and depth of teachers’ knowledge about Aboriginal histories, cultures and knowledges to inform the professional development they would like to receive in this area. Also, it sought to understand teachers’ perceived capacity to teach Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people effectively. Thus, the advantages of a multiple case study were aligned with the objectives of the research.

However, according to Cohen, Manion and Morrison (2011), while a case study is “strong in reality”, it is “difficult to organise” (p. 292). In the current study, this proved to be the case with permission being sought from busy principals, for whom this was not usually a priority, and in one case took several months to organise. The data, however, proved to be “strong in reality” which was deemed more important than another methodology which might have been easier to organise (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2011).

**Participant sample**

A purposive sample of teachers from five Catholic primary schools in the Eastern Region of the Archdiocese of Sydney was chosen. The sample comprised two primary schools with high Aboriginal enrolments (one low SES and one high SES) and two primary schools with only a few Aboriginal enrolments, and one primary school in a high SES area with no Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander enrolments. This is a representative sample of Catholic systemic schools in this region. In total 32 teachers volunteered to participate in group interviews as part of the study.

**Data collection**

Data were collected from semi-structured group interviews with voluntary members of school leadership teams and teachers from five schools in the eastern region of the Archdiocese of Sydney. Semi-structured group interviews were used to gather data. Up to six staff members from each of the purposively selected schools were invited to take part in the group interview. As the participants had been working together for a while, there was likely to be a level of trust between them and, potentially, a common goal with the research. Furthermore, since participants were contributing to the content of the professional development program to be developed, it was useful that they heard what others had said (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2011).
Data analysis

Data were analysed using thematic coding of interview transcripts: first the transcripts of the interviews were read to discover emergent themes and categories, allowing themes and meta-themes to emerge. Those initial clusters provided the broad view and the subsequent line-by-line coding allowed for higher and higher levels of abstraction to be reached. Line-by-line coding was then followed by identification of pertinent text. This was then summarised and linked to the meta-themes and sub-themes as these developed.

Findings and discussion

The first research question investigated to what extent teachers considered that they would meet the proficient level of Standards 1.4 and 2.4 (AITSL, 2011). While they are distinct, there are overlaps. In the way the interviews in the study unfolded, and to provide a more logical explication of the data and discussion of the findings, I start with teacher views on Standard 2.4

Teacher efficacy to meet Standard 2.4

The literature emphasises the need to teach understanding of and respect for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander histories and cultures and, further, why it is important to include Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander perspectives across key learning areas. There has been limited research, however, conducted about the most effective way to instruct teachers on how to include these histories and cultures in their everyday teaching. The role of this work appears to have fallen to the responsibility of individual education systems of schools, with little rigorous research conducted in order to determine the effectiveness of approaches to the teaching of Aboriginal histories or about Aboriginal cultures and languages.

Fear of causing offence

An issue that was common across all of the interviews was that teachers lacked confidence and were afraid of offending if they were to do or say something that may be perceived as ‘wrong’. Pascoe (2014), however, noted that this equally causes antagonism, and instead recommends:

… we have been so antagonistic to the representation of that philosophy in our schools ... We don’t need to close the gap or reconcile Aborigines. We need, instead, to know our history, learn from it and do something about our greed. (p. 91).
Nevertheless, this was a strong emphasis from participants in the current study: “I think there is a fear of saying it wrong” (Participant 14). The flow-on effect from teachers’ uncertainty and concern about causing offence, is that they may be “viewed as politically incorrect – sometimes it is like walking on eggshells” (Participant 18). Instead of taking the risk, some would omit the perspective altogether from their programming, “We are terrified of doing something more offensive than of saying nothing at all” (Participant 7). Firstly, being ‘politically correct’ is a White concept. It is not a reality in Aboriginal ways of seeing and knowing. In Aboriginal ways of teaching and learning there is an open and honest communication within a safe space for students to be where they are in their learning, anything they do from there is just their next step. Secondly, this could be attributed to what Rose (2012) has termed racism by cotton wool as a result of Australian education systems overtly suppressing and devaluing aspects of Aboriginal knowledge. In absence of this knowledge, teachers who have a willingness to do the right thing but are afraid of getting it wrong, take an easier option.

Participants were highly capable and dedicated teachers, yet they were not prepared to take risks and embark on the more authentic tasks, which they would relish trialling in other learning areas. One key focus of any professional development should be to empower non-Indigenous teachers to feel they have the efficacy to ‘say something’ and not let the fear of putting a foot wrong get in the way.

**Importance of valuing Aboriginal lived realities in the classroom**

In reflecting on their current practice, there were some examples of teachers considering that their practice was leading to good outcomes for children and young people when Aboriginal perspectives were included in their teaching. They noted a shift in the students’ confidence as a result of authentic learning. It is interesting to note participants’ responses to the following auxiliary question that was put to them during the interview: *What positive effects on their learning have you seen, when children start to learn more about themselves and be strong in their identity?* It is “a nice solid foundation point in that they can see, or hear about Aboriginality … and it’s been valued within the school community” (Participant 25).

A specific example was provided by Participant 26 who described the positive outcomes for an Aboriginal boy in her class and the flow-on effect impacting other children:

**Authentic. It wasn’t forced and I think that really helped, I wouldn’t say everyone, but many of the students to deepen their understanding at a real level. Kind of given permission because we were talking about it so much, so at some point he [the Aboriginal boy in question]**
obviously had a shift where he became more verbal because he’s not shy, but he is a quieter boy. Like he is quite happy to chat but he’s not there sort of offering his opinion and speaking up in every conversation…. So he would say his ‘great Aunty said’ because it happened to a family member, someone in his family. It just seemed to flow and then some of the other girls in particular and a couple of the boys chose something [Aboriginal experience] to research as a result of those conversations. And it was really quite emotional you know when they got into it. Very real.

From this it became clear that when Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people see their identities, histories and cultures valued in their schooling and visible in their classrooms, it can be seen in their self-efficacy, their willingness to participate in class discussions is enhanced. Then learning becomes relevant through lived experience. This type of positive outcome was envisaged and represented in the leaves of the tree in the painting discussed earlier (Figure 1).

*Importance of local Aboriginal histories and cultures*

Across a number of interviews teachers mentioned that they did not know much about the local Aboriginal culture or history. These teachers commented that it was this lack of knowledge that inhibited their teaching of Aboriginal perspectives in their respective classrooms. Within the group interviews, teachers voiced their concern that their lack of knowledge could lead to superficial, tokenistic, and potentially damaging outcomes for students: “We do it on a really tokenistic level so we can tick it as done. But with no depth. Lots of us did the token art lesson” (Participant 8).

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander educators have highlighted the dangers of teachers presenting Aboriginal content in their classes where children only learn superficial generalisations about Aboriginal peoples and cultures. Linking to the theoretical framework, if this occurs, as noted also by participants in the current study and as identified by Nakata (2007), it is problematic to represent Aboriginal knowledge to non-Indigenous and Torres Strait Islander children where their learning becomes rigid and stereotypical. The participants concluded that a professional development program would need to address teachers’ insecurity about current practice by providing them with appropriate ways of thinking about their learning and teaching strategies and by providing opportunities to practise.

Teachers expressed their dissatisfaction with what they are doing with regards to Aboriginal knowledge and perspectives, especially in schools with a significant population of Aboriginal
and Torres Strait Islander students, because: “we are not part of that culture, because we all have our own cultures. I have never had schooling on it, teaching on it, so I know I have huge gaps” (Participant 11). Teachers were tentative about their own efficacy in this area, and consequently prefer to rely on the work of others; moreover, they described a lack of engagement and a tendency to relegate the preparation for this area to a place after other curriculum areas. As noted by several authors, (Martin, 2003; Yunkaporta, 2009; Nakata, 2008), it is essential that the starting point is Aboriginal lifeworlds and that Aboriginal knowledges are valued as equal to Western knowledges. This would need to be an important theme in professional development offered to teachers to assist them to feel less inadequate.

Teachers need opportunities to develop their knowledge beyond surface knowledge, deeper levels of knowledge, the importance of connecting to country and all that entails, in a way that is appropriate for children and young people. This knowledge would be on many levels: physical and intellectual, to emotional and spiritual. In learning this way, one develops an awareness of connecting to ‘country’ on deep levels within oneself (Edwards & Buxton, 1998). This conceptualisation is visually presented in the painting discussed earlier (Figure 1). As people grow in understanding, so does their sense of country; this needs to have a strong focus in any professional learning opportunities for teachers.

The focus of future professional development needs to assist teachers to move beyond the sole use of outsourcing, or the study of isolated and unrelated elements of Aboriginal cultures. Rather, they need to be empowered to engage with Aboriginal ways of knowing, to find a learning space, the interface between Western curriculum knowledge and Aboriginal knowledge. Participants need opportunities to “engage in negotiating a space where common ground could be determined and built upon in culturally safe, yet challenging ways” (Yunkaporta & McGinty, 2009, p. 56).

**Teacher efficacy in meeting Standard 1.4**

The literature (Buckskin, 2013; Dockery, 2011; Martin, 2009; Phipps & Slater, 2010; Sarra, 2010) highlights the importance of teachers having or developing the requisite knowledge of the cultural identity of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people. Participants in the current study consistently expressed a fragility of confidence in this matter and an uncertainty of where to go to obtain information. As Participant 2 stated: “If we did want to have that background where do we go for that kind of information?”
Participants also noted that professional development opportunities for classroom teachers in the teaching of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students is extremely limited, almost non-existent at the time of this study. This mirrors the findings of Moreton-Robinson et al. (2012) and Ma Rhea et al. (2012). The majority of teachers interviewed expressed their limited knowledge of how Aboriginal children and young people learn and about Aboriginal pedagogies. Participant 9, for example, stated: “especially for someone that’s had no experience or no background, nothing in Aboriginal education”.

Yunkaporta (2009) maintained it is an unfair expectation placed on classroom teachers if “[t]hey are expected to do something that nobody has shown them to do” (p. 5). This raised the question of whether there is a widening of the gap between different ways of seeing and knowing. In the group interviews this discussion wove around a number of aspects. Participants noted that if all that is seen is difference – Aboriginal students’ different ways of thinking, different ways of seeing, different ways of speaking, and different ways of behaving – it could be considered aberrant. Yunkaporta (2009, p. 5) argued “when one operates and comparisons are made on a surface level of knowledge people only see differences across cultures. You have to go higher and deeper, then you will find the vast common ground, the interface between different cultures”. Participants noted that other priorities set by schools and the system, as well as their own feeling of inadequacy in how to tackle the job, make it less likely that teachers would have the time, expertise and motivation to go higher and deeper, also recommended by Yunkaporta (2009).

**Practical ways to meet the needs of Aboriginal children and young people**

There is a significant body of literature suggesting that teachers are not confident in their ability to effectively teach Aboriginal children and young people (Mooney, Halse & Craven, 2003; Yunkaporta & Kirby, 2011; Burgess & Cavanagh, 2012; Craven, Yeung, & Han, 2014). Despite goodwill and the best of intentions evidenced in the group teacher interviews, many teachers expressed their concern about their limited understanding of Aboriginal knowledge, pedagogies, and ways of seeing and learning. One participant reflected the views of teachers generally: “I don’t think they realise and I didn’t until I came here – how Aboriginal children do learn in a different way. You only know that when you are teaching them” (Participant 6). This view was expressed as quite discrete from their lack of confidence about their knowledge of Aboriginal histories, discussed earlier. Their comments focussed expressly on their competence to teach Aboriginal children effectively.
A professional learning opportunity would need to explore teachers’ lack of ‘relatedness’ in Aboriginal ways of being (Edwards & Buxton, 1998), doing and knowing (Martin, 2005). Teachers need opportunities to reflect on their own standpoint in order to find common ground for building cultural competence and in turn their confidence to avoid the negatives as articulated by Kickett-Tucker and Coffin (2011), and thereby become effective educators of Aboriginal children and young people.

The need for high expectations

The deficit positioning of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people is clearly still evident in the educational system and the government expressed by the participants in the current study, and reinforcing it again with the language of ‘underachievement’ and ‘closing the gap’. Pearson (2014) has advised people working in the field of education to beware of the pervasive and destructive effect of having low expectations. Sarra (2011) has also commented on the deficit approach to Aboriginal education and the need to avoid “the collision with low expectations” (p. 287). He noted that for too long government funding and “educators have colluded too easily with the notion that Indigenous children are automatically underachievers at school. There is no basis for this belief and it is one that must be purged from our profession” (Sarra, 2009, p. 8). In an extension of this, teachers in the current study are also asking the question of what is being done to support Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children who are performing at or above national benchmarks and high achieving students to extend their learning, the need for high expectations.

Teacher efficacy to be responsive to the local community and cultural settings

In the literature there are a number of studies (Higgins & Morley, 2014; National Curriculum Services, 2013; NSW Aboriginal Education Consultative Group, 2004; Williams, 2011) that highlight the importance of and need for parent and community partnerships with schools to support the implementation of strategies that effectively engage Aboriginal children and young people in their schooling. However, none of these studies examined in any detail the ways in which teachers are trained to, or provided with professional learning opportunities to know how to respectfully, effectively and collaboratively engage with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander parents, families and communities (Moreton-Robinson, Singh, Kolopenuk, Robinson & Walter, 2012).

The first professional knowledge Standard, knowing your students and how they learn, states that teachers at the proficient level will need to design and implement effective teaching
strategies for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students, which need to be “responsive to the local community and cultural settings” (AITSL, 2011, p. 9). Therefore, an important element of Standard 1.4 is the establishment and maintaining of respectful community engagement strategies, which are multi-dimensional and multi-relational (Nakata, 2007) and that need to be responsive to local communities.

It was evident from the group interviews that there is a lot of uncertainty about the role of classroom teachers in building respectful, authentic relationships with Aboriginal parents, caregivers and local community members. In all of the schools included in this study teachers are looking for advice, principles and strategies to assist them in working with local Aboriginal communities. Aboriginal community consultation is a process that enables teachers and school leadership teams to become aware of local community views and sensitivities. This would involve teachers getting to know members of the local community, while at the same time opening lines of communication so community members are aware of happenings in their children’s school.

Authentic partnerships with parents, caregivers, community and teachers are of critical importance, but “you can’t have a partnership without a relationship, and you can’t have a relationship without a conversation. You’ve got to have the conversation” (National Curriculum Services, 2013, p. 2). These concerns were expressed by teachers: “I think if you did a poll the majority of teachers in our system, probably don’t know, let alone have a relationship with an Aboriginal person or Indigenous person” (Participant 6). Participants noted the consequent impact on classroom teacher’s ability to work with families and communities. This clearly suggests the need for future professional learning opportunities for both school leadership teams and classroom teachers.

Parents cited in Nakata’s (2007) work have voiced that being Aboriginal, their lived experience of the everyday can be at times in conflict with what is expected by schools. No one can work in isolation; it cannot be one person’s responsibility. It is a two way process. Like all genuinely mutual and productive relationships, there needs to be open communication based on respect, a willingness to listen, share and learn from each other. Teachers identified that they need to have “a good heart and interest” (Participant 7); they need advice and practical tips to develop effective cross-cultural communication skills to reduce the likelihood of misunderstandings.

Aboriginal education is everyone’s business (Wilks & Wilson, 2014) and while Aboriginal parents and communities are considered as separate from the core business of schools, the
reality is that no single, specific reading or numeracy or any other program is going to be successful if not built upon authentic partnership with parents, families, and supported by the community. Teachers noted that if they were upskilled in this area it would enhance their capacity to meet both Standard 1.4 and Standard 2.4, in both of which they felt insecure.

Principles of reciprocal obligation, mutual responsibilities and respect are needed as the foundation for any future professional learning opportunity on how school leadership teams and teachers can establish and maintain authentic partnerships with parents, families and communities to improve educational outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people. Sarra advised:

> If we are serious about improving Indigenous educational outcomes we really have to begin to take responsibility – all of us – teachers, students, school leadership, communities, families at home. We have to work hard to build stronger smarter relationships among all these individuals. By doing this we can create classrooms as sacred spaces in which Indigenous children can be exceptional. (Sarra cited in *Stronger Smarter Indigenous Education Leadership Institute*, 2009)

**Conclusion**

Participants in the current study clearly articulated their hesitancy, and the challenges they perceive, in working at the cultural interface (Nakata, 2007). Overall, despite being experienced and successful teachers in general, they did not feel confident in being able to meet the two new Standards 1.4 and 2.4. In order to “ditch deficit thinking about the kids and the culture” (Participant 2), participants recommended that the following aspects be included in professional learning provided to allow them to better meet Standard 1.4 and 2.4.

- Cultural protocols;
- How to create a welcoming environment within our schools for students, their families and communities;
- Aboriginal pedagogies and processes;
- Strategies to engage Aboriginal children;
- Two way learnings advice for leadership teams and teachers in working towards being responsive to the needs of parents, families and communities;
- Strength-based approach that encourages a strong sense of cultural identity and a sense of belonging;
• A culture of high expectations for all students;
• Developing teacher efficacy to have a voice;
• How to move beyond surface level knowledge;
• Developing connection to country;
• Opportunities for critical reflection; and
• Finding “common ground” (Yunkaporta, 2009) at the cultural interface (Nakata, 2008).

In order to achieve the objective of classroom teachers having a working understanding of Aboriginal histories and cultures and ways of knowing, represented as the circles in the painting (Figure 1), they will need professional learning opportunities. These opportunities are represented by the branches of the tree, if teachers are to support the flourishing of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people, the lush leaves of the tree in the painting.
Chapter 5 Growing up Guyunggu > Yurunnhang Bungil Nyumba

This chapter describes how my learnings through mentors and in the experiences with Guyunggu have influenced the development of Yurunnhang Bungil Nyumba (learn respect to teach).

5.1 My learning journey

Having established what the teachers were requesting in relation to the content of PLD to assist them in meeting Standards 1.4 and 2.4, as researcher I needed to consider how best to achieve this.

The second painting is entitled “Coming together to change the tide”. Knowledge moves. The centre of the painting represents my own learning with Oomera as guide. This is a moment in time representing a life-long learning journey in developing connections to Country, that goes off the canvas as my journey continues. The other sections of the painting represent Elders, Aunties and Aboriginal friends and colleagues who have guided and supported me up to this point and who profoundly influenced the way I developed the PLD for teachers (see Figure 2 below).
Before introducing my thinking around how the knowledge incorporated in to *Yurunnhang Bungil Nyumba* came into being, it is first necessary to reflect on my own journey of learning. Aboriginal ways of seeing and knowing enables me to identify who I am, who my family is, who my ancestors are, the Country from which my motivation comes and how my storyline has been formed and developed. I would first like to acknowledge and sincerely thank my Elders and Aunties who guided and continue to support me in my different stages of learning on and off Country. Connections to Country will differ from person to person, depending on where a person is in their own journey.

I start my journey in my birth Country, Ngandowal, of Bundjalung Country. A striking feature of Bundjalung Country is Wollumbin (Mt Warning), the first place that the sun touches in Australia, a place of great significance since time immemorial. Wollumbin, along with other sites of significance in surrounding areas of Country, provides places of cultural lore and spiritual education. Wollumbin has cultural and spiritual significance beyond the Tweed Valley; this is reinforced by our knowledge of community gathering for ceremony and cultural
expression at certain sites across the valley. A Bundjalung Dreaming story takes our beginnings back to a journey of three brothers whose kinship relationships extend throughout our Country.

I was born in Murwillumbah and spent my childhood in Kingscliff, Fingal and then we moved back to Murwillumbah. These years are full of memories of extended families, my sister and brothers, and all the cousins sharing adventures on Country: Kids being kids. Nanna Buxton was born and spent her whole life on her Country. She was the keeper of our family history and relationships; this responsibility has been passed onto Aunty Jackie McDonald.

My journey of learning continued into late adolescence. Aunty Jac introduced me to two Yugambeh Elders, Auntie Ysola Best and Auntie Patricia O’Connor who were both working tirelessly to establish the Yugambeh Museum. It was at this time that I learnt of my family and cultural connections to Yugambeh. These bonds between Bundjalung and Yugambeh peoples are revealed through genealogy and are evident in our common language dialects (O’Connor, 1991, p. 4). Yugambeh people are descendants of the brother Yarberri who travelled north. In Yugambeh he is known as Jabreen.

Jabreen created his homeland by forming the mountains, the river systems and the flora and fauna. The people grew out of this environment. Jabreen created the site known as Jebbribillum when he came out of the water onto the land. As he picked up his fighting waddy, the land and water formed into the shape of a rocky outcrop (Little Burleigh). This was the site where the people gathered to learn and share the resources created by Jabreen. The ceremony held at this site became known as the Bora and symbolised the initiation of life. Through the ceremony, people learned to care for the land and their role was to preserve its integrity. (O’Connor, 1991, p. 4)

Although many people may not be aware of it, they are using Yugambeh language when they are speaking of places on the Gold Coast. As Auntie Ysola states:

Whenever they refer to such places as Numingah (shelter), Coomera (blood), Currumbin (pine tree) and many other names throughout the area.... When the boundary between New South Wales and Queensland was marked out by Surveyor Roberts in 1863-1866, he was advised by the Yugambeh people who accompanied him, advising on their names for the places he was recording; so he recorded the Yugambeh names. It was then government policy to use Aboriginal place names wherever possible – even if the surveyors didn’t always get the spelling right! (Best & Barlow, 1997, p. 12)
Incorrect spelling and all, the fact that many people are speaking Aboriginal language words should be something to be proud of and celebrated, as Country hears language.

After finishing my tertiary education, I decided I needed to go back to Country to continue my learning journey. After yarning with Aunty Pat O’Connor, she gave me permission to use the Yugambeh word *Nyumba* (to teach) this led to the establishment of *Nyumba*: Goori Consultancy in partnership with Leesa Watego. Starting in mid-1993 and operating formally until 1995, *Nyumba* focused on delivering Aboriginal Studies learnings to predominantly non-Aboriginal children and young people across the Tweed and Northern Rivers area. Leesa, when doing business journey presentations often describes the way of work as:

*We were like superheroes travelling across the region. We’d get a call for Year 11 Legal Studies, we’d study and learn up, create a presentation and deliver it. Next week we’d get a call for Year 3 Aboriginal Art, six lessons. We’d study up, create lessons, and deliver. The following week Year 8 History and Year 10 English. So we were running around the region developing and delivering all over the place. We were terrible business people - we made less than no money - but we were busy and we learned heaps.*

(L. Watego, personal communication 24 August 2019)

*Nyumba* ended in 1995, but the relationship didn’t end there. In the late 1990s, when Leesa’s first son was in grade 1, the conversation started up again. In 2000, when Leesa asked teachers at Eddie’s school what they were going to do for National Aboriginal and Islander Day Observance Committee (NAIDOC) Week and the school reply was, “What’s that?” we both knew the original work of *Nyumba* was still necessary.

In 2002, the focus from delivering face-to-face learning evolved to something more scalable - publishing. Blacklines Publications was created, again, as a partnership. That same year, the *3Rs Recognition Rights and Reform, Teaching and Learning Activities for NAIDOC 2002* (Watego, 2002) was written and published. The following year, *Keeping the Connection - water, country, spirit: Celebrating Freshwater stages early one – five.* (Watego, 2003) was published. In subsequent years, we published the following: *Christmas is Deadly: Teaching and Learning Strategies for the Christmas Celebration* (Watego, 2006) and *Easter is Deadly: Teaching and Learning for the Easter Celebration* (Watego, 2010).

In 2009, Leesa and I trialled using social media, the Critical Classroom blog, to reach a broader audience. This was successful with several e-publications. Under Critical Classroom, in 2016, we trialled the delivery of ‘live’ hangouts via Google Hangouts, an experience that was both
scary and exciting. Our ‘After dinner’ hangouts were attempting to again shift the focus from learners to educators and their professional development. We recognised that there is work involved in unlearning the untruths of the histories and memories of Australia. It takes time to reconfigure and reboot these narratives at both a personal and structural level. We believed, and still do: this shift requires investment – a long-term investment of time, energy and intellectual work. We believe the journey is not going to be easy – you can’t unlearn much in one afternoon of professional development in the staffroom on a Tuesday, nor in a single semester of a compulsory ‘Indigenous’ unit in an undergraduate course. Real intellectual work is lots of small ‘touch points’. The Critical Classroom’s ‘After Dinner’ sessions sought to be just one of many of those touch points.

It is important for me culturally and personally to highlight Guyunggu and its process of coming into being, as Yurunngah Bungil Nyumba would not exist without Guyunggu which was the first stage of an approach to learning from an Aboriginal way of seeing and afforded me the knowledge related to providing the foundation to children with opportunities to learn about themselves and their connectedness to land through an Aboriginal way of seeing. As a way of honouring this work each of the seven Experiences of the framework starts with a quote from Guyunggu. It is a necessity for me to acknowledge Oomera Edwards as it is through her generous spirit and openness to share her extensive knowledge that my learning journey has been enriched. It was a privilege to develop Guyunggu with her and twenty years later she continues to be guide for me.

I was having one of many discussions with Oomera about how the focus seems to still be on content-based rather than teaching and learning through experience of Aboriginal ways of seeing and knowing and how there is still a need to move beyond teaching about Aboriginal cultures which allows teachers and in turn children to separate themselves from what they are learning. There is a need to move with the tide and shift to learning through experience, so teachers are empowered to strengthen their pedagogy. As Lowe and Yunkaporta (2013) argue for teachers to be able to achieve this shift in perception and enhance their teaching practice, there needs to be extended engagement with Aboriginal systems of knowledges and processes, and relevant pedagogical skills. Taking this point a step further, McKnight (2017) argues that “the embedding of Country, as knowledge system and process, is limited” (p. 76). Country is not taken into account, and is waiting (O. Edwards, personal communication, 14 July 2017).
Aboriginal teachings are about ‘growing up’; to walk with the rhythms of Country and feel the spirit within Country takes time to develop. With this way of teaching and learning, to be able to act on a concept, you must not only understand it on a cognitive level but be able to feel that concept on an emotional level. This approach of learning with Country is a life-long journey of learning. The aim of Aboriginal teachings is to create future Elders who would care for their Country when the time comes. Our education system grew people who were self-disciplined, intellectually strong, emotionally sound, spiritually open, responsible, honest and respectful to all (O. Edwards, personal communication, 23 August 2018).

