Circling the Square: Indigenizing the Dissertation

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Through tradition and standardization, the structure of the dissertation template has [boxed in] a colonial standard whilst ⌐cornering⌐ ways of knowing that cannot be expressed within these limits. But within these ⌐corners⌐ ideas huddle desperately together, preserving valuable embers of knowledge, conserving strength to ignite a fire to round these ⌐corners⌐ to closer resemble a circle, forcing dialogue between disparate world-views (Ermine, 2007).

The Doctoral Forum at the Queensland University of Technology [QUT] in Australia brought together an Aboriginal doctoral candidate (at the time) from Australia and an Indigenous doctoral candidate from Canada. Discussion about the limitations of the standard dissertation format arose. While researching in diverse disciplines, we found we shared experiences of constraint and a kind of tug-of-war to address the requirements of the institution while privileging our positionality and standpoint as Indigenous peoples; speaking back to the dominant voices of the coloniser. We reflected on how the template acted to privilege Western institutional constructs and how dominant colonial structures suppress land-based methodologies, creativity, and holism.

Through our critical dialogues, we recognised that to morph the square of standardization, we must nourish an openness towards multiple ways of knowing and doing through a delicate balance of decolonizing and Indigenizing (Pratt, Louis, Hanson & Ottmann, 2018). This paper addresses how two graduate students are blurring the boundaries of the standardized dissertation structure. Through critical dialogue, the colonial structures that [box] us in, provide a means for the previously ⌐cornered⌐ and marginalized voices to be heard.

Keywords: dissertation, Indigenous ways of knowing, Indigenizing the academy

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Melitta Hogarth's vignette:

I am an Australian Aboriginal woman. I am a Kamilaroi woman. Kamilaroi Nation reaches from the now Hunter Valley of New South Wales, across the Liverpool Plains and stretching into southern Queensland including Dirranbandi, which is where my people are from. I am also a trained teacher with 20 years' experience as a classroom teacher and now, four years working within the tertiary[1] education sector. I have recently completed my PhD (Hogarth, 2018).

I was invited to present at the Doctoral Forum by Associate Professor Karen Dooley (Hogarth, 2017c). Knowing that the audience were other doctoral students, all in varying stages of their candidature[2], I wondered how I could contribute to their experience. I reflected on my pathway into higher degree research and the things I wish I knew before I started. As an Aboriginal person, entering academia and the 'ocean of research'[3], I quickly found many barriers, and I felt restricted by the traditions held in high esteem within Whiteness, as well as the academy and its very structures. [I was being boxed in]. The space privileged Western worldviews and my own approaches seemed marginalised. I was encouraged by others to 'own' my thesis and in turn, disrupt the thesis template. It was this notion of resisting the privileging of Western ways that I spoke about at the Doctoral Forum. One participant, Kori Czuy, found time to share with me her experiences in the research realm. We found a shared experience as Indigenous peoples in Western systems and thus begins our paper.

Kori Czuy's vignette:

I am Cree Métis Polish, born in the Peace Country of Treaty 8, with blood roots to Prairie Echo, Alberta, North Battleford, Saskatchewan, and Red River, Manitoba. My spirit has been revitalized in the Rocky Mountains of Treaty 7, where I grew up. I have been working in education in various capacities over the past decade around the globe but was inspired to do my Master's (at the Institute of Education in London, England) after working with Orang Asli children in central Malaysia. I then felt the need to reconnect with my own Indigenous roots and land by doing my PhD back in Canada.

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[1] In Australia, post-secondary education is referred to as tertiary education

[2] In Australia, candidacy is referred to as candidature

[3] Throughout my PhD and Master's, I used the metaphor 'research is an ocean' and played on the idea of sailing on the ocean of research in narratives at the beginning of each chapter hence, the reference here to the 'ocean of research'. See, Hogarth, 2017a; 2018

I was selected as part of the University of Calgary's (UofC) Doctoral group who travelled to Australia to embark on a transcultural journey. We met up with fellow doctoral students from QUT and Beijing Normal University and embarked on a week-long journey to learn from one another, within formal and informal settings. There were a few questions I wanted to explore during the seminar, one in particular focused on the structure of the PhD, and whether other scholars shared similar sentiments of being restricted. Throughout my doctoral journey, these restrictive boundaries have negatively affected my research, making it difficult to do my work "in a good way"– through an Indigenous methodology within an ethical space. I was lucky to meet Melitta, a strong Aboriginal woman, who presented her doctoral journey and research to the Doctoral seminar group. We found that we shared many experiences throughout our doctoral journeys, mainly about navigating colonial, Western institutional standards. We walk together on a path towards truth and reconciliation, together with an ocean between us.

Melitta: Circling the square and finding our place within Western institutions has become important to me as I have navigated higher degree research because gaining that piece of paper and the title gives my voice agency (or at least, I hope so!). I can then be seen as someone who is speaking from a position of knowing and speak back to the deficit discourses—a type of intellectual activism (Hill Collins, 2013).