There are many Aboriginal ways of seeing and knowing, on many different levels and from every different Country within Australia. Teachers need to be given opportunities to see, learn about and know because they cannot be expected to know what they don’t know. *Yurunnhang Bungil Nyumba* is one such way of seeing and knowing. Due to the distinct place-based nature of Aboriginal knowledges it imperative that children have opportunities to develop connections to Country from their local community way of seeing.

The cultural experiences provided and the pedagogy and andragogy on which the framework was conceptualised, was based on a vision that non-Aboriginal people can develop their own understandings of and connections to Country. The first place to start is with the first teacher; ways of knowing and being are grounded within Country.

The knowledge, values and skills to be learnt by children reside with adults in the community within Country. With little people this learning is by doing, by observing, through listening, through playing and learning how everything is connected. In this way of teaching, as children grow into their intellect, they begin to understand the connections between the proper behaviours they are learning from adults around them, and ultimately, the Country (O. Edwards, personal communication, 16 August 2014).

### 5.2 The philosophy of the framework

*Yurunnhang Bungil Nyumba* (Learn Respect to Teach) is written from an Aboriginal way of seeing, knowing and being. This shifts the emphasis from teaching about, content driven, to cultural education of teaching and learning through experience. In this way of teaching, a teacher is a person that has taken themselves through each experience before they teach the young ones. The framework is grounded in guiding principles that take into account the fact that a learner is a physical, intellectual, emotional and spiritual being (O. Edwards, personal communication, 23 October 2016).
The framework is also written from the standpoint that people learn what they can, according to their own growth and understanding. Aboriginal concepts throughout the framework are repeated to allow for this growth in understanding; important elements are repeated several times when they are concepts that require repetition at different stages of learning for deeper levels of understanding. In an Aboriginal way of teaching, it is understood that the real learning of deeper concepts about self, Country and spirit come when the learner is much older – physically, intellectually and emotionally.

There are seven experiences, which gently lead teachers, and in turn the children, on a journey of learning about their connectedness to each other and a clearer understanding of their place in this Country, now known as Australia. *Yurunhang Bungil Nyumba* also understands that there can be no outcomes, expectations or judgements imposed on the learning of the people involved. *Yurunhang Bungil Nyumba* is an opportunity for teachers and children alike to glimpse a different way of seeing this country and their place in it. As far as *Yurunhang Bungil Nyumba* goes, teachers must view themselves as learners and the responsibility for engagement lies within the learner; teachers will get what they put into it – the possibilities are enormous, but they will need to be worked at and earned.
Chapter 6 Moving to the second phase of the research

The first phase of the research provided the data showing what elements teachers would like to experience in professional learning, enhancing their capacity to meet the Standards 1.4 and 2.4. It was therefore necessary to conceptualise the professional learning and trial it with teachers, gaining their feedback and improving and refining it in each iteration.

6.1 Adult education and teacher professional development theoretical framework

6.1.1 A definition

The theoretical framework, within which the second phase of the research was conducted, was that of adult education and teacher professional development. Teacher skills development is related to “skills associated with curriculum and teaching innovations, pedagogical knowledge, and new approaches to teaching, learning, and assessment” (Lee & Shiu, 2008, p. 6). The term professional development refers to “a process of continual intellectual, experimental and attitudinal growth of teachers” (Lee, 2016, p. 761). There are a plethora of definitions of professional learning. For the purposes of the current study, the following definition has been adopted: “Professional learning is the formal and informal learning experiences undertaken by teachers and school leaders that improve their individual professional practice and the school’s collective effectiveness as measured by improved student engagement and learning outcomes” (Cole, 2012, p. 5).

This definition of professional learning emphasises the effectiveness dimension aspired to with the professional learning provided in the current study. The Cole (2012) definition achieves this by setting the expectation that professional learning will produce changes in practice and ultimately in students’ learning outcomes. It acknowledges the diversity of formal and informal professional learning opportunities available to teachers and school leadership teams. It focuses on the application of newly acquired knowledge and skills within classrooms to improve student engagement and in turn learning outcomes.

6.1.2 Andragogical principles

Adult professional learning and development is not a new concept (Fourie, 2013). The need for andragogy in adult learning and professional development dates back to 1833. The term was coined by Alexander Kapp who was a secondary school teacher and wrote about professional
learning in relation to education theory (Kapp, 1833 cited in Attebury, 2015), but became more commonly used in the 1950s (cf. Knowles, Swanson, & Holton, 2011).

While pedagogy refers to the art and science of teaching, it is the manner in which teachers organise learning experiences in the classroom and ultimately control what learning occurs and when it is appropriate, that relates to andragogy (Taylor & Kroth, 2009). These authors suggest the theory of pedagogy indicates that less value is placed on practical experiences, with greater focus on authority and teacher control (Smith, 2015). It is for this reason that andragogical principles are more relevant in the current study. As defined by Blaschke (2012) andragogy can be conceptualised as professional learning that adults engage in at a level where they know their strengths and weaknesses and work from their strengths to address their weaknesses and are partners in the learning with the facilitator. This author holds that an andragogical approach to teaching and learning actively involves identifying learner needs. While in the past pedagogy was assumed to align with teaching children, and androgogy aligned with adult education, according to Connor (2006), in recent times, andragogy has come to refer to learner-centred education of all ages, with, as Bandura (2005) suggests, less distinction between teacher and learner.

6.1.3 Essence of professional development

In the past, various approaches to teacher professional development have been implemented with limited levels of success. Since the early 2000s, for example, there has been consistent evidence in the research indicating that professional learning opportunities mostly do not lead to improved teaching practice, nor to improved outcomes for students (Bredeson & Schribner, 2000). In the design of the current study, it was important to utilise effective strategies. Research demonstrates that fragmented, one-off events that have little or no follow-up have not achieved intended outcomes as there was often limited transference between learnings from the professional development opportunity and classroom practice (Cole, 2012). With one-off events, attended by an individual teacher, there are unrealistic expectations imposed upon this teacher as “a single messenger” (Cole, 2012, p. 6).

Increasingly, research findings have shown that teacher quality is the most significant contributing factor to student learning outcomes (Hattie, 2008). In outlining the need for changes in professional development practice, Mader (2015) quotes Weingarten, “even high quality professional development must be directly relevant to the needs of teachers and
The natural text is:

genuinely improve teaching and learning” and, “low-quality professional development, frankly, feels like detention” (p. 2).

Theory on effective professional learning and development has progressed further over time to include the following tenets:

- professional development must be learner driven (Pugh, 2001);
- it must draw on participatory learning and relate to real-life experiences (Westbrook, 2005);
- it should incorporate reflection, mentoring and self-exploration (Mason & Wetherbee, 2004); and
- professional learning needs to be equated to the experiences, strengths, current knowledge, and career stage of each adult learner (Darling-Hammond & Bransford, 2005).

When preparing professional learning, it is also important that the provider take into consideration the learner as a person. All teachers in Australia are familiar with the precept of starting with children and how they learn (AITSL, 2011). It is no different with adult learners. The provider of professional learning must take into account the starting point of the participants. For example, a female learner in society fulfils many roles – mother, wife, aunty, coach, teacher and the professional learning must clearly contribute to one aspect of the learner within that role (Bishop, nd). Confirming Ladwig’s (2012) findings, the current study showed clear gains for children whose teachers engaged in the professional learning. These gains are described in the final section of this thesis.

6.1.4 A need for sustained support

While one-off workshops have been disparaged in recent years, particularly those of short duration, nevertheless, Guskey and Yoon (2009) whose study analysed successful professional development, note that while the “one-shot variety that offer little follow-up” (p. 496) are wasteful, those with genuine and sustained follow-up showed positive relations between professional learning and improvements in student learning (Guskey & Yoon, 2009). Professional learning is not a series of one-off events, but rather coordinated and planned learning opportunities that maximise impact.

What is needed to maintain high-quality practice is “effective, efficient and evidence-based practices that deliver improved outcomes” (Webster-Wright, 2009, p. 702) for children and
young people. Professional development that promotes collaboration is more likely to be successful (Boud & Middleton, 2003; Oakes & Rogers, 2007). With rapid social changes, the importance of reflective practice for professionals has become increasingly emphasised (Antonacopoulou, 2004; Brookfield, 2005; Katz, Sutherland, & Earl, 2005). There is agreement that professional learning needs to be “continuing, active, social and related to practice” (Webster-Wright, 2009, p. 703). This author therefore prefers the term *continuing professional learning* to just professional development or professional learning.

Key to the design of the current study was the premise that high quality professional development will enhance and ensure high quality teaching which will, in turn, lead to improved learning outcomes (Darling-Hammond, Wei, & Andree, 2010). Part of achieving this was leaving the power of decision-making with the teachers. Envisaged improvements do not come about through external education authorities imposing requirements on schools (Alexandra, 2009; Hymann, 2005; Mulford, 2008; Pring et al. 2009). Greater success is achieved when the professional development leads to a professional learning community and sustained change in practice has been demonstrated when teachers have the autonomy to choose what professional development they take part in (Mindich & Lieberman, 2012). In the current study, the first phase of the research established what professional learning teachers believed they required and would like to take part in.

### 6.1.5 School-wide culture of professional development

Sustained improvements in teacher and student learning are more likely to result if professionals actively learn with and from each other, in a constructive and rigorous way, framed by a shared educational philosophy and strategic plan for the school (Arnold & Flumerfelt, 2012). School leadership teams are critical in supporting adult learning and effective professional learning cultures. When there is a learning-oriented culture with effective conditions, support and structures to enable adult professional learning, teachers and school leaders can learn and thrive together. The leadership activity found to have the greatest influence on student outcomes is leaders’ promotion of, and participation in, teacher professional learning and development (Timperley, 2011). Her research includes the following indicators leading to success:

- teachers are supported by their peers and leaders to be innovative in the classroom, try new strategies and evaluate their impact effectively;
- feedback should be provided to teachers about their efforts to improve;
• there should be opportunities for teachers to work together on collaborative inquiry; and
• a supportive environment is needed for teachers to share their expertise with colleagues and to learn from others.

These were the foundational pillars in the design of PLD in the current study.

6.2 Phase 2 Methodology: Design-based Research

Design-based research is well suited to the field of educational research as its foundational premise is the development of technological tools, artefacts, and curriculum strategies. This then furthers an existing theory or practice, or develops new theories in naturalistic settings that can support and lead to a heightened understanding of learning (Kennedy-Clark, 2015; Barab, Dodge, Thomas, Jackson & Tuzun, 2007; Barab & Squire, 2004; Fishman, Marx, Blumenfeld, Krajcik, & Soloway, 2004). The process of design-based research is iterative and cyclical, which aligns with the authentic design of educational environments. Therefore, there is a natural synergy between design-based research and research in education (Kennedy-Clark, 2015; Lesh, 2003).

As the political climate changes, policies change, school requirements change, hence classroom practice needs to change. This is why design-based research is a suitable methodological approach. The groundswell of requests came from the participants, which in the case of the current study was teachers in the classroom. Design-based research is not a wrapped box tied in a bow that is ready to go – it needs to change with teachers’ knowledge development. For this reason, the goal of using design-based research methodological approach is to “build a stronger connection between educational research and real-world problems” (Amiel & Reeves, 2008, p. 34).

Design-based research has been defined as a series of approaches rather than a single approach, which allows for flexibility in the research design (Kennedy-Clark, 2015; Barab & Squire, 2004). Furthermore, “one of the main motivations behind design-based research is to make learning research more relevant for classroom practices” (Reimann, 2010, p. 37). As explained by Kennedy-Clark (2015) this methodology “tends to be adopted by researchers who are conducting studies in authentic educational situations such as classroom settings in order to generate theory and design relevant to a particular context” (p. 110), as was the case in the current study.
6.3 Theoretical framework and methodology weave together

As recorded in the second journal article, there is a clear justification of having teachers experience the learning themselves before programming for their classes, as foundational to effective pedagogy. A further aim of the current study was to address the recurring criticism of teachers and school students that the same cultural elements are taught year after year at the same level, regardless of the fact that the children are developing and growing and becoming more sophisticated. Therefore, while all teachers from K-6 all took part in the same on-Country experiences, journal article two details how the in-school days enhanced their ability in differentiated planning for different stages of schooling.

Figure 3, the third painting I completed, represents the connection to Country that participants experienced in the on-Country days, and also the yarning and group planning that they undertook during the in-school day. This phase of the research is reported in the second journal article and is provided in Chapter 7.

Figure 3: Two-way Learnings
Chapter 7 Second journal article

The second journal article reports the findings of the research that answers research questions 2 and 3:

What aspects of the professional development package did participants find most useful?

What suggestions would participants have for improving the professional development framework such that it would be transferable to other contexts?

This article is presented here.


**Abstract:**

This article describes consolidating elements of professional learning for teachers, increasing their efficacy in incorporating Aboriginal ways of seeing into classroom practice. Included are findings from the first school in the second phase of ongoing research in which the first phase had established what teachers already know and would like provided in professional learning. This stage of the study took place within the theoretical framework of adult education and teacher professional development. Design-Based Research methodology provided the flexibility of ongoing improvement. Teacher participants evaluated the professional learning that comprised of a day on country providing background concepts. Thereafter a follow-up day facilitated in-classroom translation of concepts into practice for teachers’ own context and year level. Participants took part in group interviews, providing feedback that has informed incremental changes to the professional learning. The main findings were that teachers recommended two days on country but not at the expense of the in-school follow-up; in addition they requested ongoing support through a blog.

**Acknowledgement of Country**

I would like to firstly acknowledge with respect the ancestors of the Country in which this study was conducted, the Gadigal, Bidjigal and Dharawal peoples of Eora Country. I would also like to acknowledge my own ancestors and ancients of Bundjalung and Yugambeh Countries. Taking this time to pay my respects to these peoples and countries through this acknowledgement is to locate myself firstly as an Aboriginal woman and then as the researcher for this study.
Introduction

Teachers in primary schools in Australia have expressed a need for professional learning opportunities to enable them to meet two new descriptors in the Australian Professional Standards for Teachers. The specific descriptors fall under a Standard related to professional knowledge and are found in the Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership (AITSL) publication, as follows:

1.4 Strategies for teaching Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students - Design and implement effective teaching strategies that are responsive to the local community and cultural setting, linguistic background and histories of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students. (AITSL, 2011, p. 9)

2.4 Understand and respect Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples to promote reconciliation between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians - Provide opportunities for students to develop understanding of and respect for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander histories, cultures and languages. (AITSL, 2011, p. 11)

In their research into current and future provision of teacher professional development in the field of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander education when related to these two standards, Ma Rhea, Anderson and Atkinson (2012) found that established teachers tend to have “fear, resistance and concern about these particular focus areas” (p. 51). Experienced teachers displayed an acute lack of confidence in meeting these two standards and they expressed the need for, and provided advice on, what aspects they would value in professional learning opportunities (cf. Buxton, 2017).

The findings of the current study, reported in this article, are part of an ongoing study taking place within a design-based methodology. The second phase of the research is reported here. In the first phase of the research (see Buxton, 2017) 32 primary school teachers contributed to the development of the professional learning content they believe they require to meet new professional standard descriptors 1.4 and 2.4 required of all Australian teachers, noted above. In this second phase of the research, nine primary school teachers, teaching children ages 5 - 12 years, took part in professional learning experiences on Country, back at school, and with ongoing blog support. The Aboriginal educator, noted above in the Acknowledgement of Country section led the professional learning, is well known to the teacher participants in that she is the Leader of Learning Aboriginal Education of the Eastern Region of Sydney Catholic Schools. As such, she has regular contact with teachers in the schools and provides support to
Aboriginal children in the schools and to the teachers who teach them. Her role includes providing professional development learning opportunities for teachers in the Eastern Region schools to better meet the needs of Aboriginal children and young people in their classes. This article reports the professional learning to date. The foundational building blocks for increasing teacher confidence and competence in this professional learning included the following: the introduction to Country; the concept of teacher as guide; and building an emotional library. An outline of the nature of the on Country programme and other elements of the programme that participants found useful are included under the “Yurunnhang Bungil Nyumba (learn respect to teach)” section, later in this article and in participants’ reported views.

**Research question**

The overarching research question of this study was the following:

How can teachers be empowered to strengthen pedagogy and meet the Australian Professional Standard descriptors 1.4 and 2.4 comprehensively to produce more positive outcomes for all: Aboriginal, Torres Strait Islander and non-Indigenous children, and young people?

**Justification for the current study**

It is important to provide the educational context within which the current study took place. It is an undeniable fact that still in Australia today, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students at all levels experience worse educational outcomes than non-Indigenous students (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2008; Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, 2014). Education for Aboriginal children and young people remains far from equitable. At the turn of the century, as noted by Buckskin (2000), Aboriginal education remained in crisis. More recent statistics show little change. There have been numerous reports setting targets and reporting progress towards closing the gap between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal peoples. The ninth Closing the Gap report (Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet, 2017), showed that of the seven Closing the Gap targets, only one is on track to be met – halving the gap in year 12 attainment by 2020. Nationally, the target to halve the gap in reading and numeracy is on track in only one area and for 1 - year level – Year 9 numeracy (Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet, 2017). This current state of affairs reinforces Dodson’s (2009) statement that “[e]ducation is something we’ve let slide miserably in recent decades. We’ve failed a lot of children in that time” (p. 1).
The Australian Government and education providers are, at this point in time, being challenged to reduce the disparity between Aboriginal and non-Indigenous student educational outcomes. The inclusion of Aboriginal knowledges and ways of seeing in-school curriculum and pedagogical practice is only, in part, a result of attempting to better Aboriginal children and young peoples’ educational participation and engagement. Effective teaching strategies that are responsive to the local community and cultural setting, linguistic background and history of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students (AITSL, 2011) represent good practice for all teachers. It is to “know students and how they learn” (p. 9). However, even at the preservice teacher education level, “there is a pattern within the Australian literature showing a separation and imbalance between Indigenous content and the transfer of effective teaching skills” (Moreton-Robinson, Singh, Kolopenuk, Robinson, & Walter, 2012, p. 1).

Challenges have been voiced

Leading Aboriginal educators challenge what research is achieving when underpinned by deficit thinking of “closing the gap” (Martin, 2009). Rose and Jones (2012) note outcomes are hindered by the “deficit syndrome” as a crisis of professional practice and mindset, when “a classroom teacher inadvertently ethnically profiles a student by mistaking the soft bigotry of low expectation with meeting a perceived need of the students” (p. 185). Buckskin (2013) contends, “Australian education jurisdictions need shock treatment to jolt them into reality, taking responsibility for the systemic failure to provide the culturally safe place that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students need to learn and develop” (p. 1). Another dominant voice in the education arena, Sarra (2009) holds that “[f]or too long I think many of us as educators have colluded too easily with the notion that Indigenous children are automatically underachievers at school” (p. 6). Pearson (2016) echoes this sentiment, explaining that low expectations become “a prison. A prison maintained by people who think they are socially progressive” (p. 2, italics in original).

For over 40 years, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander educators have been arguing for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander knowledges to be included in the curriculum and pedagogy for all students. Martin (2003) promotes a pedagogy that values Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander knowledges as equal to Western “ways of knowing, being and doing” in Australian schools (p. 9). Yunkaporta (2009) argues for the need to include authentic Aboriginal perspectives in the curriculum in ways that increase intellectual rigour and support mainstream academic success for Aboriginal children and young people. He asserts that this is
currently being blocked by: “[a]n oppositional framing of Aboriginal and Western knowledge systems, caused by shallow perceptions of Indigenous knowledge as being limited to token cultural items. This tokenism serves only to highlight difference and marginalise Indigenous thought” (Yunkaporta, 2009, p.xv).

Mainstream education valuing Aboriginal ways of seeing

The preceding discussion demonstrates that the Australian mainstream education system has largely failed in relation to Aboriginal children and young people. A contributing reason is the failure of non-Indigenous teachers to fully understand and to value Aboriginal ways of knowing as a complex knowledge system or to recognise that Aboriginal peoples, as holders and practitioners of knowledge, as being well placed to build on these and to have two frames of reference within which to interpret new information and knowledge. The professional learning opportunities discussed in this article are designed to address the identified need from teachers to explore their lack of knowledge of “relatedness” in Aboriginal ways of seeing and being (Edwards & Buxton, 1998), doing and knowing (Martin, 2003), and respectful reciprocal relationship with Country (McKnight, 2015). An important factor is teachers’ ability to start from Aboriginal children and young peoples’ knowledge base to help them bridge to the Western curriculum they encounter in schools (Nakata, 2008).

Given that the majority of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people today are attending schools with non-Indigenous school leadership teams and being taught and supported largely by non-Indigenous teachers in their classrooms, the relationships between Aboriginal and non-Indigenous people is significant in children’s schooling experience (Matthews, Watego, Cooper, & Baturo, 2005). In considering reconciliation between Aboriginal and non-Indigenous Australians, Dr Marika, a Yolngu leader, scholar, and educator holds: “[o]ur job as educators is to convince the people who control mainstream education that we wish to be included. Until this happens, reconciliation is an empty word and an intellectual terra nullius” (Marika, 1998, p. 9).

The current study acknowledges that this is the starting point. There is recently a powerful emphasis on reconciliation within Australia with the realisation that it is not the responsibility of Aboriginal peoples alone to turn negative statistics around. It is the responsibility of all Australians. A clear example of a move to reconciliation is evidenced in two new mandatory Teaching Standard descriptors that focus on the issue of teacher capacity to (a) meet the needs of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students in schools and (b) their understanding of
Aboriginal histories and knowledges such that they can assist non-Indigenous students to play their part in working towards reconciliation in Australia.

**Theoretical Framework**

This study was developed within an adult education and teacher professional development theoretical framework. On the one hand, in all adult education and professional development, there is the knowledge or intellectual capital, or symbolic capital. On the other hand, there is the constant requirement to strengthen aspects of teaching that participants might not themselves prioritise. There is a general dedication on the part of teachers to expand their “experience of dialogic approaches to learning, in order to respond in contingent and practical ways to the needs of learners as they arose” (Widin, Yasukawa, & Chodkiewicz, 2012, p. 17). This study followed Groundwater-Smith and Mockler (2009), who described professional development as more effective when teachers are able to explain the conventionality and see the effort they make as paying off in their ability to have input so that they “close the gap” between their own “moral authority and moral agency” (pp. 136-137) and the external pressures imposed upon them.

Adult professional learning subsumes the notion of andrological principles which can be defined as professional learning that adults engage in at a level where they know their strengths and weaknesses and work from their strengths to address their weaknesses and are partners in the learning with the facilitator (Blaschke, 2012). In this study, the elements of successful professional learning for teachers were foundational to the development of the professional learning offered. Elements such as ongoing support (Darling-Hammond & Bransford, 2005), activities being learner-driven (Hull, 2013; Montgomery, 2013), real-life experiences applicable to their specific context (Westbrook, 2005) and opportunity for reflection (Mason & Wetherbee, 2004) were utilised.

The potential positive outcomes in this study were two-fold. Teachers in the Eastern Region of Sydney Catholic Schools would be empowered to meet Standard descriptors 1.4 and 2.4 comprehensively. Moreover, there would be more likely to achieve positive outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children in their classes with strengthened pedagogy. When preparing professional learning, it is also important that the provider take into consideration the learner as a person. All teachers in Australia are familiar with the precept of starting with children and how they learn (AITSL, 2011). It is no different with adult learners.
The professional learning opportunity took into account the starting point of the teacher participants.

**Methodology**

Design-based research was the methodology utilised in the current study. This design is frequently used in education studies as it has as a crucial first step.

The identification and exploration of a significant educational problem. It is this problem that creates a purpose for the research, and it is the creation and evaluation of a potential solution to this problem that will form the focus of the entire study. (Herrington, McKenney, Reeves & Oliver, 2007, p. 4092)

There are a number of definitions of design-based research and it is still developing as a methodology. Seminal to design-based methodology is that it requires the following:

- Addressing complex problems in real contexts in collaboration with practitioners;
- Integrating known and hypothetical design principles with technological affordances to render plausible solutions to these complex problems; and
- Conducting rigorous and reflective inquiry to test and refine innovative learning environments as well as to define new design principles. (Brown & Collins, 1992, cited in Herrington, et al., 2007, p 4090)

Emphasising the strong theory to practice nexus that the current research envisages, Barab and Squire (2004) defined design-based research as “a series of approaches, with the intent of producing new theories, artifacts, and practices that account for and potentially impact learning and teaching in naturalistic settings” (Barab & Squire, 2004, p. 2).

**Methods**

After participant teachers had engaged in the professional learning opportunity, they were invited to take part in an interview to provide their evaluation of the professional learning and aspects for improvement. Data were, therefore, collected by semi-structured group interviews with voluntary members of the school leadership team and teachers from one school in the Eastern Region of the Archdiocese of Sydney. As participants had been working together for a while, there was likely to be a level of trust between them and, potentially, a common goal with the research. Furthermore, since participants were contributing to the content of the professional development programme being developed, it was useful that they have heard what others had to say (Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2011).
Interviews took place between November 2016 and June 2017. Ethics approval was gained from Sydney Catholic Schools and the University of Notre Dame Australia for the research to take place. All teachers where invited to participate in the interviews and provided informed consent. Initial interviews were transcribed and data were analysed using thematic coding. First, the transcripts of the interviews were read to discover emergent themes and categories, allow themes and meta-themes to emerge. Those initial clusters provided the broad view and subsequent line-by-line coding allowed for higher and higher levels of abstraction to be reached. Line-by-line coding was then followed by identification of pertinent text. This was then summaries and linked to the meta-themes and sub-themes as these developed. Participants were experienced and expert teachers. In this school, two group interviews were undertaken (Participants 1 – 5; and Participants 6 – 9).

**Yurunnhang Bungil Nyumba (learn respect to teach)**

Over the course of 2 days, participants took part in a professional learning opportunity. The first day was on Country, where Aboriginal educators through the concept and meaning of country guided participants from an Aboriginal way of seeing. Follow-up in-school workshops on the second day assisted participant teachers in implementing these concepts into strategies and activities for the children in their classes.

The pedagogy employed for the professional learning was based in Aboriginal epistemology both in method and content, so that learning built on the physical experience of being on Country and experiencing the transmission of knowledge in an Aboriginal way. This way of teaching and learning takes into account that fact that a learner is a physical, intellectual, emotional and spiritual being (Personal communication: 23.10.2016). This way of seeing is based on an understanding that people learn on many levels within themselves and knowledge is acquired physically, intellectually, emotionally and spiritually. The professional learning was written from an understanding that each individual will learn what s/he can, according to his or her own growth and understanding. Therefore, there were no expectations or judgements imposed on the learning of the participants (Edwards & Buxton, 1998).

*Yurunnhang Bungil Nyumba* teaches the first steps involved in understanding what the following words 'feel like': Respect and Responsibility. This professional learning enhances teachers’ knowledge through four experiences and guiding principles that are interconnected in order that teachers can feel confident in infusing Aboriginal ways of being into their teaching practice. The on-Country day provided foundational knowledge for participants, proper
behaviours, ways of seeing and being, and introduced reciprocal relationships with Country (Edwards & Buxton, 1998; Martin, 2009; McKnight, 2016). Concepts explored were the following:

1. **Teacher as guide.** Creating a safe learning space for both teachers and children. A sense of security in knowing, so teachers do not have a fear of causing offence and with their gentle guidance children are not afraid to take risks in their learning.

2. **Little ones’ connection to Country.** Children’s business and place in Country. Learning through observation and participation where appropriate and the teaching of proper behaviours.

3. **Knowledge from Country.** Place-based knowledge, local community boundaries, extending concept of Country, and a sense of self and community.

4. **Belonging to Country.** Country is home: Observing and listening to Country, starting the journey to walk with Country.

**Findings and discussion**

Participants identified aspects most useful to them and also a number of recommendations for the next iteration of the professional learning.

**What participants found most useful**

The following four meta-themes emerged from the interviews as the most significantly useful aspects for participants: being placed in Country and the first touch of land, the concept of teacher as guide, building an emotional library, and the practical application during the in-school day.

**Being placed in Country**

The day on Country started with an Aboriginal introduction of self to Country through a process of being placed in Country. Participants were asked by the facilitator to introduce themselves, where they come from and one thing they hope to get out of the day as a way of stating their “business” on Country. The following are representative of participants’ initial responses:

P5: For me I would like to increase my awareness of the culture, I am not part of that culture, because we all have our own cultures. How do I? I’m even further removed someone like me who is from an Irish culture. I have never had schooling on it, teaching on it, so I know I have huge gaps, huge gaps. I was worried about how to teach about the Aboriginal culture in a respectful way.
P9: I think we as educators lack knowledge and we unfortunately haven’t spent enough time on this perspective, so to be here today [on Country] and learn about Aboriginal cultural ways will help me to be more confident when teaching Aboriginal perspectives in my class.

These responses reveal an openness on the teachers’ part to gain an awareness of Aboriginal culture. At this stage, their responses were still the study of a culture, allowing teachers to distance themselves from the perspective they were hoping to include in their classrooms, as it was still learning about others and not themselves. “The need to know more or increase awareness about the separate ‘other’ is strongly present [in these teacher’s initial responses] while the concept of wanting to connect to County remains hidden/elided” (McKnight, 2016, p. 15).

Teacher as guide

The teacher’s role in Yurunnhang Bungil Nyumba is to act as a guide to the children. In an Aboriginal way, teachers are people who have the experiences, knowledge and understanding of a part or whole of a journey their students are about to undertake (Edwards & Buxton, 1998). In Yurunnhang Bungil Nyumba, it is understood that many of the teachers will be from other cultural ways of being. Therefore, they may be unfamiliar with these ways of learning. This is why the learning took place first on Country, followed by activities within the school grounds to see what the teachers’ emotional reaction would be. It was understood, though, that the reaction was a personal one and that each person may react differently to the same activity.

Their capacity to be able to act as guide was achieved by teacher participants each beginning to understand their connectedness with Country. One teacher participant, in her response to what aspects of the on Country day she found most useful, replied,

Really what you were both doing was teaching us about Aboriginal culture and concepts on more than just a surface level – How to grow up in an Aboriginal way. It makes you conscious of your own behaviour, in Country, with people and culture. It’s reflecting on our own connections to this land. I have never thought about it in that way, as a non-Indigenous person that I could connect to the land in that way. (P6)

The underpinning premise of this learning was that Country is where all can learn – that learning from Country is not solely an Aboriginal responsibility; all people can do so and become Australian in the true sense of the word.
Building an emotional library

As Uncle Max Harrison, a Yuin Elder, has stated “[t]here is plenty in that library up there [pointing to an area of Country], it is the text of the land” (Harrison & McConchie, 2009, p. 39). Similarly, the day on Country in the current study provided teachers with the opportunity to experience their first touch of land from an Aboriginal way of teaching and learning – to open the library doors so to speak.

One participant teacher commented that being on Country was an opportunity “to experience and feel history, be connected to the event instead of reading history on a page” (P4). She captures the shift from the study of history and culture from the outside on an intellectual level, to “experience and feel” on an emotional level. Participants noted that this was a new way of learning for them: “At first it was challenging but as you relax into the day it was so interesting and so beneficial” (P1). Teachers also commented on how, in this approach to learning, they were comfortable to ask when unsure, even though they were finding it challenging: “The way it was gently explained that there are no judgements that we are from another cultural way of seeing, and that’s fine” (P3). Teacher participants reported that they were learning more from the affective than purely the cognitive, and they found this at times exhausting. As part of one activity, participants had to develop an understanding of totems in Aboriginal ways of seeing and then translate that understanding into the physical by creating a representative sand sculpture. The activity elicited this dialogue in a group interview:

P8: Teaching us in an Aboriginal way: the imagery and symbols to understand the concepts explored, I’m thinking of the totem exercise. I thought I understood totems, you know, from what I have read in books – an intellectual exercise. But to feel it: that was – I don’t know how to put it – it was a different way of seeing it, to not only think about it but to understand totems on a personal level, to make that connection on an emotional level. But before then, I didn’t think it would be possible for me to do that as a non-Indigenous person.

P7: And to have us personally think about the proper behaviours for our personal totem, then taking it to the next step by showing and teaching others the behaviour they should do as they approach. It was I don’t know, teaching respect in the true sense of the word. How your behaviour shows respect.

The teachers from this school were of the strong opinion that “every teacher in our system [should] have the opportunity we experienced” (P8), to be given the option to “engage at that
level of thinking” (P7) with Aboriginal knowledge. During the group interview the teachers discussed how *Yurunhang Bungil Nyumba* teaches the first steps involved in understanding what Respect and Responsibility “feels like”. This teacher’s comment highlights the change from thinking about to feeling respect:

> I think respect comes with understanding. And as you gain more knowledge then you are able to respect something more…. I think we treat people with basic respect but that respect grows as you understand them better as a person (P8).

This is a shift from taking in knowledge on a purely intellectual level to experiencing it on an emotional level.

*Practical application during the in-school day*

In the follow-up day at the school, teachers were taken through a number of activities to assist them to implement the concepts learnt on Country into programming for their classes. The first activity was setting up the classroom as a learning space from an Aboriginal way of seeing. Before starting any experience with children, as the teacher, participants needed to prepare themselves and the space (their classroom) for their class. For example, the Kindergarten teacher would have her handprint on the wall before the children entered, indicating that she had walked this journey. Once inside, the teacher as guide acts as the voice of the classroom. This is explained to the children through story: that there have been other classes here previously and their stories are contained within this space. Thus, the children come to understand that this classroom is their learning space for a time and their story will become part of the classroom’s memory. Thereafter, children by name would be invited to find a space in the classroom to place their handprint.

Dialogue between two participants during the group interview summarise comprehensively teachers’ appreciation of how beneficial it was to have the follow-up day at the school:

**P6:** And it was so good to be shown how to bring it back into the classroom because we can talk to the children, especially the Aboriginal children but all our children in the class from our own experience, I don’t know not just the study of [pause] to be given a glimpse of, to be on Country and see, really see and feel it, the different places in Country.

**P7:** Before I had this opportunity I felt like there is a little barrier because you want to do so much as a teacher but you sometimes don’t know how to approach
certain things about Aboriginal culture. You don’t know if you are doing it the right way? So to be on Country and then being able to go through the activities was a professional development that I have never experienced before, to actually do it in that way.

While teachers said they would relish the opportunity to spend more time on Country, they were adamant that this opportunity needs to exist but not at the expense of the time they had in their school. It was there that teachers were guided through the activities and had the time to share ideas with colleagues in how to bring their learnings into their classrooms. One teacher stated that if this opportunity was not provided she would “have been stuck a little” (P3). With regards to the mode of delivery – the combination of on Country and in school – a teacher remarked, “it’s authentic learning in the true sense of the word” (P1). They emphasized that it is more than relaying information to the children. “So I’m not just standing in front of my class telling the children what we did. It’s showing them, making it real to them as well” (P3).

**Participant recommendations**

In recounting the teacher participant’s dialogue, my first concern has been to conserve the richness of their voice by including segments of the conversation. Participants made four key recommendations for improvement for the next iteration of the professional learning to be offered to other schools. These were that they would have liked more time spent on Country, more information on teaching of the Dreaming, further information on kinship responsibilities and community protocols, and some means of accessing ongoing support and mentoring.

**Time on Country**

When the teacher participants were asked how the professional learning experience could better cater for their needs, an overwhelming response was to increase the time spent on Country in order for them to become more grounded and consolidate their learnings:

I was just starting to feel comfortable in myself, that it was possible to experience my own connection, even though I am not Indigenous. But we need time to develop that connection in the right way. Would it be possible to do another day on Country? (P4)

The teachers were adamant that there is a need to spend further time on Country to build on what they have learnt. In the group interview, a teacher contrasted, how “with every other Key Learning Area we build on learning, starting with kindergarten at base level and you build on that knowledge in different stages of learning but we are not doing that with Indigenous
culture” (P3). Extending their time on Country would allow the teachers to have the time to build this competence. There was a clear enthusiasm on the part of teachers to undertake further opportunities to consolidate and extend their learning of how to infuse Aboriginal ways of seeing into their classroom practice.

Teaching of the Dreaming

Storytelling is a well-established and time-proven strategy within both Aboriginal and Western ways of teaching and learning (Edwards & Buxton, 1998; Martin, 2005; McKnight, Hoban, & Nielsen, 2010). *Yurunnhang Bungil Nyumba* was designed to give teachers and, in turn, children a glimpse into Aboriginal ways of seeing and being, particularly through the means of experiencing knowing through story sharing. One teacher commented how she spent a lot of time during the on-Country experience observing how her colleagues had opportunities to get their questions answered in a safe environment, with no fear of causing offence. Once in the familiar surroundings, back at school, she was comfortable to express her limited understanding of what the Dreaming is: “I thought the Dreamtime was a dream-like state, like when you are asleep. No-one really explained what it was before” (P4). This admission was a catalyst for a conversation:

P3: I am quite comfortable teaching an Aboriginal art lesson but I think maybe Indigenous storytelling is something that I haven’t really had a lot of information about. I know there is so much more.

P2: Yes, we can read the children a story, no problem. But it would be great to know more, have the teaching behind that story or within the stories.

Storytelling is a powerful teaching strategy and is a unique way for children to develop an understanding of and appreciation for other ways of seeing. Teachers sought more insight into the concept of the Dreaming and how Dreaming Stories are ways to teach children and young people about Country and understanding their connections. The above conversation provides direction for the second iteration of the in-school follow-up day to include a session on the teaching of the Dreaming, specifically activities for children to illustrate how all Dreaming Stories have three elements: the natural world, rules for living - proper behaviours, and spiritual connections to Country.
Kinship Responsibilities and community protocols

As there were 16 Aboriginal students enrolled at this primary school, teachers were especially interested in what they had seen previously amongst those students in relation to kinship responsibilities and what their new knowledge and understandings could bring to enhance meeting Aboriginal children’s learning needs.

P1: As you were saying that I was thinking about our Aboriginal children and kinship and how it works. It would be of great benefit for me to know more about that.

P4: There is so much we need to learn about kinship and community protocols and like you said proper behaviours, which I am really interested, and these would be good for us to know especially for our Aboriginal children.

Clearly, this was an aspect requiring further input as Aboriginal kinship systems are considered to be the most intricate and extensive in the world: intricate in relationships, proper behaviours and responsibilities to people, Country and expression of spirit; and extensive in connections across the Country. Aboriginal children are taught about their place and whom they are related to within their kinship system. Proper behaviours are also taught to children through kinship relationships. These relationships and family responsibilities are part of Aboriginal children and young people’s everyday reality. If there is to be a successful achievement of the Standard descriptors in schooling, the starting point needs to be Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young peoples “lifeworlds” (Nakata, 2001). Providing teachers with further knowledge on kinship responsibilities and community protocols could go a long way towards eliminating some misconceptions as noted by participant teachers. A positive outcome would be that Aboriginal parents and family members would no longer have to justify their own cultural standpoint.

Ongoing support and mentoring for two reasons

Teachers expressed the need for ongoing support to enable them to continue their learning journey. In addition, it was important for me, as Aboriginal Leader of Learning to ensure that teachers appropriately used the knowledge they had gained during the on Country experience. Furthermore, I needed to ensure that there was the appropriate application of that knowledge in their classrooms, and that there was not misappropriation of Aboriginal knowledge by the non-Aboriginal teachers.
One suggestion made in order to achieve this was “we can cluster schools together” (P4), to support each other through the sharing of ideas. A number of participants, reflecting the views of Blaschke (2012) and Mason and Wetherbee (2004), stressed that this professional learning experience needs “to be ongoing it cannot be just a one off” (P4).

Participants explored other avenues of support that would help them:

Putting together a bank of resources to complement the touring (walking Country) itself. I am even thinking between the five of us we could remember different things from the day. But if we had something that kind of was a resource that we could go back and check things from the day. So you have experienced it but then you’ve got the information as well to refer back to. (P1)

Teachers in the group interview commented how most of the resources they are using in the classroom are “very out-dated and not specific to the area” (P1). That there is a need to move away from the “one size fits all kind of information” [so the learning] is really relevant to the children” (P1). Teachers had the opportunity to learn on Country and engage with learning in an Aboriginal way, which was “specific to the area” (P3).

P2: We need a reference point.

P3: It doesn’t have to be in explicit detail but sometimes you are told something and you kind of forget.

P2: Yes, something to jolt your memory.

As a result of this dialogue, a blog has been created as a ‘reference point’, a space to access up-to-date resources and share ideas with colleagues. A safe place where teachers can ask for advice if an activity they tried did not go to plan. As one teacher explained to “feel comfortable to give it another go, instead of going back to old ways or not doing anything again. To see what other teachers are trying, ideas, new ways of approaching it with our knowledge” (P4). This central space will incorporate a number of recommendations and suggestion made by the teachers who participated in the study.

In addition, I ensured that in the professional learning back at school, there was appropriate application and integration of teachers’ new-found knowledge. Moreover, I meet with teachers regularly as part of my Aboriginal Leader of Learning role and ensure that what is taking place in the classroom is the culmination of the goals with the professional learning.
Conclusion

There is a need to move away from the oppositional framing of Aboriginal and Western knowledge systems, the study of approach that allows teachers to remain separated from the content they are teaching. Aboriginal ways of knowing are complex knowledge systems of which all can learn. For Aboriginal ways of seeing and knowing to be valued in Australian classrooms, teachers need opportunities to develop their knowledge beyond surface knowledge and the teaching of elements of Aboriginal culture on the same level to deeper levels of knowledge, the importance of connecting to country and all that entails, in a way that is appropriate for children and young people. The teachers who participated in the current study are highly capable and dedicated teachers who were looking forward to sharing their learnings with children in their classes, which they previously believed this to be outside their knowledge base. This links back to the theoretical framework described earlier, where the professional learning was requested by the teachers, was more than a once-off event – it spanned two days – and with the development of the blog, the support is to be ongoing.

In relation to the methodology discussed earlier, the iterative nature of design-based methodology ensures that the recommendations made in this first iteration of the research, will be implemented in the second iteration. This will take place with the next school seeking professional learning leading to enhance teacher capacity to infuse Aboriginal ways of seeing into their teaching practice.
Chapter 8 *Yurunnhang Bungil Nyumba* framework refined

8.1 Framework critiqued and refined

As stated in the second article, *Yurunnhang Bungil Nyumba* teaches children the first steps involved in understanding what the following words 'feel like': Respect and Responsibility. In this stage of the study the professional learning framework aimed to enhances teachers’ knowledge through four experiences and guiding principles that are interconnected in order that teachers can feel confident in infusing Aboriginal ways of being into their teaching practice. The on-Country day provided foundational knowledge for participants, proper behaviours, ways of seeing and being, and introduced reciprocal relationships with Country (Edwards & Buxton, 1998; Martin, 2009; McKnight, 2016). Concepts explored, as described in the second journal article, were: teacher as guide; little ones’ connection to Country; knowledge from Country; and belonging to Country.

After the first day on Country, School B’s principal and I met to discuss how it would be possible to extend the time on Country to support the teachers’ learning of further Aboriginal concepts, resulting in the teachers having two on-Country days as well as the day at school. The principal determined that the whole staff would take part, however, the research would run in parallel, with teachers being invited to take part in the research if they so choose. Interviews took place with four participant teachers and the framework was refined on the basis of their feedback.

Following design-based methodology, from teacher feedback and through conversations with my guides, we decided to make some adjustments to the existing four experiences and add three more. This was then trialled with the second school.

8.1.1 Examples of changes from participant feedback

As an example, the following feedback, received from two schools, was combined and their suggestions led to the following amendments and adjustments:

In Experience One include a section learning how to express respect through a sense of place for little people – how children are taught to explore the relationships they are developing with other people in their community and Country. How this learning gradually adds to each child’s knowledge about different places in Country.
In Experience Two include an explanation of Country as home and how this learning takes place. Restructure the experience to just concentrate on Children’s Business. Include a section on the teaching of the Dreaming, learning through play, children and their place in Country.

In Experience Three provide more information for teachers on trade routes and Dreaming tracks; as well as more information on proper behaviours for this stage of learning. Change the focus of Experience Three to community in Country – extending the concept of Country for teachers to gain an understanding of knowledge in Country.

Change Experience Four from belonging to Country to Broadening view of Country as the step was too great a step for teachers. Provide information enhancing understanding of more than one Country through kinship and totemic relationships.

Experience Five Belonging to Country – In Aboriginal ways of seeing and knowing, histories are contained within Country. Include a section language of Country, listening to Country, and the living narrative of songlines. Have a focus on sites of significance then bring it to sites of significance for the children’s learning journey.

Experience Six – in this experience provide information on a different way of seeing that came to Australia which links to history topics in the curriculum.

In Experience Seven, for Year 5 and 6 children, explore ways it will be possible to find a balance and work with Country which links to conservation and environmental topics in the curriculum.

8.2 Final background information and teaching strategies

When all suggestions from participants had been incorporated, after the PLD had been implemented in four schools, the documentation below encompasses the finalised background information for teachers and suggested teaching strategies for all seven experiences.

8.3 Experience One: Learning through a sense of place

8.3.1 Experience One: Background information for teachers

Yurunnhang (learn) Bungil (respect) Nyumba (to teach) recognises the holistic nature of children and the way they learn. In this way of teaching and learning.
Teachers are asked to act as the guides for the children, to open the doors ahead, as the children move forward in their growing sense of themselves. This way of approaching the learning experience involves both the teacher and learner in a continual shared journey of growth and learning. (Edwards & Buxton, 1998, p. 4)

**Teacher as a guide**

To effectively implement *Yurunhang Bungil Nyumba* into your classroom practice as teachers it will be first necessary to spend some time reflecting on your role as the guide for children and young people:

- creating a safe learning space for the children and yourself as the teacher;
- a sense of security in knowing so children are not afraid to take risks in their learning; and
- you as the teacher are confident in the knowledge that you have at this point in time and that learning is a continuous journey.

In an Aboriginal way of learning, teachers are people who have gone through the experiences first before they guide the children through them. Before starting this experience with the children, as their teacher, you need to prepare yourself and the learning space, by going through the experience yourself. This is important from an Aboriginal way of teaching for a couple of reasons. Firstly, as the guide for the children you will need to have some knowledge of the process involved purely on a physical level. By doing the activities prior to the children you will know what is involved. Secondly, there is an emotional level of understanding that has to do with the connections being made to the learning space. In connecting to a learning space, you need to go through the process of belonging and let the space (the classroom), tell you its story. You as the teacher must go through the process of belonging before the children enter the classroom.

**Learning how to express respect through a sense of place**

Aboriginal children learn from the adults in their family around them how to express respect. Certain family members have roles in which they teach the children the appropriate behaviours at the proper times. For example, the proper behaviour with their Elders may be quietness, avoiding direct eye contact and patience. Children are taught the respectful ways to speak and interact with different people within their kinship system.
Country
In Aboriginal English, the word ‘Country’ is both a common noun and a proper noun. Aboriginal peoples have a connection to and talk of their home Country.

When the British arrived in Australia, and as they explored the continent, they thought they were entering a wilderness. In fact, the continent was made up of the homes of people – homes that had been cared for by the Aboriginal peoples who possessed the right and duties of care because they belonged there.

Each of these ‘homes’ has their own borders, history, language or dialect, laws, protocols, music, dances, songs and ceremonies. Australia is made up of hundreds of Countries that still exist today. In this way of seeing Country is the foundation from which the people living there get a sense of place and belonging, a sense of direction and purpose, a sense of identity.

First touch of Country
We all learn through our senses – by seeing, hearing, smelling, tasting and touching, adults as guides provide opportunities for young children to experience their first touch of Country through their senses. In some communities, Aboriginal children experience their first touch of Country when they are born. Others can learn about it through family members as they are growing up. Young children quickly learn that Country provides shelter, food and clothing. It is not until they are much older that they begin to learn about the deeper levels of spiritual connections they have with their Country.

Ways to express connection to Country
Connections to Country are expressed through stories, songs, music and dances. Through these forms of expression, children begin to develop a sense of how they are connected to their Country. For example, one particular story can help explain how an Aboriginal person’s Country was created and formed by Ancestor Spirits (Dreaming Beings). This story may outline the responsibilities laid down for people to follow that told them how to care for their Country. These responsibilities are still the same ones today that present day people follow. In this way, as individuals grow in their understanding, they will know their connectedness and responsibilities for Country, for each other, and for their ongoing relationship with our Ancestor Spirits themselves.

Behaving differently in different places within Country
Interacting within a family, children quickly learn that different places have different stories. Through these stories, children learn the proper behaviours for places within Country, for
example, when passing particular groups of boulders, quietness is expected; while at the river, it is all right to be louder, depending on what part of the river. In this way children begin to understand that certain behaviours are expected at different places. In Aboriginal ways of teaching each child absorbs elements of the story according to his or her level of understanding. With frequent retelling of the story children discover more knowledge and make their own connections.

Aboriginal children are taught how everything is connected and are allowed time for the learning to happen in everyday life through repetition and with adults as their guides. In this way, children eventually begin to understand the connections between the respectful behaviours they are learning, themselves, others around them, and ultimately Country.

**Knowledge about Country**

Aboriginal children are taught to explore the relationships they are developing with other people in their community and their Country. Aboriginal peoples in different areas express a sense of belonging in various ways. For children this is done through helping their aunts and uncles with gathering and hunting of small animals and birds and learning the proper ways to be on Country when doing this. All of this learning gradually adds to each child’s knowledge about the different places in Country and how to approach certain places. They also learn some of the stories that are told while walking Country with the adults.

8.3.2 **Experience One: Suggested teaching strategies**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Teacher as guide: Experience one provides children with the opportunity to learn about how the natural and human world touches them.</th>
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<tr>
<th>Weaving a classroom story</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>There are three separate threads to be aware of when weaving your class story.</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Introduce the concept that the classroom is a space that was here before the children came and will be there long after they have moved on to their next stage of learning.</td>
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<tr>
<td>As the teacher, you will need to introduce yourself as the person who will be the children’s guide, facilitator of learning for the year. Your role as teacher is to act as the ‘voice’ of the classroom. As such, you will guide the children in the proper behaviours that are right for your classroom</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Weave a story about your classroom and include each child by name in the story so the children are given a sense of belonging to the classroom and are connected to the class as a group. The story needs to include for the children that they are starting a</td>
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</table>
journey within the boundaries of the classroom. This classroom in being here allows the children to come into its space for that year to do their learning.

- As visitors, the children need to ask permission to come and learn in this classroom. This could start by creating an action that the children can take on as they enter the classroom to show their appreciation for the space. For example, becoming quiet as they step through the front door.

There are certain behaviours that belong to the classroom’ space, the role of the guide (teacher) is to help the children to develop behaviours that are appropriate and expected for that classroom as a learning space.

- Children need to learn that the level of noise appropriate while in the classroom can show either their respect or disrespect. You, as teacher, will guide the children to this understanding. These behaviours are the way in which you, and they, show appreciation for the use of the classroom for that year.

- Now that the children have permission, a way of showing their sense of belonging they might trace their handprint, decorate and name them to show their connection to their classroom. These could then be displayed within the learning space.

- Each person in our class is different but we are all connected as Kindergarten. Class to class we are different, but we are all connected as part of the school.

Create alternative places outside of the classroom where the same process can happen. You will find that some children engage more readily in natural settings for example a grassy area or a spot under the trees. Children begin to understand they have a place outside of their home where they can belong and learn.

**A sense of self**

Support children to think about themselves, who they are and where they are from.

- Encourage the children to make a ‘Who am I?’ poster with drawings and/or photographs of their families, home and pets.

- The children could make a family tree with handprints representing their family members.

Use songs and dances that children have experienced to show how they can assist in developing a deeper understanding of belonging and connections. For example:

- Songs that illustrate a sense of belonging or connections to the children’s cultural background.
• Rhythmic dances allowing the children to experience working with others.
• If possible, introduce a song or dance from your local Aboriginal community.