Kori: Circling the square for me is about truly understanding the privilege of being a doctoral candidate and using the accompanying opportunities in a good way; by respecting and honouring generations past to better support and open doors and pathways for those without such privilege, for the coming seven generations.

...a pause for breath and to re-centre thought...

Kori: Staying within standard academic publishing constraints in regard to this paper seemed to be contradictory to our dialogues about disrupting colonial standards. Melitta and I met through dialogue, we connected through shared experiences, and we wanted to continue by representing our voices authentically. We were inspired to use metalogue (Adams, Luitel, Afonso, & Taylor, 2008), as a way to retain our voices. This methodology embraces reflexivity by looking within ourselves and our own personal scholarship and experiences, and it projects outwardly and engages through dialogue and sharing ideas, all whilst retaining our individual journeys.

The term metalogue was introduced first by Gregory Bateson in 1972, to preserve the voices of many authors, and retain perspectives that otherwise would be lost within the inauthentic third voice. Differences and voices are often swept then lost under a fictional third person carpet (Tobin & Roth, 2002), highlighting how this other voice is truly inauthentic by blanketing individual voices and silencing unique spirit. This third voice becomes the scientific voice, generalized and singular (Staller, 2007). Lincoln & Denzin (2003) stated the need to reshape traditional scientific discourse, to engage within a social justice perspective of writing and research by supporting and provoking good ongoing conversation that is about life, community, and the human purpose; of which includes a language and dialogue that may be non-traditional, non-technical, and narrative (in Staller, 2007).

Kori: The loss of voice is common in Indigenous communities, along with the process of translating the leftover voices into a Eurocentric worldview, which, I believe, removes spirit and origin stories from land and community. I like how metalogue critically engages dialogue, not privileging any one voice, especially the perception of the "all powerful" scientific voice.

Melitta: And that is it! The properties of allowing each voice to be heard and to be equal in the conversation emulates the notion of storytelling; therefore, metalogue enables us to maintain our Indigeneity, to privilege our worldview lenses while not homogenising our experiences as the Indigenous experience. From an Aboriginal Australian perspective, metalogue reminds me of yarning (Bessarab & Ng'andu, 2010), albeit given a more institutionally acceptable term of reference. As Bessarab and Ng'andu (2010) highlight, the sharing of knowledge through story is a shared Indigenous way of knowing, being and doing. It is these shared tenets that we find connections and we can make meaning of our different experiences in tertiary education. Metalogue privileges each of our stories.

Kori: Is yarning similar to a story-telling or talking/sharing circle? By allowing multiple stories and experiences to be shared and not manipulated into a common voice or idea. This reminds me of how Blackfoot Elder Eagle Speaker (personal communication [p.c.]) describes the sweetgrass braid, each strand supporting one another, stronger together than apart, with each strand moving and dancing with one another whilst retaining integrity.

Melitta: Yes, exactly! Not only does this illustrate the importance of the collective but also, the sharing of story as a means of learning, understanding and being.

> Metalogues also allow for dialogues between authors to be unfolded and cogenerated, then engaged and transformed (Staller, 2007; Roth & Tobin, 2004). This format allows the authors to engage deeply and simultaneously contribute actively (Adams et al., 2008).

Kori: I see each dialogue as fractal, where each statement has the potential to engage a dialogue into an infinite vortex of scholarship and ideas, "produced, transformed, reproduced" (Roth & Tobin, 2004, p. 4), it is an ongoing conversation. But when does it stop? When the parameters of our editors say so? When a word limit is reached. The dialogue doesn't finish, it can't finish, but somehow it is forced to… Maybe those three dots should be used more, replacing the finality of a singular dot, with three dots to represent openness and continuity. The three dots represent a breath in (and with it ideas, energy, and spirit), instead of the finite statement of a period, to breathe out, letting out ideas, and with it, the breath of continued life.

Melitta: The restrictions set within all parameters of writing and the institutional constructs and its rules are parameters, we, as Indigenous peoples, are constantly having to live and work within. Disruption of these constructs can only be so far. We are bound by rules and yet, wherever disruption is possible; we must act. By using metalogue, we are actively resisting the dominant norm. The fractal properties you talk about are our way of ensuring our knowledges and understandings of our experiences in the Western institution are shared.

Perhaps, we will know the end of this component of our conversation when we naturally stop for breath. Our conversation does not end, but our sharing with others does.

Furthermore, we need to consider, how much do we share? What do we share? We need to be aware of the fact that when we tell our stories, we are consciously and unconsciously deciding what is and is not said (Bessarab & Ng'andu, 2010).

Kori: What is not said – to read between the lines, within the space where the known and unknown dance, the flux, ebb and flow...chaos. "Chaos and its offspring, creativity, are generative forces of the universe," (Cajete, 2000, p. 17), creativity is birthed between the lines.

> To question the boundaries of the institution and academia, then questions of *where* and *if* there is a limited atmosphere of intellect and dialogue arise. Staller (2007) speaks of a need for a balance between safeguarding quality and fostering innovation and creativity. The boundaries have been built to safeguard the quality and rigor of the scientific and academic community, to uphold the *high* standards that have built the institutional foundation. Along with this balance, there must be critical engagement with the question about *how* and *why* the boundary was constructed in the first place.

Melitta: Or moreover, how these boundaries and constructs are maintained?! This question I pose because of my own work where the means in which institutional and societal constructs are maintained are evident in language; through the power not just of the coloniser but the power of maintaining the dominant ideologies (Hogarth, 2017c; 2018). Indigenous ways of knowing, being and doing are positioned on the periphery (Herbert, 2012); the binary construct acts to make explicit the difference allowing the differing worldviews to position Indigenous knowledges; and therefore, the Indigenous experience, as inferior. We must therefore "play the game" and work within both worlds. With this in mind, the use of metalogue as a methodological approach enables us to reposition Indigenous ways by bringing storytelling into the centre.

Kori: Every time I question the [box] I hear, "just play the game". Immediately, that little colonial voice in my brain, created through years of Eurocentric education, tries to rationalize my actions. I hear, but I try not to listen. How am I embracing Indigenous ways of knowing by playing the game? Or supporting the next cohort of Indigenous scholars? Indigenous methodologies make space for voices outside of the colonial to thrive, gently nudging the dominant voices aside to critically engage with the Indigenous voices that have been marginalized. Mi'kmaq Elder Marshall talks about 'two-eyed seeing', one eye representing Indigenous worldviews and the other Western worldviews, and the strength of each is used to support each other, resulting in equality (Hatcher, Bartlett, Marshall, A., & Marshall, M., 2009). But I feel like Indigenous ways of knowing first require equity to build equality, perhaps closing the Western eye to focus on the Indigenous perspective, building its strength, capacity, and understanding. Maybe "two-eyed" seeing is what we strive towards?

Melitta: Yes, and it is interesting that we need to constantly have these inner monologues. Worrying about the Western and wanting to privilege the Indigenous self—we are being encouraged to enter the Western space, but then we are told, or at least, we feel that we must conform to the [box].

> Staller (2007) stated a main advantage of metalogue allows for increased transparency, where ideas develop actively, are revealed in time, but not hidden within the abstract confines of the "intellectual atmosphere" (p. 155).

Kori: The idea of grounding the abstract through transparency, for me, challenges the boundaries of written scientific and academic text. To reveal the process of knowledge creation through the dialogue and infinite nature of coming to know, allows for the humility of the process to be revealed. Through this humility we allow for the abstract to become grounded, to become human, and therefore to be brought into the "realm of the real world" (Staller, 2007, p. 155). Coming to know through an Indigenous worldview focuses on humility and coming to know through our mistakes by acknowledging them, not retreating, moving through them to become stronger.

Melitta: *And so we are sharing our thought process, our ways of negotiating the square and the very things we must consider each time we enter this space. We are constantly conflicted and the push-pull nexus that Torres Strait Islander academic, Nakata (2007a, 2007b) refers to when we are participating in the cultural interface becomes apparent. We actively look through both a Western lens and an Indigenous lens; looking for ways to privilege our Indigeneity while revealing the taken for granted assumptions and hidden institutional constructs and bias located within the [box]. As a result, we are constantly trying to find our place and unfortunately, finding ourselves on the periphery (Herbert, 2012). Our ways of doing are seen as different and yet, it is just how we do it. Our ways of knowing being classed as unique and yet, here we are working towards completing a PhD within a Western institution where structures and regiment is rife. What we find is we need to take ownership of our research and to do that, we disrupt the template; softening the edges of the [box].*

I remember when I first enrolled in the Master of Education (Research) (Hogarth, 2015). It had taken me three whole years to actually convince myself that it was even possible (Hogarth, 2017a). I was an External (online) student as I was living over 700 kilometres from the university and I was lost from the beginning. I had to complete two theory units that introduced quantitative and qualitative methodologies. Needless to say, the methodological approaches considered were very standard. They did not reflect me and I failed to see how I was going to make this work. That was, until I began exploring and reading the work of mostly Australian Indigenous academics such as Martin Nakata (2007a), Aileen Moreton-Robinson (2013) and Lester Rigney (1999) but also, international Indigenous academics like Linda Tuhiwai-Smith (1999) and Marie Battiste (2000) and the approaches they used. In their words, their experiences, their challenges and solutions; their stories —I could see myself. Their voices were strong; their convictions and intentions clear and here was I, wading in a very deep pool, treading water. I am glad that I took the longer road and completed the Master's prior to taking on the PhD (Hogarth

2015; 2018). It gave me space and time to find my place; my niche on the periphery, giving me the confidence to chip away at those ⌐ corners ⌟ .