Give the children time to reflect on how these activities have explored the relationship children have with other people and Country. Guide children to see how songs and dances can help people to understand and express this relationship.

**First touch of land**

Provide opportunities that give children a sense of self and how the outside world touches them by exploring their sense of sight, sound, smell, touch and taste.

Guided walk around the playground.

• Children take off their shoes to feel what is under them, for example, asphalt, sand, grass or dirt.
• Gently direct the children to close their eyes to better feel the elements around them. For example, the wind on their faces or the sun on their skin, head or back.
• Ask the children to listen to the sounds around them (both bush and artificial sounds).
• Guide the children through the playground; ask them to be aware of the different scents around them.

So the children have the opportunity to experience their playground design activities that lead the children to become more aware of their surroundings. On a number of occasions, take the children on walking tracks within the school grounds where they can see what is happening.

• Finding an ant trail. Children look for their nest. Observe how the ants react to different weather; look at ant behaviour, for example, rubbing feelers to tell others where food is.
• There are over 1,500 Australian native bees. They can be black, yellow, red, green or even black with blue polka dots. Watch or observe native bees (they do not have stingers) behaviour, for example, they wiggle their bottoms to communicate to direction of food sources.

Explain to the children that the ants and bees have as much right to be in that place as they have.

Revisit on a number of occasions the track that the children have walked to observe changes and/or differences.
Ways to express connection to place

For children home is where your family is and their sense of belonging is developed.

- Teacher facilitated discussion about where we live and what makes it a home. Is it the people (and pets) you share it with? Is it the smell of your favourite meal cooking? Or the warmth of snuggling under your favourite blanket on a cold night?
- Children could be introduced to different types of homes around the world, for example, Tonkonans homes of the Toraja people, igloos of the Inuit, Teotho of the Tiwa people, Cave homes built on a mountainside in Spain, Palafitos in Chile, a yurt in Mongolia, or a floating green house in the Netherlands, to name a few.

Introduce the idea of Country as home for Aboriginal peoples.

Behaving differently in different places in Country

Through family, children learn that different places have different stories and proper behaviours.

Children could make a list of places they go with their family, for example, visiting grandparents, going to the movies with siblings, going to the beach with family. Are there different behaviours expected of them in these different situations?

- Children could revisit the proper behaviours in their classroom. They could investigate the proper behaviours of other classrooms and compare them to their classroom. Are there any differences?
- Children could be taken to places that have certain proper behaviours that accompany each visit.

In Aboriginal ways of learning certain behaviours are an integral part of seeing and relating to different places within Country. Your behaviour shows your respect to the particular place.

8.4 Experience Two: Little ones’ connection to Country

8.4.1 Experience Two: Background information for teachers

The Dreaming is the spiritual concept of purpose, time, connectedness and spirit. The Dreaming encompasses spiritual knowledge, past, present and future. It explains all life, the connections between people, land and spirit and is expressed through a continuing journey of growth and learning. (Edwards & Buxton, 1998, p. 44)
Aboriginal peoples belong to their home ‘Country’. For little ones, part of this way of learning is listening to stories and songs allowing the imagery to settle within the subconscious part of a child’s mind. This is one way that children learn about their connection to a particular Country. The histories contained within the stories and songs help Aboriginal children to learn about their home and Country. As young people grow and mature, they will learn to identify with that area and particular places within it.

**Teaching of the Dreaming**

The Dreaming explains all life and the connections between people, Country and expressions of spirit. Each Aboriginal community has their own histories and laws, which are contained in Dreaming stories. Some communities share parts of the same story and are connected through Dreaming tracks. Dreaming stories are a way to teach children about their connection to Country, as they grow in their understanding so does their sense of belonging to Country.

**Children’s Business**

“Children’s business is a time when children can bring into the world all they have learnt from their surroundings and the adults around them” (Edwards & Buxton, 1998, p. 58). Aboriginal children, when very young, copy what the adults around them are doing, learning through observation and participating when appropriate to do so. Children accompany adults but remain relatively free, learning through play. As appropriate, and this will differ from community to community, children learn bush skills – for example, recognising different animal and bird tracks. They may learn how to locate bush tucker in their Country and what they can and cannot eat. In time they learn about the seasons these foods can be gathered. By the time a child is eleven or twelve years of age they are quite independent in the bush, being able to catch their own small prey, make a fire and cook their own catch, as well as find their own water.

For all little ones their learning begins with and is done through play. Today, a safe space is created where children can show their families what they have learnt, for example, how well they can dance or sing. These occasions are filled with laughter and fun for everyone concerned. This is also an opportunity for the teachers of the songs and dances to observe children’s progress and identify areas that need further development.

**Yulungagi (toys) and Yulunga (games)**

Depended on your situation, you, as the teacher may have opportunities to go bush with your class with an Aboriginal guide. Regardless, you will be able to provide the children with opportunities to experience Aboriginal games and the making of toys. There are a number of
games that children could play and toys they could make. For example, younger children could start with the first toys given to infants – rattles and rings made from shells, wool, string and palm fibres.

As with all children imaginative play is integral to their learning. For example, both boys and girls will play Gunya (house). This may include setting up a camp of their own, complete with gunya and fire, and practising their skills in hunting and food gathering. The search for food is as much a part of play as it is a part of daily life for the children. Whether as toys or as personal belongings, dilly bags, baskets and digging sticks are often carried and used by children.

A doll could be imagined from a stick with a distinguishing feature like a knob to represent the head, a forked stick, or pieces of bark tied with grass. Although they were not elaborate, this relied heavily on the imagination of the child. Often dolls are carried about much as a baby would be, in dillybags, small bark baskets or coolamons, just like their grandmother, mother, or aunts would do. If children were too young to weave their own basket or carve their own Coolamon, their grandmother or aunt would likely do this for them. The children would be told stories about how dilly bags and coolamons are made and used. In this way young ones learn about places in Country where the fibres and wood are collected from, how and when to do so and by whom.

Young boys play games with small spears to see who is the most accurate in hitting a target such as a rolled-up ball of grass. The boys move further away each time to make it more difficult to hit. This game helps build the boys’ stamina as well as accuracy in spear throwing. They also practise making various animal and bird tracks in the sand or dirt. They then show other children and see if they are fooled by the tracks. Ball games were also played to build eye and hand co-ordination and swiftness of movement in dodging the ball. Adults sometimes make toys for the boys, such as small spears, shields and carved canoes.

**Proper behaviours for little people**

Proper ways of behaving are an integral part of seeing and relating to different places within ones Country. This is an integral part of young children’s learning as behaviour shows to what extent young people know and understand their connection with an area. By observing children’s physical behaviours, the children’s teachers can gain an insight into their level of understanding of what they are learning at that particular time and stage.

The adults around them teach Aboriginal children how to behave at different places in Country. Each place within Country has certain behaviours that accompany each visit, for example,
when to be quiet and when it is alright to talk and play. Children learn through stories not to cross community boundaries, or not to swim in certain waterholes, the places where they can walk about freely and the places they cannot go. Aboriginal children learn that respectful behaviours are part of growing up, these behaviours include listening to advice and instruction from parents, aunties, uncles, and especially grandparents, how to share with others, looking after and out for younger children.

**Connecting to Country**

There are a number of ways children can connect to different places. Children are taught to become aware of not only the place they are in, but also the plants, animals, trees, and birds they are sharing it with. The more times they visit an area, children begin to build up an emotional memory which includes the stories they are told and dances that they watch at that place. It is through this emotional memory that children begin to connect with the place. Through observation and by participating where appropriate the children learn behaviours that show their connections to and respect for being in that place.

**Showing respect through behaviours**

Connecting to a place within Country involves not only knowing the place extremely well, but also knowing the behaviours expected while visiting that place. These behaviours show their level of respect and connection with the place. As children gain more knowledge their learning expands and grows and their behaviours over time become more subtle and refined. Some proper behaviours that children learn in relation to showing respect for their Elders is that they do not hold direct eye contact. As young ones grow older, they learn other proper behaviours, such as how to wait for an answer or how to ask a question indirectly rather than directly. As children reach different levels of maturity, they are able to take on more involved ways of thinking and, in turn, behaving (Edwards & Buxton, 1998).

**Children and their place in Country**

Children have a part to play in the overall cultural system. For instance, children need to be in proper relationships to other people within their kinship system; otherwise, the stories, songs, dances and places cannot be passed on. The children and young people are the future custodians of these particular songs, dances, and places in Country.
### Teaching of the Dreaming through stories and developing skills through play

#### Aboriginal children learn about their Country.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Teaching of the Dreaming</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Aboriginal peoples both past and present use stories to develop children’s connection to Country. Dreaming stories teach knowledge that is relevant to many learning areas.</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Divide the class into small groups of four to six. Each group could be given a name (use animals or birds from the local area) to signify their membership of the group.</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Choose a Dreaming Story for each group that has elements of the natural environment and rules for living for the children to listen to.</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Each group should be allowed the opportunity to listen to the story on a number of occasions.</strong></td>
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Teacher facilitated class discussion about the ‘characters’, their actions and the consequences of their behaviour.

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<td><strong>What does the story tell us about the natural environment? For example, how the kangaroo got its pouch or why the emu no longer flies?</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>In each group, divide the story into parts so the children have the opportunity to retell parts of the story to members of their group.</strong></td>
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<td><strong>Allow time for each group to share their story with the rest of the class orally.</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Choose another Dreaming story about the sky and constellations and repeat the process of sharing.</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>If available, the children could also listen to stories outlining rules for living from the Torres Strait Islands.</strong></td>
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Dreaming stories are a way to teach children about their connection to Country, as they grow in their understanding so does their sense of belonging to Country.

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<th>Boundaries and proper behaviours</th>
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<tr>
<td>Aboriginal Children learn that there are places in their Country that they are not yet allowed to visit.</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Starting from ways of seeing that the children are familiar. With teacher guide the children in walking around their school grounds and see what areas they a free to go and areas that are out-of-bounds.</strong></td>
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</table>
Once back in the classroom, teacher facilitated class discussion about the areas in the school that are out-of-bounds and the reasons why these areas have restricted access, and the consequences of entering these areas.

Young children go through the process of learning which areas within the school they can safely access and areas that have restricted access.

### Ways of connecting people to their Country

Aboriginal peoples have always had and continue to have places of significance, special places within their Country. These places are used for different reasons. Some are learning places, meeting places, places for celebrations, healing places and places for ceremony.

Revisit the children’s classroom story from Experience One. If there are children new to the class help them to be woven into the story. Extend this story to include their immediate surroundings. Children should be led to the same understandings about their surrounding environment of the school grounds as they have developed about their classroom. This will extend their sense of connection with place. Teacher facilitated discussion about the different places within out school.

- Before leaving the classroom give each child a line drawing of the school with buildings and playgrounds illustrated.
- Teacher guided walk of the school grounds, children mark with a pencil where the school comes together for assemblies and or special occasions, the canteen, sick bay, where the class eat their lunch, play games, their classroom.
- Provide the children with a number of symbols to represent these identified areas within the school grounds.
- Give each child an A3 blank piece of paper so they can draw their symbols without the guidance of the line drawing.
- Children create a painting of the school grounds using their symbols.

Aboriginal children learn that there are special places within their Country. Through their own observations and outdoor experiences, children can learn to identify places that are special for different reasons. Ask children for examples of places that are special to them.

Prompting questions:

- Why is this place special to you?
- How do we feel when we are in this place?
- What is the proper behaviour in this place?
To extend the idea of special places discuss with the children times of celebration and special occasions form their children’s own experiences. For example, birthday celebrations, religious celebrations, sport and class awards.

- Ask the children what makes these celebrations special?
- Is there appropriate behaviour at these events?
- Children could add to their map their tracks showing special places using drawings and/or symbols.

Children could add to their map by including a symbol for their special place or places.

**People behave differently in different places and Countries**

Teacher facilitated discussion about how people behave differently in different places. From their own experiences:

- Children could make a list of places they go to with their family at different times during the week, for example, visit grandparents, go to church, the movies or the beach. They could then look at how they behave at these different places.
- Children could discuss the rules of their classroom investigate and compare them to a couple of other classrooms in the school.
- Create a classroom rules poster.

Certain ways of behaving are an integral part of seeing and relating to different places within ones Country. This is an integral part of young children’s learning as behaviour shows to what extent a young person knows and understands their connection with an area.

**Ways to express connections to place and Country**

In an Aboriginal way, certain ways of behaving are an integral part of seeing and relating to different places. This means that your behaviour shows your respect to the particular place.

- Children could be taken to places that have certain proper behaviours that accompany each visit. Are there stories, songs or dances that express this respect?
- To help children understand that there is different behaviours for different places within the school the children could think about different areas within the school grounds and activities that take place in those areas, for example, school assemblies, sport and exercise equipment.

Draw the children’s’ attention to the fact that it is not only the place that has behaviours, but it is also the activities within the space that have associated behaviours.
**Yulungagai (toys) and yulunga (games):**

Provide opportunities for the children to make yulungagai (toys) and play yulunga (games):

- In your local area go bush with an Aboriginal person and allow the children to make toys. For example, using shells, string or wool the children could make a rattle for a younger sister, brother, or friend.
- Children could find drawing sticks to be used in sand games. Allow the children to create their own story games.
- There are many different types of dolls for different age groups. Children could use materials found in the school grounds or a bush area to make their own dolls.
- Children find up to six sticks place them on the ground in a row away from themselves. Once you have stepped over all six. That person removes one stick and places it at the end. As each child takes their turn, the spaces between the sticks get wider.
- There are variations of throwing-and-dodging games for young children that are fun and develop skills for adult life.

Through play Aboriginal children are taught to help and encourage one another, to look out for each other and to work together.

Yulunga (playing) is a resource of traditional Indigenous games produced by the Australian sports commission. “It combines curriculum principles and cultural traditions in sport-related activities for people of all ages, while ensuring the integrity of traditional games” (Goodes cited in Edwards & Meston, 2008, p. iii).

**Gugiyn (fast) nahri (play) in Bundjalung.** Edwards and Meston (2008, pp. 250-251) have some excellent suggestions on how to organise a tabloid event using traditional Aboriginal games.

1. **Kalq:** Players with a paddle bat each stand in a circle 2–3 metres apart. Players hit (underhand) a unihoc ball around the circle. Count one for a hit by each player. Record number of hits.

2. **Koolchee:** Players divide into two groups, 10 metres apart. Arrange marker cones 1 metre apart in the middle. Players in each group take turns to attempt to roll a tennis ball between the markers. Record number of good rolls.

3. **Gorri:** Players line up behind each other. A hoop-sized target is marked against a fence or wall 5–7 metres in front of the group. Players take turns to attempt to throw
a ball ‘through’ the hoop. Balls must hit inside the circle to count. Record number of
good throws.

4. **Boogalah**: Players are in two groups either side of a goal post crossbar or volleyball
net. A ball is thrown back and forth over the bar/net. Count the number of successful
catches. Record the number of catches.

5. **Kee’an**: Players line up behind each other and take turns to throw a foxtail ball —
held in the middle of the tail — over a set of cricket stumps and into a storage bin.
Count one for each successful throw. Retrieve the ball for the next player. Record the
number of good throws.

6. **Tarnambai**: Players line up behind each other. Each player in turn rolls a tennis ball
out past a line 5–7 metres away and runs out to retrieve it. Count one for each time
the ball is returned. Record the number of returns.

7. **Kolah**: Players line up behind each other. Each player in turn attempts to throw a
beanbag or small soft ball into a small hoop 3–5 metres away. The thrower retrieves
the beanbag each time. Count the number of successful throws that land inside the
hoop. Record the number of good throws.

8. **Kai**: Players stand in a circle about 2 metres apart. Use a light ball such as a medium-
sized gator skin ball. Use the palm of the hand to hit the ball upward towards the next
player. Players hit the ball around in a circle either way). Count the number of players
who hit the ball. Record the number of hits.

You need to:
- allocate a time limit for each activity;
- ensure all groups are taken to each activity and the rules of the game are explained;
- assign each group to an activity to start and the rules are quickly revisited;
- allow a short set practice time.

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**8.5 Experience Three: Community in Country**

**8.5.1 Experience Three: Background information**

There can be a number of communities within a Country. These communities have their
own boundaries. Within these boundaries, each community has its own special places
and stories about natural landforms. Families visit these places at various times of the
year to perform ceremonies and teach the young. (Edwards & Buxton, 1998, p. 40)
Country boundaries
Aboriginal peoples lived with very different boundaries than what we know today. Through an oral tradition, knowledge of these boundaries has been passed on over thousands of generations. Children are taught these boundaries from a very early age through stories and being told where they can and cannot go by adults in their community.

Dreaming tracks
“Dreaming tracks” are words that describe the journeys or paths taken by Ancestral Beings, their patterns of movement and connection that criss-cross Australia. Today, Aboriginal peoples follow these same tracks to keep the connections alive. Dreaming sites are places along the tracks and are usually natural landforms: sources of water, mountains, rock formations, hills and trees that have special stories attached to them. These stories are about Ancestral Beings, which were usually in animal or bird form. Their actions and behaviours shaped particular places within Country during the Dreaming. Dreaming tracks tell of special features in the land and seascapes, spirit beings that have passed that way or reside in those places. These stories, and walking the tracks, help people from that particular area to connect and identify with their Country on deeper levels. There are many songs and dances that are still sung and performed today by Aboriginal peoples whose Dreaming belongs to that area of the Country.

Sense of community
A sense of community happens in much the same way as a person comes to understand Country. Early teachings develop a child’s sense of community by gradually building their perception of their place within their community. Aboriginal children are taught from an early age to whom they are related through their kinship system. This then links to them learning proper behaviours when interacting with different family members within their people in their community. In this way, people learn in community about behaviour and consequences for inappropriate or disrespectful behaviour. Cultural protocols exist in all Aboriginal communities. This is why it is important that local Aboriginal peoples in your area, where possible, be involved in the teaching of Yurunnhang Bungil Nyumba, by providing specific content.

Trade routes
Aboriginal communities have developed a complex web of trade routes that extended across the whole continent of Australia. Each Aboriginal community traded, and still trades across
boundaries with other language groups. Some highways and major roads today are based on Aboriginal trade routes. People traded items such as ochre, stones, weapons, implements, and food. In this way, sometimes stories, songs and dances were also traded, as a way of sharing gifts of respect.

Trade was not only a method of sharing resources but also a direct line of communication, a way of getting or sharing news from one Country to another. People used these opportunities to organise future meetings, social gatherings and sharing of cultural knowledge. On these occasions when it was necessary to travel over long distances sign language was often used to overcome any language difficulties that may arise. Trade required people from different language groups and Countries to respect boundaries, proper behaviours and cultural differences.

**Message sticks**

Another form of communication is a message stick. In most areas, message sticks are small (between 10 and 30 centimetres) flat pieces of wood usually carved or painted with symbols and designs. When one community wished to notify another of a celebration, or if they had items they wanted to trade, a young man was selected to carry a message stick to the people of that Country. The message stick was a physical sign that the person had permission or a very good reason to be in another’s Country. When someone carrying a message stick entered another Country, he would announce himself, and know the ways of showing respect; this would be by observing protocols, his body language, and explaining the reason for his visit.

**Seasonal signs and celebrations**

For Aboriginal peoples Country determines the seasons. In this way of seeing, Country shows its people seasonal indicators to let them know when to be at certain places at various times of the year. Plants are pointers to where food can be harvested, for instance, on the north coast of New South Wales people would begin to journey towards the coast, when the *bilongil* (paperbark tree) flowers arriving as the *jullum* (mullet) are swimming up the coast.

Aboriginal peoples also look to Country for signs of the changing seasons, watching the animals to see what they're doing, to know if the storm season is approaching. When the *ngawan* (lili-pili) start to fall, it is time to bring out warmer clothes. This Country has different seasons to the ones that the British brought with them and which Australia continues to adopt today. There are between six and twenty-two seasons in different parts of Australia. This place-
based knowledge draws connections between life cycle stages of plants and animals within Country.

Seasonal celebrations and feasts happen when certain plants and bush foods are in abundance, for example, the Bunya festival in Githabul Country in southeast Queensland. The people gather from many places and camp for weeks while the nuts are collected, prepared and eaten. Another time of celebration was when a whale had beached itself, for example, in August 1788 on the coast near Botany Bay and another in Sydney Harbour, at Manly Cove, at the end of July 1790 (Attenbrow, 2018); the whale feast that followed in Guringai Country is well documented. Word would have been sent to neighbouring communities to come and share in the abundance of food. These times were and are used to celebrate an abundance of food and new growth, getting together and catching up with the news from other communities, to strengthen bonds with families and in community, and to trade.

**Proper behaviours**

Proper behaviours are an expression sometimes used by Aboriginal peoples to describe a set of behaviours that show respect. For example, in a family group, the Elders of the family are accorded a high level of respect. In this way, on a physical level, the Elders are served first, and can have the pick of the foods available; this is a way of showing proper behaviours and respect.

If younger children ask a direct question to an Elder, there will probably be no response. Children are not expected or encouraged to question the teaching being provided to them. This holds implications for teachers in schools today who might expect Aboriginal children to question if they don’t fully understand the lesson. However, teachers should bear in mind that questioning like this for some Aboriginal children would be completely removed from their lived experience and it would not enter their minds to do so as they would feel that they are being rude and showing inappropriate behaviour.

Children are taught how to behave, so they can interact within the family group. Aboriginal children learn from an early age that respectful behaviours are required of them. These behaviours could include listening to advice and instruction from parents, aunties and uncles and grandparents, how to share with others, looking after younger children, conserving water, and learning not to be greedy.
8.5.2 Experience Three: Suggested teaching strategies

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Buildings on lessons learnt from the previous experience children extend their understanding of Country.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Walking tracks in the community</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>For Aboriginal peoples, Dreaming tracks and sites are usually natural landforms that have special stories attached to them.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To start with a familiar way of seeing, teacher, as guide, assists the children to:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Create a visual depiction (visual diary) showing their journey from home to school. Any stops on the way could also be included in their illustration/visual diary. If children are driven to school by parents or catch public transport their visual diary could start at home and note places on their way to school.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Children write a couple of sentences about their journey.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Give children time to think about an area outside of previous tracks within the school grounds (see Experience Two), possibly to a local park, the river or beach, a place outside the ‘Country’ of the school and their home to include in their visual diary.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Draw this track from memory and discuss why they chose this track.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Individually walk in their mind in their own different direction to build up a visual map of their local area.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>As the teacher, identify a few places of importance to the community and you could organise a day trip for the children to visit, for example, a museum, the zoo. Back at school the children could add, in their visual diary, walking tracks to these places. If these places of importance were further afield, they would use a symbol for travelling.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Children then speak about their journey and special places. In Aboriginal ways of teaching, the journey is important. Reinforce with the children that it is as much about the journey as it is about reaching the special place.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Each child in the class has their own individual map showing the tracks they have walked in their local area.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• From these individual maps, the teacher and children could create one large community map showing all children’s walking tracks. In creating this together, the children should learn a number of things: A sense of place and boundaries, and shared experiences of Country.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Walking tracks are linked to the landscape alongside of it.
The track is woven into a larger picture of Country. As it is walked, the Country unfolds itself through the stories, histories, songs and more.

**Community boundaries**

There are very old community boundaries within Australia that still exist today. A sense of community could be introduced to the children by dividing the class into four smaller Dreaming groups. Locate and show children a map of Aboriginal boundaries of your neighbouring communities (Aboriginal map of Australia).

- Draw children’s attention to Aboriginal boundaries of the area in which their school is located.
- Assist each Dreaming group in your class to identify what the neighbouring Aboriginal community is (one in each direction), north, south, west and east.
- Add these communities to the class community map.

To introduce the children to the idea that there is another way of seeing Country and community boundaries:

- Invite an Aboriginal guest speaker who has a connection to your local area to teach the children about boundaries and old tracks.

**Trade routes**

Introduce the children to trade routes that extend across Australia. People traded for materials they could not get in their own country, such as hard stones for grinding and spearheads.

- Allocate one Dreaming group to represent your local community. Allocate the other three Dreaming groups to neighbouring communities for role-play purposes. Children research what would have been available in that region for trade with neighbouring communities.
- Goods for trade are special. Children each take time to create something using their individual talents that they know will be traded.
- The four Dreaming groups all from neighbouring communities have come together to trade. This is the role-play.
- The whole class sits in a circle. Children are sitting with what they have each created on the ground in front of them.

Before trading begins, the teacher and children decide on proper behaviours and protocols. For example, should we all be sitting or standing? This needs to be a collaborative decision. Do we have to trade an item that has already been traded – What if I get something I really like and then someone else wants it? The group must decide this before trading starts.
the children to think about how they would like to introduce themselves? For example, first name and Country we come from.

- How do we show that the object we are trading is important to us?
- Children take turns to trade their items, but they cannot trade with people from their same group.
- Continue until each child has a different item from when they started.
- Children could include a trade route to their visual diary.

Trading routes were a way that people passed on news from other areas, brought new songs and dances as well as traded for materials not found or were scarce in their Country.

### Mapping Country

Mapping is a way of expressing connections at different points along a particular track or path in Country.

- Children revisit their school map (from Experience Two) map of their school.
- Children have time to reflect on the many different stories for each of these areas individually, share a story in pairs, is there a story that the whole class has experienced?
- Extend the mapping exercise so that children can choose or design symbols to include in their map that represent - a meeting place for school assembly area; bush tucker for the canteen; a trade route for deliveries; children’s business (eating and playing) and other outside activities.

Introduce the children to ‘Star maps’ as a means of teaching navigation.

- Patterns of stars are used when people are walking outside of their own Country, for ceremony or celebrations as a memory aid, and trigger waypoint, similar to navigation with a GPS today. Their waypoints are also used as a place to rest for a while or a turning point.
- Children could look at how Aboriginal peoples’ explanation of star maps differs from Western explanations. For example, the Emu in the Sky, the Seven Sisters, and the Southern Cross.

Mapping Country is part of a living tradition; it is a landscape filled with stories, ceremonies, knowledge, songs, and histories – both spiritual and human. All of these are imbedded in the Country.