    Kori: *My journey was similar, only discovering Indigenous methodologies in my PhD. I chose to not do land-based research[4] in my Master's, blaming my lack of funding. Smith (1999) would have said that I was questioning research that would have been done* on *instead of* with*. It was not my community, they were not my stories, I had only read written colonial perspectives in academic journals by white male professors who may very well have been doing research on, but I don't want to speculate… This uneasiness I later understood through Indigenous ways of knowing as the uneasiness of my spirit, feeling the repression of colonization.*

    Melitta: So essentially, the question is why? Why do we find the need to disrupt the template, to break down the sharp edges of the [box] and essentially, circle the [box]? For me, the need is to find me. I am not the kind to actively participate in demonstrations or protests. Instead, I enjoy protesting in the institutional space. It provides me opportunity to disrupt at the interface where Indigenous and non-Indigenous knowledges meet. By completing the Masters (Hogarth, 2015), I felt I was in a position of knowing. I knew what the template asked, and I knew what the template denied me of. It dictated the recipe, or what was necessary, but the method was up to me. The final presentation was up to me. I was about to spend an extended length of time with these words —I needed it to be me. It was me. Surely, with this realisation, it had to reflect me.

    Kori: *Yes! Creating and pushing the boundaries of dialogue and disrupting by questioning that what has been taken for granted as assumption, is also my protest. I am questioning "universal" mathematics by closing the eye receptive only to Eurocentric, colonial math, and understanding mathematics through relationships between humans, land, animals, spirit, and cosmos. I have created a framework (see Figure 1) that critically engages ethno(mathematics) by beginning with Indigenous worldviews instead of assuming colonial universality. This framework (represented as a cross-section of the sweetgrass braid), always begins in the East (rising sun), by understanding math through stories with/about land and community (the first strand); for example, stories about constellation positions foretelling seasons, hunting, or harvest. Weaving in the second strand engages a personal understanding and reflection to ground these knowings; for example, star stories from childhood memories, open to all histories, experiences, and cultures. The third strand of Eurocentric mathematics is then weaved in. Each strand has equal strength, but by critically engaging with the first two strands, like closing the Western eye, equity is better created. Without this critical focus on the marginalized perspective, especially with mathematics, translation into the Eurocentric worldview is automatic because this worldview is often taught as standard and "universal".*

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[4] Here, land-based research meant learning with and from the land and the people of that land. Limited funding resources meant this Indigenous learning/research method would not be feasible for me. I later read Smith (1999), who stated that colonization transformed space, changing Indigenous space, or land, from living *with*, through respect and reciprocity, to defining land as a commodity, to be tamed and controlled.

The critical braid
Story-based Indigenous methodological framework
to explore ethno[mathematics]
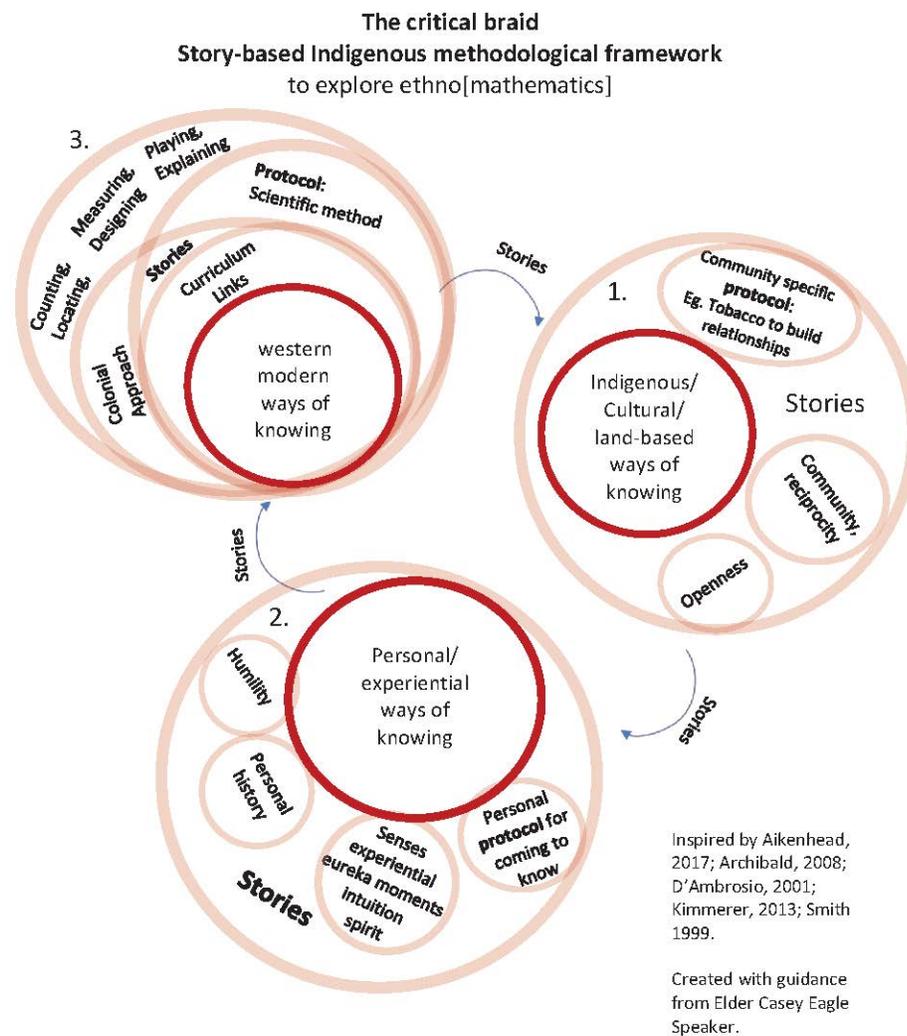
Figure 1: The Critical Braid: Story-based approach to explore ethno(mathematics).
Always beginning in the East, the rising sun, with the stories from the land.

In the academy, these dialogues, questions, and frameworks are the demonstrations and protests. Softening the edges by acting on what we both know is valid without feeling the need to always "play the game" or translate into Eurocentric worldviews, but embrace dialogue together, through open minds and hearts.

Melitta: The scary part for me was that QUT specified that:

- the thesis is well written having due consideration to relevant writing conventions and style guidelines;
- that the spelling, grammar, punctuation and choice of language are of a high standard;
- that the thesis is presented in English;

> - that all citations and the bibliography comply with relevant disciplinary conventions; and
> - that all typing errors are corrected (QUT, 2016, p. 3).

The privileging of Standard English is not lost to me. Regardless of your cultural backgrounds, your ways of knowing, being and doing—you must submit to Western institutional structures. On the flip side, you are essentially being told—Western standards are the only way to achieve a PhD.

I have internal monologues with self all the time. I know that I suffer desperately with imposter syndrome and there is a need to continue fighting my brain demons (Hogarth, 2017a). So, the inner monologue went something like this: Deep breaths, Melitta. You know what needs to be done and you have the recipe. You need to make this thesis yours! Stand strong and most importantly, be true to yourself. Remember, this is not just for you to get that floppy hat; it is for your family; the kids in your last teaching job and basically, every Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander student in every school.

Kori: The first time I disrupted the PhD [box] to play with the humanity lost in the dust of the ⸢corners⸥, was when I created my first academic poster. I was excited to be given the opportunity to play with my thoughts in a way that was creative, innovative, expressive, and personal, to be able to work through and express my research outside of the traditional written paper format. Like you said, being true to myself.

Melitta: I am jealous of your courage to enter the space of an academic poster. While my undergraduate degree was in Creative Arts, I have avoided the research poster arena because of the systemic understandings of what makes an academic poster. I yearn to return to the paintbrushes and easel and yet, still have not find my way.

Kori: I got out my bristol board, pencils, markers, (no paint this time) and turned on my artistic brain. The thought process around how to simplistically represent my work pictorially and holistically was intense and complex. I connected with my poster through piles of eraser dust, glue ridden fingers, rainbow knuckles, and intricate hand-drawn graphics. I was well into my creative process when that annoying colonial voice acted up again: maybe a little research on academic posters would be important. I remember the moment that search appeared, my heart dropped into my stomach, my spirit screamed… standardized format, abstract in top left ⸢corner⸥, followed by literature, methodology etc. I thought I had found a way to thrive within the ⸢corner⸥, but quickly the edges reminded me of where I was, and the rules I was to follow. I decided to dwell within my humility and ignorance towards these parameters, and continued the journey I embarked upon between myself, my research, and the poster.

Melitta: I applaud your strength here to continue and maintain your position. The conformity and structures of Western institutions and your farce of ignorance shows grace and yet, a means in which we are to disrupt the academy. The kinesthetic qualities of running your fingers through glue, connecting with your research is a cathartic process. Those who do not dabble in the Arts would never understand this process. But is it more than that? Is it part

of us as Indigenous peoples? Historically, storytelling is not just through the oral tradition but was captured on the walls of many a dwelling (Bessarab & Ng'andu, 2010). While it shouldn't matter, did you show the poster? Is it something you will do again?

     __Kori:__ I will continue to disrupt the academic poster standards and confront the whispers around me about the unprofessional appearance and juvenile nature of my posters. Because, yes, there is a connection between senses and Indigenous knowings, understandings as relationships created through these sensorial, observational, interactive moments.