Country is vibrant and alive with the Dreaming. It guides and teaches the people about the right ways to behave both with each other and with the Country itself.
Mapping can be used as a trigger for a song or a story or history. It is one of the aids Aboriginal peoples use to help them remember centuries of knowledge.

**Message sticks**

Extend children’s knowledge of proper behaviours and protocols for crossing community boundaries. Message sticks are carved pieces of wood with symbols and designs, which act like a passport to allow the holder to pass through another Country. Message sticks offer a way of understanding the diversity of Aboriginal cultures.

- The children could locate images of different styles of message sticks.
- Children could create message sticks from cardboard or wood in appropriate shapes, such as oval or oblong.

Teacher facilitated discussion on symbols for meaning. Start with symbols that are familiar to the children, for example, stop sign, school speed limit signs, pedestrian crossing sign, exit signs, to name a few.

- Provide students with examples of symbols in Aboriginal art that could be used to create a message.
- Provide the children with the opportunity also to create their own symbols.
- Children create their own message using the symbols provided or created.

As an extension activity the children could research ways different cultures meet and greet each other and the proper behaviours for such greetings.

**Seasonal signs**

Aboriginal peoples have extensive knowledge of Country and its seasons and the availability of bush foods. Seasonal signs are many and vary from Country to Country. Celebrations can be held when food is plentiful and depends on the Country in different areas of Australia.

Teacher facilitated discussion on local seasons:

- Children could locate picture books to learn about the different seasons in Australia.
- Children identify the different seasonal signs, which are relevant to their area.
- Children could design and make a Country calendar, using plants and bush foods from the local area.
- Children could find picture books about weather. List ways in which animals and people know it is about to rain.
- Children could record the weather for a period of time.
- One day when it is raining allow the children to go outside and see where the water gathers on plants and in Country.
Children could create a T-Chart to compare what Country is like before and after rain. Using an iPad the children could record how the sky changes over a period of time.

Community to community there are also different seasonal celebrations.

### A sense of community

Each community has its own way of doing things, from food preparation, songs and dances, to the language spoken. All of these help the community identify with each other and their Country.

- Children discuss how a sense of group identity is created. They identify how links to their family and community are acknowledged and celebrated.
- Children could share personal experiences about their families and community celebrations.
- Children could explore different techniques for food collection and preparation in different communities and different areas.
- Children could listen to different songs and watch different styles of dance, which are a form of cultural expression.

A sense of community comes as a child learns about who he/she is related to, what the relationship is with the person, how to behave with this person and what is expected of them in the relationship. As the children start to see where they fit in relation to others around them, they begin to get a sense of themselves within family and community.

### Dreaming trails

Dreaming Trails are tracks that have stories attached to various landforms along the way. Aboriginal peoples learn about their history and Country from these trails.

- Divide the class into four groups and allocate an area in your school (or community) for each group to create the history and trails for that area.
- Allow the children time over a couple of days to enable each group the opportunity to spend time in and observe the area.
- Children can then create a sand or Papier-Mache model of their playground and the different Dreaming trails contained within the school or community.
- Aboriginal children are taught that certain places in Country have expected behaviours. To help children understand this concept they could have proper behaviours for certain places along their tracks.
- The group chooses a spokesperson to explain their model to the rest of the class.

Dreaming Trails can be taught to children through art, stories, song and dance.
8.6 Experience Four: Broadening view of Country

8.6.1 Experience Four: Background information for teachers

Aboriginal people can be connected to a number of countries through kinship and totemic relationships. For example, some people may have special responsibilities towards their grandfather or grandmothers’ Country. These people would know the stories, songs and dances of that particular area, at various times throughout the year, and would attend gatherings for ceremonies at that place. (Edwards & Buxton, 1998, p. 48)

At other times, Aboriginal peoples can be called upon for their view and advice, when outside events such as large-scale sporting or cultural events, tourism endeavours or mining proposal are being proposed in their Country. This would be done the way it has always been done. A decision is made by taking in what is right for Country, listening to the advice of the spirits of the Country, particularly the ones responsible for that particular part of the Country. Discussions would then take place with the people who have the knowledge around cultural events, tourism or mining. All of this information is weighed up with what the Country and spirits have said. A decision is not made unless all voices are heard and the information held feels right (O. Edwards, personal communication, 14 October 2018).

Totems

The word ‘totem’ did not originate in Australia. It comes from the Ojibwe Nation, a Anishinaabe First Nation Canadian language word *Doodem* for clan that was borrowed into English as Totem (Native Women’s Centre, 2008). This is a word that is now commonly used in Australian English. Here, it describes the connections, both emotional and spiritual that exist between an Aboriginal person and a particular fish, animal, bird, fish, or plant. Each Australian Aboriginal language group has their own word for ‘totem’; for example, the Darkinyung language group has the word *binanggai*. Aboriginal peoples can have a number of *binanggai* – clan, family and individual totems to develop connections and relationships on a number of levels. Clan and family *binanggai* are passed on to the younger generations.

There are also personal *binanggai*. These can be given to children before they are born, when their mother comes to the physical realisation that she is with child, or shortly after the child is born. Today, in some communities due to the consequences of history, the giving of a personal *binanggai* may be later in life. If a child or young person’s *binanggai* is a wombat, for example, the child or young person will learn all the stories, dances and songs about wombats. They soon
learn to identify with wombats. Children will also visit binanggai sites within their Country. In time, a strong emotional affinity will develop for the child or young person’s particular animal, bird, fish or plant.

**Sense of belonging through binanggai relationships**

An Aboriginal person’s responsibilities associated with their binanggai are different depending on their birth Country and the relationship they have with certain people in their community. As an Aboriginal person it is not you as an individual that is important but your place, responsibilities and obligations within community and Country.

**Kinship**

Clan groups share a common language and kinship system. Aboriginal peoples have developed a way of knowing who family and relatives are which differs from a Western understanding. It is based on a different philosophy of relationships. In this way of understanding, an Aboriginal child would have more than one mother and father – their birth parents plus usually, their mother’s sisters would also be their mothers and their father’s brothers would be their fathers. These relationships also apply to grandparents. The grandmother’s sisters are also grandmothers; the grandfather’s brothers are also grandfathers. Children from a very early age are taught about their place and to whom they are related within this kinship system.

In Aboriginal ways of seeing there are complex, sophisticated levels of kinship, for which each Aboriginal language group would have a different word. In English, the first level of kinship is moiety (a word derived from the Latin word meaning ‘half’). Within this system of knowing everything has two halves. Each half is a mirror of the other. Depending on Country, a child’s moiety is determined by their mother's side (matrilineal) or their father's side (patrilineal) depending on knowledge contained with their Country. People who share the same moiety are considered siblings and have a reciprocal responsibility to support each other.

Everyone who has been brought up with this way of seeing would have a kinship or ‘skin’ name, as well as a given name. Skin names have a prefix or suffix that indicates gender and is kept throughout life and is very important as it carries information about how generations are linked and how people should interact in proper ways. Binanggai are an integral part of kinship, as they also define relationships and connections.

All children love stories. Aboriginal children learn by sitting and listening to stories told by older people in their community. The stories are a key method of teaching children and young
people about their Country and kinship. Kinship relationships teach children proper behaviours. For example, children in some communities are taught from a very early age that the proper behaviour when talking to an Elder or teachers is to avert their eyes. It is disrespectful to establish and maintain direct eye contact. Children learn when they are little who to help and the ways in which that can be done, for example, bringing food to Elders at a social gathering and looking out for and after younger children. As children grow in their understanding in a cultural sense, these relationships can change. When a young person approaches puberty, proper behaviours determine who they can talk to and interact with. These proper behaviours differ from community to community, but children growing up in these communities learn the proper behaviours and right relationships within their Country.

**Belonging to different Countries through kinship**

Aboriginal kinship systems are extremely complex and vary across Australia. As stated earlier, depending on the Country, kinship systems can follow either a patrilineal (paternal) or matrilineal (maternal) line. If a community has a matrilineal line, this means the children belong to the same clan group as their mother and are affiliated with other matrilineal nations. In communities living in accordance with their kinship system members of the same clan group cannot marry each other. When a person marries, there would be one skin group from which partners should ideally be chosen. These marriages are known as ‘straight skin’ and are preferred. Marriages with a forbidden partner would be a ‘wrong skin’ marriage and are not allowed under any circumstance.

In addition to connections with their birth Country or the Country in which they live, children and young people may have connections to Country through their grandmother or grandfather, who may be from a different Country. As young people grow in their understanding of Country, they will gradually learn that they have kinship obligations and responsibilities to more than one Country.

In this way of seeing, an Aunty is the sister of a child’s father. An uncle is the brother of a child’s mother. As such an Aunty or Uncle’s responsibility is to prepare their nieces and nephews for their early education and also discipline when necessary. Aunts or Uncles may also have responsibilities as owners of stories, songs and dances from a particular area in Country and will have to attend ceremonies where the stories and songs need to be heard and the dances need to be performed.
Some Aboriginal peoples can have connections to Country through family in different communities. This means a person might have a position as the owner of certain songs in one Country but have responsibilities as an Aunt or Uncle in another community. Consequently, adults have a number of responsibilities within Country and through kinship, which tie communities together on a number of levels. Children learn from an early age how to relate to the various adults around them and, as they grow, this understanding helps to give the young person a sense of belonging, strong sense identity, and solid connections to Country.

8.6.2 Experience Four: Suggested teaching strategies

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Introducing children to an understanding that people over their lifetime can have connections to more than one Country.</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Connections to more than one Country</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>From children’s understanding of connection to Country, they can now broaden their knowledge to include how people can be connected to more than one Country. Some of the lines that connect people to other communities and Countries are based on totems and kinship responsibilities.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Locate and show children a map of Aboriginal communities and their boundaries in their region. The children could look at the different regional groups, for example, coastal – saltwater, mountains – fresh water, plains and desert regions.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Children could investigate the different resources available depending on Country and how the seasons can affect communities in these different regions.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Children could learn about how Dreaming tracks extend outside their own Country into other Countries. Each Country has its own stories for its part of the Dreaming track or trial.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Invite an Aboriginal speaker who has a connection to your area, and if possible, another Country within Australia, to teach the children about Dreaming tracks or trails.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Totems</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The Totem exercise is designed to enable children to experience an emotional connection with an animal, bird, fish or plant.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Provide children with an opportunity to think about an animal, fish, bird or plant, which they have a connection to. It could be as simple as an Australian animal they like. Once the children have the picture in their heads of that animal, fish, bird or plant, ask them to draw it on a piece of paper or make a sculpture.</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
Once the drawing/sculpture is finished, ask the children to reflect on the feeling of their connection with their animal, fish, bird or plant.

Having established this feeling of connection, the totem exercise carries the children on towards discovering that there are certain behaviours that they must put into place if the connection is to be respected by others.

- After the children have acknowledged their feeling, ask them to create a symbol that represents their connection to their animal, fish, bird or plant. For example, animal or bird tracks, a part of the plant or fish stylised. These symbols could be used in a sand drawing on cardboard.

- Once children have completed their symbol, if more than one child has chosen the same or similar totems group these children together. Explain to the children that they are part of a family group.

- Ask the children to walk around the room or learning space you are using, and gently place their symbol where it feels right for it to be.

- After all children have placed their symbol. The teacher chooses an area outside the classroom, learning space for everyone to gather.

The aim of this exercise is to enable children to experience the feelings that exist with the word ‘respect’ and to learn about the responsibilities that come with their connection to another living entity.

- Teacher facilitated discussion with children. Explain to the children that the symbol they have created represents the feeling they have for their animal, bird, fish or plant. How they allow others to treat their symbol shows their respect or disrespect for themselves and their symbol.

- Give the children some quiet time to think of a behaviour that feels right for them. That is the right way for their classmates to approach their symbol, for example, being quiet when approaching and respectful in the presence of the symbol.

- The children start at the nearest group of symbols. The children who created the symbols lead the class to their symbols, telling others in the class how they want them to behave. It is the children who created the symbols responsibility to guide the rest of the class in the right behaviours.

- Children are invited to speak about their symbol to the rest of the class and, when it is time to move on to the next symbols, they tell the class how it is right for them to leave.
• Continue this journey until all children have had the opportunity to talk about their symbol and proper behaviours.

Aboriginal children learn that there are relationships and proper behaviours associated with their totems through their kinships system.

**Kinship**

Teacher facilitated discussion on how each family is a little different. There is not always a mum and dad, brother or sister, sometimes there can also be grandmothers and grandfathers as carers for children. There can be many aunties, uncles and cousins. Allow children time to think about their families.

• Who lives with you? (It can be people that live with you sometimes or all the time).

• Do you have words for different members of your family?

Expand the children’s concept of family by guiding them to an understanding of extended families in Aboriginal communities. Children learn about the different relationships and responsibilities of members of their extended family.

• Divide the class in half and then each half into two or four groups. Create a class community map with each child’s family name.

• Display the class community map and ask the children to find their family name. Hand out blank extended family charts and assist the children in filling them in with their family members’ names.

• Once the children have an understanding of Aboriginal extended families, they work out their relationship to every member on their family chart.

Aboriginal kinship systems are detailed and complex as they are the basis for how people relate to each other, their roles and responsibilities in family and community. These systems of relationship vary across Australia.

The teacher guides the children in understanding that proper behaviours and responsibilities can differ from Country to Country. People can hold different responsibilities depending on what Country they move in at any given time. For example, a woman in her mother’s Country may take on the role of a healer, but in her father’s Country her role is that of daughter, sister and aunty. Teacher facilitated discussion on what roles do we have at school and at home.

• Children could look at the different responsibilities they have in the classroom or at the school (examples of roles for children).

• As the teacher use yourself as an example, I am your teacher at school, but I am a daughter or son, husband or wife, aunt or uncle, at home with family.
The children could look at roles and responsibilities they have at home.

Re-visit family chart to include each family member’s role and responsibilities.

Are there proper behaviours in your family?

Some Aboriginal peoples can have connections to Country through family in different communities.

8.7 Experience Five: Belonging to Country

8.7.1 Experience Five: Background information for teachers

In learning this way, people also develop an awareness of connecting to Country on some deep level within themselves. This sense of Country is an ever-moving journey, on levels that are intellectual, emotional and spiritual. As people grow in understanding, so does their sense of Country. (Edwards & Buxton, 1998, p. 56)

In this way of teaching, Aboriginal children are immersed in Country to feel a sense of belonging; a sense of self comes from Country.

Our history is in Country

In Aboriginal ways of seeing and knowing, histories are contained within Country. People use these histories to explain to children the way the natural landforms, animals, birds and fish came into being in one’s Country and how the stars were created and by whom. The teaching of these histories helps to develop relationships one has with Country; and the relationship that each person has with others around them. There are stories to develop relationship with each entity in Country. Building a relationship with each one gradually grows the physical, intellectual, emotional and spiritual bond that ties a person to that particular part of the Country.

Language of Country

Aboriginal languages are much more than words, and are not only a communication tool, but also a direct link to Country.

Our languages match the vibration of Country and carry with them much more than mere words. Language comes from the very sound of Country and all living things respond to it on some level. (O. Edwards, personal communication, 24 March 2018)

There is a link between culture and language and how these shape a sense of identity. In Aboriginal ways of seeing and knowing, language comes from Country, and culture is
influenced and impacted by language. In some parts of Australia, Aboriginal languages are sleeping. For many Aboriginal peoples, Aboriginal English is their first language and an important part of their identity. Torres Strait Creole is similarly an important element of identity for Torres Strait Islander peoples and is used as a common language among speakers of different Torres Strait languages.

Today, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples across Australia are speaking out about the need to protect, preserve and maintain languages. In 2017, the New South Wales cabinet introduced an Aboriginal Language Bill, the first state of Australia to do so. This was a statement of recognition by the government of the importance of protecting and maintaining Aboriginal languages.

**Listening to Country**

Aboriginal cultures have developed over millennia, ways of learning and, in turn, ways to educate and pass on knowledge to children and young people. Over time Aboriginal peoples have developed ways that enable people to understand their own connectedness in this Country. Through these ways of learning, Aboriginal peoples learn about respect as a way of being, and how proper behaviours show that respect. The Country continues to speak and its people continue to hear.

**The living narrative of songlines**

Songlines from the past, present and future help Aboriginal people understand how they are connected to a particular place. (Edwards & Buxton, 1998, p. 36)

Songlines have been connecting Aboriginal peoples to Country for time immemorial; they are a living narrative of Country and Sky. Songlines are a way of explaining the creation and connections people have to particular areas in their country. One way this may be done is by telling the stories of how the hills, rock formations, waterholes and rivers were created by a particular spirit ancestor. Songlines are also mental mapping devices. In learning the history of the area, people will also learn about their spiritual connections and responsibilities to look after and care for that particular area in their Country.

This word ‘songlines’ has sometimes been used to describe the interconnecting stories, dances and songs that criss-cross a Country. On one level, their purpose is to teach about the Dreaming Beings and how they created the various special places or places of significance within a Country. On another level, songlines help place people within their families, their histories and Country. Within this narrative of Country, landforms act as a memory aid to a particular part
of the song and story, the knowledge and law are literally grounded in Country. This way of
learning by singing the songs and doing the dances enables people to deepen and express that
connection to place, everything has an order, and everything has a place.

There are many songlines, which are used, depending on a Country’s interconnected history.
One example is the Rainbow Serpent’s journey through many different countries, creating
rivers, hills and mountains as it moved through. Therefore, a number of communities that
perform the songlines of the Rainbow Serpent across a number of different Countries, do so in
their own languages.

**Sites of significance**

All sites are significant places if you are at that level of learning. A person can progress to
higher knowledge sites as that person’s learning and testing is completed. This learning is a
lifelong journey and there are sites for all levels. Some are secret sites and are only known by
the highest level of knowledge people. Other sites are linked to a particular learning that a
person or people are doing at that specific time in their journey. There are sites that are
specifically for men’s and women’s business. Every site can teach us something about the
place, the living things within it, including ourselves. It is we who have to do the work to hear
it speak.

There are many places in Country where you can see the physical evidence of the connections
between Aboriginal peoples and their expression of their culture. One example is Middens,
each midden will have a different composition of shells and bones depending on what part of
the Country it is located. Some middens have artefacts made from materials that were not found
in that area, providing evidence of trade between different communities that gather together for
ceremony and celebrations.

Forms of cultural expression will vary across Australia, depending on the Country. In New
South Wales, for example, these can be seen in engraving on rock platforms along the north,
central and south coast. Here you will see carvings of whales, emus, kangaroos, wallabies, fish,
and Dreaming Beings. In many caves there are ochre handprints of family groups. Some of
these caves were used as shelter; others were classrooms where young ones were taught about
the stories and their responsibility to those stories and themselves. Some caves were large
enough for family groups to live in as they travelled across their Country.
For tens of thousands of years carved trees have contained information on how to travel on Country, marking sites of significance that are unique to that Country. Scarred trees are a sign that you are entering a sacred or special site and you should act respectfully.

8.7.2 Experience Five: Suggested teaching strategies

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Experiencing a personal sense of Country</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Country is home</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>For children to develop their understanding of ‘Country is home’ it is important for them to experience a personal sense of Country.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>A sense of belonging</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Starting from their lived experience children could reflect on their connections to places that they and their family have connections to.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Individually children could think about places where they have a connection to and a sense of belonging. This could be a place they go to with their families or on their own. For example, Grandparents’ house, or the beach.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Are there children in the class that share this connection?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Prompting question – explore how they feel in those places: happy, relaxed, and excited.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Individually children could gather visual representations of their chosen places and put them into a multimedia presentation. With each image, the children add a word explaining their feelings at that place.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>As teacher, guide the children to recognise that their feelings are part of the grounding of knowing Country.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Language of Country</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Introduce children to the notion that Australia is a multi-lingual country. Over 250 distinct Aboriginal languages exist within the Australian mainland, some of which are sleeping, and two languages of the Torres Strait Islands, Miriam Mir and Kala Lagaw Ya. It is important to note that some Aboriginal languages in Australia are in a stage of revitalisation.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Where possible introduce the children to the language of the Country where your school is located.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• The children learn a greeting in the language of Country.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
• The children learn the language words for body parts; one example to show the children is *Marrin Gamu* ([http://marringamu.com.au/](http://marringamu.com.au/)) a song that was created to introduce children to the diversity of the first languages in Australia.

• The children create posters with language words for body parts to display in their classroom.

• The children locate language words for animals, objects or weather features in their local area.

• As a class the children compile a big book of language words with illustrations or a song with actions for younger children.

It is respectful to be able to communicate in the neighbours’ language when in their Country. Therefore, some Aboriginal peoples are fluent in a number of languages.

**Listening to Country**

There are a number of skills that can be developed to listen to Country, allow time for the children to listen to and observe Country.

• Find an area where all the children can gather to start to listen to Country.

• Children gather in a circle, allowing enough space between each child so they are not touching the child standing next to them.

• Guide the children to close their eyes and listen to the land, the sounds around them. Ask the children to tell you what they hear.

• Before listening for a second time, show the children how to put their kangaroo ears on by placing their hands behind their ears and slightly cupping their hands, as this will magnify the sounds around them. Then ask the children to listen for the natural sounds around them.

• Walk around the outside of the circle and choose a number of children by tapping them on the shoulder. Then they drop their hands from their ears, step into the circle and walk as quietly as they can. The children still forming a circle around them try to track the children with their eyes closed, by using their listening skills.

• You, the teacher, call out stop or freeze. The children in the centre of the circle stop moving and freeze. The children forming the circle, with their eyes still closed point to where they think that have heard the children moving within the circle. Once they have pointed to where they believe the children to be they can open their eyes and see if they have successfully tracked someone.
• The children could work in pairs and practice tracking each other over a number of different surfaces within the school grounds.

• To develop the children listening skills further children could take turns to see how close they can get to their partner over a certain distance without their partner hearing them approach.

Paying attention is a big part of seeing and listening to Country.

• To develop their observation skills the children, look around the school grounds to see if they can find any tracks, human or animal.

• The children come back to the circle and share what they have found.

• Children could choose a tree, shrub or flower in the school grounds and watch over it for a time over a few days to see the relationship within its Country. For example, are there birds or insects, or do the leaves and flowers change?

• The children could identify some factors in their Country that are needed by plants.

• With your guidance as teacher the children could create their own object, for example, a pamphlet, artwork, or written description to show the knowledge and skills they have learnt.

These are skills that children will develop gradually as they mature.

The living narrative of songlines

Songlines were the first travels of Ancestor Beings and have been journeyed by thousands of generations of Aboriginal peoples. The history and lore of Country are contained within these songlines.

• Teacher facilitated discussion on: What are songlines?

• Why songlines are important to Aboriginal peoples?

• How songlines connect people to their history contained within Country?

‘Songlines: The living narrative of our nation’ was chosen as the NAIDOC theme in 2016. In that same year Australia’s ancient songlines were woven across the sails of the Sydney Opera House on 27 May as part of the first Indigenous Lighting the Sails at Vivid Sydney.

There are many songlines across Australia. The children could search on the web extend their knowledge of songlines.

Sites of significance and learning places

There are many sites and places where you can see the physical evidence of the connections between Aboriginal peoples and their Country. There are approximately 65,000 sites of significance in the state of New South Wales.
- Children revisit their school map, completed earlier, and mark a site of significance for them and their learning.
- Children take photographs of their chosen site. They divide their photograph into six irregular pieces and swap with a friend to make up each other’s jigsaw, finding out what the friend’s site is.
- Children again work with their own photograph. They identify the part of the photograph that represents their site of significance, for example, a tree, garden, plants.
- Each child takes an A4 page and divides it into four or six equal spaces. They then draw, paint, or print their chosen section of the photograph into each space, making an artwork design.
- Children write an explanation of the site of significance to accompany their artwork.
- As guide, discuss ways the children could present their artworks.

Sites of significance and learning places in Country connect many communities from different Countries over long distances, for example, the migration of whales along the coastlines of Australia. The whales travel such long distances, and through many coastal Countries’ waters, each of which will have their own stories, songlines and sites of significance for whales.

8.8 Experience Six: Different ways of seeing

8.8.1 Experience Six: Background information for teachers

The new arrivals to this land

The arrival of another people to this land created ripples of movement across Countries. The new people came from other cultures and brought with them ways of seeing the world that were alien to the ways of this land. (Edwards & Buxton, 1998, p. 66)

Onto this carefully ordered and maintained Country came a people, whose experiences both societal and religiously were worlds apart from their Aboriginal hosts.

Australia chosen as a British penal colony

In 1770, the then Lieutenant James Cook landed briefly on this continent and claimed the east coast for the English Crown under the doctrine of Terra Nullius “land belonging to no-one”. On his arrival back in Britain he recommended to the English Crown that this continent would
be a suitable place to establish a colony to off load Britain’s overcrowded prisons. From Great Britain’s perspective Australia was perceived as a suitable site for a penal colony and also provided an opportunity for Britain to establish a presence in the Pacific.

On the 18th January 1788, eleven ships of the First Fleet, containing more than 1,300 people consisting of convicts and their children, marines and civil officers, arrived on the shores of Gai-marigal Country of the coastal Darug language group (Australian Children’s Television Foundation, nd.). However, they quickly assessed conditions as unsuitable and moved, on 26th January, north to Gadigal Country of coastal Sydney language group.

**Expansion of the colonies**

Over the next few years, convict colonies quickly spread to Tasmania, and along the eastern coast of the continent encompassing territories that would later become Queensland and Victoria states. This was followed by smaller convict settlements at Moreton Bay, now known as Brisbane and at Port Phillip, which is now known as Melbourne.

By colonising this continent, Britain gained an important base for its ships in the Pacific Ocean. It also gained an important resource in terms of being somewhere to send convicts. Transportation was an established part of the legal system in Britain, and by the 1780s there were large numbers of convicts who had been sentenced to transportation. Over the next 60 years approximately 160,000 prisoners were transported to Australia.

Thereafter, thousands of British settlers, who were attracted to or enticed by the promise of available land, migrated to Australia. This contributed to the expansion of colonisation; in 1825 Van Diemen’s Land (now known as Tasmania) became the second colony in Australia. The Swan River colony was established in 1829 in Western Australia, followed by the colony of South Australia in 1834. A further colony was established in Victoria in 1851. In 1859 the people of Queensland successfully petitioned Queen Victoria for independence from New South Wales (thecommonwealth.org, nd.). In the ten years of the 1850s, a whole new wave of migration started with the discovery of gold and the white population of Australia increased by 500,000.

**Frontier Wars**

The increase of the white population was seen as invasion by Aboriginal peoples but as colonisation by the British. Aboriginal peoples expected proper behaviours from the new arrivals to their Country. However, the colonisers did not respect Aboriginal lore as they did not care to see: they were seeing from their own worldview. This resulted in violent clashes.
Frontier Wars is a term used to describe conflict between Aboriginal peoples and European settlers during the invasion/colonisation of Australia, generally described as from 1770 to 1934. These wars are rarely mentioned in Australian history books (Pascoe, 2019).

**Concept of land ownership**

“The first British visitors sailed to Australia contemplating what they were about to find, and innate superiority was the prism through which their new world was seen” (Pascoe, 2014, p. 12). The concepts held by the ‘new’ people about land came from another culture outside this country. Firstly, these concepts belonged to a different way of seeing Country. The European colonisers saw land, not as Country, but something to be owned as a resource to be used as they thought fit, with a right to buy and sell. This was and is completely at odds with Aboriginal conceptualisation of Country, where people are considered only to be custodians for the time that they are on Country. Not understanding this concept has allowed destructive behaviours to damage Country for future generations.

**More than just hunter-gatherers: changing the prism**

She swept her hand through the grass heads at Cuddie Springs. She glanced down at what she had gathered and walked back to her camp wondering.

She looked around, selected two stones and ground the seeds into a powder.

She probably tasted it and later that day she mixed it with a little water and cooked it by the fire. She made bread.

That was 65,000 years ago. The next people to try to bake bread were the Egyptians 13,000 years later. That woman came up with an idea far more important to humanity than the moon landing. That’s genius isn’t it? (Pascoe, 2019, p. 16)

Few Australians have any knowledge of this sort of ‘genius’. Two authors: Pascoe (2014; 2019) and Gammage (2011), have written recently presenting a more balanced picture. These books present evidence that Aboriginal peoples were not just a hunter-gatherer society but were growing and harvesting crops, had permanent houses and communal buildings, and were farming and managing Country, its animals and plants - behaviours that are inconsistent with the hunter-gatherer notion (Pascoe, 2014). The evidence is derived from the diaries, letters and other written sources by the early British explorers.

Many readers of the explorers’ journals see the hardships they endured and are enthralled by the finds of grassy plains, bountiful rivers and sites where great towns could be built; but by adjusting our [explorers’] perspective by only a few degrees we see a vastly different world from the same window (Pascoe, 2014, p. 12).
Both authors write of how Aboriginal peoples managed the continent for tens of thousands of years. Pascoe (2014) writes:

Europe was convinced that its superiority in science, economy and religion directed its destiny. In particular the British considered their successes in industry accorded their colonial ambition a natural authority, that it was their duty to spread their version of civilisation and the word of God to heathens. In return they would capture the wealth of the colonised lands. (p. 12)

They began to develop ‘land’ from their view and had no interest whatsoever in seeing Country. They were blind to the genius of Aboriginal peoples “they were here to replace it” (Pascoe, 2014, p. 13).

Gammage (2011) highlighted two facts relating to 1788 that illustrate different ways of seeing. Firstly, “unlike the Britain of most early observers, about seventy percent of Australia’s plants need or tolerate fire. Knowing which plants welcome fire and when and how much, was critical to managing land” (p. 1). Fire-stick farming was seen as strange to the new observers as they did not understand that areas of Country could “be burnt and not burnt in patterns, so that post-fire regeneration could take place” (p. 1), enticing animals and ensuring regrowth. Secondly, “animals could be shepherded in this way because apart from humans, they had no serious predators. Only in Australia was this the case, not in England (p. 2). The introduction of animals such as sheep and cattle to Australia had devastating effects on Country – “destroying in just a few seasons soil that had been carefully cultivated for tens of thousands of years” (Pascoe, 2019, p. 28).

**Assumptions of ownership and assumed rights**

Generally, when a person owns an animal it is assumed that the animal is there to do what the person wants. The assumed rights are that the animal belongs to the person, and that the animal has no understanding of what is happening. This Western way of viewing not only animals, but land, allowed people to log old growth forests and change thousands of hectares of Country to a completely different landscape. With the assumption of ownership and the assumed rights, the ‘owners’ could do whatever they wanted.

From a Western perspective, this concept of owning belongings is on a physical level. Physical things can be sold, changed or destroyed by the person who is perceived to have ownership. In contrast, from an Aboriginal perspective, a sense of belonging is “outside of oneself, be it family, community, or Country and carries with it certain behaviours and responsibilities”
(Edwards & Buxton, 1998, p. 70). In an Aboriginal way of seeing, human beings are custodians for the time they are on Country. Not understanding this concept, has allowed destructive behaviours that have damaged Country for future generations of people. “To damage that which you belong to means you also damage yourself” (Edwards & Buxton, 1998, p. 70).

8.8.2 Experience Six: Suggested teaching strategies

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>The arrival of another people to this land</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Why Australia was chosen</strong></td>
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</tbody>
</table>

The activities in Experience Six provide children with the opportunities to see from different points of view and perspectives. While the children work through the activities it is important not to be judgemental but to encourage the children to look at how the new people perceived their world and the reasons for why the new people behaved in the way that they did. Teacher facilitated discussion on the reasons for migration to Australia.

- The children could investigate where the new people came from, their cultural background, structures in their society, and what the new arrivals life was like in their homelands.
- Based on children’s prior knowledge what are some of the reasons people might want to explore other parts of the world at this point in time?
- Why was Australian chosen? Explain to the children how Australia was used as a penal colony for Great Britain. Children could consider why Great Britain wanted to move its criminal population to another part of the world?
- Children research what it would have been like onboard one of the eleven ships of the ‘First Fleet’ from the point of view of an officer, guard, or convict arriving on the shores of Australia.
- Children could create a narrative text from the perspective of their chosen person on the First Fleet.

Colonial beginnings

Building on Stage 3 curriculum content, The Australian colonies unit is a study of colonial Australia in the 1800s. The children could look at the founding of British colonies in Australia.

- Teacher facilitated discussion about how the new people arriving in Australia came from different cultural backgrounds and ways of seeing and how they imposed them on Country.
- What do we know about the lives of people in colonial Australia and how do we know?
- Provide short clips that show how the new arrivals brought their way of seeing the world to Australia and imposed these views on Country.
- Children create a character profile (Convict, guard or officer, or settler) to gather information about their life.

Teacher guides children to an understanding of what Aboriginal peoples’ reaction was to the new arrivals, and what they thought of how the colonisers treated their fellow countrymen and women.

Frontier wars

The Australian frontier wars is a term used by some historians to describe the violent conflicts between Aboriginal peoples and white settlers during the British colonisation of Australia.

- Using their own understandings of the people on the First Fleet and Aboriginal people, the children explore the conflict that arose.
- Children may wish to hold a mini speech competition where one group provides the views of the colonisers; the other group the views of the Aboriginal peoples.

It is important that children understand that the frontier wars were not quickly resolved. They continued for 140 years as the colonisation spread across Australia.

Expansion of the colonies

Teacher facilitated discussion – Why did the colony need to expand and how do you think the colonisers did it?

- Divide the class into six groups, each group investigates when and why each state or territory in Australia was ‘colonised’.
- The children could create a timeline for each state or territory to present their findings to the rest of the class in a form of their choosing.
• In their research the children could consider how the expansion of European settlement impacted on Country; how Aboriginal peoples in Australia impacted European settlers. For example, Bungaree assisted with European exploration. Children also consider how the expansion of European settlement impacted Aboriginal peoples and cultures.

Through a range of sources, the children investigate the impact of invasion and European settlement and how people have different points of views and experiences.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Aboriginal resistance</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Aboriginal resistance took the form of guerrilla warfare, in south-eastern New South Wales. This type of resistance, organised by people such as Pemulwuy of Bidjigal (Botany Bay), Windradyne of Wiradjuri (Bathurst), and Bilin Bilin of Yugambeh (Logan). The children view First Australian Episode 1 Clip 3 NSW Resistance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Support children in finding out about the life of Aboriginal resistance fighters.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Prompting questions: What Country did the person belong to?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- When did the resistance take place and in what form?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- How successful was the resistance and why?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Children present their findings.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Aboriginal resistance varied in intensity at different places and at different times.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Assumption of ownership and assumed rights</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The new people’s view of the land comes from other cultures and countries. These ways of seeing land and not Country meant that they quickly changed the land into something more familiar to their eyes.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Children look at the introduction of new species of animals, for example, foxes, rabbits and hunting dogs for sport and the consequences of introducing these.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Children could investigate the beginnings of Australia’s agricultural society and the establishment of the Sydney Royal Easter Show that has been going since 1823.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Children could research how the land was changed for agriculture and industry.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The new people’s attitudes towards land have shaped and influenced land use over time. Land was, and continues to be, perceived as a resource to be utilised and developed – with no consideration for Country.
Belonging to Country versus land ownership

A central concept to be explored is belonging to Country versus the concept of land ownership.

- The children create two lists under the headings Ownership and Belonging. The children think about an object they own and a group they belong to. Under each heading the children write down the emotions that belong to each object or item they have written in their lists. Look at the difference between the two lists and talk about the emotions that belong to the wider picture of ownership of and belonging to the land.
- Children write from their own experiences of belonging and ownership to identify the feelings associated with these two concepts.
- Children compare the different ways of owning a piece of land and belonging to Country.

There is increased awareness these days of global warming and its effects as a result such agricultural practices.

8.9 Experience Seven: Finding the balance to walk with Country

8.9.1 Experience Seven: Background information for teachers

To walk with the land is a two-way process of returning nourishment. In caring for the land as part of the process of giving back. (Edwards & Buxton, 1998, p. 56)

Country is “loved, needed, and cared for, and Country loves, needs, and cares for her peoples” (Kwaymullina, 2005, p. 12). Country is family; sense of self comes from Country. Everything you do is an expression of your connections to Country: Aboriginal peoples sing the songs necessary for a particular place within Country, dance the dances that belong to their Country and perform rituals and ceremonies. In doing this people give back in both physical and spiritual ways for the nourishment they receive from Country. In this way people walk in balance with Country.

Living with Country

Aboriginal knowledges have been greatly suppressed as a part of the colonial process in Australia. Our people lived completely sustainably, and in balance with each other and Country, since the Dreaming. Aboriginal peoples who have been grown up in this way have
intimate knowledge and comprehensive understanding of Country, which has been developed over thousands of generations. With this multi-disciplinary knowledge base, Aboriginal peoples’ knowledge of the seasons, the life cycles of plants, animals and birds and the intricate relationships between all living things, allows people to live with Country. In this way of knowing and by looking for the patterns of relationships in Country, it is possible, for example, to see that when the wattle is flowering, you know it is time to fish for mullet and whiting as they are migrating down the coast. This understanding means people travel Country and connect with the rhythms of Country.

**Conservation is still a scientific perspective on land**
Conservation can only take people so far in their understanding about the land; conservation is a step in the right direction in enabling Australians to learn about Country. Conservation is still based on the colonisers thinking and their use of land. It will take time and a willingness to learn about their own lack of knowledge of Country.

This identification with Country is on many levels from intellectual, social relationships, emotional connections to the deeply spiritual (Edwards & Buxton, 1998). We kept our Country clean and healthy by regenerating Country through practices like fire-stick farming; we gain knowledge of the relationship between animals and plants through our totem systems. Ancestral Beings left their spirit in Country for future generations to follow the lore of Country. Significant sites are meant to be interacted with, danced on, sung up, and have ceremonies performed on and around them. They are the places where the spiritual and the physical meet – where the ancient stories can be spoken about, danced and sung. They are the places that are the doorways to other worlds. What they are not, is something that is to be conserved and isolated, separated by a boardwalk where human feet do not touch the ground. “In the meantime these sites wait to be sung up again, to feel the rhythmic dancing of feet, the vibration of voices calling it alive again to play its part in the health of the Country; in the meantime Country waits” (O. Edwards, personal communication, 20 September 2018).

There are many people in Australia today who are looking for the right ways to work with Country. In learning from time-honoured ways to care for Country, people have the opportunity to find a balance for people and Country.

**The balance for Country and people today**
Over the past 231 years there have been changes to the surface of Country, with farming, mining and redirecting water sources. Because the new people did not learn about this Country...
upon their arrival, it allowed ways of farming and treatment of the land to be put into place that did not take into account what is right for Country.

Today, there is greater awareness amongst Australians of the importance and delicate balance in this land to which they have come. They are now beginning to learn the lessons that were never learnt on arrival. This will involve finding new ways to look at everything, understanding the damage to Country is ultimately to themselves. For example, there has been logging of old-growth forests, the salt tables have been brought to the surface from too much irrigation, of the flow of rivers have been redirected, and there has been over use of chemical fertilisers in order to keep Country producing crops when it was exhausted and in need of a rest. It is now waiting to be sung up again.

**Connection to Country is felt**

Aboriginal connections to Country are based on all levels of a person’s being, the physical, intellectual, emotional and spiritual. The intellectual capacities of our old people are and continue to be immense. The cultural memory is written in Country; songs and stories are attached to the landscape and there are places within Country that are visual aides to recall these.

Relationship with Country is two-way: one of receiving and one of giving. People have responsibilities to Country, which they perform and in return for they receive nourishment, physically, emotionally and spiritually. This relationship is reciprocal and all entities are connected. Through this Aboriginal way of learning, a person also develops an awareness of connecting to Country on deeper levels within themselves, an emotional library of experiencing and feeling Country. As this connection grows so does one’s sense of Country. This sense of Country is felt rather than just known. Through ways of listening to and feeling Country, people stand with and belong to Country on very deep levels.

Finding the right way for Country, in an Aboriginal way of seeing, means there is always a proper way of doing things that takes into account the needs of people and what is right for Country. This concept is based on many levels of understanding and spiritual connectedness to Country. In this way, people walk in balance with Country. There are reciprocal cycles that connect Country, people and spirit. Sites of significance are open for all to learn from when it is their time. It is a natural way of living with Country (O. Edwards, personal communication, 17 August 2017).
Respect and what it means will be different for every individual participating in *Yurunnhang Bungil Nyumba*, as a person can only express respect from where they are in themselves and their understanding of the concepts in the seven learning experiences.

8.9.2 Experience Seven: Suggested teaching strategies

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Developing a growing awareness of Country and finding a balance</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Before embarking on this final experience, as the guide, it is important to revisit what knowledge and understanding the children have in their emotional library from previous experiences. Review some of the foundational elements of <em>Yurunnhang Bungil Nyumba</em>.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Living with Country</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Aboriginal peoples walked on Country practising horticulture and aquaculture for tens of thousands of years. A thirty-six-thousand-year-old grinding stone used by Aboriginal peoples has been located in New South Wales, used to turn seeds into flour for baking. This was well before the Egyptians made bread around 17,000BC (Pascoe, 2014). Researchers estimate there were over 140 grasses for grain (Pascoe, 2019, p. 30). European explorers’ diaries describe in detail grain harvesting by Aboriginal peoples across Australia. The Aboriginal grain belt extended far beyond the current wheat belt.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Locate a map of the Aboriginal grain belt and the contemporary grain belt in Australia.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Children investigate ways Aboriginal peoples live with Country. For example, use of native grasses, the selection of seeds to plant, soil management, harvesting crops, and food storage.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>People today have an interest in Australia’s bush foods, the industry is growing.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Children could investigate Aboriginal food enterprises.</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Teacher facilitated discussion on Aboriginal fishing methods and practices and how they vary across the Australia depending on Country. For example, the use of lines and hooks, nets, different types of spears, ancient fish traps and cages, and eel traps and pens.

- The children could investigate the language words and materials used in their local area to make fishing spears, nets, lines and hooks.

- What are the main food items collected from your local waterways? How are they collected, prepared, and cooked? For example, the collection of *ugerie* or *biddiagan* in line with the tides. Only the mature shells are collected, young shellfish were returned to the surf to grow.
- The children could locate information on fish traps, weirs and fish harvesting systems that were in the rhythms of Country.
- Based on their findings, in pairs, the children could design a fish trap or harvesting system that would work in their local area.

For special occasions and times of celebration, community gatherings, or ceremonies, more fish would be needed. At these times canoes would be used.
- The children could investigate what trees would be used to carve the canoes in their region.

In this way, children’s awareness of how people and Country can be in balance, through a reciprocal relationship, will be enhanced.

**Walking on Country**

Aboriginal peoples are the ultimate environmentalists. There is a right time to receive from Country in accordance with the seasons of Country, and a time not to take from the land, the rivers or the sea. Provide the children with opportunities to walk on Country, to show the connection between Country, people and spirit. Some suggestions are:

- Going Biddiagan. Collecting pipis at the beach with an Aboriginal guide.
- Finding *Nguruny* (Emu) eggs with an Aboriginal guide.
- Go bush in your local area with an Aboriginal guide to identify and taste bush tucker, visit grinding groves and find grinding rocks, or visit rock engravings.
- Children could research different ways Aboriginal peoples walk with Country and make a blog post.

These activities provide children with a more sophisticated understanding of finding the balance to walk with Country.

**Conservation is still a scientific perspective on land**

There are large areas of Country that have been set aside under the protection of National Parks and Wildlife. Teacher facilitated discussion to find out what the children already know about National Parks and Protected Areas.

- The children could write some of the key points on what National Parks are and why they are important.
- Children could research the history of the closest National Park or Nature Reserve to their school.
- Research the people involved in the initial push to set aside an area of land as a National Park or Nature Reserve and their reasoning. For example, Bouddi National
Park on the Central Coast of New South Wales was established through the efforts of Marie Byles, Paddy Palin, and a small group of local people from that area.

- Children could develop a proposal to protect an area of land, explaining their reasoning.

World Heritage areas are places that have been set aside for protection.

**Finding the balance for people and Country**

Within each community and Country there are people who have extensive knowledge and wisdom about Country. These people are called Elders and are consulted when there is a problem that the community cannot find a solution to. The Elders know the rules that apply to the lore and, after much discussion with others of knowledge, come to the proper decision as to the way to care for Country.

The following is a suggested activity that the whole class could participate in. The class could role play the class as a community using Aboriginal ways of decision making on an issue affecting the community, for example, lack of water and its effects.

**Preparation before the role play:**

- Teacher selects an issue for class community to find a solution.
- Teacher divides the class into three family groups. From each family group select two knowledge holders.
- Teacher nominates which knowledge holder is responsible for animals, birds, fish, people, land and ceremony.
- Teacher provide a prompting question for knowledge holders to consider in developing their knowledge base, stating the issues and its effect on the community.
- While knowledge holders are thinking of one solution for the issue, break the remainder of the class into family groups. Each family group has responsibility for Animals, people and Country.
- As a family group discuss the issue and formulate a question from the perspective of the concern for animals, people and Country. Nominate a person from your family to ask your question of the knowledge holders.

**Role play**

- Position knowledge holders in a circle in the centre of the room.
- Family groups sit in various points in the room.
• The nominated three family representatives sit in a line about one meter from the knowledge holders and wait to be waved forward one by one to ask their question of the knowledge holders.
• Once they have asked their question they return quietly to their family.
• Knowledge holders discuss the three questions because they are all connected.
• Once the knowledge holders come up with a possible solution of what they can all do as a community that is connected, they return to their family group and pass on the possible solution.

Teachers should be aware that children may have ongoing questions, queries or concerns as they add to their emotional library in relation to the activities they have undertaken in finding a balance that is right for them and Country.

The framework was amended three times. In its completed form it was used with the fourth school. Interviews with those participants elicited no further significant suggestions for improvement, thus, data saturation was reached.

After a time, it was important to consider participants’ evaluation of the PLD and the usefulness of the blog. This constituted Phase 3 of the research and is discussed in Chapter 9.
Chapter 9 Yarning circles via technology

9.1 The blog

It was recognised from Phase 1 of the study that having a follow-up option after the face to face days of the PLD was essential for the continued learning of the teacher participants. The blog was created as a response to a number of teachers requesting to have a place to allow them to collaborate before trialling a new idea “because sometimes questions don’t come up until you go to teach something” (P3). The aim of the blog was to provide a place of reference that is directed by teachers for teachers and a space to share ideas with colleagues.

While this was a great idea, what I failed to realise is that my experience with blogging is fairly limited and the initial uptake was disappointing. Even though I have had a blog for a number of years, using it as an engagement tool, is a whole different world. Despite my best intentions, I realised it was not effective. In early January 2018, I consulted with Leesa Watego, Managing Director Iscariot Media and founder of Deadly Bloggers, to discuss options to increase participant engagement with this online platform. She provided guidance around the use of a number of different tools as well as planning a communication and engagement schedule. This enabled me to try a number of platforms to increase teacher participation and feedback.

The first step was to use slides with images of the on-Country day as a trigger for engagement and an opportunity to recap on concepts explored and strategies from in-school day that they, as teachers and guides for the children, had experienced. Secondly, I sent emails when new content was added to encourage teacher participants to the platform. A third steps was to pose questions – Can you think of an activity for …..? Thereafter, teachers were drawn to the opportunity to co-design a learning and teaching sequence, collaborate, share and support each other.

Initially in the setting up of the blog, as researcher, I played a dominant role. However, with the additional prompts from early 2018, teachers increasingly undertook responsibility for the information being shared on the blog. After a year it was timely to evaluate the effectiveness of this ongoing support in relation to the PLD. This was Research Question 4 – What is participants’ evaluation of the effectiveness of the PLD and online forum in supporting their professional learning needs in the long term?
9.2 Research design for Phase 3 – elements of qualitative evaluation

In order to answer the fourth research question, it was important to have a methodology precisely tailored to providing the data that was sought.

9.2.1 Methodology – qualitative evaluation

Evaluation refers to judgement, whether referring to everyday, subjective assessments people make, or whether one is referring to more formal evaluation noted as “disciplined inquiry” (Schwandt, Lincoln & Guba, 2007, p. 22). It can refer to evaluation where there is collection and analysis of information about outcomes and structure of programs or interventions and how participants review these immediately and in retrospect. “Qualitative evaluation is characterized by an emerging construction of … elements, methods, techniques, and instruments that are incorporated into the evaluation puzzle to understand and change program practices” (Tayabas, Leon, & Espino, 2014, p. 3). In the current study, this was the case with the introduction of images, emails and prompts to promote engagement, which led to increased collaboration. Given that there were five schools involved in the study, each with its idiosyncrasies, qualitative evaluation was particularly useful in providing the variations in opinion of a number of participants in different contexts (Kerber, Kirchhof, Cezar-Vaz, & Silveira, 2010). The evaluation component of the current study was providing participants’ evaluation a year or more after the PLD and what, further, they would recommend.

“Qualitative evaluation deals with practical issues, with the potential of promoting change in the course of programs, and leads to judgments of merit and value linked to a specific context and population” (Tayabas, Leon, & Espino, 2014, p. 4). In particular, by using a qualitative evaluation approach, the current study illustrated how the practical issues of the blog affected teaching programs in their real settings, using the experiences and perceptions of the participating teachers. Fitting with the methodologies and data interpretation of previous phases of the research, this methodology is grounded in the epistemological perspective and traditions of qualitative research. It aims at improving the understanding and interpretation of phenomena, in this instance the PLD, from the standpoint of the teacher participants involved (Carr, Loucks, & Bloschl, 2018).
9.2.2 Method

Again, group interviews were used to gather data on participants’ views. The same thematic coding was used to identify participant’s positive and negative perceptions of the usefulness of the blog and the PLD.

9.2.3 Findings

The blog as a social platform provided the space for participating teachers to share elements of the framework that they successfully introduced to the children in their classes and to ask for advice in adapting their lessons that may not have been as successful.

P2: Having the blog was something to fall back on. I tried something and it didn’t quite work. After asking for advice I felt comfortable to give it another go from a different angle instead of going back to the old ways of just letting it go. Seeing what other teachers were trying gave me ideas, another way to approach it.

The teachers developed creative ideas together, going beyond their own individual learning by interacting with and guiding each other through their understanding of the concepts discussed on Country, and how to implement them into their classroom practice.

Teachers need to understand the new knowledge before they can share it with the children in their class. The in-school days provided the initial assistance in translating their new ideas into their teaching practice, shared understandings that cultivate learning, and generated further interaction on the blog. For example,

P25: The fact that we have access to the blog is great as some of us need the support of text-based resources because we were ignorant of any other way of approaching this area. At first just the thought of integrating an authentic perspective was difficult because I was uncertain of how to go about it. So to have this space to ask questions and be assisted, was great.

The blog provided a space for ongoing collegial peer support and a means to contact the researcher if teachers were “a bit stuck” (P3). This was considered of prime importance by participants in effectively changing their practice as noted by one of the participants:

P17: The professional development days gave me opportunities to learn from another way of seeing, experiment in my classroom, reflect, and then discuss my thoughts on how to improve my lessons with teachers. Having access to the blog
added another level as we were able to get answers to our questions that we may not have asked in front of our colleagues.

The blog was a safe space for teachers to yarn via technology, share thoughts, ideas and resources over a period of time. Thus, the two days of PLD are “not just isolated” (P5). This illustrates the importance of offering professional learning opportunities over time so teachers have the opportunity to refine and apply their learning to their teaching practice within the context of their classroom. Further discussion on the findings of phase three of the research are reported in the third journal article in the next chapter.
Chapter 10 Third Journal Article

The third journal article which is in press at the time of presenting this thesis, continues the story of the support teachers needed and highlighted the importance of the ongoing nature of that support.


Abstract/Purpose

When providing professional development for teachers, certain factors should be considered and included to ensure it is effective and enhances teacher practice and outcomes for children in their classes. While this is achieved in many curriculum areas, there has been little written about effective professional development for teachers in relation to Aboriginal education in Australia, enhancing teacher confidence in meeting the needs of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children. This paper describes a study concerned with the ongoing development of a professional learning framework empowering primary school teachers to infuse Aboriginal ways of seeing and being into their classroom practice.