     The validity of knowledge acquisition through all senses has been marginalized by the separation of sight, raised and praised as the sense of science and power (Classen, 1993; McLuhan, 1962), reinforced by Descartes who stated that rational truth is only through the mind, without body (Descartes, Weissman & Bluhm, 1996). This marginalization has restricted ways of coming to know from multiple senses and even spirit. The knowledge I gained, and therefore can convey through the use of multiple senses when creating a non-traditional poster is deep, raw, and human, much different than slotting in copied and pasted information into a ready-made template. The template is cold, shiny, synthetic, without spirit, connections, or the rawness and humility of being human...isn't research done by humans?

     Melitta: Well, we can only hope so but sometimes, the research fails to see the human. Never is that more evident than the historical, anthropological, and scientific research upheld in the corpus about Indigenous peoples (see Smith, 1999). And I guess that is what I see as part of our role in disrupting the system—bringing Indigenous voices to the Indigenous experience: illustrating our humanity. I seek to do this in my research—or at least, I hope that is what I do. I focus on language and policy discourses and I spoke earlier about my Master's being a testing ground —it enabled me to work out the recipe of the thesis; the key ingredients necessary and also, identify the places in which the [box] could be stretched, the ⌐ corners ⌐ could be rounded and I could be me (Hogarth, 2015).

     The ways I disrupted the thesis template were subtle and yet, explicit. I began each chapter with a vignette; a type of internal monologue or sharing the process in which I interpreted the purpose of each chapter. I used the analogy of research as an ocean throughout telling the story of self as the emu; my family's totem, navigating the ocean of research (Hogarth, 2017a; 2018). I shared the adventure as I sailed in my boat. The inclusion of self further exemplifies how much the thesis itself had been internalised; it had become an extension of me. The story of the emu became a metaphor; I like metaphors.

     Within my thesis, I also explored and developed a methodological approach, Indigenous Critical Discourse Analysis, which I represented as a conceptual framework (Hogarth, 2017c; 2018). The conceptual framework (see Figure 2) was a visual representation of the methodological approach but it was also a metaphor of self. It was a representation of my eye; a metaphorical representation of the lens in which I saw the world and the lens in which I analysed policy. I included a preface to the thesis to ensure that the way in which I wanted the conceptual framework to be interpreted was made explicit.

     I included an extra layer to the audit trail of the data analysis by including insight to the thought processes as I worked through the data (Hogarth, 2018). Vignettes as written text, reflective thought, and poetry—I even considered including a graphic novel snippet depicting

self on the boat, but I got to that stage where it was time to move on. I was over the thesis; there was so much more I wanted to explore, and it was time for me to stop. I felt it, my Supervisors felt it—it was time to let it go and take a breath...
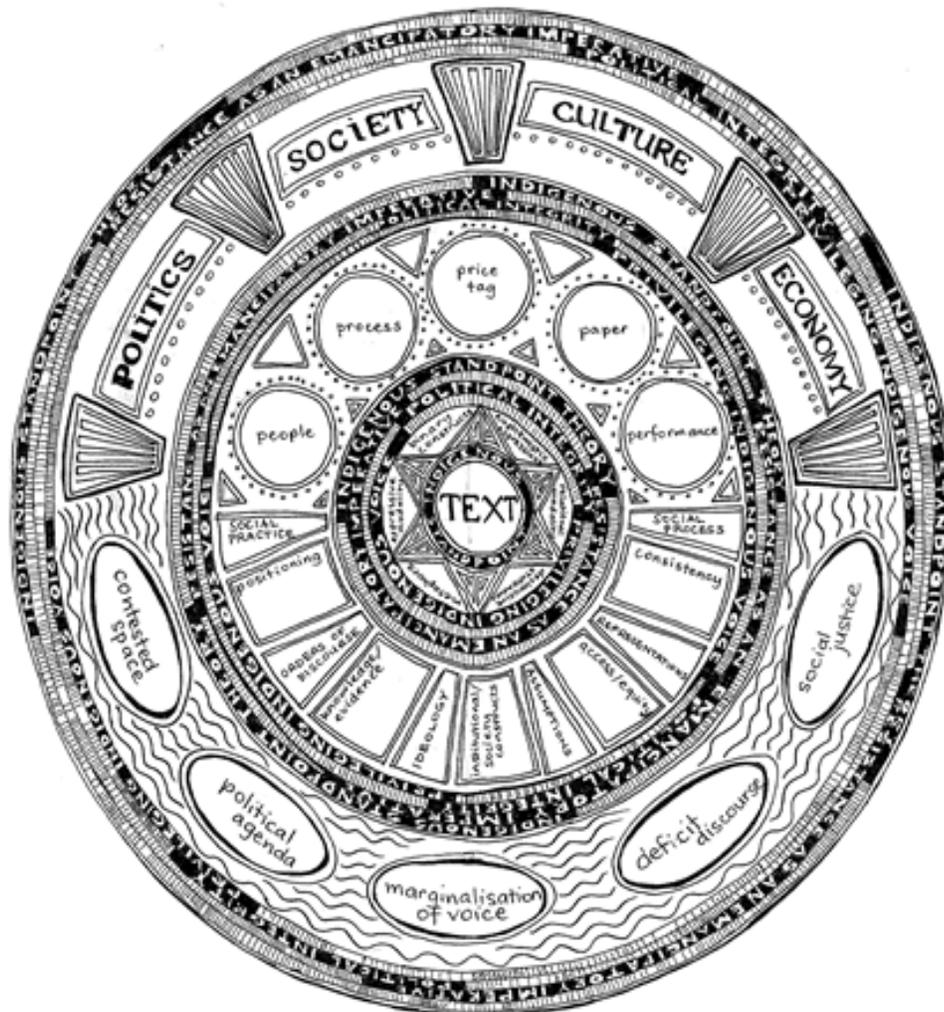
Figure 2: Indigenous Critical Discourse Analysis: a conceptual framework
(Hogarth, 2017c, p. 25)

Kori: Time, the colonial monster that has its claws in every moment, second, (rational) intent. Its elbow blocks my spirit, its voice interrupts my stories, it uproots, disengages, and segregates.
The restrictive element of time was brought up several occasions throughout the "Decolonizing the Dissertation" sessions, put on by the SAGE (supporting Aboriginal graduate engagement) network at the UofC. This year SAGE has held several panel discussions focused on the hurdles, emotional labour, and misconceptions around doing graduate research at the academy as Indigenous students attempting to work within an Indigenous framework. We have had phenomenal

turn-out at the sessions, from both Indigenous students and allies, and the need for these dialogues is clear, but now what?

I was a part of a SAGE panel that focused on emotional labour, and one of the main concerns between the panelists was about "what to reveal?" Like you mentioned earlier Melitta, "how much do we share?" and "what do we share?" There are conversations that need to be had, a truth that needs to be told, but … in time. We cannot hurry to rush towards the embers from the dwindling fire of knowings, our (humanity's) eagerness, lack of humility, or patience will only scare away the fire. This fire metaphor is from an Anishinaabe seven fires prophecy about seven prophets (represented as fires) visiting the people, from the creation of Turtle Island (the first prophet), to the fourth prophet who foretold about the encounter between the "light-skinned" people and the "red-skinned" people, and if they worked together in brotherhood through the recognition of and respect for different knowings, they would together become a great Nation (Benton-Banai, 1988). Unfortunately, greed, ego, and mind reigned over land, community, and spirit (Benton-Banai, 1988). But there is hope in the seventh fire, the rebirth of spirit and knowing held close by Knowledge Keepers. The embers of the seventh fire are delicate, easily smothered, easily scared away by the extinguishing methods of colonization. There is reciprocity to fire, it is a powerful gift that carries great responsibilities, it can create and nurture, but also destroy if not respected (Kimmerer, 2013). Reciprocity within learning and knowledge is often absent in Eurocentric knowledge, instead supports a one-way pathway towards [the teacher] filling an empty bucket [the student] with knowledge (Freire, 2005/1970). To allow for Indigenous ways of knowing to thrive within the Institution, maybe our first step is to understand the notion of reciprocity. If there is an understanding about how to best receive and understand knowings and therefore reciprocate these knowings in a good way, would this lead to a better understanding about the values of these knowings through the created responsibility held by the listener/receiver? Then… how would our original question of "how much do we share?" and "what do we share?" potentially be opened up?

Melitta: Again, I find myself jealous. The number of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander PhD and Master's students in Education at QUT was limited. Culturally safe spaces where we could share our experiences, our challenges and so forth, being together and sharing space was limited. A small cohort of us tried to find space but as we were all also working full time, the opportunity to come together did not always happen. Instead, we tended to support each other through emails, texts and phone calls. Even then, the work life tended to take priority and distance and isolation tended to take over.

Kori: I can't agree more, it is an isolating process. But, the SAGE network is opening discussions with Indigenous students about navigating how to be a trailblazer, supporting mentorship (with each other and Elders), and creating safe space to share our experiences, hurdles, and triumphs.

Melitta: Oh, most definitely—it is needed! But I think what we are essentially highlighting here is that it needs to be led by Indigenous peoples and more importantly, by the students and supported by the Indigenous Units and the University as a whole. The demands of the academy and the structures have become so restrictive, and in a world where technology is changing on a daily basis, the need to come together and share is paramount for our souls. It is important for us to have access to key Indigenous mentors and Elders—to

remind us of the fight for the privileges we have today they fought and to remind us for the need to continue the fight!