Acknowledgement of Country

I would like to firstly acknowledge with respect the ancestors of the Country in which this study was conducted, the Gadigal, Bidjigal and Dharawal peoples of Eora Country. I would also like to acknowledge my own ancestors and ancients of Bundjalung and Yugambeh Countries. Taking this time to pay my respects to these peoples and Countries through this acknowledgement is to locate myself firstly as an Aboriginal woman and then as the researcher for this study.

Introduction

There have been professional standards for teaching in New South Wales, Australia since 2005. In 2011, national standards for teachers became mandatory in all States and Territories. As noted by Mockler (2013) there has been ‘a shift in the past decade from a discourse focused on teaching quality to one focused on teacher quality’ (p. 37), leading to greater accountability for teachers to demonstrate quality teaching. The benefit of the standards, according to State and Territory policy-makers, is that they ‘make explicit the elements of high quality, effective
At the same time in Australia, there has been increasing determination to promote ways for Aboriginal children and young people to have the same educational outcomes as their non-Indigenous peers where currently and historically there has been an enormous difference in educational outcomes. For example, ‘Indigenous students (45.4%) are less likely to complete year 12 compared to non-Indigenous students (88.1%)’ (Buckskin, 2013, p. 4). This has led to a shift from deficit models of support and approach in government rhetoric from ‘closing the gap’ to finding ways to enhance the wellbeing of Aboriginal children and young people in schooling by creating space for Aboriginal worldviews and the use of a ‘strength-based approach’ (Perso, 2012, p. 18).

Therefore, two new standards were introduced into the AITSL (2011) national professional standards for teachers: ‘Focus area 1.4 Strategies for teaching Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students’ (p. 11) and ‘Focus area 2.4 Understand and respect Aboriginal and Torres strait Islander People to promote reconciliation between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians’ (p. 13). Under each standard are descriptors for teachers to meet in progressive stages of their careers from ‘graduate’, through ‘proficient’ and ‘highly accomplished’ to ‘lead’.

At that time, with the introduction of the national standards, I was the Leader of Learning Aboriginal Education with the Eastern Region of Sydney Catholic Schools. There are eleven dioceses within New South Wales; most Catholic schools today fall under the guidance of the dioceses and are known as systemic schools (Catholic Education Commission NSW, 2015). Teachers whom I supported discussed their disquiet about their capacity to meet the ‘proficient’ descriptors of standards 1.4 and 2.4. I therefore formalised it in a research study exploring whether that feeling of insecurity was pervasive amongst primary (elementary) school teachers in that region, and what professional learning and development (PLD) they would like in order to enable them to meet the two new descriptors as follows:

1.4 Strategies for teaching Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students - Design and implement effective teaching strategies that are responsive to the local community and cultural setting, linguistic background and histories of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students. (AITSL, 2011, p. 9)
2.4 Understand and respect Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples to promote reconciliation between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians - Provide opportunities for students to develop understanding of and respect for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander histories, cultures and languages. (AITSL, 2011, p. 11)

**Methodology and methods**

In the study, a purposive sample of 32 teachers from five systemic Catholic primary schools in the Eastern Region of the Archdiocese of Sydney volunteered to participate in semi-structured group interviews.

Table 1 below shows the number of teachers and students in the schools, the socio-economic status (SES) of the student body, the percentage of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students in each school and the percentage of students achieving in the top quarter in Australia based on national testing in years 3 and 5.

**Table 1: School and participant demographics**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Years’ teaching</th>
<th>School A: 22 teachers; 388 students; high SES; 11 per cent Aboriginal; 44 per cent in top quarter in Australia</th>
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<tr>
<th>Years’ teaching</th>
<th>School B: 16 teachers; 125 students; low SES; 55 per cent Aboriginal; 6 per cent in top quarter in Australia</th>
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<table>
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<tr>
<th>Years’ teaching</th>
<th>School C (two interviews P11-16 and P17-22): 20 teachers; 297 students; middle SES; 4 per cent Aboriginal; 48 per cent in top quarter in Australia</th>
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Data from the interviews were analysed using thematic coding of transcripts: first the transcripts of the interviews were read to discover emergent themes and categories, allowing themes and meta-themes to emerge (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2011; Creswell, 2013). Those initial clusters provided the broad view and the subsequent line-by-line coding allowed for higher and higher levels of abstraction to be reached (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).

Findings in phase one of the research were that these experienced teachers displayed an acute lack of confidence in meeting these two standard descriptors and they expressed the need for, and provided advice on, what aspects they would value in professional learning opportunities.

The data derived from this phase of the study drove the content of the ensuing PLD (Buxton, 2017). The thematic analysis of the interviews identified concepts and content teachers felt would benefit them in meeting the two descriptors. The content that participants requested, in phase two of the study, was organised into a professional learning framework comprising seven
experiences, each including background information, guiding principles, teacher prompts, and sample teaching and learning activities.

The design of the professional learning framework was driven by current understanding of what constitutes effective professional learning for teachers, which is seen as paramount for meeting the diverse needs of learners (Borko, Jacobs, & Koellner, 2010). Learning experiences for teachers often include teaching rounds (Bowe & Gore, 2017), lesson study (Cerbin & Kopp, 2006; Chibchibu and Kihara, 2013), coaching (Darwin, 2000; Megginson & Clutterbuck, 2007), workshops or seminars (Zepeda, 2013). This paper discusses the approach adopted in terms of seven key elements for successful professional development for teachers (Darling-Hammond et al., 2017; Desimone, 2009).

Phase two of the study was conceptualised and enacted within an adult education and teacher professional development theoretical framework and Design-based research was the methodology utilised. The professional PLD was provided at four schools – the fifth school has planned to undertake the PLD in October 2019. After completing the PLD, semi-structured interviews with participant teachers took place and were transcribed and thematically coded, providing their reflections and feedback for improvement on the PLD they had undertaken. The feedback from the semi-structured interviews after participants had completed the PLD led to amendments and refinements in the design and content of the PLD. These are included in the discussion section of this paper.

Phase three of the current study emanated from participants’ request for ongoing support and collaboration. It contributed to new insights on how professional learning has empowered teachers in Sydney Catholic Schools’ Eastern Region to infuse Aboriginal ways of seeing into their teaching practice, as they shared thoughts, insights, resources and effective learning and teaching activities with each other collaboratively in person or via a blog.

**Concepts explained for teachers**

‘Country’: In Western parlance, ‘country’ is written with a lower case ‘c’ and denotes the whole country of Australia. The Aboriginal concept of ‘Country’ is capitalised to distinguish it from the Western concept and because it is a common noun and a proper noun. The country of Australia is made up of hundreds of Countries that still exist today. Country is the foundation of Aboriginal ways of knowing, where everything is in relationships, where the spiritual and physical worlds of Country interact.
‘Dreaming’, ‘Dreaming tracks’, ‘Dreaming sites’, and ‘Ancestral Beings’: The Dreaming is the spiritual concept of purpose and connectedness that encompasses spiritual knowledge past, present and future. Dreaming tracks are words that describe the journeys or paths taken by Ancestral Beings, their patterns of movement and connection that criss-cross Australia. Today, Aboriginal peoples follow these same tracks to keep the connections alive. Dreaming sites are places along the tracks and are usually natural landforms: sources of water, mountains, rock formations, hills and trees that have special stories attached to them. These stories are about Ancestral Beings, which were usually in animal or bird form. Their actions and behaviours shaped particular places within Country during the Dreaming. Dreaming tracks tell of special features in the land and seascapes, spirit beings that have passed that way or reside in those places. These stories, and walking the tracks, help people from that particular area to connect and identify with their Country on deeper levels. There are many songs and dances that are still sung and performed today by Aboriginal peoples whose Dreaming belongs to the area of the Country.

‘Yarning circle’: is a discussion forum that can be formal or informal.

‘Message sticks’: In most areas, message sticks are small (between 10 and 30 centimetres) flat pieces of wood usually carved or painted with symbols and designs. When one community wished to notify another of a celebration, or if they had items they wanted to trade, a young man was selected to carry a message stick to the people of that Country. The message stick was a physical sign that the person had permission or a very good reason to be in another’s Country. When someone carrying a message stick entered another Country, the messenger, always a youngish man, would announce himself, show respect through body language, observe protocols and explain his reason for his visit.

‘Songlines’: have been connecting Aboriginal peoples to Country from time immemorial; they are a living narrative of Country. Songlines are a way of explaining the creation and connections people have to particular areas in their Country. One way this may be done is by telling the stories of how the hills, rock formations, waterholes and rivers were created by a particular spirit ancestor. Songlines are also mental mapping devices recording the location of waterholes, rivers and hunting grounds. In learning the history of the area, people will also learn about their spiritual connections and responsibilities to look after and care for that particular area in their Country.
Overview of the professional learning provided in Phase 2 of the research

Over the course of two days primary school participants took part in a professional learning opportunity. The first day was on Country, where Aboriginal educators, through the concept and meaning of Country from their world view, guided participants through the content learning experiences from an Aboriginal way of seeing. Follow-up in-school workshops on the second day assisted participant teachers in designing learning and teaching, implementing those concepts into strategies and activities for the children in their classes at the various levels.

The philosophy of Yurunnhang Bungil Nyumba (Learn Respect to Teach)

The professional learning framework is written from an understanding that people each learn what they can, according to their own growth and understanding. Concepts throughout the PLD, discussed below, are repeated to allow for this growth in understanding; important elements are repeated several times, when they are concepts that require repetition at different stages of learning for deeper levels of understanding. In an Aboriginal way of learning, it is understood that the real learning of deeper concepts about self, Country and spirit comes when the learner is much older – physically, intellectually and emotionally.

Within the framework, there are seven experiences, which gently lead teachers, and in turn the children, on a journey of discovery about their connectedness to each other and a clearer understanding of their place in this Country.

The seven concept areas of content provided during the PLD can be summarised as follows:

First: Teacher as guide – learning through a sense of place

A safe learning space was created for the teachers to develop a sense of security and confidence in the knowledge one has at any point in time, while at the same time acknowledging that understanding is partial and developing, as learning is a lifelong journey. This security, when provided in the classroom, would ensure that children, too, are not afraid to take risks in their learning.


Learning through observation and participation where appropriate, Dreaming stories as a teaching strategy were introduced. The Dreaming explains all life and connections between people, Country and expression of spirit. Each Aboriginal community has their own histories and lore that are contained within Dreaming stories. Proper behaviours for little people are
taught through these stories; showing respect through one’s behaviour, was addressed. This learning was consolidated through a yarning circle (discussion forum) and games.

Third: Community in Country – place-based knowledge.

Local community boundaries were discussed; then the concept of Country was extended to include a sense of self and community. A sense of community happens much the same way as a person learns about a sense of Country. A sense of community happens from early teachings and the gradual building of a person’s perception of their place within the community. Participants learnt about Dreaming tracks, trade routes, message sticks, seasonal signs and celebrations.

Fourth: Broadening view of Country

Aboriginal peoples can be connected to a number of countries through kinship and totemic relationships. Participants learnt about how a sense of belonging is developed through these relationships and how proper respectful behaviours apply when having any dealings with the people in their community. In this way, people learn in community about behaviour and consequences for inappropriate or disrespectful behaviour. Aboriginal communities are based on family kinship systems that are very detailed and complex and vary across Australia and each Aboriginal community has different expected behaviours.

Fifth: Belonging to Country – Country is home

In Aboriginal ways of seeing and knowing, histories are contained within Country. Aboriginal cultures have, over millennia, developed ways of learning and, in turn, ways to educate and pass on knowledge to children and young people. Over time Aboriginal peoples have developed ways that enable people to understand their own connectedness in this Country. Participants were assisted in observing and listening to Country. They then started the journey to walk with Country and experienced how this could be understood by children through songlines (capturing histories and the living narrative of Country) and why sites of significance are important.

Sixth: Different ways of seeing – The arrival of another people.

Links to history were made highlighting the different ways of seeing brought by non-Aboriginal peoples, who held the view of assumed ownership and rights. The contrast between a sense of belonging to Country versus land ownership was highlighted for inclusion with older children.
Seventh: Finding the balance to walk with Country.

Links here were to sustainability and science in the curriculum with a focus on the balance for Country and people today. Participants were shown how walking with Country is a two-way process of returning nourishment, for self and Country. In doing this, people give back in both physical and spiritual ways for the nourishment they receive from Country. In this way people walk in balance with Country. Country needs people and people need Country.

Design elements of effective professional learning and development

In recent decades, a ‘new paradigm’ for professional learning and development has emerged from research that questions and cautions against the traditional, one-day, ‘drive by’ workshop model (Darling-Hammond et al., 2009, p. 4). From the literature there seems to be a building consensus with regards to key principles for designing learning experiences that can impact teachers’ knowledge and practice. (Desimone, 2009; Gregson & Sturko, 2007; Hawley & Valli, 1999).

This consensus, articulated by Desimone (2009) and others, argues that effective PLD is: a) content focused; b) features active learning; c) is collaborative and aligned with relevant curricula and policies; d) models effective practice; and e) provides coaching and expert support. Darling-Hammond et al. (2017) include two more elements to this five-part framework, namely, f) time for feedback and reflection; and g) ensuring professional learning is of sustained duration.

Findings and discussion: participant views linked to seven elements for effective PLD

The PLD reported in this paper aimed to enable primary teachers to have the knowledge and skills to meet the professional standard descriptors 1.4 and 2.4. In conceptualisation and development of this PLD, the seven design elements for PLD to be effective, noted above, were utilised. Additionally, Yurunhang Bungil Nyumba (Learn Respect to Teach), the professional learning framework, is written from an Aboriginal way of seeing, learning and teaching. This goes beyond content – it takes into account the way knowledge is taken in by walking on Country and experiencing connection to Country and, thereby, building participants’ emotional library. This is embedded in the seven elements for effective professional development identified in the literature and these are discussed below.
PLD is content focused

‘Professional learning that has shown an impact on student achievement is focused on the content that teachers teach’ (Darling-Hammond et al., 2017, p. 5). Findings of phase one of the current study determined the concepts and content explored during the on-Country days which teachers had identified as areas for their learning. The professional learning on-Country provided teachers with a substantial amount of necessary content as described above. In each iteration, of the professional learning undertaken by teachers, following design-based research processes, they provided feedback on the value of the content covered and offered suggestions, allowing for the refinement of the content over time. The way the activities were introduced, were valued by teachers:

P23: And the games, the way you taught us the listening and tracking skills for children, the art of listening, putting our kangaroo ears on. I can see the children really enjoying that activity.

P22: One thing that seems obviously important to you [Aboriginal peoples] and which I think is really interesting is language and the way you use songs to teach because that is the way children learn best and to learn some language of this country is such a gift to the children.

In Aboriginal ways of seeing, language comes from Country, and culture is influenced and impacted by language. Teacher feedback expressed their willingness to learn more about languages of Country and how the connection between culture and language can contribute to a sense of identity. This was therefore added to the framework.

PLD ensures active learners

‘The design of professional development experiences must address how teachers learn, as well as what teachers learn’ (Darling-Hammond et al., 2017, p. 7, emphasis in original). Teachers are adult learners and their professional development is a form of adult education (Gregson and Sturko, 2007). Professional learning opportunities need to acknowledge and value that teachers are adult learners who learn in different ways, come from a variety of cultural backgrounds, and work in a variety of content specific settings. The professional learning framework in this study is grounded in guiding principles that take into account the fact that a learner is a physical, intellectual, emotional and spiritual being (O. Edwards, personal communication, 23 October 2016). Little (1993) argues that the one-size-fits-all workshops, a common approach to professional development, ‘requires little in the way of intellectual struggle or emotional
engagement and takes only superficial account of teachers’ histories or circumstances’ (Little, 1993, p. 22). Agreeing with this view, (Knowles et al., 2005) hold that bringing in outside experts who determine the content and mode of delivery of the professional development can turn adults into passive learners, who can in turn develop negative attitudes that become a barrier in the learning process.

In the current study, the content of the professional learning was determined after extensive consultation with teachers who wanted to have the knowledge and expertise to move away from tokenistic dot-paintings and the bringing in of a dance troupe which was common practice prior to the PLD:

P8: Or do it on a really tokenistic level so we can tick if off as done. But with no depth. Lots of us did the token art lesson.

P6: We were teaching on the surface, a superficial exploration, we would focus on a particular artefact or an aspect of the culture, like art but provided no real context, connection to the people or community with who the artefact or art belongs to, let alone the connections to Country.

P7: Before the day at (location on Country) I think as a school we relied on outsourcing, as we didn’t know much about teaching about. Not really. It is difficult not to feel it’s not your business. How do I know? It’s only saying what you have read or heard others say. But I don’t feel confident. It’s not my culture to speak about at a deeper level. But to be on Country and experience it with you ladies’ guidance – I can try and talk from my experience of it. What I saw and felt on the beach. That was great, to realize that I can make the connections.

More recently, Darling-Hammond et al. (2017) suggest that active learning moves away from ‘sit and listen’ lectures-based model to one that engages teachers directly in the practices they are learning and are connected to teachers’ classrooms and students. Furthermore, ‘providing them an opportunity to engage in the same style of learning they are designing for their students’ (Darling-Hammond et al., 2017, p.v) is recommended.

In the current study, this was seen as vital. First, the teachers chose to undertake the professional learning – it was not imposed; second, the content was derived directly from teacher input; third, to enhance active participation, the professional learning therefore provided teachers with a full day of experiences on Country. In an Aboriginal way of teaching
and learning, teachers are people who have gone through the experiences first before they guide the children through them. The professional development also took into account a variety of learning styles with opportunity for participants to listen, watch, learn through play, create through dance, and express through art, and to collaborate with colleagues:

P18: The way the professional development was delivered - it was so practical. Other in-services we go to we sit in a room all day and you start drifting off because it is so much information. We had a lot of information but it was the way it was delivered. I was actively engaged the whole time. Different people contributed all the time, for example, depending on the activity – song, dance, reflection.

Active learning opportunities allowed teachers to transform their teaching and ‘not simply layer new strategies on top of old ideas’ (Trotter, 2006, p. 8)

**PLD allows for collaboration**

‘As schools have increasingly structured teaching as a collaborative community endeavor, it makes sense that teacher collaboration is an important feature of well-designed PD’ (Darling-Hammond et al., 2017, p. 9). The PLD provided teachers with opportunities to share ideas and collaborate in their learning within the context of their school. The in-school day, in the current study, built on the concepts learnt on Country by providing teachers with opportunities within their classrooms and the school grounds to trial teaching strategies and learning sequences for the concepts explored on Country. As with the on-Country day, before starting the learning experiences with the children at school, it was necessary for the teachers to consolidate their learnings on Country by going through the experiences themselves in this new context.

This is important from an Aboriginal way of teaching for a couple of reasons. First, as the guide for the children, teachers will need to have some knowledge of the process involved purely on a physical level. By doing the activities prior to the children, they know what is involved. Second, there is an emotional level of understanding that has to do with the connections being made to the learning space through a process of belonging. Teachers had the opportunity to go through the process of belonging before the children would enter the classroom so they were able to make the learning activities applicable to the age group they were teaching.

Through a guided walk around the school grounds, teachers were provided with opportunities that could develop the children’s sense of self and how the outside world touches them by exploring their sense of sight, sound, smell, and touch. With guidance from an Aboriginal
educator the teachers designed activities for their children to become more aware of their surroundings.

Teachers traversed from their own experience on Country to planning for their children. For example, extending on the content discussed above, Aboriginal peoples belong to their home ‘Country’. Teaching of the Dreaming through stories and developing skills through play fosters Aboriginal children’s learning about their Country. The histories contained within the stories and songs help Aboriginal children to learn about their home and Country. As people grow and mature, they will learn to identify with that area and particular places within it. The adults around them teach Aboriginal children how to behave at different places in Country. Certain ways of behaving are an integral part of seeing and relating to different places within one’s Country. This is woven into young children’s learning as behaviour shows to what extent people know and understand their connection with an area. During the in-school day, teachers collaborated with peers teaching the same aged children to develop activities that would promote these understandings for children in their classes.

‘Teaching can be an isolating business, where individuals rarely get time to reflect on how to improve things collectively’ (Smeed and Jetnikoff, 2016, p. 119). When time for professional reflection and collegial discussion, problem solving and future planning are part of the mix, professional development in schools can be effective and sustainable. Agreeing with this view, Darling-Hammond et al. (2017, p. 10) hold that ‘[c]ollective work in trusting environments provides a basis for inquiry and reflection into teachers’ own practices, allowing teachers to take risks, solve problems, and attend to dilemmas in their practice’. Therefore, during the in-school day, teachers had time to meet in stage groups (stage one - Kindergarten to Year 2; Stage two – Years 3 and 4; Stage 3 – Years 5 and 6), an opportunity they welcomed to discuss their plans and ideas in a safe space. In this way the teachers’ learning moved beyond their individual classrooms:

P24: To be given the time to put thought into how we will present our own learnings into our classrooms and the planning with other teachers helped me come to the realisation that I can really do something that is really quite powerful and special for the kids. I would never think that we would be able to do that.

Another teacher, one of many, spoke of the value of ongoing collaboration with peers and how it gave her confidence in the level of knowledge she had acquired.
P14: I didn’t want to teach this because I didn’t know if something was right, and how to approach it. How to bring that personal perspective, that confirmation. That it is OK to be where I am at, as that is the only place I can teach from.

This quote exemplifies the realisation that teachers had come to, that they do not need to apologise or feel insecure in the level of knowledge they possess as they will continue to expand this level of knowledge through further collaboration with their peers and the professional learning providers.

The teacher-identified need for ongoing sustained support and collaboration led to the development of the blog, phase 3 of the current study. Teachers identified a number of areas that they felt they needed guidance: ‘terminology in the form of a glossary’ (P22), up to date resources, and a safe place to get their questions answered as they arise.

**PLD provides models of effective practice**

Taking on the recommendation of Darling-Hammond *et al.* (2017) that PLD activities should mirror the style of learning that the children will experience, the in-school days accomplished this. There were opportunities for Aboriginal educators to model content and pedagogical learning strategies for the teachers who will become the guides for their classes. Teachers undertook the teaching and learning activities themselves, in the collaboratively developed lessons, just as their students would be doing.

**PLD provides coaching and expert support**

P12: To me it was like having a mentor teacher in Aboriginal ways of seeing. Someone who has the expertise, learning about the concepts and going through the strategies. We do it for other key learning areas, so why don’t we do it for Aboriginal education?

During both the of the professional learning days, on Country and in school, Aboriginal educators guided the teachers by modelling teaching in an Aboriginal way, facilitating group discussions through yarning circles, and providing stimulating experiences that catered for widely differing initial starting points of individuals:

P3: I think realising that we do know the content but also building confidence on how to teach it, the time to share ideas and being open to try new things because we have gone through the activities ourselves and know what it feels like, or us knowing what we are comfortable with or what we are not sure about and that
it’s okay to be unsure. We were encouraged to ask questions and assured that there was no judgment on our learning, the same as we are with the children in our classes.

The PLD works from the premise that there cannot be expectations or judgements imposed on the learning of the people involved.

P19: I think every teacher in the system should have to do it. The way you can engage in it at all sorts of levels, to be in Country and you walk with you both on Country, talking with you about it, you built relevance for us, you helped us to couch it.

In the initial stages of this study, Aboriginal ‘experts’ guided teachers through the professional learning but it has become evident through discussions on the blog that the participant teachers are increasingly taking on a coaching and mentor role with one another.

**PLD provides time for feedback and reflection**

Feedback and reflection are two distinct but complementary processes and are both powerful tools for effective professional learning (Darling-Hammond *et al.*, 2017; Bates and Morgan, 2018).

P12: What I found most rewarding was the feedback I received, that what I was doing was okay – and the way forward with a wide range of potential activities.

As noted by Schon (1987) feedback and time for reflection are critical in deepening knowledge and understanding. The on-Country day followed the recommendation of Darling-Hammond *et al.* (2017, p. 14) with ‘built-in time for teachers to think about, receive input on, and make change to their practice’. The blog provided further feedback on strategies implemented and resources to develop knowledge and further reflection on teaching practice. This reinforces the notion expressed by participating teachers that professional learning needs to be a process and not a singular event. During the on-Country day teachers appreciated the time put aside for deep and considered reflection as recommended by Smeed and Jetnikoff (2016).

P28: The fact that we were given time to sit, listen and reflect on our new learnings during our time on Country was great.

Time was also given before the in-school day to reflect further on their learning and to consider areas where those teacher participants felt they needed further information. In this way the PLD was careful to avoid the pitfall described by Smeed and Jetnikoff (2016, p. 107) ‘teachers are
not subjected to a one-off workshop off site, only to flounder alone, when they try to implement the new ideas and skills in their individual classrooms’.

**PLD is of sustained duration**

Providing professional learning experiences that incorporate the elements described above requires time for effective implementation. Time is an important consideration for a number of reasons. Firstly, there are competing agendas for the allocation of professional learning days that are allocated to a school in a given year. There is a need for supportive leadership teams to allocated one of these days for on-Country and another for in-school application. As a Principal stated:

P4: I would like to see compulsory professional learning opportunities for all staff in our primary and secondary schools. We should be required to allocate a staff development day and follow up experiences so that all staff are resourced to implement the cross-curriculum priorities.

Although the literature does not clearly identify the duration of effective professional development, it does indicate that meaningful professional learning that translates to changes in practice cannot be accomplished in short, one off workshops (Darling-Hammond *et al.*, 2009; Desimone, 2009). Participant teachers agreed with this view:

P8: We need regular targeted experiences relevant for the community in which the school is situated as well as compulsory in-servicing on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander histories, culture and languages so that all teachers can confidently implement the History Curriculum.

P10: There is so much for us as teachers to learn, I think it would be so beneficial to have another day next year. So we are grounded in what we are learning, in order to be confident to pass on our learning with the kids in our class, without fear.

Teachers requested ongoing days on Country to ground their learning, but not at the expense of the in-school days, as they also requested, through the blog, more teaching and learning strategies to use with their class.