Kori: "Paramount for our souls", I couldn't have said it better. It is so easy to get lost amongst the speed that technology has forced onto our everyday. With the constant focus on the future, I feel like I am constantly tripping to keep up. When Indigenous students and Elders gather and light a ceremonial smudge, it allows us to reconnect with our spirits and the land, it cleanses us of the drive towards tomorrow, allowing the present and those around us to reconnect.

Melitta: As an educator, I am very much aware of the institutional structures prevalent within education as a whole. Education becomes a means to create the 'ideal citizen' with its assimilatory properties; to [box] people into a whole and to progress neo-liberal ideologies (Morgan, et al., 2006). This lens of individualism highlights the struggle for me—the institutional structures and how they essentially do not prepare you as an academic. A PhD is so personal that the isolating properties of the research process is so necessary and yet, the privilege of conducting research by yourself on any project after this is virtually impossible. All research after this, I will need to work with others as part of a team. Add to that, the fact that Indigenous methodologies are placed on the periphery and yet, more and more in Australia, there is consistent call to increase the number of Indigenous higher degree research students (Universities Australia, 2017). If our ways of knowing, being and doing are not seen as valued within the University environment, how can we strive and succeed without breaking down these perceived structures? Our motivations and stubbornness, the reason for entering this space need to be constantly nurtured and rejuvenated and finding space together is essential. And yet, we are constantly reminded and instructed to remain within the [box]—preferably more towards the centre but if we must disrupt, on the periphery (Herbert, 2012).

Kori: I am not the best at staying in the [box], following the rules, or playing the game. So, it isn't surprising that it wasn't until the third year of my PhD that I checked the "formatting guidelines" (UofC, n.d.) for my dissertation, few I am sure I will follow. Anxiety grew as I read the rigid format, (a format many students wouldn't question), 10-point black font, with a fourteen-point checklist on how to format a title page, and any artwork should be put in the appendices—defined as the place to put things that would normally clutter your thesis! This 2-D format lacks a connection to the human that created it, the community that supported its creation; it's not a [box], it's a 2-D square of confinement. There is hope as I scroll down to the section called 'non-traditional thesis', explained as a way to "[expand] the parameters, content, and purpose of the thesis...to reimagine graduate pathways and explore new ways of engaging in advanced scholarship," (UofC, n.d.). This hope slowly deteriorates as the section on 'challenges' of doing a non-traditional thesis greatly outnumbers the 'benefits and outcomes'. Besides the challenges of time, additional work (still requiring a submission that follows the publication mandates of the university), uncertainty, and a steep learning curve (UofC, n.d.), the benefits seem to connect research and the University with the community and industry, and support skills of innovation, collaboration, critical thinking, and interdisciplinarity. These benefits seem to provide a pathway of success for the student in working in a global world, beyond the University. Think about it, who is the traditional thesis for? Who reads it? How many are even published? And if they are, again, who reads them? The walls of the [box] that academia and the institution have built around them have blocked them off from community, with gatekeepers restricting access to those

who can play well with those already thriving inside. There is little or no interplay between what is inside those walls with the outside, or what snuck in but is stuck in the ⌜ corners ⌟. Smith (1999) stated that these systems (or walls) are erected as a cultural force-field, to block out competing or oppositional discourses, ensuing the dominance of Western Eurocentric colonial interests. Indigenous knowings seem to be viewed as an opposition, fighting against scientific truths of the well-established knowledge systems that have been so successful in gaining power through profit. The non-traditional thesis and augmenting the ⌜ corners ⌟ and walls of the [box]/cube of the institution seem, in theory, to allow for connections between the University with community, and potentially with the land and spirit. In theory is great, but where is the praxis, support, implementation strategies?

Melitta: The parameters and structures set are definitely a deterrent and break down our individualism, our creativity, the very things that make us—us! As I said previously, I already knew what the University wanted, the rules and regulations. The notion of a non-traditional thesis is not even the list of the types of theses viable at QUT (QUT, 2016). A thesis by monograph, a thesis by publication, and a thesis by creative works are the only options available. I suppose the thesis by creative works may be considered as a non-traditional thesis but the inclusion of an exegesis to support the creative work ensures that a traditional thesis component is included. In that instance, as someone who did a Bachelor of Creative Arts, the need for words to validate the work seems assumptive and again, I find myself returning to the question—how much do we share? I have included poetry and vignettes within my thesis; drawing the analogy that research is like an ocean in which I am navigating, using metaphor to act as barrier and protect myself. After all, we are still working within the structures.

Kori: Metaphor as protection, to protect the embers—raw, delicate, human, with potential to ignite a community, a gathering of knowings, a togetherness that often a fire creates. But also, protection from destruction, ourselves, from our knowings, protection through strategic sharing. In time...

Melitta: This conversation could continue for ages but the restrictions and therefore, the [box], is calling for an end. Limitations to the story once again illustrates the [box]. Our story has just begun; there is a lot of work still to be done in this space but at least we have started the conversation. Perhaps now is the time to take a breath...

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