P13: The activities we did on the day and bringing them back to the children. Maybe a follow-up day would be good so we have more activities that we know are alright to do with the children. That’s what was special for me. Going outside
[in-school] and doing that brought the connection together. I know I don’t do it all the time and I certainly didn’t do it previously with my class. When I did do it, after the professional learning, it was so special and unique. If there was a chance to do more than just the two days so we have more strategies that we could use, that would be awesome.

Data derived from semi-structured interviews with participants across the four schools (named P1 – P32), following the professional learning, showed that teachers would value ongoing support. Thus, phase three of the study came about with ongoing support being provided by means of a blog. This was considered of prime importance by participants in effectively changing their practice as noted by one of the participants:

P17: The professional development days gave me opportunities to learn from another way of seeing, experiment in my classroom, reflect, and then discuss my thoughts on how to improve my lessons with teachers. Having access to the blog added another level as we were able to get answers to our questions that we may not have asked in front of our colleagues.

This illustrates the importance of offering professional learning opportunities over time so teachers have the opportunity to refine and apply their learning to their teaching practice within the context of their classroom.

**Conclusion**

This study highlights that if professional learning is developed taking into account current literature on elements of effective professional learning for teachers, the outcomes can be transformational. In the current study, this view is captured by the following participants:

P4: A bit like teach the teacher? Or coaching that seems to be big at the moment. A chance to follow up or check in on how we have put into practice what we have learnt over these two days and how we are going with implementing these aspects and activities into our classrooms. A chance to de-brief in a way, to talk through what worked and what did not. The blog is great for that.

P18: There has to be a commitment by our system to keep this going, to have opportunities to build on what we are learning. I would definitely sign up for that each year and I am positive that a lot of our staff would also.
With a crowded curriculum and a limited number of allocated PLD days for teachers, to request two full days for a non-examinable aspect of the curriculum can be difficult. However, as clearly demonstrated in this study, the time allocation was considered to be of prime importance by participants.

The seven elements noted in the literature do not promote the importance of one element for successful professional development over another. While this study showed all elements to be important, a major contribution that this study makes is highlighting the importance of the ongoing collaboration and support teachers need if they are going to change practice in the longer term. For example, teachers in the first school in the study, two and a half years after on-Country and in-school days, still talk about the on-Country day when new content is being discussed in their stage groups, and how they will incorporate Aboriginal ways of seeing with this content. They share these insights with colleagues via the blog. Often PLD is offered by ‘experts’ but over time, teachers need to be confident and equipped to continue without the expert’s constant input. In most instances the ongoing collaboration and support has been achieved through the blog which is available to teachers anywhere any time.

Finally, the value of the PLD described in this paper, was attributed by teachers to the improved learning for children in their classes. Participants noted increased engagement on the part of Aboriginal children:

P28:  After attending the profession learning days and trying the cultural lessons it increased my Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students’ pride in their culture and has helped build their parents’ confidence in participating more in school events.

Non-Aboriginal children also showed increased interest and teachers noted improved interpersonal relationships amongst the children in their classes.

With the refinement of the PLD as recommended by participants, the learning experiences have been consolidated and will be published and made available to all interested teachers in Australia. The principles embedded within them are likely to be applicable to teachers beyond those shores.
Chapter 11: Yarn up and unfinished business

11.1 Continuing the discussion

This current study sought to contribute to the space for new knowledge (see Painting 1: Standing solid and tall) and the potential benefits for Aboriginal children and young people at the cultural interface of schooling by recognising and valuing their unique identities, cultures, linguistic backgrounds and being responsive to the local community.

P1: I think because when you learn about it generalised – I think it’s removed from them. But when you teach it from the context of an area they know, they have a greater understanding of how meaningful it is and the fact that it did actually happen and it’s not just a story, its history and it actually did happen.

P5: It’s authentic learning in the true sense of the word, I suppose.

11.1.1 Standard 1.4

For teachers to meet Standard 1.4, it is essential that the starting point be Aboriginal lived realities and that Aboriginal knowledges are valued as equal to Western knowledges (Yunkaporta, 2009; Nakata, 2008; Martin, 2003). This requires systems of schools, leadership teams and classroom teachers to recognise and value Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander knowledge systems and develop an understanding of the complexities of the cultural interface. As noted in the first journal article, Nakata’s (2007) cultural interface theory constituted an appropriate framework in capturing the nuances and multi-dimensional views that non-Indigenous teachers expressed in considering their capacity to meet Standard 1.4. Teachers commented on specific examples within their schools when Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children saw their identities and cultures valued in their learning, by being visible in their classrooms, and how this increased their willingness to participate, to share experiences, and their self-efficacy was visibly enhanced. “Definitely. You can see even with the kids when they read a story and they don’t connect with it. But, if it is something local, or they see themselves, their culture, they love it!” (P4). Learning can become relevant through their lived experience.

11.1.2 Standard 2.4

This current study also explored the breadth and depth of teachers’ understanding about Aboriginal histories, cultures and knowledges to inform the professional development they
would like to receive in this area. Standard 2.4 requires teachers to develop a broad knowledge of Aboriginal histories and cultures to work towards reconciliation. This linked back to Standard 1.4 where the study identified teachers’ perceived capacity to teach Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people effectively. Teachers found that after the PLD, they had more insight and this knowledge was valued as they noticed Aboriginal children were becoming increasingly engaged in classroom discussions and felt safe to share their lived experiences. As articulated by P21 “I found a clear change in some of the non-Aboriginal children’s attitude and willingness to participate in the activities because of how Aboriginal way of seeing were being introduced to them”.

There was also a request from teachers for more content so that they would better meet Standard 2.4. This was provided (see Chapter 8 for background information for teachers) and reflected on in Phase 3 of the study.

11.2 Perceived barriers identified by teachers

An identified area of concern that was common across all the interviews was that teachers lacked confidence and were afraid of causing offence. Therefore, a key consideration in developing the initial framework was how to empower non-Indigenous teachers to be comfortable with what they know, and with the understanding that they can only teach from their current understandings. The level of knowledge teachers have at any point in time will change as they continue to expand their knowledge through their learning journey. Teachers need to have the efficacy to share their learnings and not let fear be a barrier.

Another area of concern voiced by the teachers was how their lack of knowledge contributed to superficial, tokenistic, and potentially damaging outcomes for the children in their classes. Teachers also highlighted the lack of professional learning opportunities for them in the teaching of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people. At the time of the first phase of the research, they noted that PLD in this area was extremely limited. “You can’t even go on the Sydney Catholic Schools Intranet and do an in-service of your own accord. Like you can go and do one for numeracy, Maths Matters and ESL Matters and Literacy Matters. Why isn’t there an Aboriginal Matters?” (P13). As Yunkaporta (2009) maintained, it is an unfair expectation placed on classroom teachers if “[t]hey are expected to do something that nobody has shown them to do” (p. 5). These concerns shaped the development of the initial framework. Following design-based methodology, the professional learning framework was introduced to one school and feedback for improvement was provided by participants. As
reported in the second journal article, the content and delivery of the learning was amended and improved until the final iteration was completed (see Chapter 8). This was interwoven with what was identified in the literature as the critical elements of adult education and teacher professional development if it is to be effective.

11.3 Elements of adult education and teacher professional development

As discussed in the third journal article, several aspects of the PLD were identified as extremely important to lead towards sustained change in teaching practices, to the benefit of children and young people.

11.3.1 Cannot be one-off or only one in

Agreeing with Darling-Hammond et al. (2009) and Desimone (2009) teachers in the group interviews identified the need to continue their learning journey and to have this stipulated on the school agenda. Consequently, the professional learning in this study was not a one-off; two days of professional learning was provided and the blog ensured a community of learners received ongoing support. In School A, bringing this to fruition was a supportive leadership team. The teachers appreciated having the opportunity of the two days but expressed the need for “follow-up days throughout the year. It needs to be on the agenda, even at a staff meeting, a check in on how we are going maybe for ongoing support” (P4).

A point of difference that was raised by participant teachers was the comprehensive inclusivity of the professional learning opportunity; that all members of the teaching staff were able to attend both the day(s) on Country and the inclusion of the follow-up day in school. Most of the professional development days that teachers had previously attended required attendance of one teacher only from that school, with thirty to forty schools in attendance for the day. The expectation there was that the one teacher from the school would take the learnings back to the school and share with colleagues. When this took place, it would turn into a purely intellectual exercise of sharing content. Participants described that, at times, this caused some apprehension on the part of the ‘single’ teacher. This teacher would have been selected to attend because the interest and will was there, with motivation and desire to make a difference in their teaching practice, but then to have the expectation that “now you know it all” (P15) or be the “go-to person with regards to everything Aboriginal” (P12), causes stress. Being the beacon for Aboriginal education in a school and not having access to ongoing support was found to be counterproductive.
11.3.2 Community of learners

Schools are well placed to easily develop a community of learners amongst the teachers. They have the elements already embedded: they love their school, they love their learners, and they are intensely interested in enhancing their practice to the benefit of the children they care for and educate. This current study capitalised on these elements. The powerful impact of the on-Country day in each of the four schools was precisely because there was a level of cohesion and trust between the members of the group from the outset. This, coupled with their express desire to undertake the professional learning, meant that they were open to the richness of the learnings within the experiences.

11.3.3 Support from system of schools

Providing professional learning experiences that incorporate the elements described above requires time for effective implementation. As discussed in the third journal article, for schools to allocate two or three days of professional learning to a non-examinable aspect of the curriculum can be problematic and will only be enacted if principals can be confident that the time allocation will be worthwhile. The findings of the current research go some way to providing that assurance, but always the support of the senior management and the system will be paramount.

11.4 Personal learnings on this research journey

My personal learnings include both cultural and ethical considerations.

Many Indigenous researchers have struggled individually to engage with the disconnections that are apparent between the demands of research, on one side, and the realities they encounter amongst their own and other Indigenous communities, with whom they share lifelong relationships, on the other side. There are a number of ethical, cultural, political and personal issues than can present special difficulties for Indigenous researchers who, in their own communities, work partially as insiders, and are often employed for this purpose, and partially as outsiders, because of their Western education or because they may work across clan, tribe, linguistic, age and gender boundaries. (Smith, 1999, p. 5)

For me, four incidences of tension evolved. First, the original intent of *Yurunhang Bungil Nyumba* was to develop a framework of pedagogy for primary teachers so as to have wider applicability whereby people in different Countries could incorporate their own content. The
pedagogy employed for the PLD was based in Aboriginal epistemology in method and content; the teachers’ learning built on the physical experience of being on Country and personally experiencing the transmission of their own knowledge to the children in their classes. This way of teaching and learning takes into account the fact that a learner is a physical, intellectual, emotional and spiritual being (O. Edwards, personal communication, 23 October 2016). For this to be possible, specific content needs of participating teachers were taken into account as they were developing their own knowledge base. This was incorporated into their learnings within the framework. It is necessary to stress that, where possible, specific content needs to be responsive to the local community. Teachers need to be open to opportunities to develop their own connections to Country and their emotional library of experiencing and feeling Country. Consequently, in this thesis, the content here is likely to be more applicable to people living on the east coast of New South Wales and may not be transferrable in its entirety to other Countries. Nevertheless, the Aboriginal concepts that are explored and pedagogy remain relevant and transferrable. It is hoped that having access to the content for this cohort of teachers, may provide ideas to other teachers who are wishing to make use of the framework.

Second, journal articles as part of this EdD would ideally each have had only one focus. However, understandably, journals wanted a more comprehensive package, so I had to put aspects in to meet their requirements that would have fitted better in the overarching story of the thesis – the parts between the journal articles.

Third, within the journal articles I often wrote about the concepts to be included in experiences requested by participant teachers without explicitly explaining the concept itself. It is so intrinsic to my ways of knowing that it makes sense to me with no further verification. I am inclined too often to assume this is general knowledge, which it may not be. One particular example is a journal article reviewer noting that Country is being capitalised and used in a way that is different from Western parlance and I needed to provide an explanation. This was a learning for me not to assume that readers or teachers will have the background knowledge that I have.

Fourth, there was tension for me in ensuring that the background information I provided for teachers did not become misinterpreted by them when translated into activities for children. Consequently, I tried to develop clear examples of what would be appropriate activities for children. As noted by Daes (1993):
Heritage can never be alienated, surrendered or sold, except for conditional use. Sharing therefore creates a relationship between the givers and receivers of knowledge. The givers retain the authority to ensure that knowledge is used properly and the receivers continue to recognise and repay the gift. (p. 9)

This notion caused tension for me as I did provide content and I must trust that it will be used properly and respectfully and contribute ultimately to the benefit of Countries, to their peoples, and, most importantly, to their children and young people.

The framework is not intended to sit in a bookcase or on a shelf collecting dust, but to be used, reviewed and adapted to suit the needs of individual schools and to be responsive to local communities, to work in partnership with community people on Country in finding common ground and balance.

11.5 Synopsis of answers to the research questions

Findings from the phases of the research answer the research questions as detailed in the three journal articles. In summary, the four subsidiary questions complement one another to answer the overarching research question. These were:

11.5.1 Questions 1

What elements would participants like to see in a professional learning package to enhance their capacity to meet Standards 1.4 and 2.4?

Here, the advantage of case study methodology was exemplified as explained in the first journal article. Using a multiple case study methodology (Yin, 2014), I was able to see similarities and differences across the five schools that had varying numbers of Aboriginal children and young people enrolled. It was interesting in this phase of the research that experienced, confident and competent teachers in any of the five schools – even those with a high Aboriginal enrolment - did not feel that they met the Standards at the start of the study. They requested PLD on Aboriginal pedagogies and concepts that would move them away from surface level, tokenistic, repetitive activities – teaching the same elements of culture year on year with the same level of knowledge. Teachers requested strategies that would counter deficit thinking in relation to not only Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people but also their culture. They wanted to know how to enact high expectations for both. These findings were reported and discussed in the first journal article.
11.5.2 Question 2

What aspects of the professional development package did participants find most useful?

The second question provided four main responses. First, participants cited being placed in Country so they began to understand the concept of teacher as guide, as a key positive. Second, they valued experiencing the journey themselves before guiding the children on their learning journey. Third, they appreciated comprehending the notion of an emotional library that they began to build up themselves; that they would be able to introduce this concept to their children. Fourth, they highlighted the critical importance of the in-school day to translate their learnings into practical activities appropriate to the age of children they were teaching. This was when the realisation dawned that they would be able to do this teaching from their current level of knowledge in that point in time. These findings were presented in the second journal article.

11.5.3 Question 3

What suggestions would participants have for improving the professional development framework such that it would be transferable to other contexts?

Also discussed in the second journal article are participants’ recommendations. These were: the opportunity to spend more time on Country, more information on the teaching of the Dreaming, further information on kinship responsibilities and community protocols (see 8.1.1). This additional information is provided in the final iteration of the background information for teachers (see Chapter 8). The last recommendation related to ongoing support which was provided through means of the blog and was discussed in the third journal article.

11.5.4 Question 4

What is participants’ evaluation of the effectiveness of the PLD and online forum in supporting their professional learning needs in the longer term?

This was the focus of the third journal article. Participants spoke about their change in practice, about children’s engagement with the pedagogy and the content, about their excitement at seeing the children embracing a new way of seeing. Participants noted several aspects in the design of the PLD that ensured they did indeed change practice. However, they emphasised that the ongoing support, through the online forum, was an important element giving them confidence in changing their practice in the longer term.
11.6 Overarching research question

The overarching research question in the current study was: How can teachers be empowered to strengthen pedagogy and meet the Australian Professional Standards 1.4 and 2.4 comprehensively to produce more positive outcomes for all: Aboriginal, Torres Strait Islander, and non-Indigenous children, and young people?

This current study was developed with a convenience, purposive sample in one region of the Archdiocese of Sydney. While the findings were positive in this system of schools, there is no guarantee that it would be transferrable to other school systems. This framework provides one way that teachers can be supported; it is not necessarily the only way. It is not one size fits all. In different systems of schools, teachers may have very different responses and needs.

A lot of thought, a lot of collaboration with my guides and collaboration with the participants has led to the way the final iteration of the framework looks. Design-based research provided the opportunity to get feedback immediately from teachers from four schools to refine the content of the framework specific to their needs. However, this cannot be claimed for all schools, in all Countries. As discussed in Chapter 1, while aspects of the framework are likely to be very useful to other schools wishing to strengthen teachers’ capacity to meet Standards 1.4 and 2.4, the findings of this research are not generalisable – nor were they intended to be.

11.6.1 Where to next?

The intention from here is to put the framework up online and receive feedback from teachers in other schools and systems to see if it meets their needs in enhancing teachers’ capacity to meet Standards 1.4 and 2.4. The site will be set up as a payback system – if a person receives, she or he needs to give back. If teachers access the resources on this website, the expectation would be for them to share their own cultural learning with other teachers in this learning community (O. Edwards, personal communication, 10 November 2019). The payback could be requested in the following way: if you have a question, ask it; if you have a great idea, share it; if a teaching strategy worked really well in your classroom, share that too.

11.7 Conclusion

Coming full circle, I finish with where I started – by acknowledging Country and giving full recognition of Country as our first and eternal teacher. As McKnight (2017) has stated, “No human owns knowledge from Country, Country does. Elders and community members are the custodians to hold, protect, care for and share” (p. 240). Connections to Country will differ
from person to person, depending on where a person is in their own learning and growth journey. Relationship with Country is two-way: one of receiving and one of giving. People have responsibilities to Country, which they perform and in return as they receive nourishment, physically, emotionally and spiritually. This relationship is reciprocal and everything is connected and interwoven. In Aboriginal ways of learning, it is understood that the real learning of deeper concepts about self, Country and spirit come with maturity, “It will take a certain maturing of people before they earn the privilege of understanding something more than just surface level view of this continent” (O. Edwards, personal communication, 31 October 2019). As human beings, we all have a responsibility to start this journey of learning to care for Country, as Country needs people and people need Country; Country patiently waits.

The final painting presented here (see Figure 4 below) is one I started at the beginning of the journey I’ve undertaken in the completion of this study. It acknowledges Country as first teacher and our guides. It is not finished. This is deliberate, as the journey is not finished. This thesis is a major part of the work, but, as discussed earlier, the framework Yurunnhang Bungil Nyumba needs to be implemented in other contexts and may in all likelihood be refined further.
Figure 4: Yurunghang Bungi Nyumba: Unfinished business
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LETTER TO PRINCIPALS

Dear Principal

Professional learning

Professional learning in relation to equipping teachers to comprehensively meet Standards 1.4 and 2.4 of the Australian Professional Standards for Teachers is available to your school. It will consist of one full day on country with in-school follow-up.

A research project separate from the professional learning

The content of the professional learning has been developed from input from 32 teachers in primary schools in the Eastern Region. I really would like this professional learning to be of an excellent standard and useful to teachers more broadly in Australia. In order to refine and improve on what teachers experienced, I need their feedback, critique and suggestions. Members of your school staff are therefore invited to participate in the research project described in the attached Participant Information Sheet. The title of the research project is: Yurunnhang Bungil Nyumba: Infusing Aboriginal ways of being into teaching practice through professional learning.

Approval and invitation

The research project has already been granted approval by the Sydney Catholic Schools (Reference Number: 2016007).

If you are happy for your staff to be invited to participate in the research project, please would you distribute the attached Participant Information Sheet among your staff.

It should be noted at the outset that neither the name of your school nor the names of teachers who choose to participate, will be mentioned in the final report.

Yours sincerely,

Lisa Buxton

Date:
Appendix B - PARTICIPANT INFORMATION SHEET

Yurunhang Bungil Nyumba: Infusing Aboriginal ways of being into teaching practice through professional learning

Dear Participant

You are invited to participate in the research project described below.

What is the project about?

The research project investigates what your perceptions are in relation to professional learning you will be undertaking. The content of the professional learning has been developed from input from 32 teachers in primary schools in the Eastern Region. I really would like this professional learning to be of an excellent standard and useful to teachers more broadly in Australia. In order to refine and improve on what you experienced, I need your feedback, critique and suggestions. The research project is separate from the professional learning that the Sydney Catholic Schools has requested.

Who is undertaking the project?

This project is being conducted by Lisa Buxton and will form the basis for the degree of Doctor of Education at The University of Notre Dame Australia, under the supervision of Professor Marguerite Maher.

What will I be asked to do?

If you consent to take part in this research study, it is important that you understand the purpose of the study and the tasks you will be asked to complete. Please make sure that you ask any questions you may have, and that all your questions have been answered to your satisfaction before you agree to participate. If you wish to participate:

- You will be invited to take part in a group interview with colleagues, or an individual interview if you would prefer. The interviews will be audiotaped and professionally transcribed.
- The interview questions will not have a right or wrong answer. They will be seeking your views on the professional learning opportunity you undertook and suggestions for improvement.
- The interview will take no more than one hour of your time.
- The interview will take place at school or at a mutually convenient location” (not at the participant’s home unless necessary).
- There are no expenses related to participating in this research nor is there any payment to you.
- You will have access to the Shared Blog so you will be provided with ongoing support as you put new learnings into practice in your classroom.
- After a year you will be invited to see if you would like to contribute further to the research by providing a reflective piece on how you taught before the professional learning and what lasting impacts it has had on your pedagogy and any benefits you might have noticed in relation to the student learning. This is completely voluntary and is not an expectation.

**Are there any risks associated with participating in this project?**

There are no specific risks anticipated with participation in this study. However, if you find that you are becoming distressed it is advised that you receive support from your region’s wellbeing team.

**What are the benefits of the research project?**

For you, personally, will be the benefit of knowing you have made a valuable contribution to the development of a Framework that will potentially enhance the capacity of teachers to meet Standards 1.4 and 2.4. The flow-on potential benefits are that teachers will have the knowledge and skills to be able to better meet the needs of children and young people in their classes.

**What if I change my mind?**

Participation in this study is completely voluntary. Even if you agree to participate, you can withdraw from the study at any time without discrimination or prejudice. If you withdraw, all information you have provided will be destroyed. Withdrawal from the group interviews is possible before they take place. However, after the recording it will not possible to take off individual participants’ contributions from the recordings because the professional transcription will have de-identified participants.

**Will anyone else know the results of the project?**

Information gathered about you will be held in strict confidence. This confidence will only be broken if required by law.

Confidentiality will be maintained by the data being de-identified. Specifically, you will be given a pseudonym when the interviews are transcribed. Only the researchers will have access to the audio files and the transcriptions.
Once the study is completed, the de-identified data will be stored securely in the School of Education at The University of Notre Dame Australia for at least a period of five years. The results of the study will be published as a journal article and a thesis.

**Will I be able to find out the results of the project?**

Once we have analysed the information from this study we will email you a summary of our findings. You can expect to receive this feedback in 2017.

**Who do I contact if I have questions about the project?**

If you have any questions about this project please feel free to contact either myself lisa.buxton@nd.edu.au or my supervisor, Marguerite Maher (marguerite.maher@nd.edu.au). My supervisor and I are happy to discuss with you any concerns you may have about this study.

**What if I have a concern or complaint?**

The study has been approved by the Human Research Ethics Committee at The University of Notre Dame Australia (Approval Number 016035S). It also has approval from Sydney Catholic Schools (Reference Number: 2016007). If you have a concern or complaint regarding the ethical conduct of this research project and would like to speak to an independent person, please contact Notre Dame’s Ethics Officer at (+61 8) 9433 0943 or research@nd.edu.au. Any complaint or concern will be treated in confidence and fully investigated. You will be informed of the outcome.

**How do I sign up to participate?**

If you are happy to participate, you will be provided with a consent form at the time of interview. Your Principal will notify teachers the date, time and venue of the group interviews.

Thank you for your time. This sheet is for you to keep.

Yours sincerely,

Lisa Buxton
Appendix C – Consent form

CONSENT FORM

_Yurunnhang Bungil Nyumba_: Infusing Aboriginal ways of being into teaching practice

- I agree to take part in this research project.
- I have read the Information Sheet provided and been given a full explanation of the purpose of this research project and what is involved in the interview(s).
- I understand that I will be interviewed and that the interview will be audio-recorded.
- The researcher has answered all my questions and has explained possible risks that may arise as a result of the interview and how these risks will be managed.
- I understand that I do not have to answer specific questions if do not want to and may withdraw from participating in the project at any time without prejudice.
- I understand that all information provided by me is treated as confidential and will not be released by the researcher to a third party unless required to do so by law.
- I agree that any research data gathered for the study may be published provided my name or other identifying information is not disclosed.
- I understand that research data gathered may be used for future research but my name and other identifying information will be removed.

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- I confirm that I have provided the Information Sheet concerning this research project to the above participant, explained what participating involves and have answered all questions asked of me.

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Appendix D – SAMPLE INTERVIEW SCHEDULE

Yurunnhang Bungil Nyumba: Infusing Aboriginal ways of being into teaching practice

This research project investigates what your perceptions are in relation to professional learning you have undertaken. The content of the professional learning has been developed from input from 32 teachers in primary schools in the Eastern Region. There are no right or wrong answers to the following questions; your answers will act as a guide in refinement of the profession learning experiences.

The day on Country

1. When you think about the time you spent on Country, what are your reflections? Prompts for if participant responses are superficial:
   - What aspects did you find challenging at first?
   - Did you feel more at ease later in the day?
   - What were the most interesting aspects for you on that day?
2. What aspects of the time on Country did you find empowering in relation to providing you with the knowledge and skills to better be able to meet Standards 1.4 and 2.4
3. What recommendations would you have for the organisation of that day?
4. What recommendations would you have in relation to the content covered on that day?

In-school Professional Development Day

5. What aspects of the professional learning were most useful to you?
   Prompts:
   - Knowledge of Aboriginal histories and cultures?
   - Strategies for teaching Aboriginal children and young people?
   - Ability to embed Aboriginal ways of knowing being and doing as a key pillar of children’s learning?
6. What recommendations would you have for me so that I can improve the professional learning opportunity for other teachers in other schools and regions?
7. (To be asked after a year of the Blog) What aspects of the Blog were useful to you
8. What recommendations do you have in the ongoing use of the Blog?